

WAR CRIMES IN SYRIA

UN chief demands justice

Brahimi begins mission, says he faces 'very difficult' task

AFP, Geneva

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday called for all war criminals in Syria to be brought to justice, as his human rights chief urged a probe into the slaughter of hundreds in the town of Daraya.

"We must ensure that anyone, on any side, who commits war crimes, crimes against humanity or other violations of international human rights or humanitarian law is brought to justice," Ban said in Geneva, where he opened the 21st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

"I am deeply troubled by the aerial bombardments of civilians by government forces, by the increasing sectarian tensions, by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and by the apparent choice of both sides to pursue a solution through force rather than dialogue," he said.

Ban called on the rights council

"to maintain its vigilance on Syria, including on the question of accountability".

Meanwhile, peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi admitted he faces a "very difficult" task as he launched his mission to Syria, where warplanes bombed rebel zones and clashes claimed dozens more lives.

Cairo said meanwhile that it was hosting a meeting of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey for a four-way "contact group" proposed by Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, looking at ways to calm the Syrian conflict.

On his first trip to the region since taking up his duties last week, Brahimi said after meeting with Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi in Cairo that he plans to visit



Syria "in a few days."

Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her part urged an immediate probe into the slaughter late last month of several hundred people in the Syrian town of Daraya.

"I am deeply shocked by the reports of the massacre in Daraya and I urge an immediate and thorough investigation into this incident," she said on the first day of the three-week rights council session.

"I call on the (Syrian) government to ensure full and unhindered access to the (UN) Independent Commission of Inquiry," she said, also calling for "full support" of the new UN and Arab League peace envoy for the Syria conflict, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Brahimi, who succeeds Kofi

Annan in the role, was yesterday meeting with Arab League officials, Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi and other leaders in Cairo to discuss the crisis and finalise plans for a pending visit to Damascus.

Brahimi has described the bloodshed as "staggering" and called the destruction "catastrophic".

More than 27,000 people have died since the violence began 18 months ago, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

In its latest report, published last month, the UN Commission of Inquiry accused the Syrian regime and, to a lesser extent, the opposition forces of committing crimes against humanity.

The commission also announced that it was drawing up a confidential list of people responsible for the atrocities, in a first step towards eventually bringing them to justice.

Before any trials can happen though, numerous difficult steps

Romney's math doesn't add up, says Obama

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama mocked Mitt Romney's "two plus one equals five" economics, poking his Republican foe as he wrapped up his two-day trip across Florida in a bid to woo undecided voters.

Romney and his Republican running mate Paul Ryan meanwhile struggled to explain the accounting in their taxation plans, with fiscal policy and slow job creation taking centre stage in the White House race.

In Florida, Obama courted retirees by lambasting Romney's plans to reform the Medicare health care system for the elderly.

He also picked apart interviews in which the two Republicans declined to name any of the tax loopholes they plan to close to make their promise to cut taxes, while also trimming the deficit, add up.

"It was like two plus one equals five. They couldn't answer questions about how they'd pay for \$5 trillion in new tax cuts and \$2 trillion in new defence spending without raising taxes on the middle class.

In television appearances, Romney and



Ryan declined to specify how exactly they would cut loopholes in the tax code to pay for rate reductions.

The Republican nominee, a multi-millionaire, also denied he planned to cut taxes for the rich.

"I want to make sure people understand, despite what the Democrats said at their convention,

I am not reducing taxes on high-income taxpayers," Romney said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

As Obama's armored bus trundled from west to east through Florida, he plunged into restaurants, diners and bars.

At one stop, he was surprised to be lifted a foot off the ground by hulking and exuberant pizza shop owner Scott Van Duzer.

Meanwhile, President Barack Obama raised \$114 million for his re-election bid last month, his campaign announced yesterday, after the president wrapped up his two-day trip across Florida in a bid to woo undecided voters.

Campaign officials said 1.1 million Americans contributed to Obama's operation during the month to make up the total, which was easily the most lucrative fundrais-

NEWS IN brief

32 killed in fresh violence in Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

At least 32 people were killed in ethnic clashes yesterday in southeast Kenya, a Red Cross official said.

"I counted at least 32 people dead, among them are seven police officers," Caleb Kilande, a Red Cross official at the scene, told AFP.

The clashes broke out Monday in Kileleshwa village in southeastern Kenya, in an area that has been rocked by fighting for several weeks.

"Tensions remain high in the area, but the fighting

Canada is 'extremist govt': Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday said Canada had a "neo-conservative extremist government" as it kept up a furious response to Ottawa's decision last week to cut diplomatic ties.

Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi used that description in an interview with the Iranian parliament's website (icana.ir) in which he also said the Canadian government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper was "boundlessly defending international Zionism."

Canada last Friday made the surprise announcement that it had shut its Tehran embassy and was ordering the Iranian embassy in Ottawa closed by

Yemen kills key Qaeda leader

AFP, Sanaa

Yemeni troops killed the second in command of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, regarded by Washington as the jihadist network's deadliest branch, in a raid in the east, the defence ministry news website yesterday said.

"The Saudi terrorist Saeed al-Shehri, the second man in al-Qaeda, was killed in a quality operation by the armed forces in Hadramawt," the 26sep.net news website reported.

"Six other terrorist elements accompanying him were also killed," it added quoting what it said was a "high-ranking source," without mentioning when

Fugitive Iraq VP rejects verdict

AFP, Ankara

Iraq's fugitive Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi yesterday rejected his murder conviction and death sentence and ruled out returning home until he is guaranteed "security and a fair trial".

