

Assad's fall 'matter of time'

Says ex-UN observer chief; world powers fear massacre in Aleppo

AGENCIES

The former head of the UN observer mission in Syria yesterday said it is "only a matter of time" until President Bashar al-Assad's government falls.

But Norwegian Gen Robert Mood, who left Syria last week, said Assad's fall would not necessarily mean an end to the 16-month-old conflict.

"In my opinion it is only a matter of time before a regime that is using such heavy military power and disproportional violence against the civilian population is going to fall," Gen Mood told the Reuters news agency.

Syrian gunships pounded rebel positions in Aleppo yesterday and troops clashed with insurgents as government forces readied an all-out assault billed as the "mother of all battles."

Amid widespread expectations that an increasingly desperate President Bashar al-Assad will pull out all the stops to secure Syria's commercial capital, residents of some districts fled in fear of a massacre.

Ground troops, artillery and armour have been massing since Thursday on the outskirts of Syria's second city, and a security source told AFP that by Friday deployments were "almost complete."

A day earlier, a security official said the troops would take part in a "generalised counter-offensive on Friday or Saturday." The US state department



Bashar al-Assad

Robert Mood

says it fears Syrian government forces are preparing to carry out a massacre there.

The pro-government al-Watan newspaper warned that the "mother of all battles" was about to start.

Global powers have expressed fears of a potential "slaughter" in Aleppo and called for maximum pressure to prevent it.

French foreign ministry spokesman Bernard Valero told AFP Friday that "with the build-up of heavy weapons around Aleppo, Assad is preparing to carry out a fresh slaughter of his own people."

Noting the massing of forces, US State Department spokesman Victoria Nuland said "this is the concern that we will see a massacre in Aleppo, and that's what the regime appears to be lining up for."

Separately, UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights Navi Pillay appealed to both sides to spare civilians, citing concerns of "the likelihood of an imminent major confrontation".

Saying she had also received more reports of opposition fighters torturing or executing prisoners, Pillay stated her belief that "crimes against humanity and war crimes have been, and continue to be, committed in Syria".

The Red Crescent has suspended some of its operations in Aleppo, Syria's most populous city, because of the heavy fighting.

Rebels were also stockpiling ammunition and medical supplies in preparation for the expected assault.

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights yesterday reported four deaths in Aleppo, among at least 29 killed nationwide.

A Syrian MP from Aleppo has fled to Turkey, Turkey's state-run Anatolia news agency says.

Ikhlas Badawi, a mother of six, said she was defecting in protest at the "violence against the people".

Meanwhile, another defector, Gen Manaf Tlas, has put himself forward as a possible figure to unite the fractious opposition.

In an interview with a Saudi newspaper, Asharq al-Awsat, he said: "I am discussing with... people outside Syria to reach a consensus with those inside."

Cautious on Syria, Obama

moves to help rebels

REUTERS, Washington

In his first year in office, US President Barack Obama sent a letter to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad seeking a new start to a long-strained relationship.

Now, nearing the end of his first term, with a presidential election looming in November, Obama is moving cautiously toward greater support for Syrian rebels, as international diplomatic efforts that had been Obama's first preference falter.

Reuters has learned that the White House has crafted a presidential directive, called a "finding," that would authorize greater covert assistance for the rebels, while still stopping short of arming them.

It is not clear whether Obama has signed the document, and US officials declined to comment on the finding, which is a highly classified authorization for covert activity.

But in recent days, the Obama administration has signalled publicly it plans more help for the rebels.

"I have to say that we are also increasing our efforts to assist the opposition," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on

Tuesday.

The administration is seeking ways to help Assad's opponents by increasing supplies of communications equipment and sharing intelligence about Assad's troop movements. The United States has already sent encrypted radios.

The administration is also trying to help the rebels become better organized, planning for when Assad falls, and keenly monitoring Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles to ensure they are secure.

Hillary hinted this week that if the rebels could control a swathe of Syrian territory from which to operate, more US and allied backing would follow.

