

Hillary sent on ME mission

AGENCIES

Hillary Clinton is en route to the Middle East to join efforts to broker a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas, in a move that suggests a breakthrough is close, reports the *Guardian*.

The US secretary of state, who had been accompanying Obama on his visit to south-east Asia, left Cambodia yesterday for talks in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Cairo, where she will meet the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, Palestinian officials and Egyptian leaders.

A White House spokesman said Clinton would make clear an escalation of the conflict would be in nobody's interest. The US, Britain and other western governments have urged Israel not to mount an assault similar to Operation Cast Lead, in which 1,400 Palestinians in Gaza were killed four years ago.

The Cairo truce talks ran into trouble on Sunday after news that 10 members of one family had been killed in Gaza in an air strike apparently aimed at killing a Hamas or Islamic Jihad leader.

Hillary will meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank and Egyptian leaders in Cairo, reports *The Independent*.



The Obama administration blames Hamas for the latest eruption of violence and says Israel has the right to defend itself. At the same time, it has warned against a ground invasion, saying it could send casualties spiralling.

Obama made the decision to send Clinton after speaking to Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi and Netanyahu late on Monday night, deputy national security advisor Ben Rhodes said.

"Secretary Clinton will emphasise the US interest in a peaceful outcome that protects and enhances Israel's security and regional security," Rhodes said, though stopped short of calling Clinton's trip a mediating mission.

News of Clinton's trip came as Israeli leaders yesterday discussed an Egyptian plan for a truce with Gaza's ruling Hamas militant group and after the death toll from Israeli raids on the enclave rose to more than 100, reports AFP.

Israeli sources made clear that a ceasefire deal would have to mean an end to all hostile fire from Gaza into Israel, including small arms fire at troops near the border. Hamas fighters must also be stopped from crossing into Sinai to mount attacks against Israel from Egyptian territory. Hamas must not be allowed to rearm. Any ceasefire must not be a simple "time out" for Hamas but provide an extended period of quiet for southern Israel.



1. Israeli soldiers stand on tanks at an Israeli army deployment area near the Israel-Gaza Strip border yesterday, as talks aimed at securing a deal between the Jewish state and Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers continue. 2. Palestinian families evacuate their homes on the back of trucks following an Israeli air strike in Gaza City yesterday. 3. A Palestinian man inspects a damaged building following overnight Israeli air strikes on the southern Gaza Strip town of Khan Yunis yesterday.

NEWS IN brief

US embassy guard stabbed

REUTERS, Tel Aviv

A man stabbed a security guard at the US embassy in Tel Aviv yesterday and was apprehended, a police spokesman said, and Israel Radio reported the assailant was an Israeli with a criminal background.

The motive for the attack, which occurred outside the beachfront embassy, was not immediate.

Dozens killed in Mali clashes

AFP, Bamako

Dozens of people have been killed in clashes between Islamic radicals and secular Tuareg fighters in northern Mali since Friday, witnesses and officials said.

"It's a real massacre, there are dozens dead," said a Malian security source, referring to the fighting in the region of Gao. Witnesses on the ground confirmed the scale of the clashes.

4 US men charged in 'terror plot'

AP, Los Angeles

Federal authorities say four California men have been charged with plotting to kill Americans overseas and in the United States by joining al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

According to the federal complaint unsealed Monday during initial appearances, 34-year-old Sohail Omar Kabir introduced two other California men to the radical Islamist doctrine of Anwar al-Awlaki, a deceased al-Qaida leader.

Indian festival stampede kills 18

AFP, Patna

India yesterday launched an inquiry into a stampede, which killed 18 women and children when a makeshift bridge collapsed at a Hindu festival, as devotees returned to pray at the scene of the tragedy.

The incident in the eastern city of Patna, near the holy Ganges river, occurred late Monday as tens of thousands of worshippers rushed to offer prayers to the setting sun as part of the Hindu ritual of Chhath.

Pak court quashes girl's blasphemy case

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistan court yesterday threw out all charges against a Christian girl accused of blasphemy in a case that drew international condemnation, lawyers said.

Rimsha Masih spent three weeks on remand in an adult jail after she was arrested on August 16 for allegedly burning pages from the Quran in a case that prompted worldwide condemnation.

