



Heads of state and international organisations pose for a family photo during the G20 summit in Saint Petersburg yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Strikes could worsen humanitarian crisis

UN chief makes impassioned plea at G20; Syria urges US Congress to block attack; Russia issues new warning

AFP, Saint Petersburg

UN chief Ban Ki-moon made an impassioned plea yesterday against military action in Syria, warning that it could spark further sectarian violence in a country already suffering from a humanitarian crisis "unprecedented" in recent history.

Meanwhile, the head of Syria's parliament has urged the US Congress to vote against military action targeting the Syrian regime, state news agency SANA said yesterday.

"Any military intervention would be illegal because Syria is a sovereign country and does not represent a threat to the United States, and any strike would not be authorised by the (UN) Security Council," Lahham said urging diplomacy to solve the crisis.

Speaking at a humanitarian meeting hosted by Britain on the sidelines of the G20 summit, Ban called on world powers to put aside their differences over the Syrian conflict, and to take concerted action to get desperately needed aid to the population.

"I must warn that ill-considered military action could cause serious and tragic consequences, and with an increased threat of further sectarian violence," Ban said.

About third of Syria's pre-war 20.8 million population has fled abroad or have been forced from

their homes during the popular uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime which is now in its third year, UN refugee agency data showed.

"This is a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions in recent history," Ban said.

But "as some flee the country, others dig in to fight," Ban said, pointing to the need therefore to "avoid further militarisation of the conflict and revitalise the search for a political settlement instead."

With a political solution proving elusive as world leaders dig in their heels over their entrenched positions, Ban called for unity in securing humanitarian aid for the population.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday warned the United States against targeting Syria's chemical arsenal.

"With particular concern we perceive the fact that military infrastructure facilities securing the integrity and safety of Syria's chemical arsenal are among the possible targets for military strikes," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

"In this respect we warn US authorities and their allies against striking any chemical facilities and adjacent territories," the statement said.

"Such actions would represent a dangerous new turn in the tragic development of the Syria crisis," the ministry said, warning that the strikes could prompt the release of highly toxic substances.

## CONGRESS'S MANDATE ON SYRIA Obama may have to wait 2 more weeks

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Barack Obama may not be able to seek over-all congressional support for an attack on Syria for as long as a fortnight, amid signs he has failed to build an international alliance at the G20 and still faces the prospect of heavy defeat in the House of Representatives.

Sources at the G20 expected a vote in the Senate next week but a delay for at least for another week in the House. But the Republican-controlled House - where Obama faces his toughest opposition - has yet to even agree on the text of a resolution. Current calculations suggest Obama will lose in the House substantially.

Unless both Houses adopted the same resolution, which is unlikely, additional time would also be required to synchronise the two resolutions in order for a unified congressional position on the limits of force to emerge.

The slow timetable would give the White House longer to win over opinion, as well as increase the possibility that the UN weapons inspectors will report definitively on whether chemical weapons were used on 21 August.

The UN report will not ascribe responsibility for the attack, and David Cameron admitted scepticism that he would ever be able to persuade the Vladimir Putin that the attack was carried out by forces loyal to President Assad.

The longer timeframe also risks anger dissipating over the attack.

## Assad using chemical weapons: EU

AFP, Vilnius

Evidence points that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons in an attack near Damascus last month, EU defence ministers have concluded.

"There are many signs that the regime used the (chemical) weapons," Lithuanian Defence Minister Juozas Olekas said as EU counterparts met in the Baltic state, which currently holds EU's rotating presidency.

Olekas said that although all his fellow ministers believed those responsible must be held accountable" there were "a variety of opinions" on what should be done in response.

Another EU official who spoke on condition of anonymity said France and Denmark were among the most vocal supporters of military intervention against the Assad regime, while Italy and Spain remained more sceptical.

## SURVEILLANCE ROW Obama promises answers by Wednesday: Brazil

AFP, Brasilia

US President Barack Obama has promised answers by Wednesday to allegations of US spying on Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, her government said yesterday.

