



CHEMICAL WEAPONS UN leader formally warns Assad

AFP, United Nations

UN leader Ban Ki-moon has formally warned Syria's President Bashar al-Assad against using chemical weapons in the country's civil war, a UN spokesman said yesterday.

Ban said earlier that any use of chemical arms would have "huge consequences" for the Syrian leader, adding to stern warnings made by US President Barack Obama and other western leaders in recent days.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday said Washington fears a "desperate" Syrian President Bashar al-Assad could use chemical weapons as rebels bear down on Damascus, repeating a vow to take swift action if he does.

Rebels fighting to overthrow Assad said they had surrounded an air base near Damascus, a fresh sign the battle is closing in on the Syrian capital, a day after Nato agreed to send air defence missiles to Turkey.

UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said the letter was handed to Syrian authorities on Tuesday.

The Syrian government has said it would not use the weapons against its "own people."

Typhoon Bopha kills 283 in Philippines; scores missing

REUTERS, New Bataan

Blocked roads and severed communications in the southern Philippines frustrated rescuers yesterday as teams searched for hundreds of people missing after the strongest typhoon this year killed at least 283 people.

Typhoon Bopha, with central winds of 120 kph and gusts of up to 150 kph, battered beach resorts and dive spots on Palawan island on Wednesday but it was weakening as it moved west.

Hardest hit was the southern island of Mindanao, where Bopha made landfall on Tuesday. It triggered landslides and floods along the coast and in farming and mining towns inland.

Interior Minister Manuel Roxas said 300 people were missing.

Most affected areas were cut off by destroyed roads and collapsed bridges and army search-and-rescue teams were being flown in by helicopter.

Power was cut and communications were down.

Thousands of people were in shelters and officials appealed for food, water and clothing. Dozens of domestic flights were suspended on Wednesday.

The governor of the worst-hit province, Compostela Valley, in Mindanao said waves of water and mud came crashing down mountains and swept through schools, town halls and clinics where huddled

residents had sought shelter.

The death toll in the province stood at 160. In nearby Davao Oriental province, where Bopha made landfall, 110 people were killed.

"The waters came so suddenly and unexpectedly, and the winds were so fierce," the Compostela Valley governor, Arthur Uy, told Reuters by telephone.

Damage to agriculture and infrastructure in the province was extensive, an official said.

About 20 typhoons hit the Philippines every year, often causing death and destruction. Almost exactly a year ago, Typhoon Washi killed 1,500 people in Mindanao.



Residents using a makeshift stretcher carry the dead body of a boy as they cross a destroyed highway in the village of Andap, New Bataan town, Compostela Valley province yesterday, one day after Typhoon Bopha hit the province.

PHOTO: AFP

EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLING Top Judge ups ante against Pak govt

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top judge yesterday said he was determined to pursue the government over killings and disappearances in one of the most troubled parts of the country, accusing the authorities of inaction.

Supreme Court chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who in June dismissed the then prime minister, has for months been trying to investigate violence in Baluchistan, in southwest Pakistan on the Afghan and Iranian borders.

Baluchistan is one of the most deprived areas of Pakistan. Rights activists have accused the military of mass arrests and extrajudicial executions in its bid to put down a separatist insurgency that erupted in 2004.

Chaudhry took the unprecedented step of ordering the security services to produce missing people in court, but said yesterday that despite 71 hearings on Baluchistan, not a single missing person had been recovered.

"It is constitutional responsibility of executive government to protect life and property of citizens and failures to do so are bound to have consequences sooner or later," Chaudhry told the court.

Baluchistan is also plagued by Islamist militancy, and rights activists have raised concern about increasing sectarian violence against Shias.

Chaudhry ordered the Baluchistan government to submit another report in two weeks' time, but did not set a date for the next hearing.

NEWS IN brief

Greece EU's most corrupt country

AFP, Berlin

Greece is seen as the most corrupt country in the EU, Transparency International said yesterday, adding that crisis-hit nations are being held back by an inability to deal with graft.

Publishing its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, the Berlin-based watchdog ranked Greece 94th out of 176 countries.

Top of the class this year were Denmark, Finland and New Zealand. Lawless Somalia, North Korea and Afghanistan remain rooted to the foot of the table.

\$631b US defense budget passed

AFP, Washington

The US Senate unanimously passed the Pentagon's 2013 budget on Tuesday, despite a political impasse over debt reduction that could see huge cuts to military spending next year.

After months of negotiations, lawmakers voted 98-0 to approve the \$631 billion National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, which began on October 1.

Kate 'feeling better' in hospital

AFP, London

Prince William's pregnant wife Kate was feeling better on Tuesday after a second day of hospital treatment for acute morning sickness, palace officials said.

William spent most of the day at his wife's bedside as congratulations poured in from around the world after Monday's announcement that the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, both 30, are expecting their first child -- a new royal heir.

30 killed in S Sudan cattle raid

AFP, Juba

At least 30 people were killed and dozens wounded in a cattle raid between warring communities in South Sudan, the latest in a string of bloody clashes between rival ethnic groups, officials said yesterday.

