

Syria claims control of Aleppo

Egypt air strike kills 20 after Sinai attacks

Morsi sacks intelligence chief, generals

Rebels deny claim; Iran plans regional meet in Tehran; 98 killed

AFP, Damascus

Syria said its troops seized a rebel-held Aleppo district yesterday after storming it and "annihilating" most of the insurgents, as a long-threatened ground assault on the key city was launched.

The rebels promptly denied the claim, acknowledging that a "barbaric and savage attack" on the neighbourhood of Salaheddin was under way but later saying they had recaptured much of what they lost.

The offensive came as Amnesty International raised concerns about the plight of civilians in the commercial capital and warned both sides they would be held accountable for attacks on residential areas.

Early in the afternoon, state news agency SANA said "our brave armed forces have taken full control of the district of Salaheddin" and "inflicted heavy losses on groups of armed terrorists, killing or wounding a large number of them."



Rebels fight with Syrian forces in Idlib yesterday

Dozens of rebels were captured, including foreigners, and others surrendered, SANA said. It said troops seized a large number of arms used by rebels "to terrify the inhabitants and to murder members of the

forces of order."

State television said the "armed forces dealt violent blows to the mercenary terrorists" in Salaheddin, "annihilating most of the terrorists."

Hours later, rebel commander

Wassel Ayub said the FSA had launched a counter-attack and retaken part of Salaheddin.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed the rebels were making gains.

At least 33 people were killed in Aleppo, with a total of at least 98 people across the country, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A total of 225 people -- mostly civilians -- died in Syria on Tuesday, one of the worst days for casualties in the nearly 17-month uprising the Observatory said last week had cost more than 21,000 lives.

Amnesty showed satellite images indicating an apparent increased use of heavy weapons in the Aleppo area, and warned forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad attacks on civilians would not go unpunished.

Amnesty said it was concerned the deployment of heavy weaponry in residential areas would lead to further human rights abuses and breaches of international law.

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi sacked his spy chief and two generals yesterday after a deadly ambush on soldiers prompted the military to launch unprecedented air strikes on militants in the Sinai.

The government appeared set on regaining control of Sinai, where 16 soldiers were killed in a militant ambush on the weekend which exposed Egypt's weak grip on the lawless peninsula despite a bolstered military presence since last year.

The changes in the military and intelligence ranks came as the army declared tentative victory against the Islamist militants on Wednesday, hours after state television reported 20 militants killed in airstrikes.

The campaign to uproot the militants was launched on Tuesday, two days after gunmen ambushed a border guard outpost near Israel's border and killed the 16 soldiers, the



Mohamed Morsi



Murad Muwafi

military said in a statement.

"Elements from the armed forces and interior ministry supported by the air force began a plan to restore security by pursuing and targeting armed terrorist elements in Sinai, and it has accomplished this task with complete success," it said.

It would continue "continue implementing this plan," it added in a statement, which did not provide details of the operation.

Morsi's spokesman said the president ordered intelligence chief Murad Muwafi to retire, and the replacement of the Republican Guard's chief as well as the head of the military police, Major General Hamdi Badeen.

The spokesman, Yassir Ali, did not connect the changes to the attack, but a senior official close to Morsi told AFP the shuffle was ordered because of the Sinai incident.

Morsi also sacked the governor of North Sinai, AbdelWahab Mabruk.

NEWS IN

brief

US to reward Zimbabwe progress

AFP, Cape Town

The United States will reward efforts by Zimbabwe's leaders to pave the way toward free elections, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday.

"Here in Africa, the international community has made it clear that the people of Zimbabwe deserve the right to have their voices and votes counted in a free and fair election," Clinton said in a speech at a Cape Town university.

She urged regional leaders -- including the Zimbabwe mediator, South African President Jacob Zuma -- to push for a recently approved draft constitution to go to the vote that would allow new polls

Belarus expels Swedish diplomats

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's ties with Belarus soured further yesterday as Minsk expelled all Swedish diplomats and closed its mission in Stockholm, five days after the ex-Soviet state expelled the Swedish ambassador.

European Union ambassadors will hold an emergency meeting Friday on the issue, an EU source in Brussels said.

Bildt last week said ambassador Stefan Eriksson, who took up the post in Minsk in 2008, was expelled because of his pro-rights stance and meetings he

France heads back into recession

AFP, Paris

France is headed back into recession for the second time in three years, its central bank warned Wednesday in a fresh blow to the recovery prospects of the stricken eurozone.

In a gloomy survey of the outlook for Europe's second biggest economy, the Bank of France predicted a 0.1 percent contraction in gross domestic product (GDP) for the third quarter of this year.

France emerged from its last recession -- defined by economists as two consecutive quarters of nega-

Iraq attacks kill 19

AFP, Baghdad

A car bomb targeting Shia pilgrims in Iraq and the shooting of a lawyer and his family left 19 people dead yesterday, after al-Qaeda warned it would target lawyers and retake territory in a new campaign.

