

# UN chemical weapons inspectors leave Syria

Disarmament team arrives in Lebanon

AFP, Damascus

UN experts wrapped up their investigation of alleged gas attacks in Syria yesterday, as a chemical weapons disarmament team arrived in neighbouring Lebanon ahead of their trip to Damascus.

President Bashar al-Assad has insisted Syria will comply with a UN resolution under which his regime must turn over its chemical weapons for destruction.

The UN Security Council was scheduled to begin talks yesterday on a statement about the humanitarian crisis in Syria which could include a disputed call to allow cross-border missions, diplomats said.

On the ground in Syria, the violence continued, with regime forces launching air raids in the provinces of Homs and Aleppo, and a car bomb exploding

in Damascus province.

The UN team of chemical weapons experts, which is on its second mission to Syria to investigate seven alleged attacks, left Syria yesterday afternoon, crossing into Lebanon.

The team has said it hopes to present a final report on the alleged attacks by late October.

Earlier this month it submitted an interim report that confirmed the use of the nerve agent sarin in an August 21 attack in the suburbs of Damascus.

The US threatened military action in response, accusing regime forces of deliberately killing hundreds of civilians with rocket-delivered nerve agents.

Syria denied the allegations but agreed to relinquish its chemical arsenal to head off a strike under a US-Russian deal which was enshrined in a landmark UN resolution.

The team of 20 inspectors from the Hague-based Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons overseeing the agreement arrived in Lebanon yesterday, a day before heading to Syria.

The road between Damascus airport and the Syrian capital is the scene of frequent fighting, so the inspectors will travel by road from Beirut instead.

"At this point, we have absolutely no reason to doubt the information provided by the Syrian regime," an OPCW official said Sunday.

In his first comments since the UN resolution was passed on Friday, Assad on Sunday told Italy's Rai News 24 his regime "will comply".

"Of course we will comply with it, and history proves that we have always honoured all treaties we have signed," state news agency SANA quoted him as saying.



Opposition fighters hold a position in the Jubaila neighbourhood of Syria's northeastern city of Deir Ezzor yesterday as the violence in the war torn country continued, with regime forces launching air raids in the provinces of Homs and Aleppo, and a car bomb exploding in Damascus province.

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWSIN brief

### Greece plans new anti-racism law

REUTERS, Athens

The Greek government said yesterday it would soon present a bill targeting racist hate speech, part of a crackdown on the far-right Golden Dawn party after the killing of an anti-fascist rapper.

"(The bill) will be submitted to parliament in a matter of days. It has symbolic and moral value," Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos told reporters, adding that it would align Greek legislation with European standards.

### Militia clashes kill 10 in east DR Congo

AFP, Rd Congo

Fighting between two rival militia forces has killed at least 10 people in the Masisi territory of the east of Democratic Republic of Congo, official and civic sources said yesterday.

"There were clashes between the APCLS (Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo) and elements of the Shaka on Friday and Saturday at Kalembe," John Banyene, chairman of Masisi's civil society association, told AFP.

### Ex-finance minister Ghani to run for Afghan president

AFP, Kabul

Former finance minister Ashraf Ghani yesterday launched his bid to become the next president of Afghanistan, kickstarting the 2014 election race as the first big name to declare his candidacy.

Ghani, who is also a former World Bank academic, confirmed he would run in the April poll to succeed Hamid Karzai as the Nato-led military coalition withdraws and officials seek a peace deal with Taliban militants.

"(I) plan to contest in the upcoming presidential elections," Ghani said on his Twitter account, in a message that was verified by a senior official working in his office.

### Popes to be declared saints in April

BBC ONLINE

Pope John Paul II and Pope John XXIII will be declared saints on 27 April 2014, Pope Francis has announced.

The Pope said in July that he would canonise his two predecessors, after approving a second miracle attributed to John Paul.

Polish John Paul, the first non-Italian pope for more than 400 years, led the Catholic Church from 1978-2005.

Pope John was pontiff from 1958-1963, calling the Second Vatican Council that transformed the Church.

## FODDER SCAM CASE

# Indian court convicts Lalu, 44 others

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

An Indian court yesterday convicted Lalu Prasad Yadav, whose party is an ally of ruling Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, in a corruption case that disqualifies him from Parliament membership and contesting for at least six years.

Another 44 accused, including former Bihar Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra, six politicians and four Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, were also convicted by the court of Pravas Kumar Singh in Ranchi, for fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 37.7 crore from government treasury in what has come to be known as fodder scam.

