

Tension high amid 'proxy' war fears

US takes aim at Iran, Russia after Israel raids Syria sites

AFP, Damascus

The United States yesterday said Iran is stepping up support for the Syrian regime and that Russia is still arming it, heightening fears the conflict may spill over the country's borders.

The assessment by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came as US Vice President Joe Biden prepared to discuss the crisis with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Syrian opposition chief Moaz al-Khatib.

Fresh concerns about the 22-month conflict drawing in the wider region arose after Damascus threatened to retaliate over a reported Israeli air raid on a research facility and close ally Iran warned the attack would have "grave consequences".

Israel has frequently warned that if Syria's chemical weapons fall into the hands of archfoe and close Damascus ally, Lebanon's Shia movement Hezbollah, this would be a casus belli.

Hillary gave a grim assessment of the conflict, warning of "the dangers of an increasing civil war and a potential proxy war".

"The worst kind of predictions of what could happen, both internally and spilling over the borders of Syria, are certainly within the realm of the possible now," she said. Iranians "have been actively involved (in Syria) from the very beginning. It appears that they may be increasing that involvement and that is a matter of concern to us."

She noted Russia was propping up the regime despite US efforts to work for an international solution to a conflict the UN says has cost more than 60,000 lives.

Blast at Mexico oil giant's HQ kills 25

AFP, Mexico City

A huge blast rocked the headquarters of Mexican state-owned oil giant Pemex on Thursday, killing at least 25 people, injuring 100 and leaving rescuers scrambling to find survivors into the night.

Officials said the blast ripped through an annex at around 3:40pm, causing severe damage to three floors. Witnesses said a roof connecting the annex to the tower collapsed. Thousands of people were evacuated.

Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong told a news conference that 17 women and eight men had died, and that 101 people had been injured.

A spokesman for the civil protection agency said there was an apparent "accumulation of gas" in an electrical supply room, but the exact cause of the blast has yet to be confirmed.

Hillary's legacy at the heart of US diplomacy

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton is stepping down as the top US diplomat firm in the belief she has restored America's global standing during her tenure that may also have traced a path to the White House in 2016.

But as she sweeps out of the imposing buildings of the State Department for the last time, how will history judge her as secretary of state?

How she stacks up against giants of American diplomacy like Henry Kissinger and James Baker and how she'll fill in the blank pages as she opens a new chapter in her life remain open questions.

She now leaves office with the highest popularity rating of any of President Barack Obama's cabinet members, imbued with the title of "rock star diplomat" and with many saying she'll be the Democratic Party's strongest hope in the next elections, despite her constant denials that she is planning to run.

Critics say Hillary cannot point to a signature issue achieved under her stewardship. The major challenges of the day -- Syria, the new world order emerging from the Arab Spring, Iran's nuclear ambitions and the search for peace in the Middle East -- she bequeaths to her successor John Kerry.

Yet the Obama administration seized



the opportunity to heap praise on her in opening up Myanmar. She helped the United States pivot its focus toward Asia and built a solid alliance in support of biting sanctions against Iran.

And she brought to Obama's administration her charisma, celebrity status and a willingness to travel, believing that even in this interconnected world, face-to-face meetings remain one of diplomacy's most important tools.

"Remember what we faced in January 2009: Two wars. An economy in freefall. Traditional alliances fraying. Our diplomatic standing damaged," she told the Council on Foreign Relations on Thursday.

Four years on, while the world "remains a dangerous and complicated place," much has changed, she argued, saying "we've revitalized American diplomacy and strengthened our alliances."

"As a long-term enduring legacy, I think I'd feel prouder about that than having invaded another Middle Eastern country," she said.

Observers also point to Europe's renewed faith in America, after Hillary made 42 trips to the continent during her time in office.

SYRIA CRISIS

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PHOTO: AFP

Egyptian protesters throw projectiles in front of the presidential palace during a anti-Morsi demonstration in Cairo yesterday.

Rushdie slams Mamata over his Kolkata no-show

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Controversy over Salman Rushdie's plan to visit Kolkata refuses to die down with the Booker prize-winner author yesterday alleging that the West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee herself ordered the police to block his arrival.

The 65-year-old Booker prize-winning author issued a one page statement before flying out of India and also tweeted that the Kolkata police had made his visit to the city "impossible" and accused Mamata of leaking his programme to the press and Muslim leaders "clearly inciting protests".

"...The day before I was due to travel to Kolkata we were informed that the Kolkata police would refuse to allow me to enter the city. If I flew there, I was told, I would be put on the next plane back. I was also told that this was at the request of the Chief Minister," Rushdie said in the statement.

Rushdie, accused of blasphemy for his book "The Satanic Verses", was to take part in the Kolkata Literary Meet as a "surprise guest" on January 30 to promote the movie adaptation of his novel 'Midnight's Children' but the organisers later denied having invited the author.

In his tweet, the author said "the simple fact is that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee ordered the police to block my arrival...I was told the police would put me on next plane out...The police gave my full itinerary to the press and called Muslim leaders, clearly inciting protests."

