

UN chief warns of Syria-Turkey escalation

Turkish military retaliates Syrian fire; rebel bastions pounded, 61 killed

AFP, Damascus

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned yesterday of a "dangerous" fallout from spiralling violence along the Syrian-Turkish border, as regime troops shelled rebel bastions across Syria leaving dozens dead.

"The escalation of the conflict along the Syrian-Turkish border and the impact of the crisis on Lebanon are extremely dangerous," Ban said at the opening of the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg, France.

The armed uprising in Syria has increasingly sparked violence on the country's border with Nato member Turkey, with the Turkish military returning fire on Sunday after a shell launched from Syria struck the border village of Akcakale.

There were no casualties in Sunday's incident, but last Wednesday five civilians were killed in the village by shelling from Syria.

Since Wednesday, the Turkish military has responded in kind whenever Syrian ordnance has breached its territory, inflaming tensions between the former allies and leading to fears of a broader conflict.

Turkey's parliament on Thursday gave the government the green light to use mili-

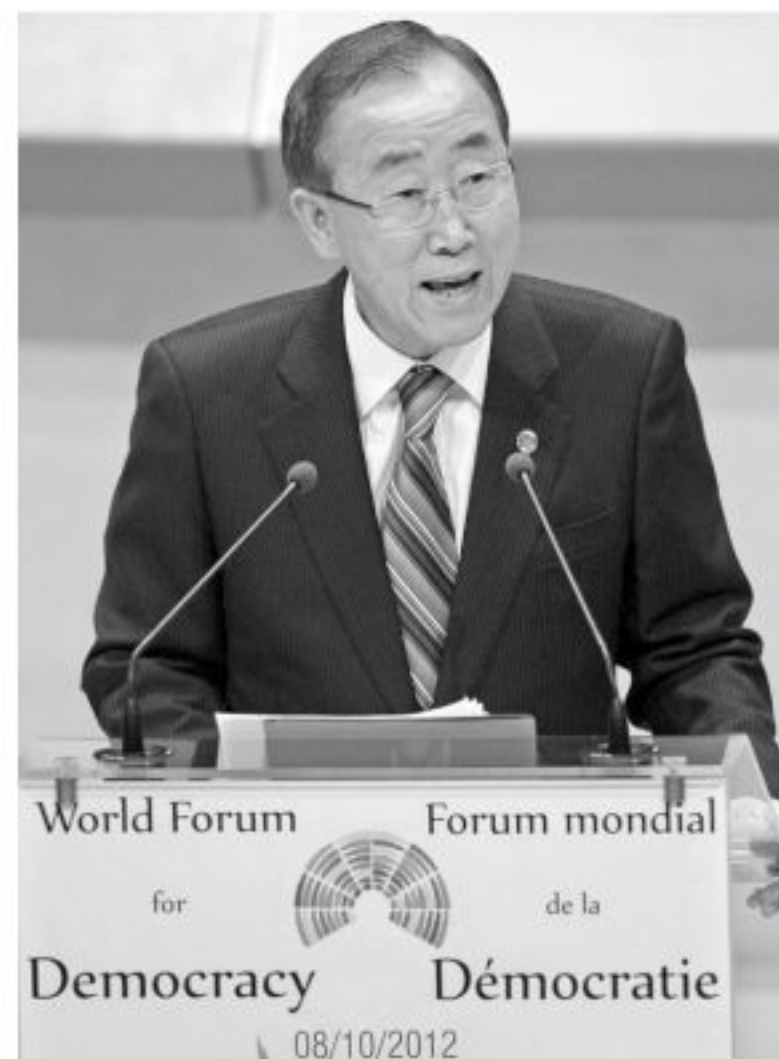
tary force against Syria if necessary.

The UN Security Council has strongly condemned cross-border attacks by Syria and called for restraint between the two neighbours whose ties have nosedived, with Ankara supporting the rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The UN chief also raised concerns about arms supplies to both Assad's regime and rebel forces.

