

NEWSIN brief

Egypt army storms Islamist-held town

AP, Cairo

Security forces backed by armored vehicles and helicopters yesterday stormed a town south of Cairo that had been held for over two months by militants loyal to the ousted Islamist president, swiftly taking control despite some resistance from gunmen.

Local activists Adel Shafiq and Ezzat Ibrahim said a joint force of army and police rolled into the town of Darga, about 300 kilometers south of the Egyptian capital, before dawn on Monday. They said there were about 10 minutes of intense gunfire, followed by sporadic shots as government forces began house-to-house searches to arrest militants.

Typhoon hits Japan

AP, Tokyo

A powerful typhoon lashed Japan with torrential rain yesterday, leaving two dead as it damaged homes and flooded parts of the country's popular tourist destination of Kyoto, where 260,000 people were ordered to evacuate to shelters.

Typhoon Man-yi, packing wind speeds of 162 kilometers per hour Monday night, was centered off the northern coast and heading to the northern main island of Hokkaido, dumping more heavy rain.

3 women shot dead in Pak 'honour' crime

AFP, Peshawar

Relatives have shot dead three women in a lawless tribal area of northwest Pakistan after one of them left her husband, officials said yesterday.

The "honour" killings happened in Jawaki village in the Darra Adam Khel district, between the cities of Peshawar and Kohat. Relatives shot the three dead at their house late Sunday and buried them on Monday morning.

Indonesia volcano erupts; flee 6,000

AP, Medan

Nearly 6,000 people were evacuated from their villages following the eruption of Mount Sinabung in western Indonesia, an official said yesterday.

The 2,600 m volcano in North Sumatra province erupted early on Sunday after being dormant for three years, sending thick ash into the sky with small rocks pelting neighbouring villages, said National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho.

Iran to send cat astronaut into space

AP, Tehran

Iran's hunt for its next animal astronaut may turn to the distinctive and locally named Persian cat, an official said yesterday, in another possible step by the country's ambitious aerospace program that has also raised Western concerns about spillover military applications.

The report by the official IRNA news agency comes seven months after Iran claimed it launched a monkey out of earth's atmosphere and successfully returned it home. The account, however, faced international questions after photos appeared to show different monkeys in pre- and post-launch images.

Gun attack kills top Afghan policewoman

AFP, Kabul

The top policewoman in Afghanistan's restive south died yesterday after being shot by assassins, just months after her predecessor was gunned down, in the latest attack to highlight the threat to women in public life.



US Secretary of State John Kerry and British Foreign Secretary William Hague sit yesterday opposite French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius as they meet at the Foreign Ministry in Paris on the Syria crisis. Britain, France and the United States yesterday agreed to step up their backing for rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Story on page 16).

Iran will accept any elected Syria ruler

AP, Tehran

Iran's President Hasan Rouhani says his country will accept anyone as ruler of Syria who is elected by the Syrian people.

His remarks reported by the official news agency IRNA are a slight change of emphasis from comments by other Iranian leaders, which have often emphasized Iran's support for its ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, and blamed the West for the rebellion against him.

Syria plans a presidential election in 2014, but few in the opposition take the vote seriously or believe it can be held amid the country's civil war.

UN team probing 14 chemical attacks Syria deal only a step to ending war

AFP, Geneva

UN-mandated human rights investigators said yesterday they were probing 14 alleged chemical weapons attacks in Syria, but said they were still unable to pin the blame on either side.

"We're investigating 14 cases of alleged chemical weapons use," said Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, head of an independent commission inquiry set up by the UN Human Rights Council.

Pinheiro told reporters that given the difficulties in gathering evidence, it was still not possible to establish responsibility for the attacks, committed since the inquiry team started its work in September 2011, six months after the conflict began.

The comments came after he presented a fresh report on Syria to the Human Rights Council. A previous report had mentioned only four attacks, in March and April.

The commission steered by Pinheiro has been refused access to Syria by the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which has also declined since October 2012 to respond to its requests for

information.

But after holding out for almost a year, Syria appeared to have given some ground to the four-member team by last week when its UN ambassador invited former international war crimes prosecutor Carla del Ponte to visit the country.