Youths armed with automatic rifles from the Dinka Gok ethnic group in Lakes state marched for around eight hours to attack a rival group of cattle herders from the Dinka Rek tribe in Warrap state, said local official Isaack Mayom Malek.

Israel advances with E1 settlement plan

Palestine says move marks end of peace process

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli plan to build new settler homes in a sensitive area near Jerusalem passed a first hurdle yesterday, sparking fury from the Palestinians, who said building there would end all hopes of peace.

Israel's plan for construction in a strip of West Bank land outside Jerusalem called E1 has sparked a major diplomatic backlash, with experts warning it could wipe out hopes of establishing a viable Palestinian state.

"If Israel decides to start building in E1 and approves all the settlements in it, we consider it to be an Israeli decision to end the peace process and the two-state solution, which ends any chance of talking about peace in the future," Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat told AFP yesterday.

Public radio said a defence ministry planning committee had approved plans for 3,200 homes in E1 and in annexed east Jerusalem, which would now be made available for public objections.

News of Israel's intention to push ahead with plans to build in E1 emerged on Friday, a day after the Palestinians won UN non-member state observer status.

It sparked an immediate outcry from top diplomats in Washington and Brussels, with at least six governments summoning the Israeli ambassador to protest at the move.

The UN warned the plan could deal an "almost fatal blow" to the two-state solution.

Construction there has been on Israel's radar since the early 1990s, but the plans were never implemented because of heavy pressure, largely from Washington.

World's oldest person dies

AFP, Washington

The world's oldest person, American Besse Cooper, died on Tuesday at the age of 116, CNN reported.

She passed away in Monroe, Georgia.

Guinness World Records gave Cooper the distinction of being the oldest living human in January 2011. She was born August 26, 1896 in Tennessee.

Meanwhile, a Chinese woman who was certified as the tallest in the world has died, an official said yesterday.

Yao Defen, of eastern China's Anhui province, was listed as the world's tallest woman in 2010. She stood seven foot eight inches high.

Egypt crisis turns violent

AFP, Cairo

Supporters and opponents of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi lobbed Molotov cocktails and rocks at each other yesterday as their standoff turned violent near the presidential palace in Cairo.

As the country faces its most divisive crisis since Morsi took power in June, the United States called for an open and "democratic dialogue".

"The upheaval we are seeing... indicates that dialogue is urgently needed. It needs to be two-way," US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told journalists in the Belgian capital.

At the heart of the battle is a decree issued by Morsi expanding his powers and allowing him to put to a referendum a disputed constitution drafted by Islamists.

The November 22 constitutional declaration has sparked deadly protests and strikes, but Vice President Mahmud Mekki said a December 15 referendum on the charter would



go ahead as planned.

Skirmishes broke out after thousands of Islamists rallying to the call of the Muslim Brotherhood bore down on the presidential palace, tearing down opposition tents and chanting that they would "cleanse" the area.

The two sides threw stones at each other before the secular-leaning opposition protesters, who had besieged the palace in their

tens of thousands on Tuesday, escaped into side streets before regrouping.

Prominent opposition leader and former UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei said Morsi bore "full responsibility" for the violence and that his regime was losing more legitimacy every day.

Tens of thousands of opposition protesters had encircled the palace on Tuesday demanding that Morsi go, opposing the charter and with some calling for a boycott of the referendum.

CLIMATE SUMMIT EU, US rule out funding pledges

AFP, Doha

The European Union and United States yesterday said they would not make concrete near-term funding pledges at UN climate talks in Doha.

The EU said tight finances prevented it from taking on new commitments as a bloc, while Washington insisted that it was already "doing what we agreed to do and what we've committed to do."

Their positions angered negotiators for the world's least developed states, who insisted on pledges for funding from 2013. They say a total of \$60 billion is needed from now to 2015 to help them deal with worsening drought, flood, storms and rising seas.

Indian coalition wins FDI vote in parliament

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday won in the Lok Sabha, Lower House of Indian Parliament, vote on the issue of allowing foreign direct investment in retail sector.

While 253 lawmakers of Lok Sabha voted against the opposition-sponsored motion criticising FDI in retail, 218 voted for it, out of 471 members who were present in the House.

The victory for the government, which had lost its majority in September following withdrawal of Trinamool Congress from ruling Congress-led UPA, came after two days of stormy debate in the Lok Sabha on whether to allow retail giants like Walmart and Carrefour in Indian domestic retail sector.

Shortly before the voting, members of Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party headed by Mayawati stated walkout from the House,

thereby helping the government to win the battle by bringing down the majority mark (the number of lawmakers' support required)

Both SP and BSP are outside allies of UPA.

On Tuesday, during a day-long debate, opposition MPs flayed allowing foreign supermarkets in India, alleging they would wipe out small shopkeepers, exploit farmers and sell only Chinese-made products.

A similar vote is scheduled in Rajya Sabha, the Upper House, for Friday.

The Indian government embarked on a string of bold economic reforms since September, throwing open key sectors such as retail and civil aviation while proposing greater foreign investment in insurance and pensions.

The pro-market push comes as the government faces a slowing economy, an increasing fiscal deficit and high inflation.





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