

# UN Council endorses Annan's plan on Syria

Japan closes embassy; Islamists claim blasts responsibility

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council yesterday demanded that Syria "immediately" implement a peace plan proposed by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan and gave a veiled warning of international action.

Following intense negotiations between the major powers, Russia and China signed up to a Western-drafted text which calls on President Bashar al-Assad to work toward a cessation of hostilities and a democratic transition.

The presidential statement, which carries less weight than a formal resolution, gives strong backing to Annan and the six-point plan he put to Assad in talks in Damascus earlier this month.

"The Security Council calls upon the Syrian government and opposition to work in good faith with the envoy towards a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis and to implement fully

and immediately his initial six-point proposal," says the statement.

The council said Annan should regularly update the body on his efforts.

"In the light of these reports, the Security Council will consider further steps as appropriate," the statement adds.

Annan's plan calls for a UN-supervised halt to fighting with the government pulling troops and heavy weapons out of protest cities, a daily two-hour humanitarian pause to hostilities and access to all areas affected by the fighting.

The Security Council also agreed a press statement, proposed by Russia, which condemns bomb attacks in Damascus and Aleppo at the weekend.

Meanwhile, Japan's foreign ministry yesterday said it would close its embassy in Syria, citing deteriorating security conditions amid a brutal crackdown on

anti-government protesters.

A ministry statement said the embassy, which had already been reducing its operations since earlier this month, will continue to operate out of Japan's diplomatic compound in neighbouring Jordan.

A number of countries have already curtailed their diplomatic activities in Damascus, including the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Switzerland and the Gulf Arab countries.

Meanwhile, an Islamist group claimed responsibility for last weekend's suicide car bombings in central Damascus to avenge the Syrian regime's "massacre of Sunnis," in a statement posted online yesterday.

The group said the attacks were "to avenge the people of Homs" besieged by regime forces.



People run to safety on the streets of Mexico City after a strong quake hits Mexico on Tuesday. The powerful 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck southwest Mexico, injuring 11 people, damaging hundreds of homes and sending panicked residents out onto the streets of the capital.

PHOTO: AFP

## UN to debate on Sri Lanka war crimes

AFP, Geneva

Sri Lanka comes under the spotlight this week when the UN Human Rights Council considers a US resolution urging Colombo to probe alleged violations during its war with Tamil separatists.

Rights groups say up to 40,000 civilians died in the final months of Colombo's military campaign to crush the Tamil Tigers, who waged a bloody decades-long campaign for a separate homeland for minority Tamils.

The US resolution, which could be considered as early as Wednesday afternoon, has been dismissed by Sri Lanka.

The US resolution urges Sri Lanka to ensure "justice, equity, accountability and reconciliation" and says Colombo's own probe did not adequately address concerns.

## Climate to cost \$2t a year in damage to oceans by 2100

AFP, Paris

Greenhouse gases are on track for inflicting costs of nearly \$2 trillion annually in damage to the oceans by 2100, according to a Swedish study published yesterday.

The estimate by the Stockholm Environment Institute is based on the assumption that climate-altering carbon emissions continue their upward spiral without a pause.

Warmer seas will lead to greater acidification and oxygen loss, hitting fisheries and coral reefs, it warns.

Rising sea levels and storms will boost the risk of flood damage, especially around the coastlines of Africa and Asia, it adds.

On a business-as-usual scenario, Earth's global temperature will rise by some four degrees



Celsius by century's end, says the report, "Valuing the Ocean."

On this basis, the cost in 2050 will be \$428 billion annually, or 0.25 percent of global domestic product.

By 2100, it would rise to \$1,979 billion, or 0.37 percent of output.

If emissions take a lower track, and warming is limited to 2.2 C, the cost in 2050 would be \$105 billion, or 0.06 percent of worldwide GDP, rising to \$612 billion, or 0.11 percent, by 2100.

"This is not a scaremongering forecast," says the report.

It cautions that these figures do not take into account the bill for small island states swamped by rising seas. Nor do they include the impact of warming on the ocean's basic processes, such as nutrient recycling, which are essential to life.

