

Russia blames West for violence amid UN rage

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday accused the West of pursuing policies that had destabilised states in the Arab world and now risked creating chaos in Syria.

"The most important thing is that our partners cannot stop themselves," news agencies quoted Putin as saying at his local Moscow residence.

"They have already created a situation of chaos in many territories and are now continuing the same policy in other countries -- including Syria," said Putin.

His comments came after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged action from the "paralysed" UN Security Council.

More than 305 people were killed across Syria on Wednesday, making it the bloodiest day of the 18-month revolt, a human rights group said.

"The atrocities mount while the Security Council remains paralysed and I would urge that we try once again to find a path forward" so that the council can try to end the violence," Hillary said.

Her appeal came amid mounting attempts by Western governments to press Russia and China to ease their opposi-



SYRIA CRISIS

tion to UN action against the Assad regime. British Prime Minister David Cameron said the blood of children killed in the conflict had become "a terrible stain on the reputation of this United Nations."

Arab ministers weighed calls for intervention, meeting UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi on the General Assembly sidelines.

The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, called on Tuesday for an Arab intervention force. However Arab League secretary general Nabil al-Arabi told

reporters he did not believe the emir intended it to be a "fighting force."

Countering the accusations made by the West, Putin used apocalyptic language to warn that Syria risked seeing the kind of bloody chaos that followed the Roman Empire's invasion of Carthage and the great city's fall in 146 BC.

He described this as the world's first example "of wide-scale ethnic cleansing".

One fable said the Romans killed the Carthagians and then salted corpses to make sure that nothing ever grew there -- a process Putin described in bloody detail and warned might be repeated again in Syria.

No compromise over islands: Japan

Beijing slams Tokyo's claim

AFP, United Nations

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda insisted Wednesday there could be no compromise with China on the ownership of a disputed island chain drawing a sharp rebuke from Beijing.

Speaking to reporters at the UN General Assembly in New York, Noda said China misunderstands the issues at stake and demanded an end to threats against Japanese citizens and business interests in China by nationalist protesters.

"So far as the Senkaku islands are concerned, they are an integral part of our territory in the light of history and of international law," Noda said.

"It is very clear and there are no territorial issues as such. Therefore there cannot be any compromise that could mean any setback from this basic position," he told reporters.

China yesterday criticised Japanese PM's comment as "obstinate persistence".

"China is extremely dissatisfied with and sternly opposes the Japanese leader's obstinate persistence in his incorrect views regarding the Diaoyu islands," Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said in a statement.

China and Japan are locked in an escalating confrontation over the islands that triggered street protests across China and saw attacks on Japanese businesses doing business in China.

Relations between the countries plummeted to their lowest ebb in years after Tokyo announced on September 11 that it had completed a deal to buy three of the uninhabited outcrops from their private owner.

Obama exploiting Arab Spring: Assange

Mocks US president at UN event



IAN S, London

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has accused US President Barack Obama of seeking to exploit the Arab Spring revolutions for political gain. He was addressing a gathering of diplomats at the UN through a satellite videolink.

Assange spoke from the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he sought refuge three months ago from extradition to Sweden. He is wanted for questioning on allegations of sex offences, reported guardian.co.uk.

He focused on Obama's address to the UN General Assembly Tuesday in which the president gave a staunch defence of freedom of speech and spoke of American support for the revolutions in the Arab world.

Assange said that it was 'audacious' for the American government "to take credit for the last two years of progress", given past US support for the ousted Arab dictators, the media report said.

Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street peddler whose suicide sparked the revolt, "did not set himself on fire so that Barack Obama could get re-elected", he said.

He added it was "disrespect to the dead to claim that the United States supported the forces of change."

He went on to claim that it was the leak of classified US diplomatic cables to Wikileaks by Bradley Manning, an US soldier, that "went on to help trigger the Arab Spring".

While referring to Obama's UN defence of the freedom of expression, Assange spoke of the treatment meted to Manning in US prison, where he was held in isolation, stripped and left naked for hours in his cell, and to the denunciation of Wikileaks by American leaders.

Greece adopts more cuts defying protest

AFP, Athens

Greece's three-party coalition government agreed yesterday on the "main points" of a 13.5-billion-euro (\$17.4 billion) austerity package, tied to the release of vital EU-IMF rescue loans.

"We have agreed on the main points," Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras said after the end of the meeting, adding that the agreement of the so-called 'troika' of international creditors and that of EU peers was necessary.

