

UN chief warns Ahmadinejad

Iranian president accuses West of abusing UN veto

AGENCIES

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of the dangers of incendiary rhetoric when the two men met in New York on Sunday before this week's annual gathering of world leaders at the UN General Assembly.

"The secretary-general drew attention to the potentially harmful consequences of inflammatory rhetoric, counter-rhetoric and threats from various countries in the Middle East," Ban's press office said in a statement.

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, a brigadier general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was quoted as saying on Sunday that Iran could launch a pre-emptive strike on Israel if it was sure the Jewish state was preparing to attack it.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hinted that Israel could strike Iran's nuclear sites and criticized US President Barack Obama's position that sanctions and diplomacy should be given more time to stop Iran getting the atomic bomb.

Iran denies that it is seeking nuclear arms and says its atomic work is peaceful, aimed at generating electricity.

The UN statement said Ban told Ahmadinejad that Iran should "take the measures necessary to build international confidence in the exclusively



Ahmadinejad is greeted by Ban Ki-moon before their meeting at UN Headquarters.

peaceful nature of its nuclear program."

Meanwhile, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday attacked Western powers for misusing their UN veto power in their nuclear showdown with his country and for allowing "sacrilege" against Islam.

Ahmadinejad launched his virulent attack at a United Nations debate on the rule of law at which he said the United States, Britain and France "violate the basic rights and freedoms of other nations."

"The discriminatory privilege of the veto right

enjoyed by some members of the Security Council lacks legitimacy," he declared, speaking at UN headquarters in New York on the eve of the main UN General Assembly debate.

"And that is why the Security Council has failed to establish justice and ensure sustainable peace and security in the world," he said.

"Some members of the Security Council with veto rights have chosen silence with regard to the nuclear warheads of a fake regime while at the same time they impede scientific progress of other nations," he said.

This was an implicit reference to Iran's regional foe Israel, which has an undeclared nuclear weapons program of its own.

Western powers believe Iran is enriching uranium with a view to building a nuclear weapon, and have imposed tough economic sanctions on the Islamic regime, but Ahmadinejad accused them of abusing their UN powers.

Britain, France and Germany have officially called for new European Union sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, diplomats said.

The foreign ministers of the three countries called for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton last week calling for tougher measures as the showdown with Tehran becomes more tense, a European diplomat told AFP Sunday on condition of anonymity.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2012

World leaders meet amid frustration, turmoil

AP, United Nations

Democratic uprisings across the Arab world and the Palestinians' bid for UN membership sparked excitement and hope at last year's meeting of world leaders.

But with war raging in Syria, the Palestinian application sidelined, and deadly protests generated by an anti-Islamic video, the mood as this year's UN gathering begins is one of disappointment and frustration.

More than 120 presidents, prime ministers and monarchs meeting this week under heavy security at the UN General Assembly and in sideline events will also be preoccupied by rising tension over Iran's nuclear program and the possibility of an Israeli strike against Tehran's nuclear facilities, al-Qaida's inroads in the Sahel region of west Africa, especially in Mali, and the first decline in years in international aid to help developing countries combat poverty.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon predicted that the ministerial session, which starts today, will be among the busiest ever, reflecting "the tumultuous time in which we live - a time of turmoil and transition." It is

also taking place "against a backdrop of widespread violence linked to intolerance," he said.

Ahead of the opening ministerial session, which President Barack Obama will address, the UN chief has invited leaders to the first high-level meeting on the rule of law, hoping they "will send a strong signal to the world's people that they are serious about establishing well-functioning institutions and delivering justice."

The Syrian conflict has bitterly divided the most powerful members of the Security Council, paralysing the only UN body that can impose global sanctions and authorise military action. Russia, Syria's key protector, and China, have vetoed three Western-backed resolutions aimed at pressuring Assad to stop the violence and start political talks with opponents of his family's 40-year dictatorship who began demonstrating against his regime 18 months ago.

