

Blasts kill dozens in Aleppo

5 killed in Turkey as violence spills Syria border; Russia warns Nato over intervention

AFP, Aleppo

Three car bombs yesterday tore into the heart of Syria's second city Aleppo, killing almost 50 people, mostly troops, as the regime launched an offensive against rebels near Damascus, a watchdog said.

Rebel fighters killed at least 15 soldiers, when they attacked military posts in the northwest of the country, triggering fierce clashes, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

And the bloodshed spilled across the Syrian border when several shells from the conflict crashed into the Turkish town of Akcakale, killing at least five people and wounding nine, witnesses said.

Earlier, on Tuesday, Russia told Nato and world powers they should not seek ways to intervene in Syria's civil war or set up buffer zones between rebels and government forces.

Moscow further called for restraint between Nato-member Turkey and Syria, where violence along their shared border has strained relations between the former allies.

Tensions have flared since a mortar round fired from inside Syria struck the territory of



A picture shows the scene of car bomb explosions that hit the northern Syrian city of Aleppo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Turkey. Ankara has threatened to respond if the strike were repeated.

When asked by Interfax if Moscow worried whether the tense border situation could prompt Nato to intervene to defend Turkey, its easternmost member, Deputy

Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov warned against any such step.

"In our contacts with partners in Nato and in the region, we are calling on them not to seek pretexts for carrying out a military scenario or to introduce initiatives such as

humanitarian corridors or buffer zones."

In Aleppo, two car bombs went off in quick succession around Saadallah al-Jabiri Square near a military officers' club, ripping off part of a hotel's facade and flattening a two-storey cafe, an AFP correspondent reported.

A third bomb exploded soon afterwards at an entrance to the Old City in the nearby district of Bab Jnein, the Observatory and a military official said.

At least 48 people were killed and almost 100 wounded, the Britain-based Observatory said, citing medics. "Most of them were regime troops," it added.

Rebels also attacked a political intelligence branch in Aleppo as well as an old vegetable market where a large number of troops were posted, said the Observatory, which relies on a network of activists on the ground.

Overnight, rebels also destroyed two tanks.

Since Thursday, the fighting has become more intense, spreading at the weekend into the centuries-old, UNESCO-listed souk in the historic heart of the city and sparking a fire that damaged hundreds of shops.

