

44 killed as Syria jets blast rebel town

Peace envoy to visit Syria in push for truce

AFP, Maaret Al-numan

Syrian fighter jets blasted the rebel-held town of Maaret al-Numan yesterday, killing at least 44 people, rescuers said, adding urgency to truce calls by peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

Rescue workers said the air force's bombs destroyed two residential buildings and a mosque, where many women and children were taking refuge, in the strategic northwestern town, which was captured by rebel fighters on October 9 in their push to create a buffer zone along the Turkish border.

"We have recovered 44 corpses from under the rubble," one rescue worker told an AFP correspondent at the scene.

The correspondent said several fighter jets flew over Maaret al-Numan and the surrounding area throughout yesterday morning. They dropped at least 10 bombs on the town, they added.

The bombing came hours after the

government announced that Brahimi would travel to Damascus tomorrow to press his call for a ceasefire during the four-day Eid al-Adha Muslim holiday starting on October 26.

Speaking in neighbouring Jordan, the UN-Arab League envoy said he hoped that such a temporary ceasefire could form the basis for a longer lasting truce, warning that the alternative would be disastrous for the whole region.

Damascus said it is ready to discuss with Brahimi his proposal but wanted assurances that countries with influence on the rebels would pressure them to reciprocate. The exiled opposition said it would welcome any ceasefire but insisted the ball is in the government's court to halt its daily bombardments.

More than 33,000 people have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime erupted in March last year, according to the Syrian Observatory.

Syrian men react following an airstrike by Syrian government forces in Maaret al-Numan yesterday. Inset, people pull the body of a victim from the rubble of a building.

PHOTO: AFP



ROW OVER 'BINDERS FULL OF WOMEN' REMARK Romney's view on women is of 1950s: Obama

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Barack Obama stepped up his attacks on Mitt Romney in the battle to appeal to female voters as he sought to exploit the Republican's clumsy and odd responses during their second presidential debate.

Women's issues were prominent in Tuesday night's debate as Obama and Romney clashed over gender equality and contraception.

Obama is widely judged to have won the debate, undoing at least some of the damage caused by his painfully poor showing in the first one a fortnight ago.

On the campaign trail in Iowa on Wednesday, Obama latched on to some of the remarks made by Romney, in particular a bizarre one about being offered "whole binders



full of women" when searching for female recruits to his cabinet when he was governor of Massachusetts.

The comment went viral on the internet, with some complaining that Romney was being patronising towards women, and others expressing puzzlement over what he was talking about.

Obama poked fun of him at a rally in Iowa. "I tell you what: we don't have to collect a bunch of binders to find qualified talented women," Obama said.

"You can choose to turn back the clock 50 years for women, gays and immigrants or you can move us forward," Obama said.

The Obama campaign has repeatedly challenged Romney on his views on contraception and abortion, and accused him of wanting a return to the 1950s.

Female voters have jumped to top priority for both Obama and Romney. Until recently, Obama had enjoyed a double-digit lead among women over Romney. But Romney's team claims Obama's lead among women has gone, though the Obama team disputes this.

A Gallup seven-day poll tracking poll puts Romney ahead of Obama, 51% to 45%, among likely voters, though this was taken before Tuesday night's debate.

Afghans ready if Nato pulls out early: Karzai

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan is ready to take responsibility for its own security even if Nato forces leave the country earlier than planned, President Hamid Karzai said yesterday.

Karzai was speaking at a joint news conference with Nato Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who had earlier confirmed that the alliance's combat mission in Afghanistan would end as scheduled in 2014.

"Afghanistan is ready to expedite the process if necessary," Karzai said. "In case we do it before time we will be ready and happy too," he added.

The US-led Nato force's 11-year war in Afghanistan is increasingly unpopular in member countries and there have been calls in several Western capitals for an early end to the campaign.

Rasmussen said that while combat troops would be withdrawn as scheduled by the end of 2014, Nato had agreed to offer a new mission after that to provide Afghan forces with training, advice and assistance.

Nato has more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan backing Karzai's government against a persistent insurgency led by Taliban Islamists, and observers predict that the Afghan security forces will be hard pressed to cope alone.

The Afghan president also criticized Pakistan over Islamabad's using extremism as a tool against others.

Clashes kill 11 at Gaddafi bastion

AFP, Tripoli

Ex-rebels allied to Libya's army attacked a bastion of diehards linked to slain dictator Muammar Gaddafi in clashes that left at least 11 dead, underlining the challenges facing the government.

Wednesday's fighting came exactly a year after anti-regime forces declared the liberation of Bani Walid, 170 kilometres southeast of Tripoli.

The town came back into focus last month after the death of a former rebel from the city of Misrata who was credited with capturing Gaddafi and was later kidnapped, allegedly tortured and shot in Bani Walid.



A demonstrator clashes with riot police during a 24-hour strike in Athens yesterday. Greek riot police fired tear gas to disperse protesters at an anti-austerity rally in Athens held during the national general strike as EU leaders were to tackle the eurozone crisis at a summit. One person was killed in the following violence.

EU meets to tackle financial crisis

AFP, Brussels

European Union leaders yesterday went into their first summit since the summer amid divisions between France and Germany on how to shore up economic and monetary union in the face of the eurozone crisis.

Leaders of the 27 member states began two days of talks shortly after a head-to-head meeting between conservative German Chancellor Angela Merkel and socialist French President Francois Hollande, who entered the summit together.