Obama made the commitment to Rousseff, who met with the US president on Thursday on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Russia, the Brazilian presidency said in a statement.

"According to Dilma, Obama assumed direct and personal responsibility for the investigation of the allegations of espionage," it said.

Brazilian Foreign Minister Luiz Alberto Figueiredo is to meet next Wednesday with US National Security Adviser Susan Rice to discuss the matter, it said.

Rousseff also said at a news conference after the G20 summit that she will propose at the United Nations new rules concerning invasion of privacy.

Brazil and Mexico were angered by disclosures this week by US journalist Glenn Greenwald that the US National Security Agency had spied electronically on Rousseff and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto.

Rousseff had halted preparations for an October 23 state visit to Washington, while Pena Nieto had stressed in telephone call with Obama that the allegations needed to be investigated and any wrongdoing punished.

The NSA program allegedly allowed agents to access the entire communications network of the President Rousseff and her staff, including telephone, Internet and social network exchanges.



### NEWS IN brief

#### N Korea reopens hotline to South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday reconnected a military hotline to the South that was cut earlier this year at the height of cross-border tensions, Seoul's government said.

The line -- one of the two remaining inter-Korea military hotlines -- was disabled in late March weeks after the North's third nuclear test and the following month a joint industrial zone was shut down.

#### India business favours Modi to be PM

AFP, New Delhi

India's business community strongly supports Hindu hardliner Narendra Modi to be the next premier, a poll showed yesterday.

with the ruling Congress party's heir-apparent, Rahul Gandhi, trailing a distant second.

The Nielsen/Economic Times newspaper poll of 100 corporate leaders showed 74 percent wanted Modi to be prime minister while just seven percent believed Gandhi would be

#### EU court scraps Iran nuclear sanctions

AFP, Luxembourg

One of the European Union's top courts yesterday annulled an EU asset freeze imposed on seven Iranian banks and other companies for their alleged involvement in the country's contested nuclear programme.

The European Tribunal said its action would not have immediate effect and the sanctions will remain in place for two months and 10 days pending an EU appeal against its findings.



A Syrian man walks down a destroyed street in the centre of Deir Ezzor, the largest city in eastern Syria yesterday. While world leaders keep failing to reach deal for peace in Syria, the country suffers one of the worst humanitarian crisis of decades.

## Netherlands liable for Bosnia deaths

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Netherlands has been ordered to pay compensation for the deaths of Bosnian Muslims in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in a ruling that opens up the Dutch state to compensation claims from relatives of the rest of the 8,000 men and youths who died.

The judgment by Holland's supreme court is the final decision in a protracted claim brought by relatives of three Muslim men who were expelled by Dutch soldiers from a United Nations compound during the Balkans conflict then killed by Bosnian Serb forces.

Although the case related only to the murder of three victims, it confirms the precedent that countries that provide troops to UN missions can be held responsible for their conduct.

The case was brought by Hasan Nuhanovic, an interpreter who lost his brother and father, and relatives of Rizo Mustafic, an electrician who was killed. They argued that all three men should have been protected by Dutch peacekeepers. Mustafic and Nuhanovic were employed by the Dutch, but Nuhanovic's father and brother were not.

The men were among thousands who had sought shelter in the UN compound as Bosnian Serb forces commanded by General Ratko Mladic overran the area on 11 July 1995. Two days later the outnumbered Dutch peacekeepers bowed to pressure from Mladic's troops and forced thousands of Muslim families out of the compound.



## Australia PM heads for poll wipe-out

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday vowed to fight to the end despite polls showing him heading for an election wipe-out as rival Tony Abbott looked forward to getting straight to work.

A Galaxy survey in the Sydney Daily Telegraph, a day before voters cast their ballots, found Rudd had failed to make any inroads on the conservative opposition leader. On a two-party basis, the ruling Labor party was trailing 47 to 53 percent, with the newspaper saying Abbott's Liberal/National coalition could pick up as many as 20 to 25 extra seats in the lower House of Representatives.

This would give them more than 90 seats in the 150-seat parliament.