Rivals gear up for key debate

Rare protest in Iran over currency crisis

AFP, Denver

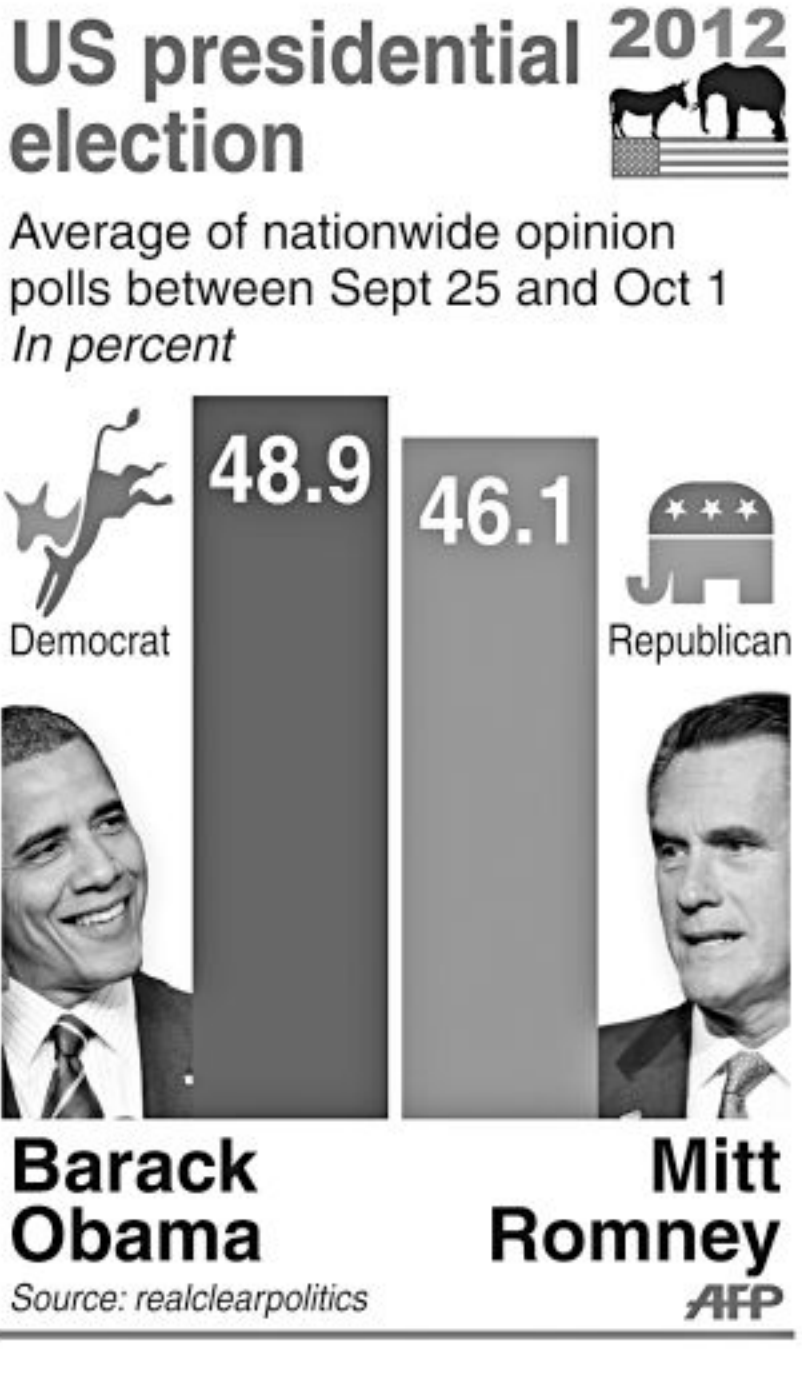
President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney at last stand face-to-face to duel for the White House in the first of a trio of debates just 33 days before American voters decide their fates.

Obama heads into the showdown in Denver with a narrow lead in his bid to defy historic omens sown by a stubbornly sluggish economic recovery, and to become only the second Democrat since World War II to win a second term.

Republican Romney, down in almost all the key battleground states that will decide who wins the 270 electoral votes needed to win on November 6, seeks a sharp change of momentum in a race that seems to be slipping away.

The rivals will step up to podiums at the University of Denver in the Rocky Mountain state of Colorado, at 7:00pm to clash over the economy and other domestic issues.

But veteran anchor Jim Lehrer, who will steer the debate for tens of millions of viewers at home, has leeway under rules thrashed out by



the two campaigns to bring up other burning issues.

That means Obama, 51, could face a grilling on his administration's shifting account of the attack on the

US consulate in Benghazi, Libya on September 11.

Romney, 65, a multi-millionaire former venture capitalist, could come under scrutiny over his complex offshore tax arrangements, which Democrats have highlighted to press the case that he is indifferent to middle class struggles.

Romney badly needs to reset the narrative of the election, after a secretly filmed tape emerged of him branding 47 percent of Americans as "victims" who pay no taxes and depend on government for handouts.

Obama and Romney, who have rarely met or spoken, have spent days in seclusion honing debate techniques, offensive parries and comebacks.

Debates are often billed as decisive, but they rarely change presidential races.

Some incumbent presidents, however, including Gerald Ford in 1976 and George H W Bush in 1992, have stumbled and ended up losing in November, so Obama will have to be on guard despite leading in the polls.

AFP, Tehran

A protest and scuffles with police occurred in central Tehran yesterday in the first sign of public unrest over Iran's plunging currency, which this week has lost more than half of its value.

Hundreds of police in anti-riot gear stormed the capital's currency exchange district of Ferdowsi, arresting illegal money changers and ordering licenced bureaux and other shops closed, witnesses told AFP.

Several arrests were seen, carried out by uniformed police or plain-clothes security officers.

A protest in Tehran's historic Grand Bazaar -- a maze-like complex of shops vital to the city -- also took place but was quickly put down by police.

The crackdown was an apparent bid to halt a dramatic plunge in the value of Iran's currency this week.

On Tuesday, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Western sanctions were mostly to blame. But rivals said his mismanagement of the economy was the main cause.

