

# Crisis become overtly sectarian

## Says UN; launches massive aid appeal; al-Qaeda presence grows strong

AGENCIES

Violence in the Syria conflict has become openly sectarian and threatens whole communities, UN investigators reported yesterday following a visit to the region.

"As battles between government forces and anti-government armed groups approach the end of their second year, the conflict has become overtly sectarian in nature," the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria said in a report.

Meanwhile, a rights group yesterday said more than 44,000 people have been killed in Syria since the outbreak in March 2011 of an anti-regime revolt that became a bloody insurgency.

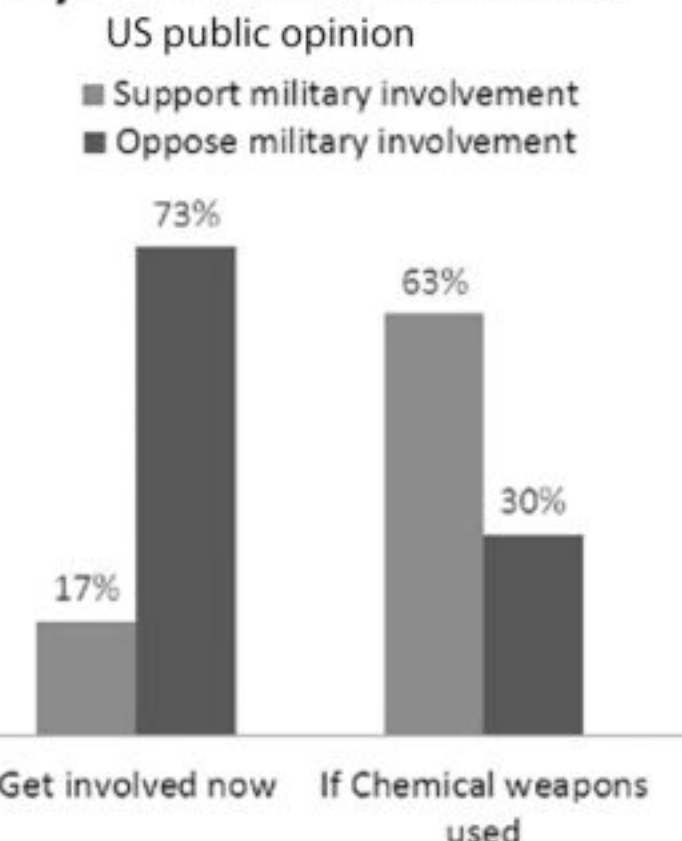
"Entire communities are at risk of being forced out of the country or of being killed inside the country," it said, stressing that "with communities believing -- not without cause -- that they face an existential threat, the need for a negotiated settlement is more urgent than ever."

Minority groups such as the Armenians, Christians, Druze, Palestinians, Kurds and Turkmen had also been drawn into the conflict, the report said.

Caught up in the cycle of attacks and reprisals, they were being forced to choose sides and allow themselves to be armed by the warring parties.

"However, the sectarian lines fall most sharply between Syria's Alawite community, from which most of the government's senior political and military figures hail, and the country's majority Sunni community, who are broadly...in support of the anti-government armed groups."

### Syria Intervention



The UN commission, which includes former war crimes prosecutor Carla del Ponte, was set up in August 2011, but has yet to actually gain access to Syria.

The UN estimates it will need \$1.5bn to slow a "dramatically deteriorating humanitarian situation" in Syria in an unusually strident terms.

The facts on the ground are stark and irrefutable. At least 1.5 million people, possibly as many as 2.2 million, are internally displaced and that figure is growing daily.

And having seen its star wane in Iraq, al-Qaeda has staged a comeback in neighbouring Syria, posing a dilemma for the opposition fighting to remove President Bashar al-Assad and making the West balk at military backing for the revolt, Reuters in a special story reported yesterday.

The rise of al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, al-Nusra Front, which the United States designated a terrorist organisation last week, could usher in a long and deadly confrontation with the West, and perhaps Israel.

That prospect alarms many in Syria, from minority Christians, Alawites and Shias to traditionally conservative but tolerant Sunni Muslims who are concerned that al-Nusra would try to impose Taliban-style rule.