An overwhelming 78 percent of the 1,503 people questioned said Abbott had performed better during the election campaign. Just eight percent said Rudd, with the rest undecided.

But the prime minister, who has struggled for traction after toppling Julia Gillard just weeks before calling the election, said he was not ready to give up.

"I believe I can win the election," Rudd said yesterday evening.

Despite his fighting words, Rudd appears to have an insurmountable task with all the nation's main newspapers backing Abbott in election eve editorials.

Voting is mandatory in Australia and by yesterday afternoon some three million of the 14.7 million enrolled voters had already cast their ballots at pre-polling stations and via postal votes, the electoral commission said.

## Author's killing by 'Taliban' shocks West Bengal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The killing of Indian author Sushmita Banerjee by suspected Taliban militants in Afghanistan on Thursday has left the literary circle in West Bengal "shocked" and disturbed at the "inhuman" incident.

49-year-old Banerjee, who hails from Kolkata, wrote her first book called "Kabuliwalar Bangali Bou", a reference to her businessman-husband Jaanbaz Khan. After marriage, Banerjee converted to Islam and was named Syed Kamala.

Luminaries in the world of Bengali literature, including Mahasweta Devi, Sirshendu Mukherjee and Shankha Ghosh have strongly condemned the incident saying the act by alleged Taliban militants goes against humanity.

Magsaysay award recipient Mahasweta Devi said, "It is tragic and I am shocked."

Author Sirshendu Mukherjee hailed Banerjee as "courageous" and said her killing was "is not only barbaric but also uncivilised. Eminent author Suchitra Bhattacharya said Banerjee's writings will influence future generations of Afghanistan to fight against Taliban.

However, the Taliban yesterday denied it was behind her murder. The 49-year-old was dragged out of her husband's house by masked gunmen in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province late Wednesday and repeatedly shot.

## Japan urges reset in ties with China

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's prime minister urged the Chinese president to reset dangerously frayed ties between Asia's two largest economies when they met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Russia.

The meeting was the first between leaders of the two countries since relations took a nosedive last year over the ownership of uninhabited islands, in a row that has led to warnings of a possible armed confrontation.

"Prime Minister Abe explained (to Xi) about our thoughts that we should develop Japan-China relations by going back to the original point of the strategic, mutually beneficial relationship," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters in Tokyo.

Despite the huge economic importance of the relationship between Asia's two largest powers, the pair have not met since the hawkish Abe took office in December and Xi in March.

Xinhua, which called the encounter "polite", cited Xi as telling Abe that Beijing wants to improve ties "on the basis of the four Chinese-Japanese political documents" -- a reference to agreements hammered out from the early 1970s onwards as the two countries normalised relations.

## US drone kills senior Haqqani leader

AFP, Peshawar

US missiles yesterday killed a senior commander in the al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network, wanted for kidnappings and sending hundreds of foreign fighters into Afghanistan, Pakistani officials said.

Mullah Sangeen Zadran, blacklisted as a terrorist by the United Nations and United States, was among six fighters killed in a drone strike in the tribal district of North Waziristan.

The United States has blamed the Haqqani network, a faction of the Taliban waging a 12-year insurgency in Afghanistan, for a series of high-profile attacks in recent years.

Two Pakistani intelligence officials, who spoke to AFP on condition of anonymity, confirmed his death and said an Arab fighter was also among the dead.

## Hillary, Tenzing to have peaks named after them



THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Nepal is set to name two Himalayan peaks after Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, the men who first climbed Mount Everest 60 years ago.

Hillary, a New Zealander, and Tenzing, who grew up in the valleys around the 8,850-metre peak, reached the top of the world's highest mountain on 29 May 1953 as part of a British expedition.

A government panel has now recommended that two unnamed mountains be called Hillary Peak and Tenzing Peak "to honour their contribution to mountaineering in Nepal". The two peaks - Hillary's at 7,681m and Tenzing's at 7,916m - have never been climbed and are among a batch of new summits expected to be opened to foreigners next spring. Officials hope the peaks will boost tourism in Nepal, home to 8 of the world's 14 highest mountains.