"We agreed on the main points, but there are issues that are still pending," said Fotis Kouvelis, leader of the government's junior partner Democratic Left.

According to the finance ministry, the package includes 11.5 billion euros in state spending cuts and two billion euros in additional tax revenue.

Greece's so-called 'troika' of creditors -- the EU, IMF and the European Central Bank -- had given the government a week to finalise the cuts.

They are expected to return to Athens by early next week and the government hopes to have the package ready before a meeting by eurozone finance ministers on October 8.

Abbas for new UN status

Israel PM seeks 'red line' on Iran

BBC ONLINE

The Palestinian leader has asked the UN to grant Palestinians "non-member observer state" by the end of the year.

Mahmoud Abbas told the General Assembly talks on such a status had begun, and that his eventual aim was to establish Palestine as a full member state.

Addressing the assembly later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for a "clear red line" to be set over Iran's nuclear programme.

The West suspects Iran is seeking build nuclear weapons. Tehran denies this.

Abbas told delegates the annual General Assembly in New York that Palestinians would continue their efforts to obtain full UN membership.

He said negotiations had begun with "regional organisations and member states" aimed at adopting a resolution making Palestine "a non-member state of the United Nations during this session".

"In our endeavour," he added, "we do not seek to delegitimise an existing state - that is Israel - but rather to assert the state that must be realised - that is Palestine."



Currently, the Palestine Liberation Organisation only has "permanent observer" status. Last year, a bid for full-member status failed because of a lack of support at the UN Security Council.

The change would allow Palestinians to participate in General Assembly debates. It would also improve their chances of joining UN agencies and the International Criminal Court.

In his speech, Netanyahu reaffirmed his country's opposition to "unilateral declaration of statehood".

Turning to Iran, the Israeli prime minister said "a clear red line" should be drawn which, if crossed, would lead to military intervention.

He said sanctions passed over the past seven years had not affected Tehran's nuclear programme.

Netanyahu said Iran should be stopped before it acquires enough enriched uranium to make a nuclear bomb.

"The hour is very late," he told delegates. "The Iranian nuclear calendar does not take time out."

He said he was convinced that faced with a "clear red line, Iran will back down".

New Delhi setting up committee for river link

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India says it has already initiated setting up a mechanism to complete a controversial project that involves connecting 30 major rivers and diverting the water of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

"Based on a Supreme Court order [of February 27], we have already initiated the process to constitute a committee for interlinking of rivers," Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal said in New Delhi last night.

The SC on Wednesday dismissed the federal government's plea seeking a review of its order to implement the ambitious project in a time-bound manner.

Two Sudans agree on oil, border deals

AFP, Addis Ababa

Sudan and South Sudan were to ink agreements yesterday on a demilitarised border zone and oil production but other key issues that nearly brought the two countries to war remain unresolved.

The partial breakthrough after four days of talks should allow for the resumption of oil exports after a stoppage that has crippled the economies of the rival nations.

However the limited agreement between President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and his Southern counterpart Salva Kiir fails to address other contentious issues such as the border of the contested Abyei region and other disputed oil producing areas.

Those issues would be addressed during another round of talks, officials said.

A press conference was to take place later in Addis Ababa with the two presidents flying out after the signing of the deal, which comes after UN Security Council deadlines for an agreement were missed.

"There is agreement on some areas," South Sudan Delegation spokesman Atif Kiir said late Wednesday, and his Sudanese counterpart Badr el-din Abdullah Badr spoke of "progress on many issues".

While few details have emerged, the two sides said a demilitarised border buffer zone had been agreed.

A combination of two pictures shows details of the face of Leonardo Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'. A Zurich-based foundation said there have always been two portraits of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci, the 'Earlier Version', left, and the 'Jacondo'.