Del Ponte, known for her relentless pursuit of criminals from the 1990s Balkan wars, said she rejected the invitation because she was only invited in a personal capacity and that the full team wanted access.

"I took the opportunity to speak with the Syrian ambassador and tell him that if, as it is said by the Syrian government, they were not using chemical weapons, it's time to invite the commission to investigate," she told reporters.

"I gave him an opportunity. I'm still expecting an answer," she added.

Pinheiro went to Syria in June 2012 after being invited in a personal capacity -- though he made it clear to Damascus that he was acting as head of the inquiry team, and rejected a subsequent invitation, he said Monday.

AFP, Beirut

A US-Russian deal aimed at eliminating Syria's chemical weapons may be a breakthrough but it does not pave the way to solving the brutal conflict, analysts and the opposition say.

"The agreement is a first step but not the solution to the Syrian crisis," said Khattar Abou Diab, Paris-Sud professor of international relations.

"We stand to see the tragedy continue in one form or another, as attention is focused on the chemical issue," he added.

Saturday's accord, announced in Geneva after three days of talks between US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, sees Syria's chemical arsenal being handed over to the international community and destroyed by mid-2014.

The deal, which Abou Diab dubbed "fragile", lays out a framework for Damascus to hand over its chemical stockpile, but does not specify how the warring parties can overcome their differences.

The agreement between Washington and Moscow, which support opposing sides in the conflict, averted a possible US-led strike against President Bashar al-Assad's regime after it was accused of

using chemical weapons to kill hundreds of people near Damascus on August 21.

A total of more than 110,000 people have been killed in Syria's 30 months of civil war, according to a monitoring group.

More than a year ago, the US and Russia had agreed to prepare a conference dubbed Geneva II that would bring rebels and regime representatives to the negotiating table.

But that initiative has all but stalled amid fundamental disagreements, particularly over who should represent the warring parties at the talks.

The main opposition National Coalition insists that Assad's regime must not be represented at Geneva II, while Damascus says Assad will remain in power until elections scheduled for 2014 are held.

"Without agreement from the Coalition and its regional and international backers, there can be no political solution in Syria," said Abou Diab.

The Paris-based analyst also said he doubts Damascus will fully comply with its international pledges.

"The regime will start to manoeuvre when inspectors start arriving, and to manipulate the locations" of the weapons, said Abou Diab.

NEWS ANALYSIS

ITALY CRUISE SHIP WRECK FREED FROM ROCKS

Members of the US salvage company Titan and Italian firm Micoperi work at the wreck of Italy's Costa Concordia cruise ship near the harbour of Giglio Porto yesterday. Salvage workers will attempt to raise the cruise ship, in the largest and most expensive maritime salvage operation in history, so-called "parbuckling", to rotate the ship by a series of cables and hydraulic machines. Thirty-two people died when the ship, with 4,200 passengers onboard, hit rocks and ran aground off the island of Giglio in January 2012.

PHOTO: AFP



12 killed in Washington shooting

CNN, Washington

Twelve people were killed yesterday after at least one shooter opened fire in a rampage at a Navy yard in the US capital, putting government buildings on lockdown and sending police SWAT teams rushing to the scene.

One suspect is dead, but two other gunmen may be on the loose, Washington Police Chief Cathy Lanier said.

"Right now we have multiple pieces of information to suggest that we had at least two other people seen with firearms. ... These are people that we believe are involved in some way," Lanier said. She declined to provide specifics about why authorities believe they were involved.

Authorities are looking for a white man and a black man in military-style clothing who could be connected to the shooting.

A dozen people are confirmed dead after the shooting at the Washington Navy Yard, Lanier said, and others are injured.

Who opened fire at the headquarters for Naval Sea Systems Command -- and why -- remains unclear.

"We still don't know all the facts. But we do know that several people

have been shot and some have been killed," President Barack Obama said earlier Monday afternoon. "So we are confronting yet another mass shooting. And today it happened on a military installation in our nation's capital."

Obama called the shooting a "cowardly act" that targeted military and civilians serving their country.

"They know the dangers of serving abroad," he said, "but today they faced the unimaginable violence that we wouldn't have expected here at home."

Earlier, authorities said a gunman dressed in all black had fired shots inside the Navy yard, injuring at least 10 people.

