

Syria agrees on Apr 10 deadline for peace plan: Annan

AFP, United Nations

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has agreed to start implementing a peace plan by April 10, but UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan told the UN Security Council yesterday there has been no progress yet in halting the bloodshed.

Annan appealed to the 15-member council to back the deadline to increase pressure on the Syrian government to halt its offensive against the opposition, diplomats at a closed-doors briefing by the special envoy told AFP.

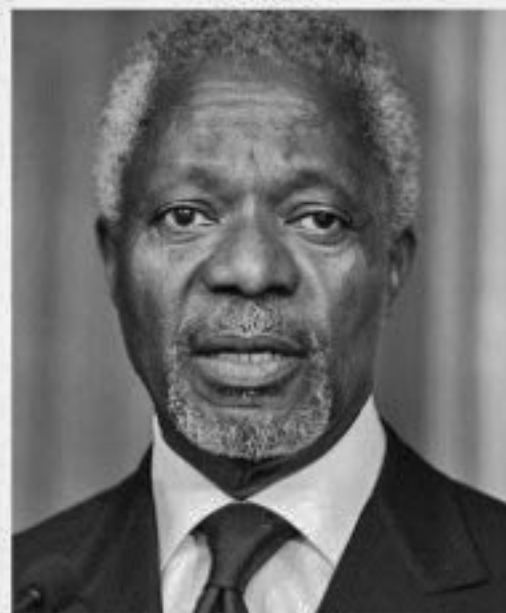
Syria has agreed to start partially implementing his peace plan by April 10 and that there should be a "full cessation of hostilities" within 48 hours, Annan told the council.

The Syrian government would start by halting the movement of troops into cities, withdrawing heavy weapons from cities and starting to pull back troops.

Annan told the council there has been "no progress" so far on reaching a ceasefire or implementing his six-point peace plan, one diplomat said.

Annan also said the Security Council had to start considering the deployment of an observer mission to monitor events in Syria.

The UN says more than 9,000 people have been killed in Syria over the past year while Syrian rights activists put the death toll at more than 10,000.



Arab and western nations have called for a deadline to be imposed on Assad, but Russia, Syria's last major ally and a permanent member of the Security Council, has rejected the calls.

Annan went to Damascus this month to meet Assad for talks and has since been in contact with the Syrian government to demand that it start moves to halt the violence.

The Syrian president has accepted Annan's plan but so far made no move to carry it out. His government has insisted there has to be peaceful conditions before it can halt its operations in protest cities.

A Friends of Syria meeting of about 80 countries including the United States, Arab and European nations called on Sunday for a deadline to be imposed against Assad.

France reaffirmed the need for a deadline yesterday. But Russia, which along with China has vetoed two Security Council resolutions, has strongly rejected the calls.

"Ultimatums and artificial deadlines rarely help matters," Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said while on a visit to Armenia.

"Annan has a Security Council mandate and it is up to the UN Security Council to decide who is complying with this plan and how," he said.

PLAGIARISM SCANDAL Hungarian president resigns

AFP, budapest

Hungary's President Pal Schmitt resigned yesterday, after he was stripped last week of his 1992 doctorate title following claims he plagiarised most of his 200-page thesis.

"Under the constitution, the president must represent the unity of the Hungarian nation. I have unfortunately become a symbol of division, I feel it is my duty to leave my position," he told parliament.

Schmitt, a close ally of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, leaves the ceremonial post less than two years after he took over the presidency in June 2010.

Rumours he might resign first arose on Friday, a day after Budapest's Semmelweis University stripped him of his PhD title, but Schmitt clung on, insisting that he could "see no link" between the plagiarism affair and his job.

The university found last week that the president copied "word-for-word" large passages of another writer's work in his thesis on the history of the Olympic Games.

Orban kept mostly out of the debate, telling public radio Friday that the president alone must make the decision on whether he should resign, while opposition parties had called on him to step down.

In Germany, then defence minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg was also forced to resign last year over allegations that he too plagiarised his doctoral thesis.



Iran vows to stick to nuclear path

AFP, Tehran

Iran declared yesterday it will not be swayed from its nuclear path by sanctions, a week before talks with world powers that are increasingly seen as a last chance for diplomacy in its showdown with the West.

"The sanctions may have caused us small problems but we will continue our path," Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi vowed in an interview with the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

"We do not underestimate any enemy, no matter how tiny and lowly they are. The regime's officials -- the supreme leader, the president, the army, the (Revolutionary) Guards and Basij (militia) -- are completely vigilant. And the nation is prepared to defend the achievements of Islamic Iran," he said.