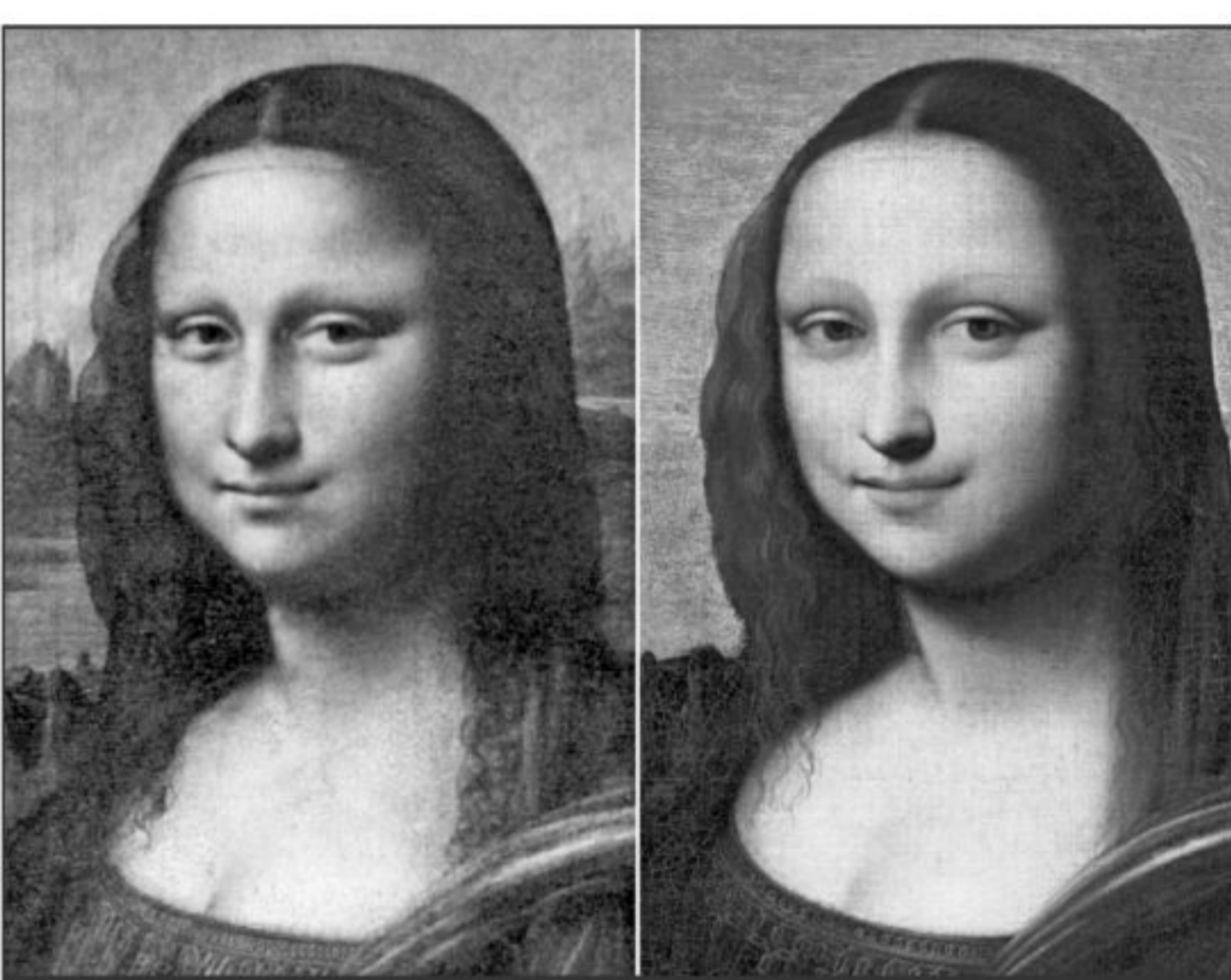


PHOTO: AFP

US to lift import ban on Myanmar goods

AFP, New York

Washington is to ease a ban on imports from Myanmar, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, lifting its last major trade embargo in a move swiftly welcomed in the former pariah state yesterday.

Hillary told Myanmar President Thein Sein in New York that the US "is taking the next step in normalising our commercial relationship", to recognise the reforms made as the Southeast Asian nation emerges from decades of army rule.

"We will begin the process of easing restrictions on imports of Burmese goods into the United States," she told the Myanmar leader, a former general who took the helm of a reformist quasi-civilian regime last year.

"We have watched as you and your government have continued the steady process of reform and we have been pleased to respond with specific steps which recognise the government's efforts and encourage further reform," she said.

The move, which will have to be carried out in conjunction with Congress, comes just over a week after democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi started a historic visit to the United States by calling for an end to sanctions.

Her National League for Democracy party hailed the announcement as a positive long term step for Myanmar and said it came after negotiations involving Hillary, Suu Kyi and Thein Sein.

India's UPA endorses govt's reforms

PTI, New Delhi

After Congress, the United Progressive Alliance yesterday endorsed government's recent tough economic decisions and discussed the need "to do more reforms."

