

## Syria violence escalates

AGENCIES

Syrian regime forces shelled the northwestern town of Al-Haffe for an eighth day yesterday, sparking fears of an impending massacre and UN demands that its observers be granted access to the flashpoint.

Amid raging violence, the UN has warned of an alarming escalation in violence in Syria and urged international powers to increase efforts to make its peace plan work.

A spokesman for Kofi Annan said the UN special envoy wanted a new conference to be held soon, but accepted the peace plan was the "only one on the table".

A truce was agreed in April but the violence shows no sign of abating. More than 100 people were killed on Monday.

Syrian troops are bombarding rebel positions in Haffa, and the US has warned that the Syrian government is planning another massacre there.

Separately, a UN report has accused Syrian troops of torturing children and using them as human shields to prevent attacks by opposition forces.

Syrian children as young as nine had been victims of killing and maiming, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, the UN said in a report.

"Rarely, have I seen such brutality against children as in Syria, where girls and boys are detained, tortured, executed, and used as human shields," Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN special representative for children in armed conflict, told AFP before releasing the report.



Muslim people carrying belongings evacuate to safer places as they walk past burnt houses in Sittwe, capital of Myanmar's state of Rakhine yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Indian to vote for president on July 19

AFP, New Delhi

India's presidential poll will be held on July 19, the election commission announced yesterday, with Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee the leading candidate for the largely ceremonial role.

Presidential candidates have until June 30 to file their nominations and results will be announced on July 22.

"The counting of votes will be held on July 22 and the result will be declared the same day," he said.

The winner will replace Pratibha Patil, the first woman to hold India's highest constitutional post. Her five-year term is scheduled to end on July 24.

Indian presidents are elected by an electoral college comprising MPs from the federal parliament's two houses and lawmakers of state legis-

## 'They want to kill me' in prison: Mubarak

AFP, Cairo



Egypt's ousted president Hosni Mubarak, now serving a life sentence over protester killings, said the authorities "want to kill" him in jail as his health deteriorated, his lawyer told AFP on Monday.

"He says: 'They want to kill me. Save me, Mr Farid, find me a solution,'" said Farid al-Deeb, his chief lawyer in the murder and corruption trial which ended this month with his sentencing.

Mubarak's health has deteriorated since his incarceration on June 2, and he was defibrillated twice to revive his heart on Monday, a prison hospital source said.

"His condition is very critical," Deeb said. "I appeal through Agence France-Presse to all world leaders and NGOs: save Mubarak."

An interior ministry source had told AFP that Mubarak's condition was "critical but stable", as officials weighed transferring him

to a military hospital in the capital. The 84-year-old former strongman was sentenced to life behind bars for suppressing a revolt against his rule in early 2011 in which nearly 850 protesters were killed.

He is currently being held in an intensive care wing of Cairo's Tora prison.

Prison authorities agreed on Monday to allow his son Alaa, also jailed in the same prison on corruption charges, to join him and his other son Gamal.

Mubarak's wife Suzanne and his two daughters-in-law were given special permission to visit him on Sunday following rumours that he had died in prison, state media reported.

Authorities have neither accepted nor declined the request to transfer Mubarak, saying only that he will be "treated like all prisoners."

## Tokyo world's most expensive city

AFP, Paris

Tokyo has regained the unenviable title of the world's most expensive city for expatriates, while the eurozone crisis has made many European cities cheaper according to a survey published yesterday.

At the other end of the scale, the survey by the Mercer group named the Pakistani port Karachi as the least expensive city, with living costs around three times cheaper than in the Japanese capital.

Tokyo pushed Angolan capital Luanda into second place to retake the top spot in the survey. Another Japanese city, Osaka, came third, the Russian capital Moscow in fourth, and Geneva fifth.

Paris dropped 10 spots to 37th, Rome fell eight to 42nd, and Athens tumbled 24 to 77th.

## Calls grow for end to Myanmar unrest

### Dozens killed; HRW says situation getting out of control

AFP, Sittwe

Dozens of people have been killed in a surge in sectarian violence in Myanmar, an official said yesterday, as international pressure grew for an end to the bloodshed.