"I am deeply concerned by the continued flow of arms to both the Syrian government and opposition forces. I urge again those countries providing arms to stop doing so," he said.

"Militarisation only aggravates the situation," he said. "I am calling on all concerned to abandon the use of violence, and move



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toward a political solution. That is the only way out of the crisis."

Turkey's military yesterday struck back at Syrian military positions after a new shell fired by the neighbouring country landed in a Turkish border area, a Turkish official told AFP.

Turkey retaliated in kind after the Syrian shell landed in Altinozu district, in southeastern Hatay province, at around 12:00 GMT, said the

official speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Turkish military retaliates immediately after every single Syrian shell," said the official. "We have anti-aircraft batteries pounding Syrian targets."

Earlier, Hatay provincial governor Celalettin Lekeesiz said a total of six Syrian shells had hit the province so far, without any casualties.

A string of rebel bastions across Syria was rocked by regime shelling and clashes yesterday, as several army checkpoints also came under attack, with at least 61 people killed nationwide, a rights group said.

Twenty of the deaths occurred when the army launched an intensive pre-dawn assault on the town of Karak al-Sharqi in the southern province of Daraa, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

In the northwest province of Idlib, five soldiers were killed and three officers, including a brigadier general, were captured during clashes with rebels at a checkpoint in the village of Zaayniyeh, the Britain-based group said.

The rebels, who also lost one of their own men, seized that checkpoint and another on the road between Jisr al-Shughur and the village of Darkush on the Turkish border, amid ongoing clashes.

The village has suffered repeated military assault, heavy shelling and attempts to storm it over the past three days and was facing "a crippling blockade and terrible medical and humanitarian conditions," the Observatory said.

Libyan assembly dismisses PM

AFP, Tripoli

Libyan premier Mustafa Abu Shagur was dismissed on Sunday after the General National Congress rejected his proposed "crisis" cabinet of just 10 ministers, days after his first line-up was also turned down.

The embattled Abu Shagur, who had been given 72 hours to come up with a new cabinet, was relieved of his duties after his last chance to form a government, and the GNC will have to elect a new premier within the next three to four weeks.

Before he had even put forward his second cabinet list in just four days, a motion of no confidence in Abu Shagur was signed by 126 assembly members.

That was rejected by the GNC president.

But when his pared-down list was put to the vote, 125 members of the 186 members present in the 200-seat GNC did not express "confidence" in his choices, against 44 members for and 17 abstentions, according to a live state television broadcast.

Under GNC rules, the assembly will now have to elect a new premier.

"In face of the dangers threatening the country, I present to you a crisis government restricted to 10 ministers, rejecting all geographical considerations," Abu Shagur earlier told the GNC.

He was taking neither geographical nor political considerations into account, Shagur said.



Mustafa Abu Shagur

NEWS IN brief

US issues Chinese firms warning

BBC ONLINE

Chinese telecom firms Huawei and ZTE pose a security threat to the US, a congressional panel yesterday warned after an investigation into the two companies.

The two firms should be barred from any mergers and acquisitions in the US, the panel has recommended in its report set to be released.

It said the firms had failed to allay fears about their association with the Chinese government and military.

The two are among the world's biggest makers of telecom networking equipment.

"China has the means, opportunity and motive to use telecommunications companies for malicious purposes," the House of Representatives' Intelligence Committee said in its report.

Israel strikes Gaza strip

BBC ONLINE

The Israeli military yesterday carried out strikes on the Gaza Strip after Palestinian militants fired about 50 mortar rounds and rockets into Israel.

Several children were among those injured when Israeli forces shelled areas east of Khan Younis.

Earlier, rockets launched from Gaza landed in Israel's Eshkol region and near Kerem Shalom. No-one was hurt.

The military wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad said the attack was a response to an Israeli air strike on Sunday.

Eight civilians were injured in that strike, when a missile hit a motorbike ridden by two militants as it travelled through the southern town of Rafah. The militants - Tlaath Jerbi and Abdullah Maqawi - were

Assange threatens to sue Gillard

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

There's nothing new about asylum seekers dominating Australian media; those attempting to reach Australian shores by boat regularly make headlines.