The decision to lend greater logistical and political backing for the rebels is the latest step in Obama's odyssey over the Syria conflict, where the president chose early on not to intervene with US military force.

Critics charge that Obama has moved too cautiously as Assad's well-armed forces have massacred civilians, a bloodbath that dissidents say has killed more than 18,000 since the uprising first flared in the city of Deraa in March 2011. Another potential

NEWS INSIGHT

Palestine in

'critical' cash

crunch: UN

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations on Wednesday called for international donations to help the Palestinian Authority through a "critical" cash shortage.

A financial crisis has been growing for President Mahmud Abbas's government this year, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry told the UN Security Council.

Saudi Arabia last week gave \$100 million to help the Palestinian Authority pay salaries that were due in June.

"We call on other donors, particularly other Gulf countries, to consider a timely donation during this period of critical shortage," Serry said.

The Palestinian Authority said at the start of the year that it was expecting a \$1 billion shortfall in its \$3.5 billion annual budget.

TAX EVASION

US, 5 other nations

strike pact

AFP, Washington

The United States and five European countries announced Thursday an agreement to fight offshore tax evasion through automatic information exchanges.

The announcement comes after a study released this week by activist group the Tax Justice Network said the super-rich are hiding at least \$21 trillion in accounts outside their home country evading tax.

"This is an important step forward in establishing a common approach to combat tax evasion based on automatic exchange of information," the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain said in a joint statement.

The partners said they agreed on implementation of a 2010 US law on reporting information and withholding tax provisions.

The so-called "model agreement" supplements the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) targeting non-compliance by US taxpayers using foreign accounts.

Their agreement sets a framework for reporting certain financial account information to tax authorities, followed by automatic exchange of the information under existing bilateral tax treaties or related agreements.

Until now, tax agreements have only provided for the exchange of information "on demand," meaning a country would already suspect possible tax evasion before requesting the information.



PHOTO: AFP

Displaced Indian Muslim villagers gesture at a relief camp in Simultapu village at Kokrajhar district in the north-eastern state of Assam yesterday. Large troop deployments appear to have stemmed an outburst of ethnic violence in northeast India, officials said Thursday, after a week of clashes that left at least 45 people dead.



Americans

still think

Obama a

Muslim: Poll

AFP, Washington

More than one in three conservative Republican voters still thinks US President Barack Obama is a Muslim, nearly four years after he won power, said a Pew Research Center survey Thursday.

"The number of Americans who say Obama is a Muslim is up since 2008, similar to 2010," senior Pew researcher Greg Smith told AFP.

Seventeen percent of 3,000 overall voters asked by Pew in June and July thought Obama was Muslim, the poll said. That number is up five percent from 2008 and down three percent from 2010, within the survey's margin of error.

Muslim American community leaders expressed concern that the lingering inability to recognize Obama's true faith showed a disturbing undercurrent in US politics, indicating a possible rise of Islamophobic discourse.

Obama's Kenyan father was born a Muslim, his middle name is Hussein, and he spent years in Muslim-majority Indonesia as a child. Millions of Americans -- particularly Republicans fueled by conservative bloggers and talk radio hosts -- suspect he is secretly Muslim, according to several polls.

Only 49 percent of those polled by Pew correctly identified Obama as a Christian, while another 31

London mayor mocks Romney

over Olympics criticism

AFP, London

US presidential hopeful Mitt Romney found himself the target of jokes in Britain Thursday after London's mayor Boris Johnson mocked comments he made about preparations for the 2012 Olympics.

Hours after arriving for a visit designed to boost his foreign policy credentials, Romney surprised his British hosts by saying there were "disconcerting" reports about London's ability to stage the Games.

Although Romney backtracked later after talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron, his comments left a sour taste.

Addressing a crowd of 60,000 gathered in London's Hyde Park for a pre-Olympics concert, Mayor Johnson said: "There are some people who are



Mitt Romney



Boris Johnson

Romney who wants to know whether we're ready. Are we ready?"

