

# 'Decisive' battle rages for Aleppo amid UN wrangle

US says regime moved some chemical weapons

AFP, Aleppo

Rebels unleashed an unprecedented barrage of mortar fire against troops in Aleppo after announcing a "decisive" battle for Syria's second city, residents and a watchdog say.

Shells crashed down at a steady rate and clashes were widespread, leaving layers of dust and smoke over Aleppo, according to the residents and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

"The fighting is unprecedented and has not stopped since Thursday. The clashes used to be limited to one or two blocks of a district, but now the fighting is on several fronts," the Observatory's Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

Residents of neighbourhoods previously spared the worst of the two-month-old battle for Aleppo also told AFP the violence was "unprecedented".

Rebels claimed they had advanced on several fronts, particularly in the

southwest, but admitted they had failed to make any significant breakthrough.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta yesterday said the Syrian regime has moved some chemical weapons to safeguard the material as it wages war against rebel forces but the main storage sites for its arsenal remain secure.

Asked if rebel forces had gotten their hands on some chemical stocks, Panetta said: "I don't have any specific information about the opposition and whether or not they've obtained some of this or how much they've maintained."

Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, which dates back to the 1970s, is the largest in the Middle East, but its precise scope remains unclear, according to analysts.

The regime has said it might use its

chemical weapons if attacked by outside countries, although not against its own people.

The Observatory which gave initial estimates of 60 people killed across the country yesterday.

Violence also raged in Damascus where troops attacked several rebel areas in both the north and the south of the capital, leaving three civilians dead, the Observatory said.

The UN Human Rights Council yesterday voted overwhelmingly to extend the mandate of its probe into rights violations in Syria, condemning the "increasing number of massacres" in the country.

Of the council's 47 members, 41 voted in favour of the resolution allowing the Commission of Inquiry to continue its investigation, which began a year ago.

The three member states that have most resisted international intervention in Syria -- Russia, China and Cuba -- voted against the resolution.

# Japan 'stole' our islands: China

US urges for 'cooler heads'

AFP, United Nations

China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi sparked angry exchanges with Japanese diplomats at the United Nations by accusing Japan of stealing disputed islands.

Chinese and Japanese envoys staged a series of attacks during Thursday's session after Yang heightened tensions over the East China Sea islands and reopened old diplomatic wounds over World War II.

The Japanese government's purchase of the uninhabited islands from a private owner this month has infuriated Beijing and set off violent protests in several Chinese cities.

China has demanded the return of the uninhabited islands, known as the Diaoyus in Chinese and the Senkakus in Japanese, for decades. Taiwan also claims the islands.

Japan's move was in "outright denial" of its defeat in World War II, he added, reaffirming China's repeated references to the 1939-45 war.

In Tokyo Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, Osamu Fujimura, told reporters Yang's remarks were "totally groundless".

As the tensions simmer between China and Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Thursday to work to calm down the rhetoric.

"The secretary, as she has been urging for a number of months ... again urged that cooler heads prevail. That Japan and China engage in dialogue to calm the waters," a senior State Department official said after the talks.

# Iran talks tough after UN condemnation

US, Israel say share same goal over Nuke issue

AFP, United Nations

Iran on Thursday vowed to "retaliate" against any attack after Israel's prime minister called for a "red line" to prevent the Islamic republic from acquiring a nuclear bomb.

Denying any nuclear military program, Iran's deputy UN ambassador said his country "is strong enough to defend itself and reserves its full right to retaliate with full force against any attack."

Meanwhile, The United States and Israel "share the goal" of stopping Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, a US official said late Thursday after top level talks in New York.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met for 75 minutes one-on-one with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The envoy, Eshagh al-Habib, told the UN General Assembly that Israel is a "regime which is based on terrorism and is the father founder of state terrorism in the world."

Al-Habib accused Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of making "baseless

allegations" against Iran during a firebrand speech to the UN assembly earlier in the day.

Netanyahu called for "a clear red line on Iran's nuclear weapons program" in his address to the 193-member assembly.

Habib said Netanyahu had "shamelessly and hypocritically" made the accusations, adding that Israel is a non-declared nuclear power. The Iranian envoy also accused Israel of organizing operations in Iran that led to the murder of several of its nuclear scientists.

Habib poked fun of a graph that Netanyahu used in his speech, which showed a cartoon version of a bomb with a lit fuse.

"For the second time in the recent history of the United Nations, today an unfounded and imaginary graph was used to justify a threat against a founding member of the United Nations," he said.

It was an implicit reference to the "proof" of weapons of mass destruction that US Secretary of State Colin Powell used when making the case for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu uses a diagram of a bomb to describe Iran's nuclear program while delivering his address to the 67th United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York. While some commentators took jabs at the cartoonish visual aid, they said Netanyahu had scored a major PR coup, winning global headlines while setting a deadline that could help ease tense relations with the White House.

PHOTO: AFP

# Bo Xilai expelled from communist party

China sets November 8 congress date

AFP, Beijing

Disgraced Chinese politician Bo Xilai will "face justice" for a litany of crimes, state media said yesterday, as it announced the Communist Party had set a November 8 date for a pivotal party congress.

The apparent decision to come down hard on Bo for alleged abuse of power, taking bribes and improper sexual relations, was the latest turn in a scandal that has rocked the party ahead of a once-a-decade leadership transition.

Both Bo's fate and the date of the congress have been the subject of intense speculation over whether China's biggest political intrigue in decades would unsettle the highly choreographed leadership change.