But yesterday it was an asylum seeker who already has an Australian passport who led the news: Julian Assange.

Giving an interview to the pressure-group GetUp!, from his bolt-hole in Ecuador's London embassy - in which he's stuck - Assange tried to pull at the heart-strings.

In his interview with GetUp! Assange made a specific threat: he had hired, he said, Sydney lawyers to look into whether he has been defamed by Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

Cameron to veto EU budgets

REUTERS, London

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron sent a warning to EU leaders on Sunday, threatening to veto any deal on the EU budget in the coming months unless it guaranteed "proper control" over spending.

British Prime Minister David Cameron on Sunday threatened to scupper European Union budget talks unless other members of the 27-nation bloc agree to "proper control" of spending, without specifying what would be an acceptable settlement for Britain.

Cameron also lent his support to a proposal for two EU budgets, one for the euro zone and another for cash-strapped Britain and the nations outside the single currency, but said it would take some time

Asha's daughter commits suicide

TNN, New Delhi

Varsha Bhosle, daughter of veteran Bollywood singer Asha Bhosle, yesterday committed suicide by shooting herself with a revolver at her home in south Mumbai, police said.

Varsha, a singer and columnist, who was in her mid 50s, had attempted suicide earlier on at least two occasions, they said.

She was rushed to a nearby hospital where she was declared dead, they said.

The body would be taken to JJ Hospital for post mortem, the sources said.

Varsha had worked as a playback singer in some Hindi and Marathi movies and appeared in concerts with her mother. She also used to write columns for web portals and magazines.



Venezuelan re-elected President Hugo Chavez, inset, gestures while speaking to supporters after receiving news of his reelection in Caracas late Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chavez wins Venezuela vote

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shrugged off cancer and a unified opposition to triumph yet again at the ballot box and claim another six-year mandate to pursue his oil-funded socialist revolution.

Sunday proved a sterner test than previous elections in Chavez's 14-year tenure, but the bombastic anti-American leftist emerged victorious again despite health scares, growing discontent and a strong opposition challenge.

With nearly all the votes counted, Chavez had 7,731,972, or 54.66 percent, compared to 6,327,429, or 44.73 percent, for his youthful opponent, former Miranda state governor Henrique Capriles.

Thousands of people massed in front for the Miraflores presidential palace following the results of Sunday's election gave Chavez a clear victory after almost 14 years in power.

In an address from the balcony of his residence, Chavez sang the national anthem and vowed to be a better president.

Afghan govt could collapse after Nato troops pull out

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan government could implode after Nato troops pull out in 2014, particularly if presidential elections are fraudulent, a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) yesterday said.

"There is a real risk that the regime in Kabul could collapse upon Nato's withdrawal," said Candace Rondeaux, the ICG's senior Afghanistan analyst. "The window for remedial action is closing fast."

The report -- "Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition" -- said the country was on course in 2014 for another set of fraudulent elections after the chaotic presidential and parliamentary polls in 2009 and 2010.

A repeat could undermine what little hope remains for stability after the Afghan government takes full responsibility for security from US-led Nato forces, the analysis by the respected Brussels-based group said.

The coalition, which has waged an 11-year war against Taliban insurgents, is drawing down its troops from a peak of some 130,000,

and almost all combat forces are scheduled to quit the country by the end of 2014.

"The Afghan army and police are overwhelmed and under prepared for the transition," said Rondeaux. "Another botched election and resultant unrest would push them to breaking point."

Within hours of the report's publication, a suicide car bomber rammed a police station in Lashkar Gar, capital of southern Helmand province, killing two intelligence agents and wounding 15

other people.

Afghan police are increasingly targets of such assaults as they take a bigger role in the fight against the Taliban ahead of the Nato withdrawal.

The Western-backed government of President Hamid Karzai and the parliament have failed to take any serious steps towards preparing for a clean vote, Rondeaux said.

"Karzai seems more interested in perpetuating his own power by any means rather than ensuring credibility of the political system and long-term stability in the country."