A state of emergency has been declared in western Rakhine state, which has been rocked by a wave of rioting and arson, posing a major test for the reformist government which took power last year.

"About 25 people have been killed during the unrest," a senior government official told AFP, requesting anonymity. He did not give details of how they died or whether they were Buddhists or Muslims.

A further 41 people were wounded in five days of unrest, he said.

The death toll does not include 10 Muslims who were killed on June 3 by a Buddhist mob in apparent revenge for

the rape and murder of a woman, which sparked the violence in Rakhine.

Rights organisations fear the number of people killed could be much higher than the official figure.

Gunfire rattled the state capital Sittwe yesterday and there was a heavy security presence, according to an AFP reporter. Plumes of smoke rose from fires dotted around the area.

Rakhine, a predominantly Buddhist state bordering Bangladesh, is home to a large number of Muslims including the Rohingya, described by the United Nations as one of the world's most persecuted minorities.

The United States urged an immediate halt to the deadly sectarian unrest, which has prompted the United Nations to evacuate more than 40 workers -- including foreigners -- and their families from Rakhine state.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Monday called for "all parties to

exercise restraint", adding that "the United States continues to be deeply concerned".

The humanitarian group Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), one of the few international aid groups with a presence in the area, said that it had suspended its activities, disrupting essential treatment.

Warning that the violence was running "out of control", New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) called for international observers to be deployed in Rakhine.

The Myanmar government considers the Rohingya to be foreigners, while many citizens see them as illegal immigrants and view them with hostility, describing them as "Bengalis".

The violence poses a serious challenge to Myanmar's reformist President Thein Sein, as the nation takes tentative steps towards democracy after decades of authoritarian rule.

## GLACIER DISPUTE

### No breakthrough in Indo-Pak talks

AFP, Rawalpindi

India and Pakistan's latest talks seeking to end decades of military stand-off on the Siachen Glacier broke up with nothing more than an agreement to meet again yesterday, both sides said.

There had been highest hope of a breakthrough after the misery of the world's fresh battlefield was brought home by an avalanche that killed 140 people at a Pakistani army camp on April 7.

A joint statement said talks between India and Pakistan's defence secretaries -- the highest civil servants at their respective ministries -- had been held "in a cordial and friendly atmosphere" at the Pakistani ministry in Rawalpindi.

The two sides would next meet in New Delhi, but no date was announced. It was the 13th round of talks to end in stalemate.

The nuclear rivals have kept a ceasefire on the Himalayan glacier since 2003. In April, Pakistan's army chief of staff, General Ashfaq Kayani, called for a negotiated solution and said that the glacier should be demilitarised.

India captured the commanding peaks in 1984 and sees the glacier as vital to monitor Pakistani positions below and important for the defence of its part of Kashmir, where a separatist insurgency has killed tens of thousands since 1989.



PHOTO: AFP

Opposition activists rally in Moscow yesterday. Tens of thousands of protesters chanting "Russia Will be Free" rallied yesterday in Moscow against President Vladimir Putin's third term despite a police crackdown on their leaders a day earlier.

## US exempts India from Iran sanctions

AFP, Washington

The United States said Monday it would exempt seven emerging economies including India from tough new sanctions after they cut back on oil from Iran, but the punishment still loomed for China.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton added India, Malaysia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Taiwan to the list of those exempt from the sanctions. In March, she made exemptions for European Union nations and Japan.

The decision was announced two days before Hillary meets Indian officials for annual talks. The move resolves one of the biggest points of tension in years in the growing relationship between the world's two largest democracies.

Under a law approved last year that irritated some US allies, the United States starting on June 28 will penalize foreign financial institutions over transactions with Iran's central bank, which handles sales of the country's key export.

Hillary said the seven economies exempted on Monday have all "significantly" reduced crude oil purchases from Iran.

However, the United States did not announce an exemption for China -- which is heavily dependent on oil from Iran and elsewhere to power its giant economy. Officials said that the United States remained in talks with Beijing.

But US officials said that China -- one of six nations in talks with Iran that resume next week in Moscow -- was a "very important partner" on the nuclear row.

