

West mulls armed action in Syria

Russia, China to oppose move; raging violence kills 137 in two days

AFP, Damascus

West has stepped up its pressure on Syria after the Houla massacre which killed 108 people, many of them children, with French President Francois Hollande said on Tuesday that he did not rule out military intervention.

"An armed intervention is not excluded on the condition that it is carried out with respect to international law, meaning after deliberation by the United Nations Security Council," he said in a television interview.

Australia said it was open to discussion about military intervention in Syria but warned of the significant challenges involved in getting it off the ground.

The US State Department had said on Tuesday it hoped the Houla tragedy would spark a "turning point" in Russia's reluctance to take tougher action against its Soviet-era ally.

Annan, during a meeting with



A photo shows an armed man standing on a plaque of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, father of current President Bashar al-Assad, during an anti-regime demonstration in Qusayr on Tuesday.

Assad in Damascus on Tuesday, urged the Syrian leader to act immediately to end 15 months of bloodshed which has claimed thousands of lives, warning that the country had reached a "tipping point."

However, China yesterday restated its opposition to military

intervention in Syria, as Russia sought to halt fresh UN Security Council action after a massacre of civilians sparked global fury.

The renewed support by Moscow and Beijing for the Damascus regime came as numerous Western nations, including the United States, Britain and France,

expelled Syrian diplomats in the wake of Friday's massacre and after France floated the idea of armed intervention to protect civilians.

"China opposes military intervention in Syria and opposes regime change by force," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin told reporters in Beijing.

Russia, which along with China has vetoed two UN Security Council resolutions highly critical of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, also yesterday said it was "premature" for the council to consider new action.

"We believe that a review now by the Security Council of any new measures on the situation would be premature," Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov told the Interfax news agency in comments that appeared to dash Washington's hopes of a change of heart in Moscow.

Japan yesterday joined the chorus of international outrage at

the slaughter of civilians in Houla, telling the Syrian ambassador in Tokyo to leave the country "as soon as possible."

Japan's decision followed the apparently coordinated expulsion of diplomats the previous day by the European Union, the United States and other governments including Australia, Canada and Switzerland.

On Tuesday alone, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a total of 98 people were killed across Syria with another 39 dying yesterday.

The Syrian authorities have repeatedly insisted that the lion's share of the blame for the deaths lies with armed rebels, a position Assad restated in his talks with Annan on Tuesday.

More than 13,000 people have been killed, most of them civilians, since the uprising against Assad's regime erupted in March last year, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

HISTORIC THAILAND TOUR

Suu Kyi gets hero's welcome

REUTERS, Mahachai, Thailand

Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday received a rapturous reception in Thailand from crowds of cheering compatriots who flocked to celebrate her first trip outside Myanmar in nearly a quarter of a century.

More than 1,000 Myanmar migrants lined the streets waving flags and holding aloft pictures of Suu Kyi as she arrived to give a speech from the balcony of a dilapidated building in an industrial zone on the fringes of the Thai capital, Bangkok.

"I've said this time and again - I don't want to make promises. It's not good if you cannot keep your promises after you've made them, But I can make you one promise - I will try my very best," Suu Kyi told the crowd, speaking in Burmese.

"I wish the migrant workers from Burma good health and wealth, that they be free from danger and can come back home as soon as possible."

Dressed in a floral blouse and red traditional longhi, or sarong, Suu Kyi waved and smiled as the crowd chanting "Mother Suu" jostled for a glimpse of her.

Labour activists estimate there are at least two million Myanmar migrants in Thailand, many sending home part of their wages to help families in a country where a third of the 60 million people live below the poverty line.

Suu Kyi said she would work to improve the rights and working conditions of Myanmar migrants.



BLOOD DIAMOND TRIAL

Taylor jailed for 50 years

AFP, Leidschendam

A UN-backed war crimes court yesterday sentenced Liberia's former president Charles Taylor to 50 years in jail for arming rebels in Sierra Leone in return for "blood diamonds".