Germany's UN Ambassador Peter Wittig, the current Security Council president, said "change in the Arab world" will be uppermost in the minds of the leaders - as was the case at last year's session.

Over 2,000 Syrian soldiers defect to Jordan

Warplane kills children ahead of UN briefing

AFP, Damascus

More than 2,000 Syrian soldiers have defected to Jordan since the conflict erupted last year in the neighbouring country, the commander of Jordan's border guards said in remarks published yesterday.

"The number of refugees who have entered Jordan through unofficial border crossings until Wednesday has reached

more than 74,000 Syrians... 2053 of them soldiers from various ranks," Brigadier General Hussein al-Ziyud told the semi-official Al-Dustour newspaper.

Ziyud said the soldiers have been "taken to special places under special protection," adding that "many of them were shot at as they tried to enter Jordan and some of the gunfire hit Jordanian territory."

Meanwhile, regime warplanes struck rebel positions in Aleppo yesterday, killing three children, as insurgents claimed to control most of Syria ahead of a UN Security Council address by peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

Before the annual UN General Assembly

beginning today, the UN and Arab League envoy is set to brief the UN Security Council behind closed doors on his contacts in Damascus, including with President Bashar al-Assad.

Brahimi discussed Syria with UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Saturday and both agreed that the 18-month crisis was "a steadily increasing threat to regional peace and stability," a statement said.

Yesterday's briefing comes a day after at least 82 people were killed in violence nationwide in Syria -- among them 40 civilians -- according to figures supplied by Britain-based watchdog the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It said three children from one family were among five people killed in a strike by regime warplanes on Monday on the northern city of Aleppo, the country's commercial hub that has been a focus for fighting since mid-July.

"Three children from the same family were killed when their building collapsed in Maadi district, which is located in the Old City of Aleppo, 600 metres (yards) from the citadel," the Observatory's Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

Anger over slain envoy's diary

AP, Los Angeles

CNN, in a story posted online on Saturday, said that it found a journal belonging to Stevens four days after he died in a September 11 attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Three other Americans were also killed.

The news channel broke a pledge to the late ambassador's family that it wouldn't report on the diary, said State Department spokesman Philippe Reines, a senior adviser to US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In a blistering statement, Reines called CNN's actions "indefensible."

The channel said in the story online that it took "newsworthy tips" from Stevens' diary and confirmed them with other sources. Citing an unidentified source "familiar with Stevens' thinking," CNN said that the ambassador was concerned about security threats in Benghazi and a "rise in Islamic extremism."

In a statement on Saturday, CNN defended its use of the journal's contents and asked "why is the State Department now attacking the messenger?"

"CNN did not initially report on the existence of a journal out of respect for the family, but we felt there were issues raised in the journal which required full reporting, which we did," the channel said.



Ambassador Stevens

RACE TO WHITE HOUSE

Obama responds to Romney's tough talk on Mideast

AP, Washington

President Barack Obama, defending his foreign policy record at a time of anti-American rage in the Muslim world, fired back at suggestions from Republican Mitt Romney that the president has been weak with allies and enemies alike.

In an interview airing the night before Obama meets with other world leaders at the United Nations, the president said, "If Gov Romney is suggesting that we should start another war, he should say so."

It was Obama's most direct rebuttal yet to persistent skepticism by his White House rival on his handling of an unraveling situation in the Middle East. Romney has charged the US stance has been marred by miscalculations, mixed messages and appeasement.

The foreign policy arguments come as both candidates sharpen their strategy just six weeks ahead of Election Day. Speaking to reporters on a flight to Colorado Sunday night, Romney acknowledged he was slipping behind Obama in several swing states and said he would spend more time with voters in the coming weeks.



"I think the fundraising season is probably a little quieter going forward," he said following a weekend largely devoted to raising money in California.

Facing Republican fears that his campaign is moving in the wrong direction, Romney huddled earlier in the day with his top advisers, preparing for next month's debates and crafting a more aggressive strategy.

