

Japan PM turns to SE Asia to counter China

REUTERS, Tokyo/Jakarta

The last time he was prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe's inaugural foreign trip was to China. In the job again 7 years later and relations with Beijing now chilly, Abe is turning first this time to the rising economic stars of Southeast Asia.



Shinzo Abe

is also clashing with countries in the region over territorial rows in the South China Sea, as well as with Japan over tiny isles in the East China Sea.

"The Japanese government is trying to solidify its relations with other countries in the region and strengthen its bargaining power before talking to China," said Narushige Michishita, an associate professor at the National Graduate Institute.

Abe has made clear that Asean's planned integration in 2015, creating a bloc with combined economies worth \$2 trillion and a population of 600 million, is a significant lure for a Japanese economy that has been trapped in deflation for decades and whose population is ageing fast and shrinking.

He also says, however, that he wants to go beyond economic ties and expand relations in the security field. He is expected to give a policy speech in Jakarta.

France vows to crush Mali Islamists

Launches ground assault; extremists attack gas field in Algeria in retaliation, kills 2



AFP, Markala

French troops engaged in close combat with Islamist rebels yesterday in Mali as President Francois Hollande vowed his forces would crush the Islamist militia.

"What do we plan to do with the terrorists? Destroy them. Capture them, if possible and make sure that they can do no harm in the future," he said on Tuesday during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda-linked fighters attacked a gas plant in neighbouring Algeria killing two and taking several foreigners hostage.

After days of airstrikes on Islamist positions in the territory they have occupied since April, French and Malian troops battled the insurgents in the small town of Diabaly, some 400 kilometres north of Bamako.

"The special forces are currently in Diabaly, in close-quarter combat with the Islamists. The Malian army is also in place," a Malian security source said on condition of anonymity.

The source added that French soldiers were "on alert" in the town of Niono, 50 kilometres south of Diabaly, as well as in the nearby town of Markala.

Meanwhile in Algeria state media said that two person had been killed and seven wounded, two of them foreigners, in an attack on a British oil giant BP field in Amenas, in the Sahara desert.

The gas plant is located 1,300 kilometres southeast of Algiers, close to the Libyan border.

An Algerian deputy said five staff -- one French national and four Japanese -- had been taken hostage.

The Irish foreign ministry said a man from Northern Ireland was also among the hostages. A Norwegian man was also reported taken hostage.

The attack was the first reprisal by the Islamists who have vowed to strike back, and comes after Algeria threw its support behind the Mali offensive and opened its airspace to French fighter jets.

The Islamists who have controlled an area larger than France in northern Mali since April, have fled many of their strongholds since the French army launched its assault on January 11. But they claim their retreat was merely tactical.

Both Paris and Islamist experts warn the jihadists are better armed and trained than expected and the battle is likely to be drawn-out and complex.

NEWS IN brief

Wave of Iraq attacks kill 27

AFP, Kirkuk

Attacks in Baghdad and north Iraq killed 27 people yesterday as hundreds attended the funeral of a Sunni MP who died in a suicide attack a day earlier, amid a political crisis engulfing Iraq.

The latest violence, which struck mostly in disputed territory in north Iraq and was the deadliest so far this year, comes with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki facing several protests hardening opposition against his rule and calls for his ouster.

IAEA team begins talks in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Experts from the UN's nuclear watchdog agency began intensive talks in Tehran yesterday to seek a way forward in resolving perennial concerns over Iran's nuclear programme, media reports said.

Iranian officials and the eight-strong team, led by the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) chief nuclear inspector Herman Nackaerts, kicked off the negotiations to "find a solution to concerns and questions raised by the IAEA," the ISNA news agency reported.

Turkey pounds Kurd rebels in Iraq

AFP, Diyarbakir

Turkish jets yesterday struck more than 50 Kurdish rebel targets in northern Iraq in Ankara's largest-scale aerial campaign in recent years.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist group by Turkey and the international community, took up arms for autonomy in the Kurdish-majority southeast in 1984, sparking an insurgency which has

Attack on Kabul spy agency kills 2

REUTERS, Kabul

Six suicide bombers launched a coordinated attack on Afghanistan's spy agency in Kabul yesterday, killing at least two and wounding 22 others, Afghan officials said.

The attack started at around noon when the first assailant detonated a large car bomb near the entrance to the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Kabul police said. Five others strapped with explosives were shot dead as they tried to enter the NDS compound, it said.

Obama to unveil gun control plans

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama was to unveil sweeping plans to tighten gun controls yesterday, with an assault weapons ban, background checks for all buyers and limits on high-capacity magazines likely.

Obama was to outline his comprehensive strategy to thwart America's scourge of gun violence surrounded by children who wrote to him about their fears for school safety following last month's massacre in Newtown, Connecticut.

The tough plans, drawn up after an exhaustive month-long policy review by Vice President Joe Biden, are expected to include a mix of legislation and executive orders using presidential power.

They will be unveiled a day after New York passed what could be the toughest US gun ownership law, becoming the first state to impose new restrictions after the December 14 killings in Newtown of 20 school kids and six adults.

Obama and Biden were due to speak at the White House shortly before noon.

Chopper crash kills 2 in central London

REUTERS, London

A helicopter crashed into a crane on top of one of Europe's tallest residential blocks in central London yesterday, killing two people as it burst into flames and threw plumes of smoke into the foggy air.

Police said there was nothing to indicate that the crash on the south bank of the River Thames was linked to an attack on London, where 52 commuters were killed in rush hour suicide bombings in 2005.

London's police said there were 11 casualties including two dead and one critically injured.

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KDL-32EX520/NX/EX650	TK. 5000	TK. 5000	Nil
KLV-40BX/CX/EX400	TK. 5000	TK. 5000	Nil
KDL-40V/NX650/EX600/EX650	TK. 10000	TK. 6900	Nil
KLV-42EX410	TK. 15000	TK. 6900	Nil
KDL-40EX720/HX750	TK. 15000	Nil	TK. 10000
KDL-40NX/710/720/HX855	TK. 15000	Nil	Free
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