The defiant words came after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Saturday that the talks between Iran and the world powers would take place April 13 and 14 in Istanbul.

She and US President Barack Obama have both publicly said that the window for diplomacy in the standoff over Iran's nuclear

programme is closing.

"Our policy is one of prevention, not containment," Clinton said in Saudi Arabia after talks with her Gulf Arab counterparts.

"It is incumbent upon Iran to demonstrate by its actions that it is a willing partner and to participate in these negotiations with an effort to obtain concrete results," Clinton said.

Israel and the United States have threatened military strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities if diplomacy and sanctions fail to curb the Islamic republic's nuclear ambitions.

The UN Security Council has imposed four sets of sanctions of Iran because of suspicions over its nuclear programme, which the West and Israel believe includes a drive to develop atomic weapons capability.

Iran denies any military dimension to its nuclear activities.

Its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has called nuclear weapons a "sin". But he has also refused to bow to sanctions, and warned Iran would retaliate in kind if attacked.



PHOTO: AFP

Men and women dressed in burqas from the group 'Faceless' call for banning of the conservative Muslim apparel throughout Australia during a rally in Sydney yesterday. The group says the complete covering of a woman's face leads to cultural isolation within multi-cultural Australia and can be used by criminals to conceal their identity.

Yemen army kills 6 Qaeda suspects

AFP, Aden

Yemen's army shelled al-Qaeda hideouts in the southern city of Zinjibar, one of the jihadists' major strongholds, killing six militants, a local official told AFP yesterday.

The official, speaking from the nearby town of Jaar where wounded militants and dead bodies from Zinjibar are usually taken, said that "a Somali group leader named Abu Bilal" was among those killed in the late Sunday assault.

The extremists, who go under the name Partisans of Sharia (Islamic law), have been locked in battles with the army in Abyan's provincial capital Zinjibar since May 2011, when they overran the city.

On Sunday, the militants killed seven policemen in an attack on a checkpoint in the southeast.

Manmohan cautions against terror threats

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday warned that modern-day terrorism has acquired "new forms and shapes" which is often driven by "bold and educated class of terrorists".

"Terrorism today has acquired new forms and new shapes. It is now often driven by a bold and educated class of terrorists," Singh said in his speech at the 27th raising day of India's elite security force Special Protection Group (SPG) which guards VIPs.

He said "While security forces are seen and known and their actions are mostly predictable, the new-age terrorists are invisible and possess far greater capability to create networks for sharing knowledge, skills and resources. Their activities are marked by the use of the latest technology as a force multiplier."

Pointing out that the security environment in India "is also impacted by a large number of external factors which are not really within our control", he asked the SPG to continue upgrading itself continuously both in terms of technology and training and inducting top quality and highly motivated personnel in adequate numbers.

India lost two of its top leaders to terror attacks -- Indira Gandhi as prime minister in 1984 and her son Rajiv Gandhi, who was also prime minister from 1984 to 1989, in May 1991 when he was out of power.



Russian plane crash kills 31

REUTERS, Moscow

A Russian passenger plane crashed and burst into flames after takeoff in an oil-producing region of Siberia yesterday, killing at least 31 of the 43 people on board, emergency officials said.

Thirteen survivors were pulled from the wreckage and rushed to hospital by helicopter but one later died. Television footage showed the plane, which had broken in two, lying in a snowy field. Only the tail and rear part of the fuselage were visible.

It was not immediately clear what caused the UTAir airlines ATR 72 to crash with 39 passengers and four crew on board, the latest air disaster to blight Russia's safety record.

"There are no explanations yet," Yuri Alekhin, head of the regional branch of the Emergencies Ministry, told Russian television from the scene of the crash.

He said the "black box" flight recorder had been found and added: "Contact was lost with the plane just over three minutes after take-off."

UTAir said on its website that the twin-engine, turbo-prop plane had been trying to make an emergency landing when it came down 1.5 km from the airport in the western Siberian city of Tyumen en route to Surgut, an oil town to the northeast.

Mali sanctions loom Rebels seize north

REUTERS, Bamako

West African leaders were set to decide yesterday whether to impose sanctions on Mali after leaders of a military coup said they would return power to civilians in a bid to avert diplomatic and economic isolation.