The violence started unfolding at 8:20 a.m. when several shots were fired inside the headquarters for Naval Sea Systems Command in southeast Washington.

Two witnesses told CNN affiliate WJLA-TV that they heard a fire alarm go off in the building where they worked, then saw a man with a rifle down the hallway as they exited the building.

"He aimed the gun and fired our way," a man who identified himself as Todd Brundidge told WJLA, adding, "I couldn't believe it."

People frantically tried to run out

of the building, Brundidge said.

"Everyone was going down the stairs. They were pushing. They were shoving. People were falling down," he told WJLA. "As we came outside, people were climbing the wall trying to get over the wall to get out. It was just crazy."

The injured included a Washington police officer who has been hospitalized, and a base security guard officer, said Metropolitan Police Department spokeswoman Saray Leon.

Three people, including the D.C. police officer, were admitted to MedStar Washington Hospital Center with multiple gunshot wounds. They are expected to survive, chief medical officer Janis Orłowski told reporters.

One person was pronounced dead at George Washington University Hospital, according to Dr Babak Sarani, chief of trauma and acute care there.

Meanwhile, at the Navy yard, helicopters hovered overhead. In one chopper, there appeared to be a police sniper peering out, with a scope at the ready.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives sent a team of about 20 special agents to the scene, a law enforcement official said. The team was

the same group that helped apprehend Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the official said.

Police spokesman Chris Kelly earlier described a suspect as an adult male, about 6 feet tall with a bald head and medium complexion, dressed in a black top and black jeans.

Emergency personnel, the FBI, U.S. Capitol Police and local D.C. police responded to the shooting, shutting down traffic in the area on the District's south side along the Anacostia River. Some people were evacuated, and others sheltered in place.

Paul Williams, who works at a nearby nonprofit, was headed to his office when he witnessed panic at the Navy yard.

"I heard four rapid bangs -- bang, bang, bang, bang," he said.

At first, he thought it was construction noise, but less than a minute later, he saw hundreds of people coming toward him.

"I didn't know what was happening. I just ran with them," Williams said. "Everyone seemed scared. People were crying. People were being consoled and calling loved ones and family."

Security was stepped up at the Pentagon.

India-China boundary row 'not insurmountable'

PTI, New Delhi

Holding that the boundary dispute between India and China is "not an insurmountable issue", external affairs minister Salman Khurshid yesterday said the two countries are committed for the "eradication" of such "irritants" from their relationship.

"It is a fact that we have an undefined boundary and therefore differences in perception, something that appears from time to time to become an insurmountable problem. But in our hearts, we know that it is not an insurmountable problem but also that both of us are committed for eradication and removal of these irritants in our relationship," Khurshid said.

The minister's statement comes in the backdrop of increased incidents of incursions along the LAC by the Chinese Army, after which the government had to explain its stand on the issue in Parliament and outside.

Chinese minister of state council information office Cai Mingzhao, who was also present at the event, said the two countries should focus more on the positive happenings.

Speaking at the inauguration of the India China Media Forum, Khurshid said the two sides "need to talk more to know each other better to fructify the full potential of this relationship between them."

Dilip Kumar's health condition now stable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The condition of Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar, who was admitted to a hospital in Mumbai on Sunday night after complaining of discomfort, is stable, his family said yesterday.

Maharashtra state Minorities Development Minister Naseem Khan, who visited the hospital this morning, said the actor's condition was stable.

The thespian, known for his memorable roles in films like 'Mughal-e-Azam', 'Madhumati', 'Devdas', 'Ganga Jamuna' to name a few, turned 90 last December.

Dilip Kumar alias Muhammad Yusuf Khan was born on December 11, 1922, in Peshawar (now in Pakistan).

With a film career spanning six decades, he was the first to receive Filmfare Best Actor honour when the awards were started in 1954. With eight wins, Dilip Kumar shares with Shah Rukh Khan the record for the most number of Filmfare awards won in that category.

He was honoured with Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest film award, in 1994 for his outstanding contribution to cinema.

He was also nominated to Rajya Sabha for a term from 2000 to 2006.

In 1998, he was awarded the Nishan-e-Imtiaz, the highest civilian award conferred by government of Pakistan.