The crowd roared "yes". And before holding discussions with the Republican candidate, Cameron took an apparent swipe at Romney's past role as head of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

"We are holding an Olympic Games in one of the busiest, most active, bustling cities anywhere in the world," Cameron said at press conference in the Olympic Park.

"Of course it's easier if you hold an Olympic Games in the middle of nowhere."

coming from around the world who don't yet know about all the preparations we've done to get London ready in the last seven years.

"I hear there's a guy called Mitt Romney who wants to know whether we're ready. Are we ready?"

The crowd roared "yes". And before holding discussions with the Republican candidate, Cameron took an apparent swipe at Romney's past role as head of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

"We are holding an Olympic Games in one of the busiest, most active, bustling cities anywhere in the world," Cameron said at press conference in the Olympic Park.

"Of course it's easier if you hold an Olympic Games in the middle of nowhere."

Afghan insurgent

attacks up 11

percent: Nato

AFP, Kabul

Insurgent attacks in Afghanistan rose by 11 percent in the past three months over the same period last year, according to the latest figures released by Nato's US-led coalition.

The month of June alone accounted for the highest number of attacks in nearly two years, with more than 3,000 assaults, including firefights and the explosion of homemade bombs, the International Security Assistance Force said.

The upturn comes as the US-led coalition starts to withdraw its 130,000 troops after more than 10 years of war and ahead of a 2014 deadline for an end to combat operations.

ISAF says one reason for the increase was an earlier start to the summer fighting season because of an early end to the harvest of opium poppies -- a major source of income for Taliban Islamist

'Hang me if am guilty'

Modi's remark over Gujrat

riots triggers row

IANS, New Delhi

A slug-fest broke out Thursday between the Congress and the BJP over Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's controversial "Hang me if I am guilty" remark related to the 2002 riots in the state.

The war of words between the two parties started after Modi gave an interview to an Urdu weekly, Nai Duniya, saying: "Hang me if I am guilty in reference the Gujarat riots."

The interview, which dealt with the post-Godhra riots, the state of Muslims in Gujarat and other related issues, was conducted by Shahid Siddiqui, a former Rajya Sabha member from the Samajwadi Party.

While the Congress slammed Modi and said his remark was "highly reprehensible and irresponsible", the BJP accused the Congress-led central government of conspiring against Modi.

Former BJP president Rajnath Singh defended Modi saying "none of the courts have found him guilty. Even after 10 years, they have not been able to prove anything".

"This is an organised conspiracy by the central government to malign the Gujarat chief minister and the Gujarat government. They are trying to bring a bad name to a model government," he said.

Joining the slug-fest, Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal said Modi had not been found guilty so far because he never allowed a case to be filed against him.

Suu Kyi eclipsing new Myanmar stars

AFP, Bangkok

Aung San Suu Kyi's iconic allure has helped train the eyes of the world on Myanmar's democracy struggle, but some experts say her star appeal could thwart the rise of a new generation of leaders.

The Nobel laureate, who has come to personify Myanmar's efforts to shrug off the yoke of decades of dictatorship, made her first speech in parliamentary recently in the latest chapter in her transformation from renowned political prisoner to MP.

She has urged to protect the right of the minorities in Myanmar but yet again kept her mum on the Rohingya issue.

On the historic European tour, the 67-year-old has suggested she is willing to accept the mantle of president if, as expected, her party wins 2015 elections seen as the apex of recent reforms.

But many are already asking who could follow in the footsteps of "The Lady".

Western governments showed great interest in finding "political alternatives" to Suu Kyi when she was under house arrest before controversial November 2010 elections, said Renaud Egretteau, a Myanmar expert at the University Hong Kong.

"Two years later, idolatry is back. Alternatives within the democratic opposition are again



marginalised."

