

NEWS IN brief

EU talks on Serbia, Kosovo fail

AFP, Brussels

Serbia and Kosovo yesterday failed to find common ground on how to defuse longstanding tensions at EU-sponsored talks, officials said.

"The gap between the two sides is very narrow but deep," said EU foreign affairs head Catherine Ashton, who chaired the eighth round of talks in Brussels aimed at normalising ties between Serbia and breakaway territory Kosovo.

The main sticking point has been the future of the Serb minority living in Kosovo, especially the north, since Pristina declared independence in

WWII bomb defused in Berlin

AFP, Berlin

German sappers successfully defused a World War II bomb unearthed near Berlin's main train station in a delicate operation that snarled rail and road traffic for several hours yesterday.

The 100-kilogramme explosive was dropped by an Allied plane during the Second World War and discovered Tuesday, a police spokesman told AFP, adding that experts believed it was a Soviet-made bomb.

More than six decades after the war, authorities believe there are still some 3,000 bombs buried beneath Berlin alone.

Man dies of H7N9 bird flu in China

AFP, Shanghai

A man in the Chinese province of Zhejiang has died of the H7N9 strain of bird flu, state media said yesterday, bringing the total deaths attributed to the virus to three since the first human cases.

Two other deaths have been reported, both in China's commercial hub of Shanghai. Other cases have been happened in the eastern provinces of Jiangsu and Anhui, the government has