However, Americans reject an immediate US military intervention in Syria's raging civil war, but are open to the possibility should President Bashar al-Assad's struggling regime use or lose control of its massive stockpile of chemical weapons, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll.

### BENGHAZI PROBE REPORT

## Four US officials suspended

AFP, Washington

The scandal over the Benghazi attack grew Wednesday as a top State Department official resigned and three others were suspended when a probe uncovered major security failures and mismanagement.

The news came amid a clamor of calls for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to testify to US lawmakers about the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya, after ill-health forced her to pull out of this week's hearings.

Assistant Secretary Eric Boswell, head of the bureau of diplomatic security, had resigned after the release of the scathing report into the September 11 assault in which four Americans, including ambassador Chris Stevens, died.

The Accountability Review Board (ARB) had fingered four individuals for their "performance," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a statement.

Hillary "has accepted Eric Boswell's decision to resign as assistant secretary for diplomatic security, effective immediately," she said.



PHOTO: AFP

**Prime Minister of Cambodia Hun Sen (C), Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R), Sultan of Brunei Haj Hassanal Bolkiah Waddaulah (L), and Prime Minister of Thailand Yingluck Shinawatra (2L) arrive during the Asean -India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi yesterday. Southeast Asian countries yesterday urged India to intervene to help resolve bitter territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, saying it was "crucial" to maintaining peace and stability in the region.**

## Modi wins big in Gujarat

### BJP loses Himachal to Congress

AGENCIES

INDIAN STATE POLLS



Narendra Modi yesterday performed a hat-trick retaining power for the third time in Indian state of Gujarat and propelled himself as a strong contender in the Indian prime ministerial race in 2014 while Congress ousted BJP from office in Himachal Pradesh.

The BJP registered its fifth consecutive victory in Gujarat, third under Modi. The win bolstered his chances of running for prime minister in 2014

Modi, who was in power ten years ago when the state was rocked by India's worst religious riots since independence, was re-elected chief minister with a final total of 115 seats in the 182-seat state assembly.

Supporters of the right-wing Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP), which is the main opposition party in the national parliament, set off firecrackers and waved flags in delight as the rival Congress party took only 61 seats.

Modi hailed the result as "a victory of development politics and good governance" as crowds chanted "PM! PM!" at his celebration rally.

While his victory was expected, Modi's popularity on the national stage remains tempered by his failure to stop the savage riots in his home state in 2002.

Some 2,000 people were killed in clashes between Hindus and Muslims, most of them Muslims.

But all investigations have cleared Modi of personal responsibility, and he has denied the accusations against him.

## Israel okays new W Bank 'city'

### UN chief warns Tel Aviv over new settlements

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel has approved plans to build 523 homes in the West Bank, Jewish settlers said yesterday, in the first step towards a new settlement "city" that drew furious condemnation from the Palestinians.

"After years, we are happy to announce that the government of Israel has decided to build a city in Gush Etzion," the head of the Gush Etzion regional council, told AFP.

He said the defence ministry had approved plans for 523 homes in Gevaot, which is part of the Gush Etzion bloc in the southern West Bank. Israel's defence ministry did not immediately respond to

requests for comment.

The new plans emerged during a week in which Israel has advanced the building of thousands of new settlement homes in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, sparking Palestinian and international condemnation.

The United Nations and all the Security Council members except the United States on Wednesday condemned the settlement moves, with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warning that Israel was on a "dangerous path."

Yesterday morning, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's spokesman warned that Israel would be held "accountable" for its settlement construction.

## JnU expels 4 more

**FROM PAGE 1** had identified three of them who had directly taken part in killing Bishwajit near Victoria Park in Old Dhaka.

Witnesses of the gruesome killing said a group of Chhatra League cadres beat up and indiscriminately hacked Bishwajit during the BNP-led 18-party alliance's road blockade on December 9.

On December 12, JnU authorities permanently expelled Rafiqul Islam Shakil, Mir Mohammad Nure Alam and Obhidul Kader and cancelled the certificates of Mahafuzur Rahman Nahid and Imdadul Haque on the same grounds.

Investigation officer of the killing case Tazul Islam yesterday told The Daily Star that the four detainees, who had been shown arrested on December 11, would soon be taken on remand.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker yesterday directed the Dhaka Metropolitan Police to form a team to investigate whether the law enforcers present on the killing spot that day had shown any negligence in carrying out their duties.