The announcement on Bo marked an unprecedentedly harsh public rebuke for a Chinese Communist official as authorities looked to lay to rest the damaging episode that has shocked China and saw Bo's wife convicted of murder.



"Bo Xilai's behaviour created serious negative consequences, seriously damaged the party and the country's reputation in China and abroad, created an extremely negative result, and created huge losses for the party and the Chinese people," the Xinhua news agency said.

Bo, the party boss of the southwestern metropolis of Chongqing, was seen as a candidate for promotion to the party's top echelons.

But he was brought down earlier this year by murder allegations against his wife Gu Kailai that came to light when Bo's right hand man and police chief Wang Lijun turned against him.

Bo was removed from his Chongqing post and analysts said the affair exposed deep divisions within the Communist Party as he retains a large following among left-leaning party members.

Yesterday's announcement now likely sets the stage for what will be a highly anticipated trial for Bo.

# Dozens escape in Iraqi prison raid

13 cops killed

AFP, Tikrit

Dozens of prisoners were on the loose yesterday after militants attacked a prison in the Iraqi city of Tikrit, leaving at least 13 policemen dead, officials said.

The violence at the prison comes after al-Qaeda's Iraqi front group announced a campaign to regain territory and said it aimed to help its jailed members escape.

Salaheddin provincial deputy governor Ahmed Abdul Jabbar told AFP by telephone that the Tikrit prison had been retaken from militants who seized it on Thursday night, but that 83 prisoners escaped.

A hospital official in Tikrit, the ancestral home of now-executed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, said 13 police were killed and 34 wounded in the violence.

A source in the Salaheddin police command said, meanwhile, that 15 policemen and seven prisoners were killed, and put the number of escaped prisoners at about 100.

Accounts differed on the specifics of the unrest, but it appears militants attacked from outside the prison, while inmates may have seized weapons from guards inside.

A police lieutenant colonel said Thursday that a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb at the gate of the prison, after which it was assaulted by gunmen.

Al-Qaeda front group the Islamic State of Iraq said in July that it was launching a "new military campaign aimed at recovering territory."

# Achebe returns with long-awaited memoir

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria's Chinua Achebe, often called the father of modern African literature, released his first major work in years Thursday with a long-awaited memoir centred on the war that nearly destroyed his nation.

"There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra" chronicles Achebe's experiences during Nigeria's 1967-1970 civil war, which saw his native eastern region, dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, secede as the Republic of Biafra.

The split came largely in response to massacres of Igbos in Nigeria's north and saw Achebe, author of the revered novel "Things Fall Apart," speak out forcefully in support of the move.

His memoir was released in Britain on Thursday and will be available in Nigeria shortly after, said publishers Allen Lane, a division of Penguin. Its release in the United States is set for October 11.

The tensions that ignited the Biafran



conflict, which left around one million people dead, including many from starvation, are largely settled.

Experts, however, say a Biafra memoir from the 81-year-old Achebe is urgently needed in a country that remains deeply fractured on many levels.

Achebe remains a towering figure in Nigerian and African literature, though he has been based in the United States in recent years where he has been a professor at Brown University in Rhode Island. He travels infrequently due to a 1990 car accident that left him in a wheelchair.

Achebe's novel "Things Fall Apart", about the collision between British colonial rule and Igbo society, remains a landmark work 54 years after its release.

"Just as we read Shakespeare, it's not possible for any student in this department to graduate without reading the works of Chinua Achebe," said the head of the English department at the University of Lagos, Adeyemi Daramola.

# UK royals have veto powers!

TNN, London

The British government will go to court against confidential letters written by Prince Charles to government ministers being made public, reflecting his intervention on legislative and other matters.

The British royal family is supposed to play a completely apolitical role.

Last week, a freedom of information tribunal instructed Whitehall to do so. An estimated seven ministries of the government will have to hand over correspondence undertaken during 2004-05.

According to UK's Guardian newspaper, Charles's consent was sought on at least 12 draft bills in the last two parliamentary sessions. It seems his powers emanate from his ownership of the £700 million Duchy of Cornwall estate, which possesses prime properties in various parts of Britain, including palatial parts of London.

Charles has been consulted on matters pertaining to coroners, energy, planning, economic development and construction, marine and coastal access and housing and regeneration. The existence of veto surprised many Britons and even aroused criticism from a section.



PHOTO: AFP

Onlookers are seen near the wreckage of the Sita Air Dornier plane crash site in Manohara, on the outskirts of the Kathmandu yesterday. The small passenger plane carrying 19 people crashed on the outskirts of the Nepalese capital, killing everyone on board including seven Britons and five Chinese, police said.

# Forces claim fall of last Somali rebel base

AFP, Mogadishu

Kenya's army yesterday said it had taken the southern Somali port city of Kismayo, the last stronghold of the al-Qaeda linked Shebab, but the African Union force said operations were still ongoing.

"Kismayo has fallen and with minimum resistance," Kenyan army spokesman Cyrus Oguna told AFP, even as several residents said that fighting was ongoing and the Shebab still controlled the city centre.

"It was a joint operation both on air and ground, we finally entered Kismayo at 2:00 am (2300 GMT Thursday)," said Oguna.

However, the rebels and city residents said the Kenyan troops were still on the outskirts of the city that they have been targeting for days.

The UN refugee agency said there was no sign so far Friday of a major exodus of civilians from the city, from which an estimated 12,000 people have fled in the past four weeks and whose total population is estimated at between 160,000 and 190,000.

Kismayo is the last major bastion of the Shebab, who have lost most of their other strongholds to the 17,000-strong African Union force -- of which Kenya is a part -- as well as allied Ethiopian forces.