Taylor, 64, was convicted last month of all 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for aiding and abetting Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) during the country's brutal 1991-2001 civil war.

In return, the court said, he was paid in diamonds mined by slave labour in areas under control of the rebels, who murdered, raped and kept sex slaves, hacked off limbs and forced children under 15 to fight.

"The accused has been found responsible for aiding and abetting some of the most heinous crimes in human history," said Special Court for Sierra Leone judge Richard Lussick yesterday.

"The trial chamber unanimously sentences you to a single term of imprisonment for 50 years on all counts," the judge said as he announced the ruling of the court based at Leidschendam, just outside The Hague.

"The trial chamber noticed that the effects of these crimes on the families and society as a whole in Sierra Leone was devastating," Lussick said in handing down the ruling, the first sentence against a former head of state in an international court since the Nazi trials at Nuremberg in 1946.

Clashes with Qaeda kills 28 in Yemen

AFP, Aden

Yemeni forces pressed an offensive against al-Qaeda loyalists in Abyan province in the south yesterday, leaving six soldiers and 22 militants dead, military and other officials said.

Troops backed by local militiamen renewed their assault on the town of Jaar, a jihadist stronghold north of the provincial capital Zinjibar, a senior commander in the south said.

Six soldiers and 12 militants were killed in "fierce clashes" on the northern and western outskirts of the town, the commander said. Yemeni forces launched an all-out offensive on May 12 aimed at reclaiming towns and cities in Abyan lost to al-Qaeda over the past year.

Assange loses extradition appeal

AFP, London

Britain's Supreme Court yesterday ruled that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden, but his extradition was put on hold to give his lawyers a chance to re-open the case.

Britain's highest court rejected the argument from Assange's lawyers that the Swedish prosecutor who issued the arrest warrant over sex crime allegations was not entitled to do so.

The seven judges were split five to two but the majority ruling was that the Swedish prosecutor was a rightful judicial authority and therefore allowed to issue the warrant for the Internet whistleblower.

Delivering the judgement, Supreme Court president Nicholas Phillips said: "The request for Mr Assange's extradition has been lawfully made and his appeal against extradition is accordingly dismissed."

But in an unexpected twist, Assange's lawyer Dinah Rose asked the judge for 14 days to consider whether to apply to reopen the case on the grounds that the judgement referred to material not argued in the court.

The judge granted the request,



which is highly unusual in the three-year history of the Supreme Court.

Assange, a 40-year-old Australian former computer hacker, was not in the central London court to hear the judgement. One of his supporters, journalist John Pilger, said he was "stuck in traffic".

If Assange fails to have the case reopened in Britain, he still has the option of a last-ditch appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Assange does not deny that he had sex with two WikiLeaks volunteers in Sweden while attending a WikiLeaks seminar, but insists the sex was consensual and argues there are political motives behind the attempts to extra-

dite him.

The women say he raped and sexually assaulted him.

Assange's mother Christine said ahead of the judgement: "It's a 24-hour nightmare because we know he is not safe and the biggest governments in the world are gunning for him."

Assange, whose website enraged Washington by releasing a flood of state and military secrets, has been living under tight restrictions on his movement for 540 days.

The white-haired former hacker has said he fears his extradition would eventually lead to his transfer to the United States, where US soldier Bradley Manning is facing a court-martial over accusations that he handed documents to WikiLeaks.

One week ago, Assange attended a film screening in London wearing a kevlar Guy Fawkes mask.

"This may be my last time in public, so I thought I should start with a situation where you won't be able to see me anymore," said Assange, who since December 2010 has been forced to report to police daily and wear an electronic ankle tag.



PHOTO: AFP

President Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Bob Dylan during a ceremony on Tuesday.