She was released on bail in September and police have since told the courts that she was not guilty and that a cleric who allegedly framed her should face trial instead.

"The court has quashed the case, declaring Rimsha innocent," her lawyer Akmal Bhatti told AFP.

Cleric Hafiz Mohammed Khalid Chishti, who first gave police the burned papers as evidence against her, was detained on September 1 for desecrating the Quran and tampering with evidence.

An official medical report classified Rimsha as "uneducated" and aged 14, but with a mental age younger than her years. Others have said she is as young as 11 and suffers from Down's Syndrome.

France ends combat in Afghanistan

AFP, Nijrab Base

French troops yesterday ended their last combat mission in Afghanistan by withdrawing from Kapisa province as part of an accelerated departure from the war-torn country.

The last 400 soldiers deployed to the volatile province started to leave Nijrab, the French base in Kapisa, at 10:00 am after a departure ceremony.

Of the 2,200 French soldiers still left in Afghanistan, a military official said that about 700 would return to France by the end of the year.

Turkey seeks Nato support on border with Syria

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said yesterday that Nato member Ankara would formally ask the alliance for Patriot missiles to protect its border with conflict-wracked Syria.

"(Patriots) are a precautionary measure, for defence in particular," Davutoglu told reporters. "We will submit the formal request as soon as possible."

Davutoglu's comments came a day after Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen said the alliance had received no formal request from Turkey for the surface-to-air missiles, but they would consider it as "a matter of urgency" if one was made.

Turkey's border villages have been hit by artillery fire from Syria as forces loyal to

Damascus battle rebels seeking to oust President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The main Islamist rebel groups in Aleppo, a key front line in Syria's civil war, on Monday rejected the newly formed opposition bloc, saying they want an Islamic state, as clashes raged countrywide.

"We, the fighting squads of Aleppo city and province, unanimously reject the conspiratorial project called the National Coalition and announce our consensus to establish an Islamic state" in Syria, a spokesman announced in an Internet video.

Syrian rebels announced yesterday the creation of a security service to "defend the Syrian revolution" in a country that has been awash with feared intelligence agencies for the past five decades.



US President Barack Obama stands with leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and leaders of Southeast Asia during a photo session at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh yesterday.

ASEAN SUMMIT Obama set to defy China over sea rows ME turmoil rocks his Asia trip

AFP, Phnom Penh

US President Barack Obama was yesterday set to defy Beijing's protests and use a summit to raise concerns over South China Sea rows that have sent diplomatic and trade shockwaves across the region.

Obama planned to pressure China on the highly sensitive issue of a code of conduct that would govern behaviour in the contested waters, according to a senior aide to the president, Ben Rhodes.

Obama was set to hold talks on Tuesday afternoon with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and the leaders of Asean nations and other countries in the region, on the final day of the annual East Asia Summit.

For President Barack Obama, an Asia trip jolted by turmoil in the Middle East was a preview of the clear foreign policy legacy he seeks and the messier one he may end up with. Obama journeyed to the region just two weeks after his re-election triumph to make a simple point: America's destiny is in Asia.



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04.	Desk Calendar for the year of 2013	2000 nos.

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Ex-Murdoch aides face graft charges

AFP, London

British prosecutors yesterday said they will charge ex-News International chief Rebekah Brooks and the prime minister's former spokesman Andy Coulson with making illegal payments to public officials.

Three other people will also be charged for payments by reporters at Rupert Murdoch's The Sun and News of the World newspapers in exchange for contact details of the royal family and information from the ministry of defence.

The charges are the latest to stem from the phone-hacking scandal which shut down the News of the World in 2011, caused a firestorm in British politics and still plague Murdoch's News Corp. empire to this day.

Brooks, who is a close friend of Prime Minister David Cameron, and Coulson, the premier's media chief until 2011, already face trial on phone-hacking charges while Brooks has also been charged with obstruction of justice.

The Crown Prosecution Service said Coulson and former News of the World royal editor Clive Goodman face two charges of conspiracy to commit misconduct in a public office over payments that were made in exchange for a Buckingham Palace phone book called the "Green Book".

The book "contained contact details for the Royal Family and Members of the royal household", Alison Levitt, the Principal Legal Advisor to the Director of Public Prosecutions, said in a statement.



Brooks

Coulson



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