The money's plunge has greatly increased inflation in Iran, which is widely seen as far higher than the official 23.5 percent given by the central bank.

Food costs, notably, have spiralled, to the concern of Iranian families. Merchants, some of whom have lost millions of dollars in a day, say doing business has become nearly impossible.

The US government has said it sees the rial's plunge as proof Western sanctions are having a big impact on the Islamic republic's economy.

Manhunt in Nigeria after massacre

AFP, Kano

Nigerian soldiers moved house to house yesterday in an urgent bid to hunt down attackers responsible for the massacre of 40 people who were shot or had their throats slit in a student housing area.

The raid in the early hours of Tuesday near a polytechnic university shook the town of Mubi, located in Nigeria's volatile northeast, where Islamist extremist group Boko Haram has carried out scores of previous attacks.

Last week in Mubi, Nigeria's military conducted a high-profile raid targeting the group, killing a senior Boko Haram figure and arresting 156 suspected members.

Motives for the gruesome off-campus attack however remained unclear, with some officials suggesting the massacre may have been linked to a recent student election.

Police have given an official death toll of 25, saying at least 22 of the victims were students. A school official said Wednesday that the death toll was at least 40, but he could not immediately say how many were students.

Abubakar Ahmed, head of the Red Cross in Adamawa state, where Mubi is located, said troops were going door-to-door looking for suspects.

According to Ibrahim, the attackers knew their victims and called them out by name in a student housing area off-campus of Federal Polytechnic Mubi, an ethnically mixed school with several thousand students.

Victims were shot or had their throats slit, he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Bangladeshi monks studying Buddhism in Thailand hold a demonstration calling for an end to attacks against Buddhist communities in Bangladesh, in front of the United Nations regional office in Bangkok yesterday. Muslim mobs attacked temples and houses on September 29-30 in southeastern Bangladesh after claims that a young Buddhist man had posted Facebook photos defaming Quran, in what Buddhist leaders described as the worst violence against the community since independence.

China firm sues Obama over blocked deal

AFP, Washington

A Chinese-owned company has filed suit against President Barack Obama for blocking its purchase of wind farms near a US military base on national security grounds, court documents made public Tuesday showed.

Obama signed the decree on Friday banning the sale of four wind farms in Oregon to the Ralls Corp and its Chinese affiliate, Sany Group.

In the decree, Obama said companies linked to Chinese nationals "might take action that threatens to impair the national security of the United States."

In a complaint filed Monday in a federal court here, Ralls Corp argued that Obama had "exceeded his limited authority to 'suspend or prohibit' a 'covered transaction.'"

It asked the court to declare the executive order "arbitrary and capricious" in contending that the transaction posed national



security risks to the United States.

"We believe the lawsuit has no merit, and we intend to defend the case vigorously," the US Treasury Department said.

The dispute comes just weeks before US presidential elections in which US trade relations with China have figured prominently.

The presidential order blocked Ralls' purchase of the Lower Ridge Windfarm, High Plateau Windfarm, Mule Hollow Windfarm and Pine City Windfarm, which are near the Naval Weapons Systems Training Facility Boardman in Oregon.

Ralls is incorporated in Delaware, but controlled by Chinese citizens through the Sany Group, according to US officials.

Ralls defended the wind farm project as one that will generate jobs in Oregon "at a time when American people need more jobs."

Chinese ships enter disputed waters: Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Chinese government ships entered territorial waters off disputed Tokyo-controlled islands for the second straight day yesterday, Japanese coastguards said.

Three maritime surveillance ships "ignored warnings from patrol vessels of our agency... and entered our country's territorial waters" shortly after 12:30 pm (0330 GMT), the coastguard said in a statement.

The three Chinese ships, which were off Kubashima, one of the islands in a chain known as the Senkakus in Japan and the Diaoyus in China, left the immediate area soon after 3:00 pm, the Japanese coastguard said.

Questions mount over Libya attack

AFP, Washington

Three weeks after a deadly attack on the US consulate in Benghazi little is known about how and why the assault happened or who was behind it, amid mounting concern over possible security lapses.

