

## INSIDER KILLINGS

## Nato scales back joint ops with Afghans

AFP, Kabul

Nato-led forces are scaling back joint operations with Afghan forces after a spate of "insider attacks" in which Afghan recruits turned their weapons on Western allies, officers yesterday said.

The move marked a setback for the coalition's war strategy, as the planned withdrawal of Western troops hinges on training and advising Afghan forces to take over security by the end of 2014.

Under the new order, most joint patrols and advisory work with Afghan troops will only be conducted at the battalion level and above, Nato officers and Pentagon officials said.

Cooperation with smaller units will have to be "evaluated on a case-by-case basis and approved by" regional two-star commanders, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a statement.

The commander of US and Nato troops in Afghanistan, General John Allen, "has directed all operational commanders to review force protection and tactical activi-

ties in the light of the current circumstances", a US military officer in Washington said in an email.

Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, speaking at a news conference in Beijing, said the insider attacks were worrisome but that he believed General Allen had taken the right approach to counter the threat.

But he insisted the insider assaults would not delay or derail plans to complete a drawdown of troops by the end of 2014 as planned.

The decision came after six ISAF soldiers were shot dead by suspected Afghan police and after the Taliban destroyed six US fighter jets in an unprecedented assault on a major base in the south.

The change by Nato also followed violent protests in Afghanistan and around the world over an amateur, American-made film deemed offensive to Islam.

The film and the wave of "green-on-blue" attacks led to the decision to limit the number of joint patrols and operations, Pentagon spokesman George Little said.



Myanmar's Member of Parliament and democracy icon Suu Kyi meets with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday in later's office at the State Department in Washington, DC. Suu Kyi yesterday sought to reassure China that Myanmar's warming relations with the US were not at its expense and voiced hope for better relations between the Pacific powers.

PHOTO: AFP

## Iran seeks observer role

Clashes continue as UN deplors 'gross' rights abuses

AFP, Damascus

Syrian troops shelled several districts in Aleppo and clashed with rebels yesterday, as Damascus ally Iran proposed an observer role for his country alongside Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia and a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Iran's proposal emerged in a meeting in Cairo on Monday of the Syria "contact group" to which it Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey belong, Tehran's official news agency IRNA and broadcaster IRIB said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi appealed for "a simultaneous halt in clashes and violence by the sides in Syria, insisted on a peaceful solution without foreign intervention and a halt to financial, military and training support for the Syrian opposition," IRNA reported, without giving a source.

He told his Egyptian and Turkish counterparts that observers from their countries, and from Saudi Arabia, could "monitor the process of stopping the violence in Syria," IRNA added.

The group is to meet again in New

York later this month on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Egypt's state news agency reported.

In Aleppo, clashes erupted in Bustan al-Qasr in the southwest and in nearby Izaa as both districts were shelled, residents in Syria's second city said, also reporting fighting further south in Sukari.

Overnight, shelling killed two civilians in the rebel-held Sakhur neighbourhood in the northeast, while nearby Hanano

## SYRIA CRISIS

was also bombed, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Syrian forces said they had secured the flashpoint Midan district on Monday after a week of fighting, although an AFP correspondent said some parts were still unsafe for residents to return.

In Damascus, at least four soldiers and one rebel were killed, as the army tried to push into the southern districts of Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, Qadam and

Assali, and three civilians were killed by shelling, the Observatory said.

Troops also bombed areas in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, where 10 civilians were killed, the northwestern province of Idlib and the central province of Homs, where a rebel was killed in fighting, the monitor added.

The Britain-based group says more than 27,000 people have been killed since the uprising erupted in March 2011. The United Nations puts the toll at more than 20,000.

As the killing continues, the head of a UN commission investigating rights abuses in Syria said they had soared dramatically in recent weeks and that the UN Security Council should take "appropriate action" against war criminals.

"Gross violations of human rights have grown in number, in pace and in scale," Paulo Sergio Pinheiro said on Monday, adding that Assad's regime and rebels, to a lesser extent, had committed war crimes.

## TERRITORIAL ROW

## China-Japan dispute threatens to escalate

Panetta in Beijing, tries to cool off tension

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Anti-Japanese protests continued across China yesterday, as the countries' competing claims to a group of islands threatened to escalate. There were reports that a large flotilla of Chinese fishing boats was due to arrive in the area later in the day.

Hundreds of Japanese firms closed their businesses, as demonstrators took to the streets to mark the anniversary of the 1931 start of Japan's 14-year occupation of northern China.

As the region braced for the possible arrival of up to 1,000 fishing boats in waters near the disputed Senkaku islands known as the Diaoyu in China Beijing reacted angrily to reports that two Japanese activists had briefly landed on one of the three islands the Japanese government bought from their private Japanese owners last week.

An aide to Yoshihiko Noda, the Japanese

prime minister, said that the possible arrival of the fishing boats would take the dispute to a "new stage".

