

# Clashes blight ceasefire hopes

300 killed in three days; regime accuses Turkey of arming rebels

AGENCIES

Fresh clashes killed at least 52 people, including civilians, in Syria yesterday despite the passing of a UN-backed deadline for a complete withdrawal of government troops and weapons.

Activists reported shelling in Homs and areas of northern Aleppo province, and unrest in the capital, Damascus.

On Monday, violence cost the lives of at least 105 people, including 74 civilians, taking death toll for the past three days beyond 300.

Syria's Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, in Russia for talks, said Damascus had taken steps to adhere to the plan by withdrawing some troops.

He blamed "armed gangs" for the continuing violence.

Under the peace plan - negotiated by the UN and Arab League's special envoy on the Syrian crisis, Kofi Annan - Syrian troops were to have completed their withdrawal from population centres and stopped the use of heavy weaponry by Tuesday, ahead of a full ceasefire coming into place on Thursday.

Damascus had agreed to the deadline, but on Sunday demanded written guarantees first that its opponents would give up arms, along with a promise from foreign states not to fund them.

## SYRIA CRISIS

ANNAN'S SIX-POINT PEACE PLAN

- Syrian-led political process to address the aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people
- UN-supervised cessation of armed violence by all parties
- All parties to ensure humanitarian assistance to all affected areas
- Authorities to release arbitrarily detained persons
- Authorities to ensure freedom of movement for journalists
- Authorities to respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully

Speaking after talks with his Russian counterpart, Muallem said army units had been withdrawn from some areas, a number of detainees released and agreement reached on getting humanitarian aid to those in need.

But he said that "despite all these positive measures we noticed on a daily basis the escalation of opposition by the armed terrorist gangs".

Meanwhile, the Syria rebels yesterday threatened to resume attacks on forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad if the regime fails to stop shelling and pull troops out of protest hubs as promised.

The opposition Syrian National Council said that new conditions set by the Damascus regime for it to comply with a UN-backed peace plan were "unacceptable."

However, the opposition agreed to "wait the 48 hours without attacking the army, and will remain in a defensive position," a rebel spokesman said.

Syria's Foreign Minister also accused Turkey of supplying militant groups with weapons and allowing them to cross its borders, AFP reports.

Kofi Annan was visiting some of the Turkish camps yesterday.

The visit comes a day after several people in one camp were injured by shots fired across the border from inside Syria. Two people were also shot dead as they approached the border from the Syrian side.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on a trip to China, said the incidents were a "clear violation" of its borders and that his country would "take the necessary measures" in response.

# 'Iran can withstand sanctions for years'

AFP, Tehran

Iran will defend its rights and has enough cash to survive Western economic sanctions, a defiant President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday, ahead of crucial talks with world powers over its disputed nuclear drive.

Iran is to meet the P5+1 group -- the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany -- in Istanbul on Saturday. Discussions are expected to focus on Tehran's nuclear programme and severe Western sanctions which are to be toughened by an EU oil embargo coming into force in July.

Ahmadinejad said Iran would overcome the obstacles the West has put in its way and had an economy able to withstand the sanctions.

"We have enough foreign currency so that, even if one barrel of oil is not sold for two or even three years, the country will be managed well and the enemies will not see their wishes (come true)," he added.

The United States and its allies fear Iran's programme mask a drive towards atomic weapons capability, despite strenuous denials from Tehran.



Ahmadinejad

# Egypt halts constitutional panel

BBC ONLINE

A court in Egypt yesterday suspended the 100-member assembly appointed last month to draft the country's new constitution.

Several lawsuits had demanded Cairo's Administrative Court block the decision to form the panel as it did not reflect the diversity of Egyptian society.

They said women, young people and Christians were under-represented.

Islamists from the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafist Nour party, which dominate parliament, have a near-majority.

# Norway gunman declared sane

AFP, Oslo

Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway last July, was not psychotic at the time of the twin attacks and can thus be held criminally responsible, a new psychiatric probe concluded yesterday.

"The experts' main conclusion is that the accused, Anders Behring Breivik, is not considered to have been psychotic at the time of the actions on July 22, 2011," the Oslo district court said in a statement which reopens the debate on whether the self-confessed killer can be sent to prison.

"That means that he is considered criminally responsible at the time of the crime."

The new evaluation counters the findings of an initial probe that found Breivik was suffering from "paranoid schizophrenia," which meant he would most likely be sentenced to psychiatric care instead of prison.

On July 22, Breivik first set off a car bomb outside government buildings in Oslo, killing eight people, before travelling to the small island of Utøya northwest of the capital where he spent more than an hour methodically shooting and killing another 69 people, mostly teenagers.



Anders Breivik

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# Santorum quits White House race

AFP, Washington

Rick Santorum yesterday dropped his long-shot White House bid, effectively handing Mitt Romney the Republican party crown to challenge President Barack Obama in November elections.

"This presidential race is over for me," Santorum told supporters in Gettysburg, in his home state of Pennsylvania.

Despite an upset victory when he won the



very first contest in the Republican nominating race in Iowa in January, Santorum has failed to build any momentum.

Santorum was far behind Romney in terms of funding and the number of delegates needed to seal the nomination at the Republican convention in Tampa, Florida, in late August.

After recent losses in Wisconsin and Maryland, Santorum had 285 delegates compared to Romney's 661, according to an Associated Press tally.

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