Rushdie attended the premiere of 'Midnight's Children' in Mumbai last night with the star cast of the film before leaving India.



Japan PM vows new statement on WWII

AFP, Tokyo

Hawkish Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday said he intends to release a new statement on Japan's attitude to World War II, just a day after unveiling plans to revamp the US-imposed pacifist constitution.

The nationalist premier, who swept to power on promises of a more robust diplomacy that will stand up to China, has long been known to favour the toning down of a 1995 apology for wartime aggression directed at Asian neighbours.

Beijing and Seoul, amongst others, have repeatedly called for Tokyo to face up to its bellicose past.

Abe yesterday revealed only that he will revisit the issue at some point in the future, and gave no insight into any new declaration.

The landmark 1995 pronouncement by then-prime minister Tomiichi Murayama was seen as a key step in what many Asian nations say was Japan finally starting to come to terms with its brutal history. The statement said Japan "through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations", adding the premier felt "deep remorse" and offered a "heartfelt apology".

Morsi vows firm hand with violent protests

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi vowed security forces will "act with utmost decisiveness" to protect state buildings, as protesters clashed with police outside the presidential palace yesterday.

The presidency, in a statement posted on his Facebook page, also said it would hold "politically accountable" opposition groups behind the violence.

It said protesters had tried to break down the palace gates and scale its walls, and demanded that opposition groups denounce the violence and call on their followers to withdraw.

The opposition National Salvation Front, which called for mass rallies yesterday, said it "had no connection whatsoever with the trouble that erupted suddenly in front of the presidential palace."

It said the NSP condemned all acts of violence and urged security forces to exercise "utmost restraint" with the protesters.

People took to the streets in a show of opposition to Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood after a wave of deadly unrest swept the country last week in the worst violence since Morsi was elected president last June.

The opposition accuses Morsi of betraying the revolution that toppled Mubarak two years ago.

The Republican Guard appealed for calm as demonstrators hurled petrol bombs over the palace walls and security forces responded with water cannon and tear gas and troops fired warning shots into the night sky.

A girl's fight for her 'name'

BBC ONLINE

A 15-year-old Icelandic girl has won the right to use the name given her by her mother, after a court battle against the authorities.

Blaer Bjarkardottir will now be able to use her first name, which means "light breeze", officially.

Icelandic authorities had objected, saying it was not a proper feminine name.

The country has very strict laws on names which must fit Icelandic grammar and pronunciation rules.

Until now, Blaer Bjarkardottir had been identified simply as "Girl" in communications with officials.

Several countries - such as Germany, Sweden, China and Japan - also restrict names.

In the case of Iceland, it's about meeting certain rules of grammar and gender, and saving the child from possible embarrassment. There is a list of 1,853 female



names, and 1,712 male ones, and parents must pick from these lists or seek permission from a special committee.

Similar concerns about child welfare are present in Germany, where a Turkish couple were not allowed to call their baby Osama Bin Laden.

And in China, people have been forced to change their names because they were deemed too obscure.

The UK and the US have much more liberal naming laws.

American parents can pretty much name their child anything. Census records in the 18th and 19th Centuries revealed people named King's Judgement, Noble Fall and Cholera Plague.

There have been 20 people named Noun, 458 named Comma, 18 called Period but only one called Semicolon.

LOKPAL BILL Hazare cries betrayal after India okays amendments

AGENCIES

Activist Anna Hazare slammed the Indian government yesterday for "betraying the people" on Jan Lokpal after the cabinet accepted the amendments.

The Bharatiya Janata Party and social activists, including Hazare, have slammed the proposed law saying it was not enough to curb corruption.

"The battle for Jan Lokpal has been on for two years. The government has been repeatedly betraying the people of this country," he said.

He threatened to go on an indefinite fast.

The cabinet Thursday delinked the Lokpal from Lokayuktas - or anti-graft ombudsmen - in states as it gave its nod to the Lokpal bill amendments.

The bill will now be put to vote in the Rajya Sabha.

The Lok Sabha had approved the Lokpal bill in 2011, but it got stuck in the upper house. In May 2012 it was referred to the select panel.

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

Faculty Search

North South University (NSU), the first private university in Bangladesh, invites applications for one Professor/Associate Professor, one Assistant Professor and two Lecturer positions for its proposed **School of Law**.

Candidates MUST have:

- Master's degrees in law from a reputed university for the post of lecturer
- Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degrees in Law from a reputed University for the posts of Assistant Professor and above
- Excellent academic background, with no third class/ division at any level
- Adequate teaching and research experience, and publications for the posts of Assistant professor and above

Salary:
Attractive compensation packages (50% house rent, medical allowance, two festival bonuses, Gratuity, provident Fund and group insurance) will be given. Salaries for extremely deserving candidates are negotiable.

How to Apply:
Send your applications to the Vice Chancellor with a copy of curriculum vitae, attached copies of academic qualifications, one passport size photograph and preferably one letter of recommendation by **10th February, 2013**. Applications and required documents may also be sent through email. For further information call or visit our website.

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