

Syria signs protocol for UN mission

UN chief says regime failed to keep truce

AFP, Damascus

Syria yesterday signed a preliminary accord outlining a protocol for a UN mission to monitor a fragile week-old ceasefire in the strife-torn country, the two sides announced.

Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad signed the deal with a member of a UN advance team, the ministry said in a statement.

"This agreement comes within the framework of Syrian efforts aimed at making the Annan plan succeed and to facilitate the UN observer mission while respecting Syria's sovereignty," the statement said.

A spokesman for UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, who drafted the six-point ceasefire accord, confirmed in Geneva that an agreement had been concluded between the two parties.

He added that discussions were under way with members of the Syrian opposition to ensure they also comply with the

ceasefire.

"The hard part lies ahead, a truly Syrian-led and -owned political dialogue to address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the Syrian people," Fawzi said.

The protocol will pave the way for some 300 UN observers to fan across the country to monitor a week-old truce aimed at ending 13 months of violence in Syria that the United Nations says has killed well over 9,000 people.

Despite the agreement signing, at least four people were killed in violence across Syria.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon earlier called for an expanded UN ceasefire observation mission to be sent to Syria even though he says President Bashar al-Assad has failed to end the violence.

The UN chief called for 300 unarmed observers to be sent on a three-month mission, in a report to be discussed by the UN Security Council later yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman, wrapped in an Israeli flag, stands in front of barbed wire at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi death camp, as people take part in the annual "March of the Living", in Poland. The annual March of the Living, which commemorates the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust, was launched in 1988, drawing thousands of people from around the world, including Jewish youths and elderly Holocaust survivors.

US blames Haqqani for Afghan attacks

REUTERS, Kabul

The US ambassador to Afghanistan said yesterday there was "no question" that the Haqqani network, one of the most feared insurgent groups in the country, mounted coordinated attacks on Kabul and other areas over the weekend.

Ryan Crocker also called on Islamabad to crack down on what he called Haqqani safe havens in Pakistan, reiterating a long-standing demand that has strained ties between the strategic allies.

"There is no question in our mind that the Haqqanis were responsible for these attacks," he told reporters.

"We know where their leadership lives and we know where these plans are made. They're not made in Afghanistan. They're made in Miram Shah which is in North Waziristan, which is in Pakistan."

Sudan to teach South 'final lesson by force'

REUTERS, Khartoum

Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir threatened war against his newly-independent neighbor yesterday, vowing to teach South Sudan a "final lesson by force" after it occupied a disputed oil field.

Appearing in medal-spangled general's uniform at a large rally in the border province of North Kordofan, the burly military ruler danced side-to-side, waved his walking stick in the air and made blistering threats against the leadership of the South, which broke off last year after decades of civil war.

"These people don't understand, and we will give them the final lesson by force," Bashir told the rally in El-Obeid, North Kordofan's capital. "We will not give them an inch of our country, and whoever extends his hand on Sudan, we will cut it."

South Sudan separated from the rest of Sudan with Bashir's blessing last July under the terms of a 2005 peace deal. But since then violence has steadily escalated, fuelled by territorial disputes, ethnic animosity and quarrels over oil.

Last week, South Sudan seized Heglig, a disputed oil field near the border between the two countries, claiming it as its rightful territory and saying it would only withdraw if the United



Hassan al-Bashir

Nations deployed a neutral force there.

Bashir vowed to retake the oil field, which he said was part of Sudan's Kordofan province. That alone would not resolve the conflict, he added.

"Heglig is not the end, but the beginning." Global powers have voiced alarm at the escalation of violence and urged the two to stop fighting and return to talks.

In a dramatic escalation of rhetoric on Wednesday, Bashir said he would "liberate" South Sudan from its rulers, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, which fought the guerrilla civil war against Khartoum.

There was no immediate comment from the South to yesterday's speech.

Some 2 million people died in Sudan's civil war, fought for all but a few years from 1955 to 2005 over disputes of ideology, ethnicity and religion.

The countries remain at odds over the position of their border, how much the landlocked South should pay to transport its oil through Sudan and the division of national debt, among other issues.

Both countries accuse each other of waging proxy war through militia operating on each other's territory.

Breivik planned three car bombs

BBC ONLINE

Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people in two attacks in Norway last July, yesterday told his trial he originally planned to detonate three car bombs.

The sole car bomb he did set off killed eight people in Oslo. Breivik said he decided against multiple bombs because building them was "more difficult than [he] had thought".

He disputed a psychiatrist's report describing him as insane. Earlier, he told the court he took a year off to play World of Warcraft.

He described using computer games to rehearse scenarios before setting off the car bomb outside a government building in the Norwegian capital on 22 July 2011.

EU to suspend Myanmar sanctions for a year

AFP, Brussels

EU nations are set to suspend sanctions against Myanmar for a year, opening the way to a potential trade and investment bonanza with over 800 firms, European Union diplomats told AFP yesterday.

"There is now agreement in principle" to "a suspension of all sanctions, except for the arms embargo," said a diplomat close to the talks who asked not to be identified.

A formal announcement is expected at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday in Luxembourg.

Despite reforms by Myanmar's military leaders, EU nations long remained split over whether to remove sanctions, with Germany urging a swift lifting but hawkish former colonial power Britain keen to maintain leverage in the still army-dominated country.

But in a joint policy-making call last week, British Prime Minister David Cameron and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi urged the suspension of all EU measures -- though not the scrapping of the sanctions.

Suu Kyi's endorsement of the suspension

was seen as crucial.