Yesterday's demonstrations reportedly spread to 100 cities, but there were no reports of violence amid a much heavier police presence.

The US defence secretary, Leon Panetta, repeated calls for both sides to prevent an escalation in the crisis amid calls for a boycott of Japanese goods that could harm ties between two important trading partners.

In China on a three-day visit, Panetta called on leaders in Beijing to develop closer military contacts with Washington to help lower tension and avoid confusion in the region.

The US has not taken sides in the sovereignty row but is bound by its security treaty obligations with Tokyo to come to Japan's



## Romney rocked by secret video

AFP, Washington

Mitt Romney was rocked Monday by a secretly filmed video in which he said nearly half of Americans back President Barack Obama because they are government-dependent "victims" who dodge taxes.

Obama's team quickly seized on film of Romney addressing rich donors, released by the liberal Mother Jones magazine, as proof the multi-millionaire candidate had written off half the nation and was not fit to be president.

In excerpts from the video, which emerged 50 days before the November 6 election, Romney is seen to say in a closed-door, private fundraiser that 47 percent of Americans will vote for the president "no matter what."

"There are 47 percent who are with him, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it," he says.

The explosive tape was the latest in a long line of comments by Romney that have complicated his attempts to shed an image framed by Obama's campaign that he is a rich businessman out of touch with the middle class.

Romney is trailing Obama in national polls and battleground states by a small but consistent margin.

## Zim caught

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collapsed like a pack of cards in pursuit of the daunting target of 183 set by Sri Lanka at Mahinda Rajapaksa Stadium.

Sri Lanka, who lost the toss and were sent into bat, owed their total of 182-4 to Kumar Sangakkara (44) and Jeevan Mendis (43 not out), who shared a 94-run stand for the fourth wicket.

Ajantha Mendis struck two blows in his first over, removing Vusi Sibanda (11) and Zimbabwe skipper Brendan Taylor (0) off successive deliveries. He next had Hamilton Masakadza (20).

He returned for his second spell and took four more wickets to end any lingering Zimbabwean hopes -- and improve his own international Twenty20 record figures of 6-16, set against Australia at Pallekele last year.

Jeevan Mendis took 3-24 to cap an all-round performance.

Sangakkara, the newly crowned ICC player of the

year, hit a 26-ball 44, studded with a six and two boundaries, while Jeevan Mendis smashed four boundaries and a six during his unbeaten 43 off 30 balls.

Both the left-handers lifted Sri Lanka from 82-3 after they were put into bat.

Tillakaratne Dilshan hit five boundaries during his rapid 39 before he fell caught behind by Taylor off leg-spinner Graeme Cremer. Skipper Mahela Jayawardene was run out for 13 while debutant Dilshan Munaweera made 17.

Twelve teams competing in the event are divided in four groups, with the top two teams advancing to the Super Eight stage, which will decide the four semi-finalists.

Australia take on Ireland in Group B while former champions India face Afghanistan in Group A -- both matches in Colombo -- on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka are bidding to end their 16-year wait for a second major title after winning the 50-over World Cup in 1996.

## Middle age begins at 55!

BBC ONLINE

Middle age starts much later than previously thought - at the age of 55, research suggests.

And Britons do not see themselves as elderly until they are nudging 70, the survey of 1,000 UK adults aged 50-plus for the Love to Learn online learning website says.

Previous studies have pinpointed the start of middle age as early as 36.

Although seven out of 10 early 50-somethings quizzed for the survey defined themselves as middle-aged, the average age at which the period of life was perceived to start was 54 years and 347 days old.

However, a sizeable minority, nearly one in five, thought middle age did not begin until after the age of 60.

## Rushdie releases memoirs

AFP, London

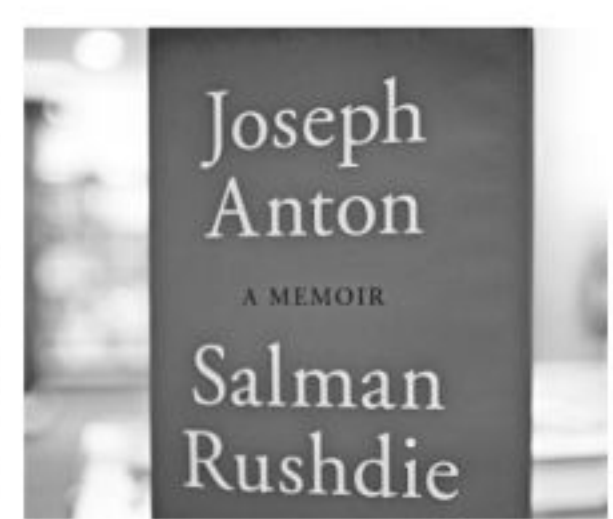
As violent protests over a US-made film rock the Muslim world, Salman Rushdie publishes his account yesterday of the decade he spent in hiding while under a fatwa for his book "The Satanic Verses".