The attacks were the latest in an apparent spike in unrest since the beginning of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, bringing to 88 the number

Row in India after Advani calls UPA-2 'illegitimate'

Sonia turns combative; Manmohan calls it disgraceful

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

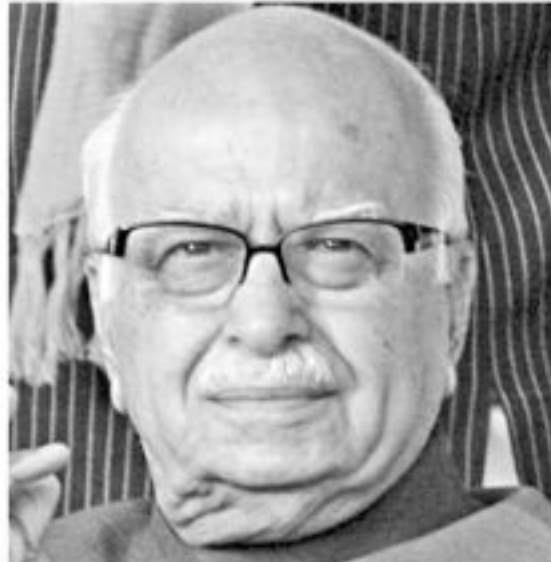
The monsoon session of Indian parliament began yesterday on a stormy note when BJP veteran L K Advani triggered uproar by dubbing the UPA-II government as "illegitimate" but was forced to withdraw the remark in the face of strong protests from Congress led by its chief Sonia Gandhi.

"The UPA-II is illegitimate. It has never happened in the history of India .... crores of rupees were never spent to get votes," Advani said, provoking the treasury benches during a debate on an adjournment motion he had moved on the recent ethnic violence in Assam.

Sonia Gandhi, Congress president and UPA chairperson, displayed some unusual aggression in the Lok Sabha when she made it clear that she would not countenance Advani's description of the government and egged on members of the treasury benches to demand its withdrawal.

The House was plunged into an uproar as BJP members launched a counter attack but Sonia Gandhi had one simple demand. "Withdraw, withdraw one word, withdraw," she said signalling the whole matter could be resolved.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh termed as "disgraceful and



unfortunate" BJP leader L K Advani's remark that UPA-II government was illegitimate.

"The remark is disgraceful and unfortunate," Singh told reporters in Parliament when asked to comment on Advani's statement in Lok Sabha.

Advani's later attempted to convince the House that he was not referring to the government after the 2009 parliamentary elections but to the 2008 confidence vote in the House on the Indo-US nuclear deal issue for which "crores of rupees were spent" to save the government.

However, this failed to impress Congress and UPA lawmakers who demanded Advani withdraw the remarks.

Advani admitted he made a mistake by speaking about UPA-II and what he actually intended to say was the 2008 vote of confidence secured during the UPA-I.

"My comments were on the confidence vote and not on election. ... Those who were whistle-blowers were sent to jail," he said, "I withdraw the word illegitimate."

With the din continuing, the Speaker adjourned the House for lunch. When the House reassembled after lunch, the Speaker observed that Advani has withdrawn those remarks and they would not form part of the records.

Court bars Gaza Muslims from praying in Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli court on Tuesday backed an Israeli government policy of allowing Christians from the Gaza Strip to pray at Israeli and West Bank holy sites, and denying the enclave's Muslims the same right.

The Supreme Court rejected an appeal lodged by six Gaza Muslims and Israeli non-governmental organisation Gisha to challenge a ruling of the Beersheba District Court, which refused to intervene against the policy.

The six women were prevented from going to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site in east Jerusalem, to pray during a Muslim festival.

The court justified its order on security grounds.



PHOTO: AFP

Residents waded through a flooded street in Manila yesterday after torrential rains inundated most of the capital the past few days. More than one million people in and around the Philippine capital battled deadly floods that killed 20 as more rain fell, with neck-deep waters trapping slum dwellers and the wealthy elite on rooftops.

Ukraine passes language bill into law

REUTERS, Kiev

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich yesterday signed into law a bill which will make Russian the official language in parts of the former Soviet republic, angering opponents who warn it risks splitting the country.

Yanukovich's Regions rushed the language bill through parliament last month in what opponents saw as an attempt to rally flagging public support in Russian-speaking regions ahead of the October vote.

The move led to street protests in the capital Kiev and brawls in parliament as the opposition, which fears it will lead to the status of Ukrainian as the state language being eroded, fought to block it.

Romney loses favour in new US poll

AFP, Washington

Republican White House hopeful Mitt Romney is losing favor among US voters just three months ahead of his tough election battle with President Barack Obama, a new poll showed yesterday.

The Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that 49 percent of voters have a negative view of the former Massachusetts governor, up from 45 percent in May.

Forty percent of voters, meanwhile, see him in a positive light, practically the same proportion from the spring.

In contrast, 53 percent of voters said they had a favorable opinion of challenger Obama, while 43 percent said they felt negatively about him.