"I don't pay a lot of attention to the day-to-day polls. They change a great deal," Romney said. "And I know that in the coming six weeks they're very unlikely to stay where they are today."

NEWS IN brief

Kenyan troops kill Somali civilians

BBC ONLINE

Seven civilians were shot dead by Kenyan troops advancing towards the al-Shabab stronghold of Kismayo, a Somali army spokesman yesterday told the BBC.

"It was a deliberate killing," said Adan Mohamed Hirsir.

The Kenyans are part of the pro-government African Union mission in Somalia, which says it is investigating the incident.

The alleged shooting happened about 50km (30 miles) from Kismayo, the largest city still in militant hands.

Kenyan troops intervened in Somalia a year ago after a spate of cross-border attacks blamed on the al-Qaeda linked al-Shabab group.

Rafsanjani son returns from exile

REUTERS, Dubai

The son of former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani returned to Iran from exile to answer charges of inciting unrest after a disputed election in 2009, fuelling speculation that Rafsanjani's influence in Tehran may once again be growing.

Mehdi Hashemi Rafsanjani arrived in Tehran late on Sunday, Fars news agency reported, having spent three years in the United Kingdom following his alleged involvement in the widespread protests that followed the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Anti-Islam film protest in Lanka

AP, Colombo

Thousands of Sri Lankan Muslims have protested an American-made film that denigrates the Prophet Muhammad, demanding the US ban it and punish its creators.

More than 5,000 protesters blocked traffic as they marched on a main road Monday in the capital, Colombo, carrying signs and banners that read "USA ban the film on YouTube," "Punishment for those involved," and "Our hearts are wounded and chests full of anger."

Protest organiser Kamil Hussain urged the U.S. to ban the film, Innocence of Muslims, and remove it from YouTube, saying "insulting a religious leader is not freedom of speech."

Protesters also displayed banners that called for boycotting American brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's.

Chinese ships deployed near disputed islands

REUTERS, Tokyo

Three Chinese ships briefly entered what Japan considers its territorial waters near disputed islands in the East China Sea yesterday, prompting an official protest from Tokyo and renewed diplomatic efforts to cool tensions between the rivals.

In a move that could further complicate the territorial row that is threatening relations between Asia's biggest economies, a group of fishermen from Taiwan -- which also claims the rocky isles -- said as many as 100 boats escorted by 10 Taiwan Coast Guard vessels would arrive in the area later on Monday.

China's Xinhua news agency said in the morning that two civilian surveillance ships were undertaking a "rights defense" patrol near the islands, citing the State Oceanic Administration, which controls the ships. One fishery patrol vessel was also detected inside waters claimed by Japan.

Japan lodged an official protest. By afternoon, all three Chinese vessels had moved further away, the Japanese Coast



PHOTO: REUTERS

A Chinese marine surveillance cruises next to a Japan Coast Guard patrol ship.

Guard said. Sino-Japanese relations deteriorated sharply after Japan bought the islands, called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, earlier this month, sparking anti-Japan protests across China.

"In recent days, Japan has constantly provoked incidents concerning the Diaoyu islands issue, gravely violating China's territorial sovereignty," China's Xinhua news agency said.

The ship patrols were intended to exercise China's "administrative jurisdiction" over the islands, it said.

Egypt sentences 14 to death over Sinai attacks

REUTERS, Ismailia

An Egyptian court yesterday sentenced 14 militant Islamists to death by hanging and four to life imprisonment over attacks on army and police forces in the Sinai Peninsula last year.

The men, members of a militant group called Tawheed and Jihad, were charged by the prosecutor with killing three police officers, an army officer and a civilian in attacks carried out in June and July, 2011.

Eight of the 14 death sentences were in absentia, court sources said.

The verdicts were met with cries from the accused against President Mohamed Mursi, the Islamist head of state elected this year and who the defendants blamed for the court's decision.

"Mursi is an infidel and those who follow him are infidels," shouted one defendant.

