

## Gazans mass for Hamas anniversary

AFP, Gaza City

Tens of thousands of Palestinians massed in Gaza yesterday for a rally marking the 25th anniversary of Hamas to be addressed by the ruling Islamist movement's leader in exile.

Politburo chief Khaled Meshaal, who arrived from Egypt on Friday, was on his first ever visit to Gaza and his first to the Palestinian territories since 1975.

The celebrations come just over two weeks after an Egyptian-brokered truce ended eight days of bloodshed with Israel which left 174 Palestinians dead.

Light rain in the early morning did not deter thousands of Gazans -- most of them women -- from turning out well before the noon (10:00 GMT) start of the main event in the Al-Qatiba complex west of Gaza City, an AFP correspondent reported.

Parallel rallies were being held across the Gaza Strip.

The security forces were out in strength, closing off nearby roads from the early hours.

Dozens of masked members of Hamas military wing the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades kept watch from surrounding rooftops.

Two large empty chairs were placed on the main stage to commemorate Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, assassinated by Israel in 2004, and Hamas military commander Ahmed Jaabari, assassinated by Israel on November 14 this year.



**Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians gather to mark the 25th anniversary of Hamas in Gaza City yesterday. Inset, Hamas leader in exile Khaled Meshaal and Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya gesture to the supporters.**

PHOTO: AFP

## Assad could use chemical weapons

*Says UK; regime warns rebels may use it*

AFP, Manama

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said yesterday that there is evidence that the Syrian government could use its chemical weapons stocks in its conflict with rebels fighting to oust it.

"We are extremely concerned about the stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and we are also concerned about evidence during the last couple of weeks that the regime could use them," Hague told reporters in Manama on the sidelines of a regional security conference.

He said Britain had joined with the United States in delivering a strong message to President Bashar al-Assad's government.

He said the option of military intervention in Syria had not been "ruled out" but Britain continued to support a peaceful transition.

He said it was not Britain's policy "to supply arms to any side in the Middle East" but added that the opposition fighters were "receiving arms and making progress on the ground".

Meanwhile, Syria warned the United Nations yesterday that rebels may use chemical weapons after they gained control of a factory producing toxic chlorine east of Aleppo city.

Washington has said the use of chemical weapons would be a red line.

Syrian troops battled rebels near Damascus yesterday leaving four fighters dead as the army bombarded opposition strongholds in the south of the capital.

More than 63,000 Syrian refugees have fled the bloody conflict in their home country for neighbouring Iraq, according to figures released by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees yesterday.

### CLIMATE TALKS

## UN deal extends Kyoto Protocol to 2020

AFP, Doha

A UN climate conference on Saturday extended the life of the Kyoto Protocol, the only binding pact on curbing greenhouse gas emissions, in a small but symbolic victory in the fight against global warming.

It took much haggling and many hours of lost sleep in the Qatari capital to arrive at the deal on interim measures to rein in climate change pending a new, global pact due to take effect in 2020.

An extension of Kyoto was finally approved with the 27-member European Union, Australia, Switzerland and eight other industrialised nations signing up for binding emission cuts by 2020.

They represent about 15 percent of global emissions. The protocol locks in only developed nations, excluding major developing polluters such as China and India, as well as the United States which refuses to ratify it.

In practice, observers say the extension of the protocol will make little difference to pollution levels as it covered only about 15 percent of global emissions and its signatories had their own legislated targets anyway.

"It is a modest but essential step forward," European climate commissioner Connie Hedegaard said at the conclusion of talks.

## Hillary to testify on Benghazi attack



AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will testify this month before US lawmakers at Senate and House hearings about the deadly September attack on the US mission in Benghazi, Libya, top lawmakers said Friday.

Hillary "has committed to testify before the committee before the end of the session" of Congress, Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a letter to fellow members.

Kerry said the top US diplomat will discuss findings of the State Department's Accountability Review Board, which other officials said was expected to release its Benghazi findings next week. The next session of Congress starts on January 3, but typically lawmakers wrap up business by the end of the year.

Hillary is also due to testify before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs "to discuss, in an open hearing, the findings and recommendations" of the review board, committee chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said.

### EUROPEAN FEDERALISM

## EU video cites Churchill's enthusiasm

BBC ONLINE

Archive footage of Sir Winston Churchill has been chosen to open a video celebrating the EU's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The video on the European Council's YouTube channel features Sir Winston declaring in 1946: "We must build a kind of United States of Europe."

In the speech, he also urged Europeans to "turn our backs upon the horrors of the past" and "look to the future".

But how he foresaw British relations with the union has long been debated.

The speech was delivered to the University of Zurich in the aftermath of the Second World War.

He told his audience: "We must re-create the European family in a regional



structure called, it may be, the United States of Europe, and the first practical step will be to form a Council of Europe." 'English-speaking peoples'

The UK went on to become a founder member of the Council of Europe - an institution which pre-dates the European Union's predecessor bodies, and remains separate from it.

Sir Winston's pivotal contribution to political co-operation in Europe is recognised by the decision to name after him a prominent building belonging to the EU's Parliament in Strasbourg.

Visitors to the Churchill building are greeted by a life-size cardboard cut-out photograph of the former Conservative prime minister looming near to the main entrance.

## Philippines typhoon would return

AFP, New Bataan

A powerful typhoon that has killed hundreds of people and wreaked devastation in the Philippines was set to smash into the country again Sunday, forecasters warned.

Typhoon Bopha had

looked to be heading away after destroying whole communities in the south, but the official weather agency said yesterday it

had unexpectedly turned and would make landfall again, this time in the north. The agency urged people to prepare for fierce winds of up to 160 kilometres an hour and heavy rains when the storm

slams.