Four Americans died in the hours-long assault when the US compound and a nearby annex in the eastern Libyan city came under sustained mortar and gunfire. Among those killed was Chris Stevens, the first US ambassador to be killed on duty in more than 30 years.

But amid three separate investigations, the US administration has remained tight-lipped, trickling out often contradictory statements. It first described the attack as being part of a spontaneous protest over an anti-Islam film before finally conceding last week "that some of those involved were linked to groups affiliated with, or sympathetic to al-Qaeda."

The lack of information, coupled with the shock of the attack, has turned

the events into a political football ahead of the November 6 elections, with Republicans slamming the Obama administration on security and foreign policy.

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In her reply, Hillary said a review board she has set up was "charged with determining whether our security systems and procedures in Benghazi were adequate" and properly implemented.

She promised to work with Congress as she also wanted "a full and accurate accounting of the events and a path forward to prevent them happening again."

Yet among all the posturing and US newspaper headlines, many legitimate and serious questions remain unanswered.

What was Stevens doing in Benghazi on September 11, the 11th anniversary of the 2001 attacks on the United States? What was the security around the compound?

Was it a long-planned or an opportunistic attack? Was Stevens on an al-Qaeda hit list as he reportedly wrote in his diary? How exactly did the main compound catch fire? And why, three weeks on, has a team of FBI investigators still failed to visit Benghazi to search the blackened ruins of the compound?

NEWS IN brief

Nato chief keeps job for 1 more yr

AFP, Brussels

Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen yesterday won a fifth year at the helm of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, leaving him in place to help oversee a difficult withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Rasmussen, 59, served as Danish prime minister from 2001-09 and is Nato's 12th secretary-general.

The 28-member alliance, headquartered in Brussels, was set up in 1949 as the United States bolstered Western Europe at the onset of the Cold War with the then communist Soviet Union.

Kuwait to dissolve parliament

The Kuwaiti cabinet yesterday approved a draft decree calling for the ruler of the oil-rich Gulf state to dissolve the 2009 parliament, the information minister said.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah said the decision was taken at an extraordinary meeting of the cabinet, the official KUNA news agency reported.

Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is expected to issue a decree dissolving the parliament later Wednesday or Thursday which would pave the



Four Darfur peacekeepers killed

AFP, Khartoum

An ambush in Sudan's western Darfur region killed four peacekeepers and wounded eight, the UN-African Union Mission (UNAMID) said yesterday.

The attackers struck late Tuesday in the West Darfur state capital El-Geneina, the peacekeeping force said.

"UNAMID personnel, who were heavily fired upon from several directions, returned fire. UNAMID and local authorities are working at the scene of the incident."

UNAMID Force Commander Lieutenant General Patrick Nyamvumba called on the Khartoum

Nepal stops showing Indian films

PTI, Kathmandu

Bowing to pressure from a breakaway faction of the ruling Maoists, theatres across Nepal have stopped showing Hindi movies to express solidarity with the outfit's anti-India stand.

"Fifty cinema halls, which were showing Hindi films, stopped screening Indian movies from Monday," said Raj Kumar Rai, Chairman of Nepal Film Producers Association.

Not only Hindi movies, but all foreign films have negatively impacted our indigenous film industry and we hope that this campaign will to some extent

Georgia leader refuses to resign

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's party yesterday rejected calls for him to resign following the stunning opposition election victory that will transform Georgia's political landscape.

The victory of the Georgian Dream coalition of billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili in parliamentary polls will give Georgia a new government and may cool tensions with its top foe Russia which cautiously welcomed the result.

Saakashvili had gracefully conceded a surprise defeat in Monday's vote and promised to facilitate the formation of the next government, a rarity in an ex-Soviet region used to revolutions and autocrats

Maldives court summons Nasheed

AFP, Male

Judges on Tuesday issued a fresh summons for Nasheed, who snubbed the start of his trial on Monday where he was to face charges of abusing his power while in office.

Meanwhile, the Maldivian government yesterday vowed to arrest the killer of a national lawmaker and called for unity in the politically restive atoll nation of 330,000 Sunni Muslims.

Nasheed's opposition Maldivian Democratic Party has condemned the killing of Ali, a childhood friend of Nasheed. Government officials said he was given a state funeral Tuesday and the country would be in mourning for three days.