Others cried "God is Great" as they listened to the judge from inside the metal cage in which they stood during trial sessions.

Egypt's Sinai has suffered from faltering security since President Hosni Mubarak was swept from power in a popular uprising in February 2011. Egypt's army and police launched a sweep after a raid that killed 16 Egyptian border guards in August.

UK, Canada to share embassies

AFP, London

Britain and Canada are to set up joint diplomatic missions and share embassy offices overseas, British Foreign Secretary William Hague was set to announce yesterday.

The arrangement will see Britain and Canada share consular services in countries where one of them does not have an embassy, a spokesman for Britain's Foreign Office said.

Reports said that the deal could also eventually involve embassy-sharing with Australia and New Zealand.

Hague and his Canadian counterpart John Baird were to sign an agreement in Ottawa ahead of a press conference revealing more details of the plans.

Iran to launch domestic internet

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Iran plans to introduce a domestic internet network in what officials say is a bid to improve cyber security but which many Iranians fear is the latest way to control their access to the web.

The announcement, made by a government deputy minister on Sunday, came as state television announced Google and its email service would be blocked "within a few hours".

The Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) said the Google ban was connected to the anti-Islamic film posted on the company's YouTube site which has caused outrage throughout the Muslim world, however there has been no official confirmation.

BO XILAI SCANDAL

China ex-police chief gets 15 years' jail

AFP, Chengdu

Chinese ex-police chief Wang Lijun, who exposed a scandal that shocked the ruling Communist Party, was sentenced to 15 years in prison yesterday for defection and other crimes.

Wang, the right-hand man of top politician Bo Xilai, fled to the US consulate in Chengdu in February, sparking a crisis that saw Bo sacked and his wife found guilty of murder ahead of a generational transfer of power.

His conviction and sentence are the latest move by the authorities to try to deal with the fall-out from the scandal ahead of the once-in-a-decade leadership transition at a Communist Party congress expected next month.

The former police chief of the sprawling metropolis of Chongqing, where Bo was the top Party official, Wang was tried for defection, bribery, abuse of power and bending the law for selfish ends, admitting all the charges.

Analysts told AFP that it remained unclear whether the authorities would put Bo -- once a contender to join the elite Politburo Standing Committee and one of the country's best-known politicians -- on criminal trial.

Bo is being investigated by the Party for "serious" violations of discipline and has not been seen for months.

In a statement, the Intermediate People's Court in the southwestern city of Chengdu found Wang guilty on each count, adding that the circumstances of the bending-the-law offence were "very serious".

Lewis and Dame Maggie win Emmys

REUTERS, Los Angeles

"Homeland" topped "Mad Men" to win the top drama prize yesterday as the Primetime Emmy awards favoured politics and 21st century tensions over shows set in bygone eras.

"Modern Family," ABC's show about the chaotic lives of three related couples and their children, won best comedy series for a third year and supporting actor Emmys for Eric Stonestreet and Julie Bowen, as well as a directing award.

"Homeland," a post 9/11 psychological thriller about a returning Iraq war hero turned by al Qaeda, won best drama after one season on cable channel Showtime. It also took home trophies for best writing and best acting for its two leads, Claire Danes and Damian Lewis, for a total of six including technical awards.

"Homeland," said to be one of President Barack Obama's favourite TV programs,



brought to an end the reign of AMC's stylish 1960s advertising show "Mad Men," which left Sunday's Emmy ceremony empty-handed.

It was the biggest shut-out in Emmy history for "Mad Men," which had gone into Sunday's awards as joint top nominee with 17 nominations.

"Homeland" also beat popular "Downton Abbey," about aristocrats and their servants in an English country house, and HBO's medieval fantasy series "Game of Thrones," in what was the first year that all the nominated best drama series came from cable television.

American politics did figure strongly in other Emmy races. "Game Change," the HBO story of Sarah Palin's entry into the 2008 US vice presidential race, was also a big winner, taking the Emmy for best miniseries, writing, directing and acting for star Julianne Moore.