A 72-hour deadline, set by West African bloc ECOWAS, for soldiers to start returning to barracks expired overnight as northern separatist rebels said they had completed a lightning push south, seizing three regional capitals in as many days as Mali's army units retreated.

A senior ECOWAS official accused the junta of "buying time" with the promises but said a decision over sanctions would only be taken at a summit set to be held on Dakar yesterday on the sidelines of the swearing-in of Senegal's new president, Macky Sall.

Last month's coup, weeks before President Amadou Toumani Toure was due to step down for elections, shattered the international reputation of stability and democracy that Africa's No. 3 gold producer had previously enjoyed.

Smart fabric for new soldier uniform

BBC ONLINE

British soldiers' uniforms could soon use electrically conducting yarn woven directly into the clothing, replacing cumbersome batteries and cabling.

The "e-textiles" could provide uniforms with a single, central power source.

This would allow soldiers to recharge one battery instead of many and cut the number of cables required in their kit.

Surrey-based Intelligent Textiles showcased the lightweight uniform at an event organised by the Centre for Defence Enterprise (CDE).

"We have built-in conductive yarns that then take power and data to where it needs to be," Asha Thompson, director of Intelligent Textiles, told BBC News.

"One of the problems with conventional cables is that breakages can be catastrophic. What we do here is build in redundancy, so that if the fabric gets cut, damaged or torn, we still have a way of re-routing the data," Thompson said.

NEWS IN brief

Macky Sall sworn in as Senegal president

AFP, Dakar

Senegal's new president Macky Sall was sworn in yesterday after a crushing poll victory over outgoing leader Abdoulaye Wade and a transfer of power hailed as an example of democracy in Africa.

"I swear to faithfully fulfil the office of president ... to observe and enforce the constitution, to devote all my efforts to defending constitutional institutions, territorial integrity and national independence," Sall said as he took the oath, his right hand raised.

Some 2,000 people attended the ceremony in the



Egypt's Coptic church to boycott constitutional panel

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's Coptic Orthodox church has decided to boycott a Islamist-dominated panel charged with drafting the future constitution, the official MENA news agency reported yesterday.

The official MENA news agency reported that the decision was taken unanimously by the 20 members of the Holy Synod to remove the two church officials who sit on the committee.

The church "considers it inappropriate to continue to be represented given the reservations of various political forces on how the constitutional

Zardari to meet Manmohan on April 8

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari will meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on April 8, when he becomes the first Pakistani head of state to visit India since 2005, Islamabad said yesterday.

The lunch talks are the latest sign of the nuclear-armed rivals making gradual progress towards normalising relations, quietly supported by a West keen to improve regional stability as Nato troops leave Afghanistan in 2014.

Pakistan said Zardari would have lunch with Singh in New Delhi and finish the one-day trip with a "private visit for prayers" at the shrine of Sufi saint Hazrat Khwaja Gharib Nawaz in Ajmer Sharif, a popular pilgrimage site.





CAREER OPPORTUNITY

North South University invites application for the following positions:

Public Relations Officer: 01 position

Qualifications and Experiences: Candidate must be a highly qualified, result-driven and experienced professional. A masters degree in Arts or Social Sciences preferably in Mass Communication or Journalism with minimum work experience of 5 (five) years in relevant field preferably at universities or in large organization. Candidate must have good rapport with print and electronic media. Fluency in English and Bangla is required. Must be well conversant in word processing, computer graphic designing, desktop publishing (DTP) and protocol related works.

Age limit: Not above 35 years

Faculty Assistant, EECS Department: 01 position

Qualifications and Experiences: Masters degree preferably in Business Administration / English / Social Sciences. Minimum 3-4 years work experience in academic administrative job in any large organization. Good communication skills in English and Bengali. Well conversant in MS-Word, MS-Excel etc.

Major Duties and Responsibilities:

- Provide student counseling regarding course registration, academic curriculum and student activities;
- Maintain faculty and student databases, official documents and office files;
- Draft, distribute and maintain official correspondence;
- Maintain liaison with faculty, students, guardians and staff of other departments, etc.

Age limit: Not above 35 years.

Monthly Salary: Attractive salary package & benefits will be offered to the deserving candidates for both of the positions.

Other Benefits: Provident Fund, Gratuity, Festival Bonuses, Group Insurance, in house free Medical Consultation etc.

Only short-listed candidates will be called for interview.

Candidates may apply with complete CV, two photographs and copies of certificates and other credentials by **19 April 2012**.

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