The court will pronounce the quantum of punishment for Yadav, who heads Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), and the others on October 3. The case was filed against Yadav 17 years ago.

Immediately after the court verdict, Yadav was taken to a high-security jail.

The RJD chief faces immediate disqualification as Lok Sabha member under a recent



Supreme Court order that a law-maker would stand disqualified immediately if convicted by a court for crimes with punishment of two years or more and under some other laws even without jail sentence.

The court has found Yadav guilty in just one of the cases against him -- that of criminal conspiracy, corruption and cheating. The judgement in the other five cases is awaited.

Yadav, who was the chief minister of Bihar state, had to resign following the uncovering of the scam. He came to Ranchi following a court order that Ranchi had the jurisdiction of the case.

Yadav had moved the Supreme Court pleading shifting of his case from the court of Pravas Kumar Singh on the ground of political conspiracy, a plea which was rejected by the apex court, paving the way for the first judgement against him.

There were a total of 56 accused in the fodder scam case. But during the trial, seven accused died, two turned approver, one admitted to the crime and one was discharged.

## Militants seize army HQ in Yemen city

AFP, Aden

Al-Qaeda militants seized army headquarters in Yemeni port city Mukalla yesterday, killing two soldiers and taking many more hostage, in their second major assault in 10 days, military officials said.

Militants from Al-Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Sharia stormed the seaside base after a suicide bomber rammed a car into the entrance.

The militants, who were dressed in special forces uniforms and drew up in four military vehicles, then took much of the garrison hostage, the official said.

The commander of the army's second military region, General Muhsen Hasan, thought initially to have been captured, was outside the building at the time of the attack, another official said.

# Egyptian court upholds jail term for Mursi's PM

REUTERS, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday upheld a one-year prison sentence against former Prime Minister Hisham Kandil, who headed the government of deposed President Mohamed Mursi.

Kandil was sentenced in April, before Mursi's July 3 downfall, for failing to implement a court ruling to renationalise a textile company sold off by the administration of autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Judge Khaled Hassan said the prison sentence must now be carried out.

Mursi appointed Kandil in July 2012, after the Muslim Brotherhood politician won Egypt's first freely contested presidential election. Mursi was deposed by the army on July 3 after mass protests against his rule. He is in detention charged with crimes including inciting the killing of protesters.

The sentence against Kandil related to a 2011 court ruling demanding the government repurchase textile company Tanta Flax and Oils from a Saudi Arabian investor who

bought it in 2005.

Officials in the Kandil government had said renationalising state enterprises was not straightforward and the company had been broken up since it was sold to the foreign investor.

Egyptian courts have issued at least 11 rulings since the revolution that toppled Mubarak ordering the state to reverse deals signed by the former president's administration. The lawsuits have been brought by activists and lawyers who say companies were sold off too cheaply and were representative of corrupt business practices during the Mubarak era.

The subsequent rulings have plunged a number of foreign companies operating in Egypt into legal limbo, exposing the government to the risk of costly international arbitration that could scare off much-needed investment from abroad.

Meanwhile, gunmen in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, a hotbed of Islamist militant activity, killed three policemen and a soldier yesterday while shooting dead a civilian in another attack, officials said.



Iraqis gather at the site of an explosion at the Al-Hussein mosque in the district of al-Musayyib, where 47 people were killed and at least 120 wounded in a suicide attack during a Shiite Muslim funeral being held inside the mosque yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Iran intentions should be judged on deeds: Peres

AFP, The Hague

Israeli President Shimon Peres said yesterday that arch-foe Iran's bid to allay Western fears over its nuclear programme should be judged "by deeds" rather than a mere charm offensive.

Peres was speaking in The Hague during a three-day official trip to the Netherlands, ahead of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the White House.

"We can judge only by the facts and by the deeds," Peres told reporters at the Peace Palace, the seat of the UN's highest legal body, the International Court of Justice.

"I hope that the facts will justify the hopes of many to see a different Iran," Peres said.

Netanyahu is due to meet US President Barack Obama later yesterday to tell him that Iran's nuclear programme must be dismantled and not merely supervised.

He is also expected to tell Obama that Israel will abandon the diplomatic path on Iran's nuclear programme if it is not completely dismantled, according to the diplomatic correspondent of Israel's Channel One television network.

The implication was that Israel may be willing to take unilateral military action against Iran.

The reporter cited sources close to Netanyahu, who headed to New York Sunday vowing to counter the "sweet talk" of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a moderate who has said he wants to resolve the decade-long nuclear stand-off.