## US exempts 11 states from Iran sanctions

China, India left out of the list

REUTERS, Washington

The United States exempted Japan and 10 EU nations from financial sanctions because they have significantly cut purchases of Iranian oil, but left Iran's top customers China and India exposed to the possibility of such steps.

The decision means banks in these countries have been given a six-month reprieve from the threat of being cut off from the US financial system under new sanctions designed to pressure Iran over its nuclear program.

The list did not include China and India, Iran's top two crude oil importers, nor US allies South Korea and Turkey, which are among the top-10 consumers of Iranian oil.

Japan, China and India combined buy close to half of Iran's crude exports of 2.6 million barrels a day, providing crucial foreign exchange for the OPEC member.

But the US sanctions and an EU oil

embargo have cut Iran out of financial networks, making it difficult to transfer funds to pay for trade and disrupting some oil shipments because of the difficulty of securing shipping insurance.

Japanese Finance Minister Jun Azumi welcomed the US decision, saying yesterday that Japan would continue to cut its imports of Iranian oil at a set rate in the future.

While China and India and others remain exposed to possible financial sanctions, US law gives President Obama the ability to waive such steps if this is in the national interest.

China, Iran's top trade partner and crude buyer, has made it clear that it rejects in principle the unilateral US sanctions. Still, China slashed Iranian crude imports by more than half in the first quarter of 2012.

India's government says it is not under any obligation to observe US sanctions, but privately has asked its refineries to cut Iran imports by at least 15 percent, industry sources

have said.

## Japan pledges major cut in Iran oil imports

AFP, Tokyo

Japan said yesterday it would continue reducing its Iran oil imports "considerably", while hailing a US decision to exempt it from new sanctions against doing business with the nuclear aspirant.

"We have explained to the US side that this trend will accelerate in the future and that we will carry out our reductions considerably," Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told reporters.

Fujimura did not elaborate on the planned cuts, but Japan's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Yukio Edano said that Tokyo has already reduced its Iran oil shipments by 40 percent over the past five years.

Last year, Iranian oil accounted for about 8.8 percent of Japan's crude imports.

## NEWS IN brief

### UK hostage released in Somalia

AFP, Nairobi

British hostage Judith Tebbutt, captured in Kenya over six months ago by gunmen who killed her husband, was released in central Somalia and flown out to Nairobi yesterday, elders said.

The Foreign Office in London confirmed the release, saying the "priority now is to get her to a place of safety."

Tebbutt, 57, was taken on September 11 last year from a remote beach resort near the Kenyan-Somali border by armed men who shot dead her husband David.

Pirates in the region also hold hundreds of hostages seized from ships in the Indian Ocean, and have in the past demanded multi-million dollar ransoms

### Qaeda behind deadly Iraq blasts

AFP, Baghdad

Key routes in Baghdad were locked down yesterday as al-Qaeda's front group in Iraq claimed responsibility for a wave of deadly blasts targeting security for a landmark Arab summit next week.

The tightened measures came a day after nationwide gun and bomb attacks killed 50 people and left 255 others wounded on the anniversary of the start of the US-led invasion of Iraq.

In a statement posted on jihadist forum Honein, the Islamic State of Iraq declared it was behind the attacks against several "official posts and security and military posts" in the country.

These attacks "destroyed the plans of the head of Iraqi security chiefs in the space of a few hours," it added.

Tuesday's violence rocked 20 towns and cities spanning the northern oil hub of Kirkuk and the Shia shrine city of Karbala, south of Baghdad, from 7:00am

### Indian MPs in new porn scandal

AFP, Ahmedabad

The speaker of an Indian state assembly ordered an enquiry yesterday into allegations that two lawmakers had viewed pornography during a sitting of the chamber.

It is the second such scandal involving state lawmakers in recent weeks after three ministers in the Karnataka assembly were filmed viewing pornographic clips when the house was debating legislation.

Janak Purohit, a journalist for the Gujarat Samachar newspaper, said he spotted two members of the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) watching porn in the Gujarat state assembly.

The lawmakers, Shankar Chaudhary and Jetha Bharwad, were watching an "obscene" video clip on a tablet computer during a session, Purohit told a local

## France killer 'set to kill again'

BBC ONLINE

The Frenchman suspected of a spate of shootings in the Toulouse area planned more killings, prosecutors said yesterday.