## India by-polls voting begins

BBC ONLINE

Voting has begun in by-elections to 26 assembly seats in eight Indian states and one seat in the national parliament.

Eighteen of the seats are being contested in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

They became necessary after ruling Congress legislators were disqualified for joining a breakaway group.

The other states are Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

A by-election is also being held in the parliamentary constituency of Nellore in Andhra Pradesh.

In Andhra Pradesh, the ruling Congress party is pitted against the breakaway group YSR Congress, led by

## French first lady tweets jibe at president's ex

AFP, Paris

With a single tweet, France's first lady yesterday managed to take a swipe at her man's ex, put herself publicly at odds with the president, and throw a spanner in the works of his Socialist party.

Innocent Trierweiler posted an apparently innocent message on Twitter wishing a relatively unknown politician good luck in his bid to win a seat in the National Assembly in Sunday's second round parliamentary vote.

But the tweet stunned France as it was clear that the real target was Segolene Royal, the woman who shared President Francois Hollande's life for three decades and is the mother of their four children.

Reports of rivalry between the two women led to speculation, which Trierweiler denies, that the current first lady had Royal airbrushed out of a film screened to Socialist faithful at Hollande's



Valerie Trierweiler



Segolene Royal

January campaign launch.

Royal, who failed in 2007 to get herself elected president, is standing against Olivier Falorni, a Socialist dissident, for a parliamentary seat for the western town of La Rochelle.

Hollande has publicly thrown his weight behind Royal. But just as she made that ringing endorsement, Trierweiler delivered her blow on the micro-blogging site: "Good luck to Olivier Falorni who has done nothing worthy of blame, who has fought alongside the people of La Rochelle for so many years with selfless commitment."

Royal, who is hoping to become parliamentary speaker if elected, declined to react to the taunt.

Trierweiler's message caused dismay in the Socialist party and sparked derision

## Yemen gains big in fight against Qaeda

AFP, Aden

Yemen's army seized the al-Qaeda strongholds of Jaar and Zinjibar yesterday, officials said, more than a year after the jihadists captured most of Abyan province.

In the first major victories of a month-long offensive, troops backed by armoured vehicles stormed the town of Jaar after al-Qaeda gunmen withdrew overnight, and hours later took control of the provincial capital of Zinjibar, officials and witnesses said.

Al-Qaeda militants had overrun most of the southern province of Abyan including Jaar and Zinjibar more than a year ago, taking advantage of a central government weakened by Arab

## North Korea in dire food crisis: UN

AFP, Beijing

Millions of North Koreans suffer chronic food shortages and dire health care, leaving one in three young children stunted, but there are no signs of reform to spur economic growth, the United Nations warns.

Some 16 million people -- two-thirds of the population -- depend on the state rationing system and suffer varying degrees of sustained food insecurity, six UN agencies operating inside the North said in a report released yesterday.

About one in three children aged under five are stunted -- too short for their age -- because of malnutrition, it said, as it launched an appeal for funding.

UN Resident Coordinator for North Korea Jerome Sauvage said although the food situation was not as bad as it was last year, child malnutrition rates in some parts of the country were "alarming".

He added: "We see among children malnutrition rates in a number of counties we have been visiting that are really alarming. Now these are chronic malnutrition problems. There is never enough food for this population."

Last year, government rations dwindled to just 250 grammes of food per person per day, Sauvage said, and Pyongyang issued a rare appeal for foreign aid.

Reclusive North Korea suffers chronic food shortages, but the situation is frequently exacerbated by floods, droughts and mismanagement.

## UK to impose family curbs on immigrants

TNN, London

In what is being described as the most far-reaching and controversial changes surrounding immigrants' rights, British home secretary Theresa May was set to announce on Monday curbs that include the end of the right to avoid deportation on the basis of maintaining "family life".

Another proposal will extend the probationary period for a non-EU spouse from two to five years, thus making it more difficult for a couple, more so if it's a marriage of convenience. Elderly relatives who might become a burden on the free National Health Service or benefits structure will be refused immigration.