Suu Kyi has said she has tried shunning the "icon" label since being propelled into Myanmar's political scene during a failed student uprising against the junta in 1988.

But as the daughter of independence hero Aung San she has failed to escape cult status both at home and abroad.

In the European tour, she received the attention

and honour which many state chief can only dream of, said Trevor Wilson, former Australian Ambassador to the country.

"I don't think the international community fully appreciates the role of other parties and political actors in Myanmar," he headed.

Many smaller democracy parties -- many of which have been eagerly pushing the country's reforms from inside the legislature for over a year -- have felt shunned by the NLD juggernaut.

Political parties representing Myanmar's diverse minority groups -- which hold some 75 seats among 10 parties -- are also considered to be on the fringe of debate, despite their importance in a country that has been racked by sporadic civil war with various ethnic rebels since independence in 1948.

But reforming the NLD to allow younger stars to rise might be hard to achieve, with Suu Kyi's democratic pedigree and strong charisma acting to shield her from negative comment.

Even the structure of the NLD itself is a cause for concern, experts said.

"Many people are in awe of Aung San Suu Kyi when they meet her and they don't easily say things to her that she may not like, or that may imply a criticism of the NLD," Wilson said. "There is a bit of an issue there."

ARCTIC DEAL FAILURE

Russian court

orders BP to

pay \$3.1b

AFP, Moscow

A Siberian court yesterday piled more legal pressure on BP by ordering the British group to pay \$3.1 billion in damages for its attempted Arctic oil exploration tie-up with the state giant Rosneft.

The ruling comes as BP holds direct negotiations with Rosneft, Russia's largest oil firm, to buy out the British firm's stake in the troubled TNK-BP joint venture it co-owns with four local tycoons.

A lawyer for plaintiff Andrei Prokhorov said the court's 100-billion-ruble (\$3.1-billion) ruling came against London-based BP plc and the group's BP Russia Investment Limited venture.

Fake note

FROM PAGE 1

retailers across the country.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of DB police arrested Rozina along with fake currencies from Motijheel area around 2:30pm on Thursday.

Following information prised out of her, police arrested Shahidul and Mariam while they were selling fake notes at Mirpur on Thursday afternoon.

The team also raided a house at South Mugda and arrested Selim, Jalal and Abid. It recovered fake currencies and currency-making materials and equipment from there.

Selim told journalists that he learnt about producing counterfeit notes from Babul, an engineer in Rangpur. "I collect Tk 100 notes, remove the prints with chemicals and then turn those into Tk 500 notes."

He also admitted to making fake notes of Tk 1,000 on new pieces of paper.

Shahidul and Mariam confessed that they were assigned to sell the fake notes in different markets.

Masudur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner (media and communication) of DB, said the gangled by Selim had been making forged notes in his rented house at South Mugda.

"Jalal and Abid used to purchase new notes in denomination of Tk 100 from note sellers at Gulistan and different banks. They then supplied each piece of the original note to Selim in exchange for Tk 130," added the DB official.

Selim then turned the notes into Tk 500 ones using chemicals and the printer, mentioned Masudur. The five others used to sell the fake notes to the retailers from Barisal, Rajbari, Satkhira and Khulna districts.

Only for Few Apartments ...

Enjoy Eid Offer!

Win a CAR Offer Valid upto 27th Raja

Flat Sale Ready & Ongoing Project with Gas & Electricity ...

Uttara (Sec- 10) (Ready)	1668-3300 sft.
Boshundhara R/A (Ready)	1250-3000 sft.
Dhanmondi (Rasel Square)	855-1770 sft.
Mohammadpur (B.Aman)	1045-1385 sft.
Bonoree R/A	825-1650 sft.
Kallyanpur	900-1250 sft.
Mirpur	850-2000 sft.

Hotline (Sales) 0171-1170434 0183-3327005-10 8828448, 9888720, 8826357 Land Wanted 0171-3083699, 0183-3327030

UNITECH Holdings & Technologies Ltd. Total Housing Solution.