200 rhinos killed this year in SA

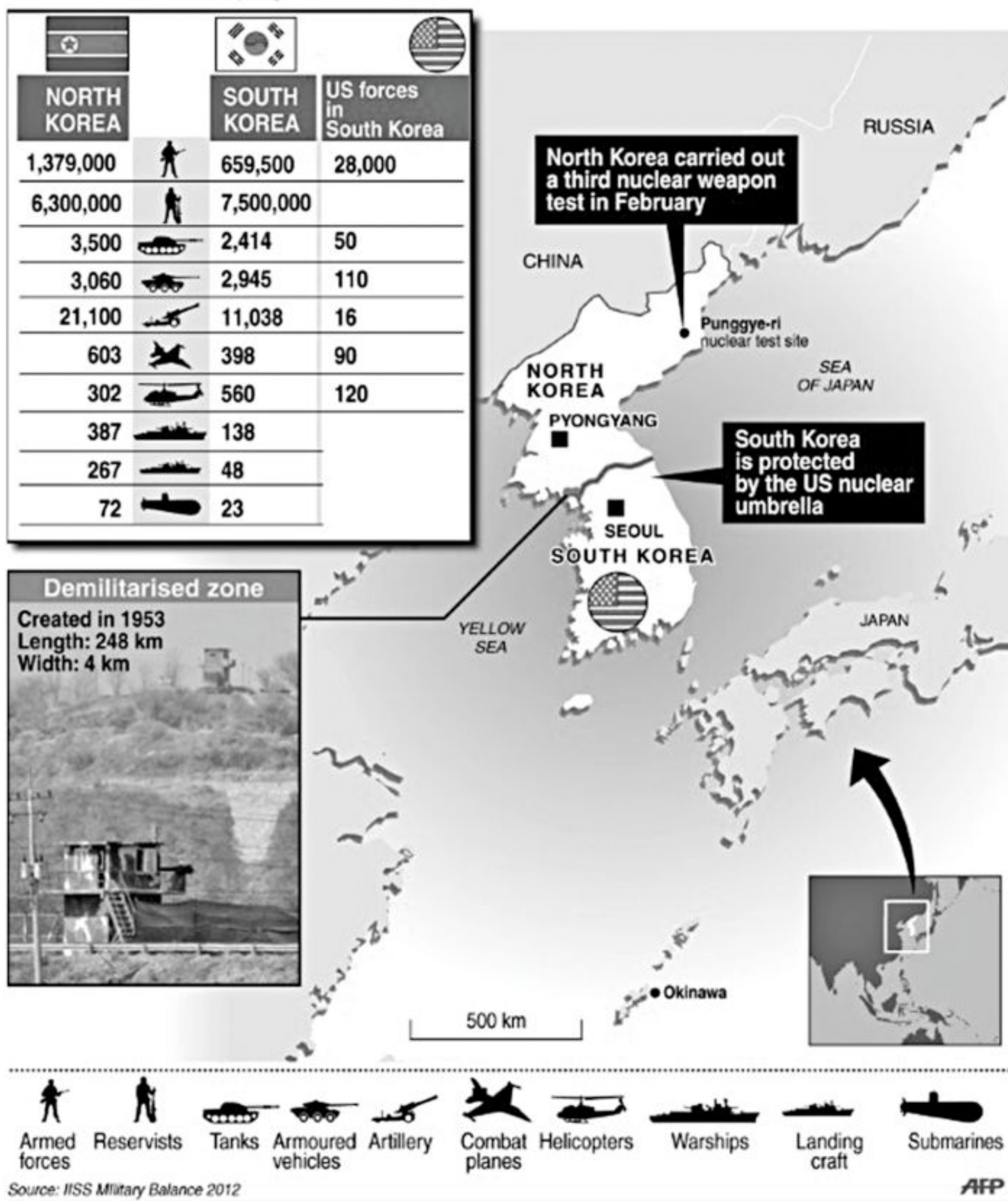
AFP, Johannesburg

Poachers have killed over 200 rhinos in South Africa this year, the environment ministry said Wednesday, as a major security operation fails to curb illegal hunting for the rhino horn trade.

The toll since the beginning of the year is now 203. Even soldiers and police with helicopters deployed to stop the slaughter struggle to secure the vast reserve, which is roughly the size of Israel. Last year, 668 rhinos were killed.

Armed forces in the Korean peninsula

A standoff there has triggered widespread international concern of an accidental conflict that could escalate rapidly



N Korea blocks access to key industrial zone

AFP, Seoul

North Korea blocked access to a key joint industrial zone with South Korea yesterday -- a sharp escalation in a military crisis that Washington blamed on Pyongyang's "reckless" behaviour.

North Korea informed Seoul in the morning that it was stopping the daily movement of South Koreans into the Seoul-funded Kaesong complex -- 10 kilometres (six miles) inside the North side of the border.

However, it added that the 861 South Koreans currently in the zone were at liberty to leave.

Any move on Kaesong -- established in 2004 and a crucial source of hard currency for N Korea -- carries enormous significance.

Neither of the Koreas has allowed previous crises to significantly affect the complex, which is the only surviving example of inter-Korean cooperation and seen as a bellwether for stability on the Korean peninsula.

South Korea's defence ministry said it had contingency plans that included "military action" in case the safety of its citizens working there was threatened.

The latest North Korean move fitted into a cycle of escalating tensions that has seen Pyongyang threaten missile and nuclear strikes against the United States and its ally South Korea in response to UN sanctions and joint military drills.

China, the North's sole major ally, appealed for "calm" from all sides yesterday, repeating Beijing's oft-declared position.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov said he was "worried" by the situation, saying even a simple human error could cause the crisis to spiral out of control.

In a rare show of force in the region Washington has deployed nuclear capable US B-52s, B-2 stealth bombers and two US destroyers to South Korean air and seaspace.

US Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday denounced the "unacceptable rhetoric" emanating from Pyongyang and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un.

"What Kim Jong Un has been choosing to do is provocative. It is dangerous, reckless and the United States will not accept (North Korea) as a nuclear state," Kerry said.

He was speaking after the North warned it would reopen its mothballed Yongbyon reactor -- its source of weapons-grade plutonium.

Earlier, UN chief Ban Ki-moon warned the situation was veering out of control and stressed that "nuclear threats are not a game". "The current crisis has already gone too far... Things must begin to calm down," Ban said, adding that negotiations were the only viable way forward.

US has 'real concerns' about Egypt: Kerry

AFP, Washington

The United States has "real concerns" about the direction being taken by the Egyptian government following recent arrests and political violence, Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday.

"We have put a series of real choices to the government of Egypt, but in the end they have to make those choices," Kerry told reporters, adding it was "a key moment for Egypt. It's really a tipping point for Egypt."

Kerry, who visited Cairo in March unlocking some \$250 million in US aid to help revive the economy, admitted President Barack Obama and the administration "share real concerns about the direction that Egypt appears to be moving in."

"But the recent arrests, the violence in the streets, the lack of inclusivity with respect to the opposition in public ways that make a difference to the people of Egypt, are all of concern today."

There has been increasing concern in the West about a number of legal complaints against journalists, which have cast doubt on President Mohamed Morsi's commitment to freedom of expression.

Billionaire prince calls on Saudi to introduce polls

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi billionaire prince Alwaleed bin Talal has called for parliamentary elections in the absolute monarchy where the king names members of a toothless Shura consultative council.

Prince Alwaleed, the richest Arab businessman and a nephew of King Abdullah, said in a television interview aired late Tuesday the monarch's January decision to appoint 30 women to the council was "very important" but needed to go further.

"For this to become historic, I think two things are essential: first, elections, even if partial, and, more importantly, (giving) powers," he said in the interview aired on several channels, most belonging to his media empire.

The prince also said that ending a ban



Alwaleed bin Talal

on women driving in Saudi Arabia was a matter of time, despite strong resistance from religious conservatives in the desert kingdom that is the birthplace of Islam.