Obama honors Dylan with top US honor

AFP, Washington

Fan-in-chief Barack Obama invested legendary singer songwriter Bob Dylan Tuesday with America's highest civilian honor, praising the gritty folk legend's never ending quest for truth.

Dylan joined other honorees including former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, John Glenn, the first American to orbit Earth and novelist Toni Morrison to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"By the time he was 23, Bob's voice, with its weight, its unique gravelly power, was redefining not just what music sounded like, but the message it carried and how it made people feel," Obama said.

"Today, everybody from Bruce Springsteen to U2 owes Bob a debt of gratitude." "There is not a bigger giant in the history of American music. All these years later, he's still chasing that sound, still searching for a little bit of truth, and I have to say that I am a really big fan."

Dylan, hiding behind trademark dark glasses, gave no noticeable sign of appreciation or emotion as he was summoned to receive the medal from Obama.

"I remember in college listening to Bob Dylan and my world opening up, because he captured something about this country that was so vital," Obama added.

The revered singer-song writer was last at the White House in February 2010, when he performed protest anthem "The Times, They are a Changin'" nearly 50 years after belting out songs of revolution on Washington's National Mall.

Holiday trip silences

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Nine of the 13 on board the microbus were family members of Zakir Hossain Sardar, chairman of Arshinagar Union Parishad in Vedarganj upazila of Shariatpur; three were domestic helps and the driver.

Zubair Shams Ribin, son of Zakir, rushed to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue hearing the news. He tried to see his mother Shahnaz Parvin's and sister Lumaisa Lubab's bodies but relatives and police prevented him. They were concerned that Ribin would not be able to take it as the impact severely mutilated the bodies.

"There is my mother, lying down; my sister is sleeping. Let me see them, please," he kept saying lying down on the morgue yard. He passed out moments later only to regain consciousness and utter the

same words again.

Rozina Begum was Zakir's sister. She, her husband Rezaul Amin Lenin, their seven-year-old son Eash and nine-month-old daughter Ishra died in the accident.

Delawar Hossain Milon brother-in-law of Lenin said Eash's kindergarten-2 exams finished on Tuesday and he was really keen to visit their grandparent's home. He had to miss out on the trip last year as his mother was pregnant with his sister Ishra.

His insistence led to Lenin applying for leave at his office and going to Shariatpur with his family.

The lone survivor of the tragic accident was Kohinur Akhter, 15. She worked as a domestic help at Rozina and Lenin's home. She was fighting for her life in Dhaka Medical College Hospital with

injuries to her head.

Witness to the accident Babul Dewan said, "Everyone in the microbus was scattered, like lumps of flesh. No one seemed alive. Suddenly we noticed a girl on the back seat drenched in blood."

"She was slightly moving her hand. We took her out and rushed to a local hospital and then to Dhaka Medical College Hospital."

Doctors at the neurosurgery department of DMCH said the girl sustained serious injuries in the head. Her condition was critical.

Rozina's sister Mina Begum and her university student son Sayem Hasan Babu also perished in the accident. Their bodies were kept at Combined Military Hospital. Their funerals would be held after Mina's son returns from a UN peacekeeping mission.

SQ Chy seeks bail

FROM PAGE 20

prosecutor of the case, to express his position on the petition.

"His party is not taking part in parliament sessions. Therefore, such a prayer seems foggy and unclear, especially when the tribunal proceedings are heading to an end," said Malum, calling upon the defence to extend their hands of cooperation.

Malum added there was no bail provision in the International Crimes Tribunal Act. Therefore, the accused should not be granted bail. He also opposed the plea of special arrangements, sought instead of bail, on grounds of security.

The hearing of the petition went on for an hour.

Salauddin Quader, who is facing 23 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971, was in the dock.

The defence submitted the petition on May 27.

Earlier on the day, Justice Nizamul Huq expressed his disappointment over two reports published by the Bangla daily Sangram when Malum drew the tribunal's attention to the reports, one of which was headlined, "Third prosecution witness against Salauddin Quader Chowdhury is fake freedom fighter", published in the Bangla daily on May 29.