Both Israel and the United States have refused to rule out military action to halt Iran's nuclear drive, which they say is aimed at developing atomic weapons, charges adamantly denied by Tehran.

# Julia Gillard explains 'misogyny speech'

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, has explained the motivation behind her famous misogyny speech, saying it was the result of a "crack point" brought about by the now prime minister, Tony Abbott's lecture on sexism.

"The speech was a crack point," Gillard said. "I thought after everything I have experienced, I have to listen to Tony Abbott lecture me about sexism."

"That gave me the emotional start to the speech and once I started, it took on a life of its own."

Gillard said she came to the view that she was getting "the burden but none of the benefits" of being Australia's first female prime minister because, from her first days in the top job, she chose not to put gender "right in the foreground".

She said she was aware of misogyny around her leadership, which included comments in the media, derogatory doctored images and an infamous sexist menu, but chose not to focus on it.

Asked whether she felt it was upsetting, Gillard joked: "More like murderous rage, really, so for my personal liberty, it was a good thing I didn't focus on [sexism]."

"Yes it's about me, but it's about all of us and about the kind of society we want to be

for all of us. We can drop the murderous but we should feel a sense of rage about it because it's only something that really spurs you on to action that is going to change."

In a wide-ranging discussion with feminist writer Anne Summers to a sold-out crowd at the Sydney Opera House, Gillard also urged support for progressive voices in the media, elaborated on her opposition to gay marriage and gave former colleague and frontbencher Tanya Plibersek a ringing endorsement as a future Labor leader.

Gillard revealed she would be taking up a role as a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute in Washington, working on global education issues as well as her professorship at the University of Adelaide.

In front of an overwhelmingly supportive crowd who cheered regularly throughout the interview, Gillard rejected the suggestion that she had undermined Rudd before toppling him as leader in 2010, saying she spent every day as his deputy working for the good of the Labor party.

She described her term, over the life of a hung parliament after the 2010 election, as a "perfect political storm", buffeted by a "hard-hitting opposition campaign" by Abbott and the leadership instability, though she did not name Kevin Rudd.



## Fresh fighting in Mali rebel bastion

AFP, Bamako

Insurgents launched a fresh attack on the Malian army in the rebel bastion of Kidal yesterday, the military told AFP, in renewed fighting since the breakdown of peace talks.

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which is fighting for autonomy in northern Mali, ambushed soldiers at a central bank, the scene of a fierce firefight on Sunday night, a senior Malian army officer told AFP.

"Our position at the bank in Kidal was attacked early this morning by MNLA troops. We responded and we have brought the situation under control," the officer said.

Panicked residents ran back into their homes in the busy downtown area as gunshots rang out around 7:00 am (0700 GMT), an aide of the regional governor Adama Kamissoko said.

# Turkey PM announces reforms key to Kurdish peace process

AFP, Ankara

Turkey yesterday moved to scrap restrictions on the use of the minority Kurdish language among democratic reforms seen as key to the stalled peace process with the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also announced that women in the civil service, with a few exceptions, will henceforth be allowed to wear the Muslim headscarf.

"Turkey is irreversibly moving in the direction of democracy," Erdogan told a news conference. "This is a historic moment, an important stage."

Kurdish-language education will be permitted in private schools, and candidates in elections will be allowed to campaign in Kurdish, Erdogan announced.

The reforms will also aim to ease rules preventing pro-Kurdish and other smaller parties from entering parliament, he said.

Turkey has long refused to recognise the Kurds, a largely Sunni Muslim people who were considered cofounders of the new republic born from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

The minority of some 15 million has complained of discrimination at the hands of the Turkish state, which they claim deprived them of their Kurdish identity and stigmatised them as "mountain Turks".

Among other reforms the prime minister announced, schoolchildren will no longer be required to recite the pledge of allegiance -- "How happy is the one who calls himself a Turk" -- each morning.

In addition, towns can revert to their previous Kurdish names, and a quirky ban on the use of three letters of the Kurdish alphabet that do not exist in Turkish will be lifted, he said.

## ODDLY enough

### 2012 Olympic athletes had bad teeth

AFP, Paris

Many elite athletes who competed at the 2012 Olympic Games had levels of oral health similar to those of poverty-stricken communities, a study said yesterday.

Researchers at University College London examined the teeth and gums of 302 athletes who visited a dental clinic at the London 2012 Olympic Village.

The athletes took part in 25 different sports. About a third of them competed in track and field, 14 percent in boxing, 11 percent in hockey and eight percent in swimming.

Most of the athletes were from Africa, the Americas and Europe.