By a margin of 53 percent to 40 percent, more key independent voters see Obama favorably rather than unfavorably. Fifty percent of this group view Romney unfavorably, compared to 37 percent who consider him favorably.

Romney has has a rough summer marred in part by a series of slip-ups during a trip abroad to Britain, Israel and Poland. He has also come under fire over his unwillingness to release his tax returns from before 2010.

The poll, carried out between Aug. 1 and Aug. 5 surveyed 1,026 adults. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus four percentage points.



RIGHT-WING TERRORISTS

More threatening than al-Qaeda?

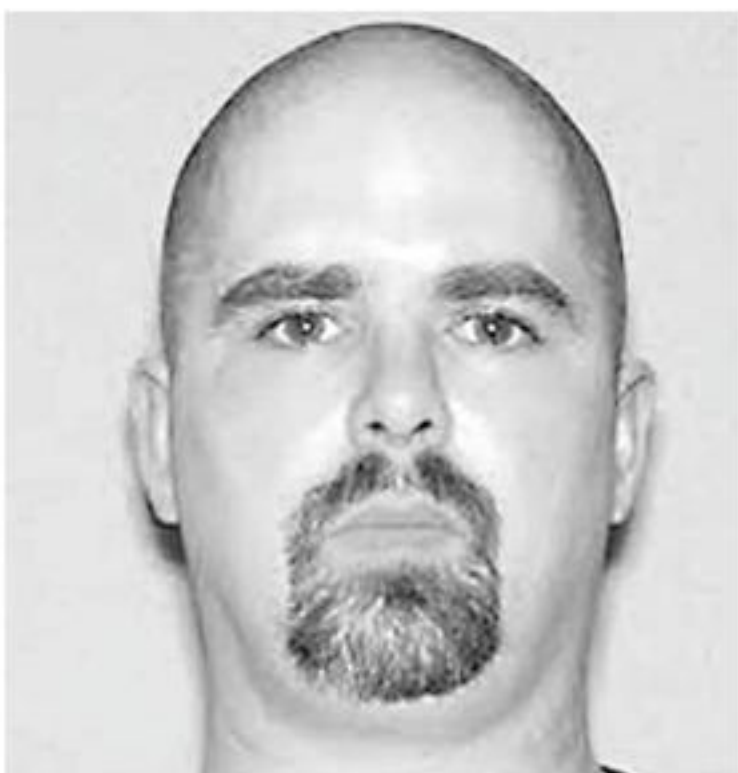
CNN ONLINE

The word "terrorism" in the United States usually brings to mind plots linked in some way to al-Qaeda, while the danger posed to the public by white supremacists, anti-abortion extremists and other right-wing militants is often overlooked.

Militants linked to al Qaeda or inspired by jihadist ideology have carried out four terrorist attacks in the United States since September 11, which have resulted in 17 deaths. Thirteen of them were in a shooting incident at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009.

By contrast, right-wing extremists have committed at least eight lethal terrorist attacks in the United States that have resulted in the deaths of nine people since 9/11, according to data compiled by the New America Foundation.

And if, after investigation, Sunday's attack on the Sikh temple in Wisconsin is included in this count, the death toll from right-wing terrorism in the U.S.



Wade Michael Page

over the past decade rises to 15.

The shooting suspect, Wade Michael Page, posed with a Nazi flag on his Facebook page and has played a prominent role in "white power" music groups. The FBI is investigating the case as a "domestic terrorist-type incident."

A particular concern for law enforcement is the Sovereign Citizens movement, whose adherents reject all U.S. laws as well as taxation and American currency. An FBI report published in

2011 said "lone-offender sovereign-citizen extremists have killed six law enforcement officers" since 2000.

The numbers in the New America Foundation database may well understate the toll of violence from right-wing extremists. Another FBI study reported that between January 1, 2007, and October 31, 2009, white supremacists were involved in 53 acts of violence, 40 of which were assaults directed primarily at African-Americans, seven of which were murders and the rest of which were threats, arson and intimidation. Most of these were treated as racially motivated crimes rather than political acts of violence, i.e. terrorism.

In the past year, the FBI has concluded investigations into a number of right-wing extremists, in some cases securing lengthy sentences for violent plots. In December, Kevin Harpham of Spokane, Washington, was sentenced to 32 years for planting a bomb at the site of a Martin Luther King Jr. parade. City workers found the bag containing the bomb an hour before the streets

filled with parade-goers.

After 9/11, there was great concern that al Qaeda or an allied group would launch a terrorist attack involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons. But in the past decade, there is no evidence that jihadist extremists in the United States have acquired or attempted to acquire material to construct CBRN weapons.

By contrast, 11 right-wing and left-wing extremists have managed to acquire CBRN material that they planned to use against the public, government employees or both.

Right-wing extremist individuals over the past decade in the United States were as likely to use violence as a means to express their political or social beliefs as those motivated by Osama bin Laden's ideology. Even more worryingly, during the same time period, right-wing and left-wing extremist groups and individuals have been far more likely to acquire toxins and to assemble the makings of radiological weapons than al Qaeda sympathizers.