Malum told the court until the allegations were proved false, no one could mention them as false.

He asked how the reporter had called the witness a fake freedom fighter even when the defence had not yet proved it.

"It has been done to debase witnesses and hinder the tribunal proceedings," Malum observed.

The tribunal chief called up the daily's correspondent,

who was present in court.

"Fake freedom fighter is a serious statement. The correspondent seems by himself to have proved the witness fake," said the chairman, adding, there was no relation between having a certificate and being a freedom fighter.

They are honourable persons and came to the court at our request, Nizamul Huq added.

"We want cooperation from all the people of the country," he said and added that the editor of the daily had already been given punishment earlier for publishing misleading reports.

The tribunal later asked the reporter to give a corrigendum of the headline.

Tribunal-1 yesterday recorded the cross-examination of the investigation officer of another case filed against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delawar Hossain

Sayedee for his alleged involvement in war crimes during the Liberation War.

The cross-examination went on for more than three hours with Sayedee being present in the dock.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until today.

APPLICATION FOR CASE TRANSFER

Meanwhile, the defence of Ghulam Azam yesterday filed a petition before the International Crimes Tribunal-1 through the registrar for transferring the case against the former Jamaat chief to the second tribunal.

A people's court passed a verdict of hanging Ghulam Azam on March 26, 1992. Justice Nizamul Huq had then requested the government to execute the verdict on April 10, 1992, say the defence in a press release.

Since he was a member of

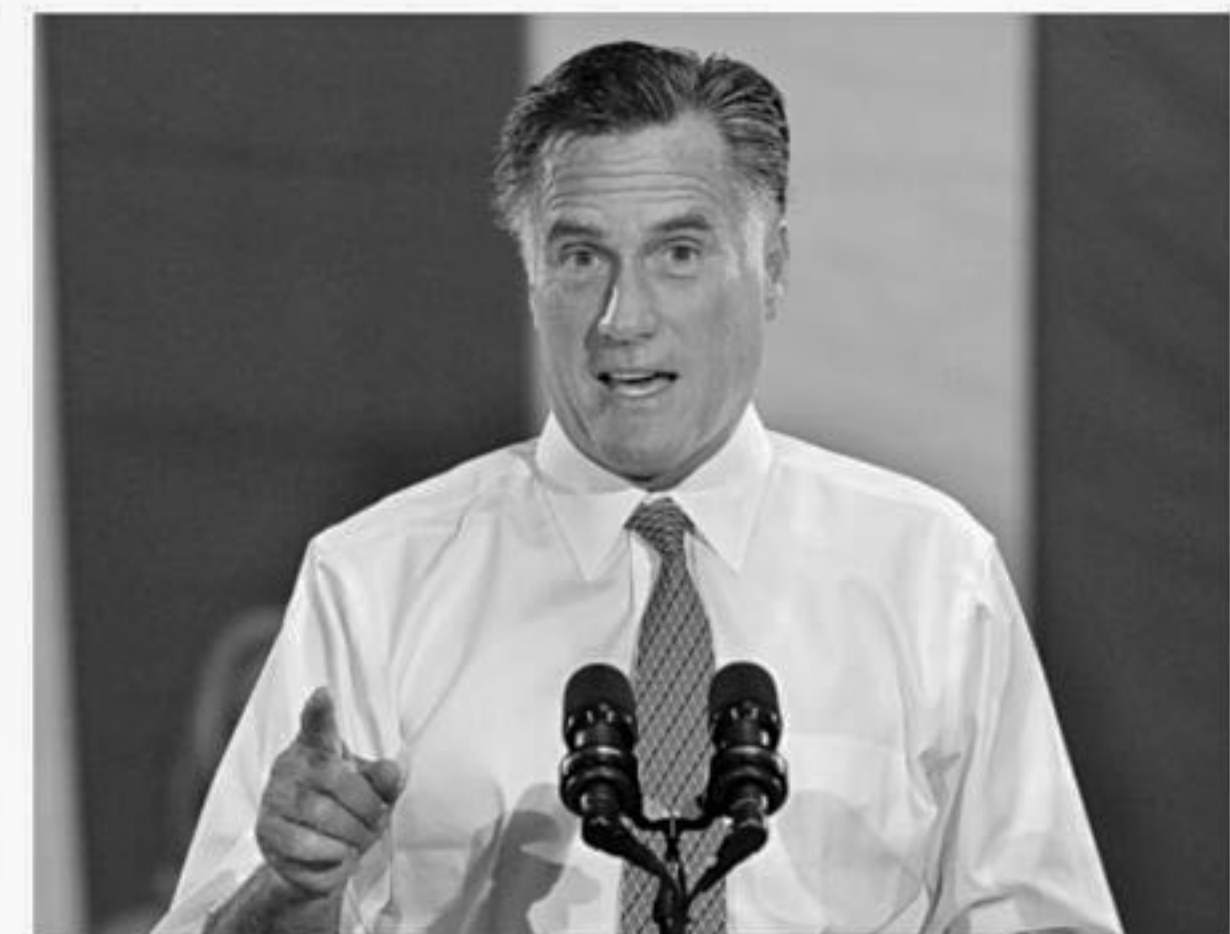
the secretariat of the investigation commission of Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee in 1992 and played a vital role to lead the probe against Ghulam Azam, he could not conduct the trial on ethical grounds.