Police cordoned off a five-storey building in a suburb of Toulouse where the 24-year-old Muslim shooter, identified as Mohamed Merah, is holed up.

Authorities said the gunman, a French citizen of Algerian origin, had been to Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he claimed to have received training from al-Qaeda.

Merah told police negotiators he had killed three French soldiers last week and four people at a Jewish school in Toulouse on Monday to avenge the deaths of Palestinian children.



A widow attends her husband's funeral at Montauban's cathedral, southern France yesterday. France paid homage yesterday to the three French soldiers who were killed in an attack by a man, also believed to be behind the murder of a rabbi and three Jewish children in the March 19 school attack in Toulouse, France.

PHOTO: AFP

## EXTRADITION OF LIBYA SPY CHIEF Mauritania has not decided yet

AFP, Nouakchott

Mauritania has not yet decided the fate of Muammar Gaddafi's former spy chief, whose extradition is sought by Libya, France and International Criminal Court in the Hague, a source close to the case said yesterday.

"Nouakchott is not in a hurry, in this case all the norms and procedures must be respected. Mauritania will take its time," the source said.

Libya's vice premier Mustafa Abu Shagur said on his Twitter account Tuesday that he had secured the extradition of Abdullah Senussi, whom the country wants to try on home soil.

"I have met the President of Mauritania and he agreed to the extradition of Senussi to Libya," Mustafa Abu Shagur wrote.

Earlier, speaking to reporters after meeting Mauritanian leader Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz in Nouakchott, the Libyan vice-premier had said the president "promised something positive" in regard to Libya's request.

Senussi, Gaddafi's former right hand man, was arrested at Nouakchott airport on Friday after arriving on a flight from Casablanca in Morocco, using a false passport.

In addition, Saudi Arabia and Spain want to interrogate Senussi over attacks committed in their countries, a diplomat in Nouakchott told AFP.

## Tuberculosis kills 70,000 children a yr

AFP, Geneva

As many as 70,000 children are dying every year from tuberculosis, as the curable disease often goes unnoticed due to a failure by health workers to recognise the symptoms, the World Health Organisation said yesterday.

"Often TB is undiagnosed in children... because the symptoms in children are not very specific," said a coordinator at WHO.

Unlike adults who often cough incessantly when infected with the disease, "children may not even cough, but may just be less playful," she said.

The UN health agency's expert said that ensuring screening of TB for all children in households would help to detect cases early.

## Romney wins in Illinois

REUTERS, Chicago

Republican Mitt Romney cruised to an easy victory over top rival Rick Santorum in Illinois on Tuesday, moving him one step closer to clinching the party's volatile battle for the presidential nomination.

Romney's comfortable win gave him a fresh burst of momentum in the White House campaign and new ammunition for his argument that it is time for Republicans to rally around his campaign and end an increasingly bitter nominating battle.

"Elections are about choices, and today hundreds of thousands of people in Illinois have joined millions across the country to join our cause," Romney told cheering supporters in Schaumburg, Illinois, a Chicago suburb.

"I'm offering a real choice and a new beginning," he said, touting his business experience and ignoring his rivals to focus his criticism on President Barack Obama. "I have the vision and the experience to get us out of this mess."

With 95 percent of the votes counted, Romney had 47 percent and Santorum, a



former US senator from Pennsylvania, took 35 percent. Romney's remaining rivals, Newt Gingrich, the former US House of Representatives speaker, and libertarian congressman Ron Paul, lagged badly.

After Illinois victory, a CNN delegate count gave Romney 540 delegates to Santorum's 239 in the race for the 1,144 needed to win the nomination.

There were 54 delegates to be allocated in Illinois from Tuesday's voting, but Santorum was not eligible to win many of them because he failed to meet deadlines to file a slate of delegates in some districts.

Romney's campaign has argued that his rivals cannot catch him in the contest to pick a challenger to Obama in the November 6 election.

Santorum and Gingrich hope to keep Romney from capturing a majority of delegates by the time the nominating contests end in June, leaving the choice up for grabs among the party's mostly conservative delegates heading into the August nominating convention in Tampa, Florida.