## Lanka chief judge found guilty

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's first woman chief justice looked set to be removed from office after a parliamentary panel yesterday found her guilty of three accusations of professional misconduct.

The charges against Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayake have raised international concerns that the government is trying to control the judiciary after crushing Tamil rebels in 2009 and consolidating its hold on power.

"We found her guilty," government panel member Susil Premajayantha told reporters in Colombo.

## US diplomat writes, sings song for Malala

AFP, Islamabad

A US diplomacy official has written and sang a Pashto song "Jenaiy", which means "girl", as a tribute to Malala Yousufzai, the teenager who was shot in the head by the Taliban for promoting education for girls.

She has taken a novel approach to diplomacy in Pakistan - singing in a local language to build bridges, where anti-Americanism runs rampant.

Shayla Cram, a public diplomacy officer assigned to Peshawar, the gateway to al Qaeda and Taliban strongholds in the northwestern tribal belt, has not only learnt Pashto but has penned her own Pashto-style song.

It features Cram on guitar and vocals and a Pakistani musician, Sarmad Ghafoor, on the rabab - a traditional stringed instrument - and urges girls to have hope for the future and pursue their dreams.

"There's definitely need in Pakistan to encourage young girls and females in their education and leadership, to make them young leaders, and that's the basic message of my song," Cram told AFP.



Shayla Cram

## Myanmar apologises to monks

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's government has apologised to senior Buddhist clerics over injuries sustained by monks in a police crackdown on a rally at a Chinese-backed copper mine, state media said yesterday.

Religious Affairs Minister Myint Maung said the incident at the mine in Monywa, northern Myanmar, in which at least 99 monks and 11 others suffered wounds including severe burns, was a "great grief" to the government, amid efforts to dampen public anger over the injuries.

## FDI will benefit consumers, farmers Says Indian PM, US welcomes

PTI, Ludhiana

A day after winning Parliament's approval to the decision of allowing FDI in retail, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said the move will benefit farmers and consumers and help introduce new technologies in agriculture marketing.

He also said the decision to allow FDI was "supported" by farmers' organisations in Punjab.

Speaking as a chief guest at Punjab Agricultural University's golden jubilee function here, he said FDI in retail will help introduce new technologies in agri-marketing, and will "benefit farmers and consumers."

The decision to allow FDI was backed by farmers' organisations in Punjab, he said at the PAU function, where he was honoured with a Doctor of Science degree.

The US has welcomed the Indian Parliament's decision to allow FDI in multi-brand retail, noting that this is a win-win for all and would deepen economic co-operation between the two countries, reports PTI from Washington.



## NEWS IN brief

### Mandela admitted to hospital

AFP, Johannesburg

Nelson Mandela was yesterday admitted to a hospital for tests consistent with old age and is doing well, the office of South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, announced.

"Former President Nelson Mandela has today, 8 December 2012, been admitted in hospital in Pretoria to undergo tests," Zuma's office announced. Mandela "is doing well and there is no cause for alarm," it added.

The ageing statesman, who turned 94 in July, has grown frail and has not appeared in public since South Africa's Football World Cup final in 2010.



### Hospital anger at Kate hoax call

BBC ONLINE

The London hospital which employed a nurse caught up in a hoax call about details of the Duchess of Cambridge has protested to the Australian network which broadcast the conversation.

The chairman of King Edward VII Hospital wrote to Southern Cross Austereo a day after Jacintha Saldanha, 46, apparently killed herself.

Lord Glenarthur said the consequences of the "ill-considered actions" were "frankly, tragic beyond words".

### Zardari to visit Malala in UK

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari was set to visit the United Kingdom yesterday to meet 14-year-old peace activist Malala Yousafzai, who is being treated at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital, sources told The Express Tribune.

Foreign office officials, terming the visit as an unprecedented gesture by President Zardari, because the president did not have any diplomatic engagements in the UK other than meeting Malala.



### Taliban creates Facebook page

PTI, Islamabad

The banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan have created a Facebook page to recruit persons to write for a planned quarterly magazine and to work on tasks like video editing and translation.

The Umar Media TTP page, which has nearly 290 likes, has a message posted on November 22 seeking writers for "Ahyah-e-Khilafat", which is described as the "official quarterly magazine" of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.

### Obama asks for \$60b in Sandy aid

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama on Friday asked Congress for \$60.4 billion in emergency funds to repair devastation from Superstorm Sandy, which paralyzed the US east coast when it hit in October.

"In total, the administration requests \$60.4 billion in federal resources for response, recovery and mitigation related to Hurricane Sandy damage in all affected states," said Jeffrey Zients, White House deputy director for management.

"While much of this damage is covered by insurance, current estimates suggest that a significant amount of damage is not covered," Zients said in a

### Cambodia market fire kills 8

AFP, Phnom Penh

Eight people, including four children, were killed in a fire that tore through a popular night market in the Cambodian tourist town of Siem Reap yesterday, police said.

The children, aged between nine and 14, were sleeping with their families on the upper floor of a building on the premises when the blaze took hold in the early hours, said Sath Nady, chief of police in

### Berlusconi confirms new PM bid

AFP, Rome

Silvio Berlusconi on Saturday ended weeks of speculation by announcing he would run again for the job of prime minister, the post he was forced out of last year.

He had called a meeting of the PDL for Sunday and had opened talks with former coalition allies the Northern League to try to agree on backing a single candidate, he said.

"I am running to win," the leader of the right-wing populist People of Freedom (PDL) party told journalists in Milanello, near the northern city of Milan.

### Hazare admitted to hospital

PTI, Gurgaon

Activist Anna Hazare was admitted to a hospital Friday after he complained of acidity but he is "doing perfectly fine", doctors attending on him said.

Hazare, who was in the national capital, complained of acidity and weakness this morning and