With at least 19 people killed in a week of furious protests over the film, Rushdie's candid memoir of the years spent on the run after he too was accused of mocking Islam, entitled "Joseph Anton", has an added resonance.

"A book which was critical of Islam would be difficult to be published now," the Indian-born writer, 65, told BBC television in an interview broadcast on Monday.

Considered blasphemous by many Muslims, "The Satanic Verses" -- published in 1988 -- earned him a fatwa from Iran's spiritual leader, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, urging Muslims to kill the writer.

His memoir, named after the pseudonym used by Rushdie while in hiding and written in the third person, chronicles the following nine years in which he was forced to move



constantly between safe houses under armed guard.

"I am gagged and imprisoned," he recalls writing in his diary. "I can't even speak. I want to kick a football in a park with my son. Ordinary, banal life: my impossible dream."

He chose the name Joseph Anton in homage to his two favourite writers, Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. His bodyguards and protection officers from Special Branch called him simply Joe.

More than two decades later, Rushdie lives mostly in New York after Iran assured Britain in 1998 that it would not implement the fatwa.

But Iran's current supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei later reaffirmed that Rushdie's murder was authorised under Islam -- and on Sunday, an Iranian foundation reportedly increased the bounty on his head to \$3.3 million.

But life in hiding took its toll on Rushdie's relationships. His second and third marriages, to Marianne Wiggins and Elizabeth West, broke down during the years in hiding -- and he admits in the memoir that he was unfaithful to both.

## Trinamool pulls out of UPA govt

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prime cabinet, will meet Friday. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at 3:00pm on Friday and resign, she added.

The exit of Trinamool and its 19 lawmakers from the Congress party-led UPA does not, however, immediately threaten the stability of the government which still has the support of over 300 legislators and needs 272 to stay in power in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

But it does make the government more vulnerable to whims of its other allies, most of which strongly oppose the surprise move to allow foreign investment in retail sector. It means Congress will now have to depend on so many other regional allies each of which has its own agendas.

Mamata Banerjee, a mercurial politician who has forced the Indian government into a series of policy reversals and led to scrap-

ping of the proposed Teesta water sharing treaty with Bangladesh in September last year, assumed power in the state of West Bengal in May last year, ending 34 years of unbroken Left Front rule there.

Mamata, a populist firebrand leader said the economic reforms would hurt the poor. "Unfortunately, we have not received any respect from Congress despite being their important coalition partner."

She also accused the Congress of indulging in the "politics of blackmail".

Congress sources say they will be able to manage by calling on other regional parties such as Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav or Bahujan Samaj Party headed by Mayawati from northern state of Uttar Pradesh. These two parties, which together have 43 lawmakers, are already

supporting Congress-led UPA from outside.

Significantly, reacting to Trinamool's decision today, Samajwadi Party made it clear that it would not be influenced by Mamata's decision and would take an "independent" view.

There has been speculation for months about the possibility of early parliamentary elections before their scheduled date in 2014 because of tensions in the UPA coalition.

Decisions taken by the federal government last Friday to open airlines to foreign capital, limit use of subsidised cooking gas cylinders to six per year, sell minority stakes in four state-run companies and hike diesel prices have also drawn sharp criticism.

Opposition parties also sharply criticised the reforms, which were announced last week. Some,

including the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and Leftist parties, have planned a countrywide strike and protests for Thursday.

There now appears only a small window for a rapprochement between Mamata and the government in the next three days.

While Mamata wanted total withdrawal of the decision on FDI in retail, raising the cap on subsidised cooking gas cylinders from six to 12 cylinders and reduction of diesel hike from Rs 5 by Rs 3 or Rs 4 for reconsideration of her decision, Manmohan Singh appears to have decided to stick to his reform decisions.

Congress was unfazed by Trinamool's decision to withdraw support to UPA and maintained Mamata's party is "still a valuable ally" and said it will discuss with government the issues raised by her.

Sources said Congress President Sonia Gandhi was expected to take up the matter with the prime minister, amid indications that the cap on LPG cylinders could be raised from six to nine per year.

The next three days gives Congress and the government some room to work out a compromise, observers say.

For this, the government may have to climb down on its stand of not rolling back its last week's decisions.

Communist Party of India asked the UPA government to prove its majority in Parliament after the withdrawal of support by Trinamool Congress. But Parliament is not in session right now.

BJP said it would consult its NDA allies on whether there is a need for a special session of Parliament in the wake of Trinamool Congress' decision.

## MEET THE LILIGER



PHOTO: BBC

Kiara, the world's first Liliger. Her mother is a liger - a cross between a lion and tiger - and her father is an African Lion, making her a quarter tiger. The cute-as-a-button cub lives in Novosibirsk Zoo, in Siberia, Russia. According to the head of the zoo's cat section, Roza Solovyova, she's only just started to "grow and develop." "Her character has not even formed yet. But I'm confident she will be a calm, confident, strong animal," she said.