"While reconfirming my absolute innocence and that of my guards, I totally reject and will never recognise the unfair, the unjust, the politically motivated verdict, which was expected from the outset of this funny trial," Hashemi told reporters.

Japan confirms islands purchase

AFP, Tokyo

Japan will nationalise a group of islands at the centre of a territorial dispute with China, the government yesterday said, as Tokyo tries both to appease nationalists and keep Beijing onside.

In a deal reported to be worth 2.05 billion yen (\$26 million) Premier Yoshihiko Noda's administration agreed to buy three islands it already runs, but which China claims as its own.

"During the ministerial meeting today, we agreed that we will obtain the ownership of the three Senkaku islands as quickly as possible," Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura told reporters, using the

Chicago teachers go on strike

AFP, Chicago

For the first time in a quarter-century, public school teachers in Chicago said they went on strike yesterday, demanding higher pay, a more adequate teacher evaluation system and better job security.

"We have failed to reach an agreement that will prevent a labour strike," Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis said in a statement. "No CTU members will be inside of our schools on Monday."

The action will involve about 25,000 teachers,



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian youths close off streets in Ramallah by burning tires during a protest against the high cost of living yesterday. Cities across the West Bank ground to a halt as transport unions called a mass general strike in protest over rising petrol prices, inset, a Palestinian taxi driver with his electric car in the streets of Gaza City. He made the electric car over several months as Gaza was hit by its worst fuel crisis in living memory.

9/11 anniversary today



REUTERS, New York

Eleven years after the September 11, 2001, attacks, New Yorkers will mark the anniversary today against a backdrop of health concerns for emergency workers and a feud over financing that has stopped construction of the \$1 billion Ground Zero museum.

While notable progress on redevelopment of the World Trade Centre has been made since early disputes over financial, design and security issues, the project remains hobbled by political battles and billions of dollars in cost overruns.

A major sticking point is the museum at the heart of the World Trade Centre (WTC) site redevelopment. Construction has been suspended because of a feud over finances between the National September 11 Memorial and Museum foundation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

When the foundation announced recently that for the first time, politicians would be excluded from having speaking roles in the September 11 anniversary ceremonies, it was seen by many victims' families and others in the 9/11 community as a public reflection of these behind-the-scenes disputes.

Bin Laden author's interview aired

BBC ONLINE

The first interview yesterday was aired with a former US special forces member who wrote a first-hand account of the May 2011 raid that killed Osama Bin Laden.

The Navy Seal, who uses the pseudonym Mark Owen, was interviewed by the US television network CBS.

Owen repeated his claim that Bin Laden was shot as soon as he looked out of his bedroom, contrary to the official version of events.

The Pentagon has said it may sue Owen for divulging military secrets.

In the interview, Owen - who has been identified by US media as Matt Bissonnette - defended what he said was the manner of Bin Laden's death.



The Navy Seal

"[The Seals] couldn't see his hands. So, he could've had something. Could've had a hand grenade or something underneath his chest," Owen said.

US officials had stated he was shot only after he had ducked back into the bedroom, prompting fears he might be grabbing a weapon.

Owen told of a later meeting with

US transfers Bagram detainees to Afghans

AFP, Bagram, Afghanistan

The United States yesterday formally handed control to Afghanistan of more than 3,000 detainees at the controversial Bagram prison, but disagreements remain over the fate of hundreds of inmates.

Kabul has hailed the transfer of what has in the past been dubbed the Guantanamo Bay of Afghanistan as a victory for sovereignty as Nato prepares to hand over full national security to Afghans and withdraw its combat troops by the end of 2014.

Analysts, however, say the move is more symbolic than substantial and human rights advocates have raised concerns about abuses of administrative detention.

Questions remain over the fate of the

inmates, who include Taliban fighters and terror suspects, 50 foreigners not covered by the agreement, and hundreds of Afghans arrested since the transfer deal was signed on March 9.

Afghan officials on Monday organised and presided over a small handover ceremony at the prison, officially called the Parwan Detention Facility but more commonly referred to Bagram after the neighbouring US airbase north of Kabul.

There was only a paltry attendance among US officers as the Afghan flag was erected over the prison, marking the transfer.

"We transfer more than 3,000 Afghan detainees into your custody," said Colonel Robert Taradash, the highest ranking US official at the ceremony.

UN nuke chief frustrated

AFP, Vienna

The head of the UN atomic agency hit out yesterday at Iran's refusal to address allegations of nuclear weapons research and called on Tehran to allow access to a suspect military site "without further delay."

"Despite the intensified dialogue between the Agency and Iran since January 2012, no concrete results have been achieved so far," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano said at the start of an IAEA board meeting.

"This is frustrating because, without Iran's full engagement, we will not be able to start the process to resolve all outstanding issues, including those involving possible



military dimensions to its nuclear programme.

"We consider it essential for Iran to engage with us without further delay on the substance of our concerns," Amano said, according to the text of his speech released by the Vienna-based IAEA. The word "substance" was in italics.

The IAEA has held several rounds of fruitless talks with Iran this year to press for access to sites and scientists involved in what it suspects has been a structured nuclear weapons research programme prior to 2003 and possibly since.

Iran denies conducting any such research and says that the documentation backing up the IAEA's accusations, set out in a major report last November, are forgeries.