For the sake of transparency and neutrality, the case should be transferred from tribunal-1 to tribunal-2, they argued.

AKM Nasiruddin Mahmud, registrar to the two tribunals, said he had received their application and forwarded it to the tribunal concerned.

Malum said according to 11(A) of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, only the chief prosecutor can make appeals for the transfer of a case from one tribunal to another for the sake of a completion of a trial speedily.

The defence cannot make any such appeals, he added.



Romney seals party nomination

AFP, Washington

Mitt Romney clinched his Republican party's White House nomination Tuesday by winning its Texas primary, vowing to get America "back on the path to prosperity" by defeating Barack Obama in November.

But the milestone was clouded by a rehashed controversy over claims by billionaire tycoon Donald Trump, a high-profile Romney supporter, questioning President Obama's birthplace.

"#1144. Thank You. Whatever challenges lie ahead, we will settle for nothing less than getting America back on the path to prosperity," Romney tweeted, referring to the number of delegates required to win his party's nomination.

The former Massachusetts governor, the only candidate who actively campaigned in Texas, won 71 percent of the vote, according to Fox News, CNN and NBC television.

US congressman from Texas Ron Paul won 10 percent in his home state, Catholic conservative Rick Santorum 7 percent and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich 5 percent, according to CNN.

In Texas 155 delegates were at stake -- which added to Romney's tally of 1,064 should take him well over the 1,144 nomination threshold, according to the website RealClearPolitics.

In nominating a multimillionaire former businessman, the Republican Party is in familiar territory, but in one key respect Romney is making history, as the nation's first-ever Mormon nominee of a major political party.

The Republican base has long been dominated by evangelical Christians, and Romney's faith has occasionally come under scrutiny by some religious leaders.

But Romney is counting on Americans seeing him as the pragmatic problem solver with the business credentials to turn the economy around better than Obama has.

Romney, 65, pivoted toward Obama in his campaign speeches and events more than a month ago, when it became clear his long march toward the nomination at the party convention in August would not be stopped.

But it was a brutal primary season. Rivals like Gingrich and Santorum humbled Romney by stealing some victories, rallying voters to their more conservative agenda and highlighting his flipflops on key issues such as abortion.

Polls show a steadily tightening White House race, with Republicans coalescing behind Romney in the weeks since Gingrich and Santorum dropped out.