"I think that driving (for women) is definitely coming," he said, playing up the economic benefits of saving wages paid to foreign drivers.

Prince Alwaleed regretted the "negative" outcome of Arab Spring uprisings, saying the politics of new Islamist-dominated governments "do not reflect the aspirations of the people ... for freedom and justice."

The uprisings which toppled strong Arab leaders would not reach the Gulf monarchies, where "the leaders look after the interests of their peoples," said the prince.

'Ready for Hillary'

AFP, Washington



Hillary

"Ready for Hillary" - the name says it all.

Supporters of the former secretary of state are laying the groundwork for a possible 2016 White House bid, officially launching a website Tuesday that features photos of the would-be candidate and plenty of praise.

The site -- www.readyforhillary.com -- belongs to the Ready for Hillary super PAC (political action committee), which aims to raise funds and rally enthusiasm for the former first lady should she decide to run.

"America is Ready for Hillary and we need your help to ensure that when she is ready to take up this challenge, we are on the ground ready to help her," reads the site when viewers click on the difficult to miss "Contribute" tab.

Since leaving the State Department on February 1, Hillary herself has fueled speculation that she is readying for a return to politics.

While the next US presidential election is years away, polls show Hillary has a strong edge over other possible contenders.

Mandela 'much better' after week in hospital

AFP, Johannesburg



Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela is "much better" and responding satisfactorily to treatment after a week in hospital suffering from pneumonia, the South African presidency said yesterday.

The frail 94-year-old anti-apartheid hero is steadily improving and doctors are happy with his progress, President Jacob Zuma's office said in a statement.

"His doctors say he continues to respond satisfactorily to treatment and is much better now than he was when he was admitted to hospital on the 27th of March 2013," it said.

"He has been visited by family and continues to make steady progress."

No details were given on a possible release from the undisclosed hospital where he is being treated.

The Nobel peace laureate was admitted shortly before midnight a week ago, his third hospital stay since December.

Israel strikes Gaza after rocket fire

AFP, Jerusalem

Defence Minister Moshe Yaalon yesterday warned that Israel would respond to any attacks on its territory and not allow its people to come under fire "in any form".

His warning was issued after militants in Gaza fired a rocket at southern Israel, and as a Syrian mortar shell and small arms fire hit the Israeli-occupied sector of the Golan Heights.

The Israeli military was quick to respond in both cases, with a tank firing back across the Syrian armistice line towards the source of fire and the air force mounting three air strikes on Gaza, in the first such raids in more than four months.

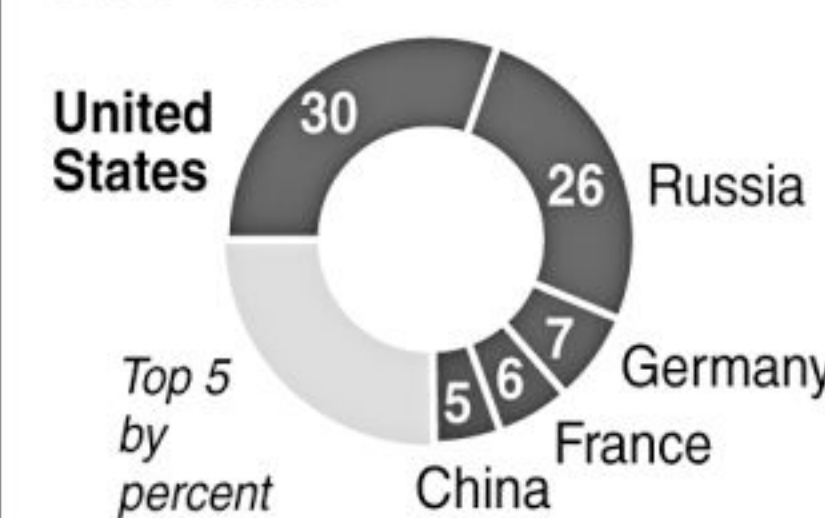
"We shall not allow in any form the establishment of a routine of sporadic firing at our civilians or our forces," Yaalon said in remarks communicated from his office.

Yaalon said Gaza's Hamas rulers were responsible for any fire directed at Israel from the coastal enclave, and in the same way, President Bashar al-Assad's regime was to blame for whatever fire emanated from Syria.