The 12-month suspension period "gives us time to assess the sustainability of reform", a diplomat said. The ministers are expected to also agree to include the possibility of reviewing the decision in six months.

Western nations eager to reward sweeping reforms that culminated in Suu Kyi's election to parliament in April 1 by-elections, have already made some reciprocal gestures to encourage Myanmar's government.

Once in place, the suspension opens up what many investors see as the next big frontier to European firms.

In all, the 27-nation bloc had slapped a travel ban and assets freeze on 491 people but early this year eased the measures, notably suspending visa bans against members of the government.

The EU in April last year suspended travel bans and asset freezes against 24 people, including the foreign minister. In February, it lifted a travel ban on 87 Myanmar officials, including Thein Sein, but kept an assets freeze against them.

NEWS IN brief

Ukraine opens new trial against ex-PM

AFP, Kharkiv

A Ukrainian court yesterday opened fresh criminal hearings against jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko in a case set to further dent the ex-Soviet nation's EU membership hopes.

The flamboyant but divisive 2004 Orange Revolution leader faces tax evasion and embezzlement charges relating to the time she spent leading a gas trading company in the 1990s before the launch of her dramatic political career.

The 51-year-old is already not due for release until 2018 for arranging an expensive gas deal with Russia while serving as premier and could now see her sentence extended until 2023 of found guilty and given the full prison term.

UK to publish hacking report on May 1

REUTERS, London

British legislators yesterday said they hoped to publish on May 1 a long-awaited report into a phone hacking scandal centered on News Corp's now-closed News of the World tabloid.

Parliament's culture committee is widely expected to criticise News Corp in the report, raising the possibility that the British broadcast watchdog Ofcom will force Rupert Murdoch's media conglomerate to cut or sell its stake in the highly profitable pay-TV firm BSkyB.

News Corp lies at the centre of a long-running scandal over phone and computer hacking, in which journalists intercepted the voicemails of celebrities and crime victims, and now faces allegations that police officers were also paid for information that was used in newspaper reports.

Zuma gives S Africa 4th First Lady

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's first polygamist President Jacob Zuma marries again this weekend, officially giving the country four first ladies and an even bigger protocol headache.

Durban-born businesswoman Bongli Ngema will tie the knot with Zuma, 70, in his home village of Nkandla, in a traditional Zulu ceremony recognised under South Africa's broad legal system.

This weekend will be his third marriage in four years, but despite the enormous public interest, details on his weddings, wives and 21 children are a closely guarded secret.

Zuma has also had two other wives. One, Kate Mantsho, committed suicide in 2000. In 1998 he divorced Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who remains in his inner circle and is currently South Africa's home affairs minister and candidate to head the African Union.

Conflict uprooted 3.5m in 2011

AFP, Geneva

Conflicts including the uprisings in the Arab world last year forced 3.5 million people to flee within their country, international monitors said yesterday.

A total of 26.4 million people were internally displaced at the end of 2011, a fall from 27.5 million the previous year, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

But the number of newly displaced people rose 20 percent compared to 2010.

The figures were released yesterday with the launch of the group's report "The Global Overview 2011, People Displaced by Conflict and Violence," hosted by the UNHCR in Geneva.

Nato, Russia at odds over missile shield

AFP, Brussels

Nato allies and Russia yesterday vowed to deepen their cooperation but remained deeply at odds over a US-led missile shield in Europe and the situation in Syria.

Despite rifts on several fronts, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Nato recalled after talks in Brussels that both sides have teamed up to fight terrorism and piracy, and cooperate on Afghanistan.

But the former Cold War foes have failed to reach a compromise on the missile defence system, which Russia fears would thwart its nuclear deterrent despite Nato assurances that it is aimed at Iran and other threats.

"Our missile defence system is not designed to threaten Russia or undermine the strategic position of Russia," Rasmussen said.

Russia has demanded legally-binding guarantees that the missile shield will not undermine its arsenal, but Nato refuses to enter into such an agreement and has instead offered political reassurances.

Nato leaders are hoping to declare the start of an "interim capability" for the missile shield at a summit in Chicago on May 20-21.

Wave of attacks kill 37 across Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

More than 20 bombs hit cities and towns across Iraq on Thursday, killing at least 37 and wounding more than 100, police and hospital sources said, raising fears of sectarian strife in a country keen to show it can now maintain security.

In Baghdad, three car bombs, two roadside bombs and one suicide car bomb hit mainly Shi'ite areas in what looked like coordinated attacks, killing 15 people and wounding 61, the sources said.

Two car bombs and three roadside bombs aimed at police and army patrols in the northern oil city of Kirkuk killed eight people and wounded 26, police and hospital sources said.

Elsewhere in northern Iraq, two car bombs targeting government-backed Sunni Sahwa militia went off in Samarra, two blasts hit Baquba, a roadside bomb exploded in



Mosul and another roadside device exploded in Taji.

In the mainly Sunni Muslim province of Anbar in the west, two car bombs targeting police killed four and wounded 10 in Ramadi while a roadside bomb wounded four people in Falluja.

Heightened tension between Shias, Sunnis and Kurds in the fragile coalition government since US troops withdrew in December has raised fears of a return to sectarian violence of the kind that pushed Iraq to the brink of civil war a few years ago.

The country is less violent than at the height of that conflict in 2006-07, but bombings and killings still happen daily, often aimed at Shia areas and local security forces.

The rift between Baghdad and the Kurds recently worsened when the Kurdistan Regional Government said it was halting oil exports because the central government was not paying oil firms operating in the north.

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