"We have received the

instruction in the evening," DMP Assistant Commissioner Gazi Rabiul Islam told The Daily Star last night.

Besides, the authorities of Mitford Hospital formed a three-member committee on Tuesday to investigate whether the on-duty doctors had shown any negligence in treating Bishwajit when he was rushed to the hospital.

Asked about its report, Director of the hospital Brig Gen Jakir Hossain said, "Primarily we can say that the hospital authorities did not show any negligence in treating Bishwajit."

**BAIL REJECTED** A Dhaka court yesterday rejected bail petitions of three suspects, who had been shown arrested on December 11 in connection with Bishwajit murder.

Lawyers of Nahiduzzaman Tuhin, Mamunur Rashid and Mosleuddin -- who are believed to be innocent -- submitted separate bail petitions mentioning that the three were not seen in the footage of the killing incident.

The lawyers also said the accused in the case had been arrested from the court area two days after the murder of Bishwajit Das.



SCHOOL MASSACRE

## Obama wants gun control measures in a month

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama put ending an "epidemic" of gun violence at the top of his second term agenda Wednesday, denying he was "on vacation" on the issue before last week's school massacre.

Obama called for "concrete" proposals within a month from a new task force that will be led by Vice President Joe Biden that will examine new gun control laws, better mental health access and the impact of violent culture.

The president said the killings of 20 children aged six and seven and six adults in an elementary school last week should give lawmakers a potent incentive for action, even when initial shock fades.

Obama said he welcomed public support for measures like the banning of assault weapons, like the one used by gunman Adam Lanza in Connecticut last Friday, and also on outlawing the sale of high-capacity ammunition clips.

He said a majority of Americans also supported background checks for all gun purchases and signaled an effort to expand mental health care, in an effort to deter psychologically troubled people from turning to mass violence.

## NEWS IN brief

### UN court jails Rwanda's ex-minister

AFP, Arusha

The UN tribunal for Rwanda yesterday handed a 35-year jail term to a former minister found guilty of genocide, in the court's final trial ruling.

Augustin Ndirabatswe, planning minister at the time of the 1994 genocide, was found guilty of genocide, incitement to commit genocide and rape as a crime against humanity.

Ndirabatswe is the son-in-law of Felicien Kabuga, accused by the tribunal of having bankrolled the genocide, and the most notorious of the nine people indicted by the tribunal still at large.

### Egypt prosecutor retracts resignation

BBC ONLINE

Egypt's new public prosecutor yesterday retracted an offer to resign he made on Monday following protests about his appointment, Egyptian media report.

Talaat Ibrahim said it was now up to the justice minister to decide whether he should stay on.

Ibrahim was appointed by President Mohammed Morsi last month, after his predecessor was sacked. The move angered senior judges who saw the sacking of Abdel Maguid Mahmoud as an attack on their independence.

### India test-fired nuke capable missile

PTI, Odisha

India yesterday successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear capable Prithvi-II missile with a strike range of 350 km from a test range at Chandipur near.

Prithvi, the first missile developed under India's prestigious Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme, is capable of carrying 500kg to 1000kg of warheads and thrustured by liquid propulsion twin engines, uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory.

### Flash floods kill 25 in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Flash floods have killed at least 25 people in Sri Lanka and left more than a quarter of a million marooned in their homes, disaster officials said yesterday.

Heavy rains, which have battered the island for much of the week, were still being reported in 14 of Sri Lanka's 25 administrative districts, with the central highlands -- one of the world's key tea producing regions -- the worst hit.

### Khamenei opens FB account

AFP, Nicosia

A new Facebook page dedicated to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quickly attracting supporters and comments on Wednesday, despite questions about its authenticity.

The page -- www.facebook.com/www.khamenei.ir -- was created on December 13 to encourage the faithful to follow "for regular updates and news."

### Yemen sacks Saleh generals

AFP, Sanaa

President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi has dramatically restructured Yemen's military to curb the influence of those linked to toppled strongman Abdullah Ali Saleh with the strong backing of Yemen's Gulf neighbours.

Hadi scrapped the elite Republican Guard commanded by Saleh's oldest son Ahmed and removed Saleh's nephew, Yehya, from his powerful post as deputy chief of central security.



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