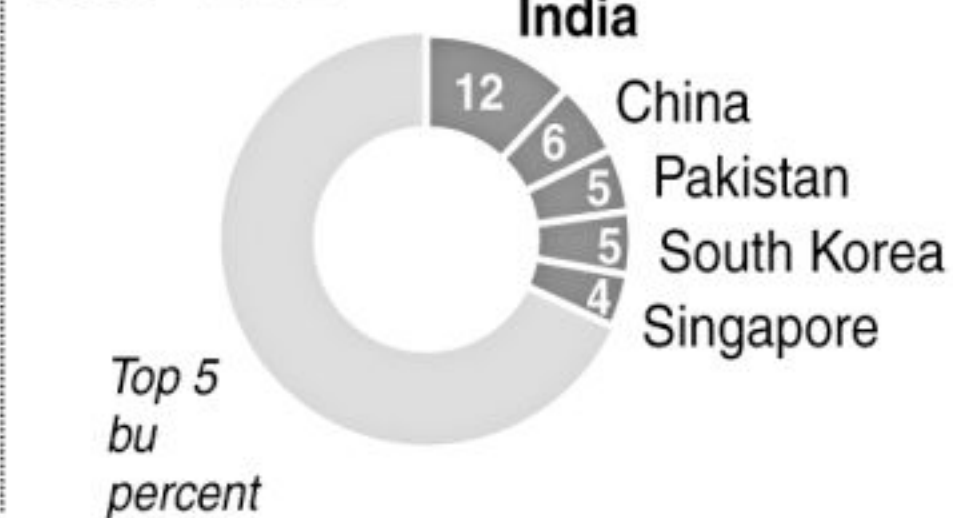
The global arms trade

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday adopted the first-ever accord to regulate the \$80-billion-a-year conventional arms trade

Biggest exporters 2008 - 2012



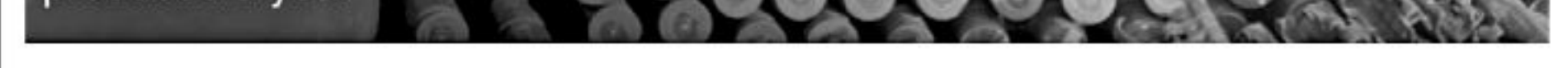
Biggest importers 2008 - 2012



Ammunition

Global trade in ammunition worth \$4.3 billion

12 billion bullets produced a year



France in uproar over minister's tax scam

AFP, Paris



Francois Hollande and Jerome Cahuzac

French President Francois Hollande yesterday vowed that a new law on the "publication and control" of ministers' wealth would be presented within weeks, after his ex-budget minister was charged in a tax evasion probe.

Hollande said the former minister, Jerome Cahuzac, "did not benefit from any protection" from top officials and that his actions were an "insult to the Republic".

Hollande promised "a ruthless fight against conflicts between public and private interests and to ensure the publication and control of the wealth of ministers and parliamentarians."

He said the government would submit a law to parliament on these measures "in the weeks to come".

The president also said elected officials convicted of tax fraud or corruption would be banned from holding public office and that new measures would be

Spain's princess dragged into corruption case

AFP, Madrid



Princess Cristina

Spain's Princess Cristina has been summoned to testify as a suspect in a corruption case, a judicial source said yesterday, dealing a damaging blow to the prestige of the royal family including her father King Juan Carlos.

It is the first time a member of the Spanish royal family has been called to appear in a court of law on suspicion of wrongdoing.

The 47-year-old princess must testify on suspicion of influence peddling on April 27 at the court in Palma on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, the judicial source said on condition of anonymity.

The case, which was opened at the end of 2011, is centred on allegations of embezzlement and influence peddling against her husband, former Olympic handball player Inaki Urdangarin, and his former business partner, Diego Torres.

The pair are suspected of syphoning off money paid by regional governments to stage sports and tourism events to the non-profit Noos Institute, which Urdangarin chaired from 2004 to 2006.

Until now, the princess had avoided being dragged formally into the case, although accusations had been mounting up against her.

UN arms treaty lacks consensus: China

AFP, Beijing

There is no consensus on an international arms trade treaty, major weapons exporter China said yesterday, after it abstained as the UN General Assembly passed the measure by 154 votes to three.

The only votes against the first treaty on the conventional arms trade were from Syria, North Korea and Iran.

The 23 countries abstaining included Russia and China, ranked respectively as the number two and five weapons exporters by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute think tank, and major buyers Egypt and India.

"We are also in favour of a treaty to regulate arms trade but China is not in favour of pushing through a treaty at the General Assembly," Beijing's foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said at a regular press briefing.

The first major arms accord since the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty aims to bring transparency and

protection of human rights to the often murky industry.

It covers the trade -- worth an estimated \$80 billion a year -- in tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles, missile launchers and small arms.

Countries abiding by the treaty would establish national controls on arms exports, and would have to ensure that weapons being exported would not be used in genocide, war crimes, or by terrorists or organised crime.

The passage of the resolution came after four weeks of talks in July ended in failure, with top producers and buyers battling to chip away at the sales conditions and exclude entire categories from the accord.

Campaign group Amnesty International has highlighted that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- account for more than half global sales of conventional arms.