The summit comes amid a general strike and violent protests over new austerity measures in Greece that left a 65-year-old man dead.

IAEA chief rejects Iran's 'terrorism' charges

US, Israeli forces to stage joint military drill

AFP, Vienna

The head of the UN atomic agency has rejected as "baseless" Iranian accusations that the watchdog has been infiltrated by "saboteurs and terrorists."

"If I give a response it is very simple: it is baseless," International Atomic Energy Agency chief Yukiya Amano said in an event in London.

Last November the IAEA published a report indicating that Iran had carried out "activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device."

Tehran has rejected the claims as being based on forgeries provided by its enemies and denies working, or ever having worked, on developing nuclear weapons.



Yukiya Amano

Meanwhile, the United States and Israel are set to launch a major military exercise in a show of unity aimed at Iran, officers said Wednesday.

The air defense drills, dubbed "Austere Challenge 2012," will unfold later this month and last about three weeks.

The elaborate exercise takes place at a politically-charged moment, amid speculation about a possible Israeli pre-emptive attack on Iran. The joint exercise originally was scheduled for April.

Meanwhile, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards yesterday rejected reported allegations from Western intelligence sources that it plans to damage an oil tanker in the Gulf to create an environmental disaster.

Faster than a bullet!

AFP, Sydney

An Australian race crew hoping to beat their British rivals to a new supersonic land-speed record of over 1,000mph launched their bid yesterday, unveiling the first parts of their rocket-powered car.

The record currently stands at a blistering 763mph -- faster than the speed of sound -- set in 1997.

Daredevil drag-racer Rosco McGlashan believes he can top 1,000mph using a rocket technology.

If successful, McGlashan will travel faster than a bullet, going from 0-1,000mph in 20 seconds as he rips through three tonnes of rocket fuel.

Newsweek to cease

FROM PAGE 1 environment.

"We are transitioning Newsweek, not saying goodbye to it," wrote Tina Brown, editor-in-chief and founder of the online Newsweek Daily Beast Company, in a statement posted on the Daily Beast website.

"This decision is not about the quality of the brand or the journalism -- that is as powerful as ever. It is about the challenging economics of print publishing and distribution."

Newsweek, which had a fierce decades-long rivalry with Time magazine, has been losing money steadily.

Brown acknowledged the merger of the print edition and the online

Daily Beast operations, called "Newsweek Global," would require layoffs.

It will be available on the web and on tablets via a paid subscription, with "select content" available on The Daily Beast website.

The company operating the magazine had indicated in July the move to all-digital was likely.

Like other US magazines and newspapers, Newsweek has been grappling with a steep drop in print advertising revenue, steadily declining circulation and the migration of readers to free news online. Circulation has fallen from more than four million a decade ago to around 1.5 million last year.

NEWS IN brief

Five countries join UNSC

AFP, United Nations

Rwanda, Argentina, Australia, South Korea and Luxembourg won non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council yesterday.

Each needed at least 129 votes from among the 193 member states of the UN General Assembly. Rwanda got 148, while Australia took 140 and Argentina 182. South Korea's secured 149 votes while Luxembourg's tally was 131.

Each year the 15-member council renews five

Colombian peace talks on Nov 15

AFP, Hurdal

Peace talks between the Colombian government and leftist FARC rebels, which were formally launched in Norway yesterday, will resume in earnest on November 15 in Cuba, the two parties said.

The two sides, which have been in conflict since 1964, are expected to begin those talks with the thorny issue of rural development, which tops the five-point peace process agenda.

Land reform was at the heart of a peasant uprising in the 1960s that saw the formation of FARC. The conflict since then claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and displaced 3.7 million.

Maoist blast kills 5 cops in India

AFP, Patna

A landmine attack by Maoist rebels in eastern India killed five policemen yesterday.

The blast in a forest area of Bihar state came following a lull in attacks on policemen since six officers were shot in May in an ambush in Chhattisgarh state.

The Maoists have been fighting a deadly low-intensity war against authorities for decades for what they say are the rights of tribal people and

Rahul rape charges dismissed

PTI, New Delhi

Dismissing petitions against Rahul Gandhi over alleged rape and kidnapping charges, the Supreme Court directed the CBI yesterday to probe the petitioner's claim that he was instigated by the top Samajwadi Party leaders into filing the charge.

Kishore Samrite of the regional Samajwadi Party had alleged that Gandhi had abducted and raped a woman in Uttar Pradesh in December 2006.

The apex court said charges against Rahul Gandhi were utterly false, misleading and motivated and there was not even an iota of evidence

Adultery is not a crime: UN

AFP, Geneva

Adultery should not be punished as a crime, the UN's human rights body said yesterday, insisting that women's rights especially are violated when countries allow punishments ranging from fines to death for infidelity.

"Adultery must not be classified as a criminal offence at all," said Kamala Chandrakirana, who heads the UN expert body charged with identifying ways to eliminate laws that discriminate

Russia may quit Kyoto Protocol

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday hinted that it may refuse to sign up to a new round of targeted carbon cuts that could see the Kyoto environmental protection treaty extended beyond its end of 2012 expiry date.

Earlier, European diplomats at the May G8 summit in France said that Russia along with Japan and Canada had confirmed plans not to join the second round of carbon cuts.

Russia last ratified the treaty in 2004.