At a meeting of constituents of the UPA, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underlined the need for economic reforms to ensure flow of foreign investment.

A fortnight after the announcement to allow FDI in retail, cap cooking gas subsidy and hike diesel prices, the leaders of the ruling coalition yesterday expressed "general satisfaction" over the decisions, which saw the exit of Trinamool Congress the second largest UPA constituent.

Rumours aimed at maligning my wife

Says Hina Rabbani Khar's husband

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan foreign minister Hina Rabbani Khar's husband Feroz Gulzar yesterday rubbished rumours about differences in their relationship as a campaign to malign his wife.

Gulzar, an industrialist from Punjab province, was quoted by Geo News channel as saying that the campaign to malign his wife was "rubbish" that does not merit comment.

He further said there was "no premise for such trash" and that he would not offer any comment on "social media gossip".

There has been considerable speculation about the fate of Khar's marriage to Gulzar since a little-known Bangladeshi tabloid claimed without any proof she was allegedly involved in a relationship with Bilawal Bhutto, son of President Asif Ali Zardari.



Gulzar said he had been informed about reports of his purported differences with his wife by his cousins, who had described the reports available on the internet as "not worth reading".

Gulzar was quoted as saying that he was not aware of the details of these reports.

Asked about rumours of his separation from his wife, Gulzar said no such issue was being considered by him.

He further said it was unfortunate that the persons behind such gossip had dragged his two young daughters into the affair.

Khar, who is currently in the US as part of President Asif Ali Zardari's delegation to attend the UN General Assembly session, was quoted by Geo News as saying that she too would not comment on such a "reprehensible matter".

NEWS IN brief

Laden was one-eyed:

Zawahiri

AFP, Dubai



Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri resurfaced for the second time in a month on Wednesday in an online video on the life of his late predecessor Osama bin Laden who he said was blind in one eye.

Dressed in a white thawb cloak and turban, Zawahiri revealed "for those who do not know" that Saudi-born bin Laden was left blind in the right eye after an accident in his youth.

He also said bin Laden was a former member of the Saudi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood before **Storms deluge historic British city**

AFP, London

Britain's most severe September storms for 30 years flooded homes and businesses in the historic city of York yesterday and threatened chaos for much of northern England.

Residents took to boats to navigate the picturesque streets of the city dating from Roman times but officials said flood defences would cope as the River Ouse reached near record levels, three metres higher than normal.

Further rain was forecast for Thursday, putting

Mugabe hints at

March polls

AFP, Harare



Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has set out plans for a constitutional referendum in November and elections in March, a timetable that was quickly denounced by the opposition as "unrealistic".

In a High Court filing seen yesterday, Mugabe, 88, set out his most concrete timetable to date for two votes that are key to a bipartisan deal designed to stop Zimbabwe descending further into political violence.

G8 to extend aid to sub-Saharan

AFP, New York

The United States and other G8 nations are expanding a program to lift 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa out of poverty and hunger within the next decade, US officials said Wednesday.

More than 60 companies pledging some \$4 billion in private business commitments to help build seed, fertilizer or small-scale irrigation firms have joined the Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition.

The initiative was launched by President Barack Obama in May at a G8 summit and brings together G8 nations, African countries and private sector firms.

17 killed in India bus plunge

AP, New Delhi

Police said 17 people died when the bus they were travelling in plunged into a river in western India.

The bus was crossing the Purna river in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra state on Wednesday morning when the accident took place. The area is 650 kilometers north of state capital Mumbai.

Head Constable Surendra Mahaske said at least 10 passengers were injured. The cause was not immediately clear because the driver was among those killed.

Iran media chief jailed

AFP, Tehran

A top aide to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who heads Iran's official IRNA news agency, Ali Akbar Javanfekr, was arrested and jailed on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

Authorities also closed Iran's leading moderate newspaper, Shargh, after it published a satirical cartoon seen as insulting war veterans, according to the website of state broadcaster IRIB.

China rejects Weiwei's tax appeal

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese court yesterday rejected Ai Weiwei's appeal against a hefty fine for alleged tax evasion which the acclaimed artist and government critic has called an attempt to silence his activism.

Ai, 55, had been seeking an open trial on the allegations of tax evasion by the company he founded, Fake Cultural Development, which had resulted in a \$2.4m fine by the Beijing tax bureau last year.

The burly, wispy-bearded avant-garde artist, who denies the allegations, said the ruling by the intermediate court marked his last chance to contest the fine in court.



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