GRAFT CHARGES AGAINST GANDHI CLAN

Vadra calls activists mango people in banana republic



TNN, New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra and India Against Corruption members yesterday sparred on online social media after Vadra posted a contemptuous message about the anti-corruption activism in the country.

Vadra wrote on his Facebook page: "Mango people in banana republic."

The Facebook status update comes two days after the Indian Against Corruption (IAC), a newly formed political party, alleged that the son-in-law of the country's ruling party chief Sonia Gandhi had indulged in real-estate corruption.

Lawyer Prashant Bhushan and activist Arvind Kejriwal on Friday alleged that Vadra had received interest free loan from DLF and purchased real estate property at throw away prices. Both Vadra and DLF have denied the allegations.

On Monday, soon after Vadra posted his Facebook status, IAC member Kumar Vishwas demanded an apology from him.

"Vadra's mother-in-law has been ruling the country so he should explain why India is being called a "banana republic," Vishwas said.

Metro rail project

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the communications ministry has set a new target for starting the construction work in 2016 and complete it by December 2019. According to the previous plan, the construction work was supposed to begin in 2013 and end in three years.

The delay has increased the project cost from \$1.7 billion to \$2.7 billion.

The government is now ready to start loan negotiation with Jica in December as both sides are very sincere about moving fast with the 20.1 kilometre metro rail project.

The problem over the installation of a depot for the project is about to end with the selection of 22 hectares of private land near Uttara third phase.

Officials said the acquisition of land for the depot would begin soon.

The metro rail project, the second largest after the \$2.9 billion Padma bridge project, became uncertain last year when the metro route was modified the second time following Air Force's objection. The route running across Bijoy Sarani was diverted towards Khamarbari and the change in route irked Jica.

A change in the route was first made in 2010 to avoid overlapping with the under-construction Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

Jica, however, did not desert the project and waited for the government to finalise the route, find a place for the depot and form a company that will eventually operate the metro rail.

Drone intrusion shows Israel is vulnerable: Iran

REUTERS, Dubai

The incursion by an unmanned aircraft into Israeli airspace at the weekend exposed the weakness of Israeli air defences, an Iranian military official was quoted as saying yesterday.

The Israeli air force shot down a drone on Saturday after it crossed into southern Israel, the military said, but it remained unclear where the aircraft had come from.

Jamaluddin Aberoumand, deputy coordinator for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said the incident indicated that Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile defence system "does not work and lacks the necessary capacity", Fars news agency reported.

The Iron Dome system, jointly funded with the United States, is designed to shoot down short-range guerrilla rockets, not slow-flying aircraft. It intercepted more than 80 percent of the targets it engaged in March when nearly 300 rockets and mortars were fired at southern Israel, the Pentagon said at the time.

The drone was first spotted above the Mediterranean near the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip to the west of Israel, said military spokeswoman Avital Leibovich. An Israeli warplane shot it down above a forest near the occupied West Bank.

Israeli parliament member Miri Regev, a former chief spokesman of the military, wrote on Twitter it was an "Iranian drone launched by Hezbollah", referring to the Lebanese Shi'ite group that fought a war with Israel in 2006.



Mitt Romney contrasts with Obama on foreign policy

REUTERS, Virginia

Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney will vow to pursue a more aggressive policy toward the Middle East yesterday if elected in an attempt to draw a sharp distinction with how President Barack Obama has handled Libya, Iran, Syria and the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Romney, in remarks at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, will make a case that his policy views reflect what advisers called the mainstream "peace through strength" doctrine they said had been pursued by prior presidents from Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton.

The address will help Romney set the stage for his second presidential debate with the Democratic incumbent on October 16. The next debate, at Hofstra University in New York state, will cover both domestic and foreign policy in a town hall format.

Romney was widely seen as having won the first debate last Wednesday in Denver, and his strong performance has halted a slide in the polls and appears to have given him new confidence for the last month of campaigning.

Romney will say that Obama has pursued a strategy of "passivity" instead of partnership with US allies in the region.