

ALLEGED COUP BID

Hundreds killed in South Sudan

AFP, Juba

Hundreds of people have died and up to 20,000 others have fled to UN bases in days of fierce fighting in South Sudan's army after an alleged coup bid, officials said.

The United States ordered non-essential embassy staff out of the country, the world's youngest nation and awash with guns after decades of war, amid fears of a descent into wider ethnic violence.

In the capital Juba, gunfire still rang out into the early hours of yesterday morning, an AFP reporter said.

The government ordered Juba airport to re-open, although regional airlines said they were waiting for security guarantees before allowing flights bound for Juba to take off.

Many of Juba's residents have spent the past two days barricaded in their homes, too afraid to move. Others used lulls in the sporadic and often intense battles to grab what belongings they could and flee to safer areas, including UN bases.

President Salva Kiir on Monday accused soldiers loyal to his arch-rival, former vice president Riek Machar who was sacked in July, of staging a coup attempt.

Machar denied any attempt to topple the president, and instead accused Kiir of using the violence to as a pretext to purge any challengers.

The government said 10 key figures, many of them former ministers, have been arrested in the crackdown, and that others, including Machar, were on the run.

UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous told the Security Council that between 400-500 bodies had been taken to



Right-wing Indian Hindu activists dressed as US President Barack Obama take part in a protest near the US Embassy in New Delhi, yesterday. India yesterday vowed to bring the diplomat Devyani Khobragade, top, home at any price after her arrest in New York, as she told how she broke down in tears after being stripped and cavity-searched. The revelation that a high-ranking diplomat could be subjected to such treatment has caused huge outcry in India.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Myanmar opium production soars

AFP, Yangon

Opium production in Myanmar soared this year to its highest level in over a decade, the UN said yesterday, with poor poppy farmers increasingly reliant on the crop in unrest-hit borderlands.

Myanmar, the world's second largest opium producer after Afghanistan, saw a 26 percent leap in production this year. It said the 870 tonnes estimated to have been produced in the country in 2013 was the largest since UN and government

Great Train Robber Ronnie Biggs dies

AFP, London

Great Train Robber Ronnie Biggs, whose escape from jail and decades spent on the run made him one of Britain's most notorious criminals, died yesterday at the age of 84, media reports said.

Biggs was part of a gang that robbed the mail train from Glasgow to London on August 8, 1963, seizing £2.6 million -- the equivalent of £46 million today.

Biggs sentenced to 30 years for the crime but escaped after 15 months from a London and settled in Rio. There he had a son, Michael, by a Brazilian girlfriend which ensured him immunity from extra-

Two tickets wins \$636m US lottery

AFP, Washington

Who needs Santa Claus when you hold one of two winning tickets announced in the \$636 million Mega Millions lottery in the United States?

The life-changing stubs for the second richest pot in American lottery history were sold in San Jose, California at a gift shop and at a newsstand in Atlanta, Georgia, CBS news reported, quoting lottery officials after the Tuesday night draw. The jackpot will be split. The names of the winners were not imme-

Hottest November in 134 years'

AFP, Washington

The month of November was the hottest experienced on Earth since record-keeping began in 1880, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Tuesday.

The finding was based on globally averaged land and ocean surface temperatures last month, NOAA said in a statement. The average temperature was 0.78 Celsius (1.40 Fahrenheit), above the 20th century average of 12.9 Celsius (55.2 Fahrenheit),

Disasters cost \$130b in 2013

AFP, Geneva

Disasters including the floods that struck central Europe in June caused global economic losses of about \$130 billion in 2013, reinsurer Swiss Re said yesterday.

The insurance industry is likely to cover about \$44 billion (32 billion euros) of all losses from such catastrophes, the company said, noting that the figure was substantially lower than the \$81 billion seen in 2012, when Superstorm Sandy battered the United States.

June's European floods in Germany, the Czech Republic and neighbouring countries caused losses of around \$18 billion, with \$4.0 billion of that insured, Swiss Re said.

They rank as the second most expensive fresh-water flood on record, but still lie a distant second to the 2011 Thailand flood which led to insured claims of over \$16 billion, Swiss Re underlined. There were also heavy rains and floods in Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Southern Africa and Argentina this year.

In terms of lives lost, last month's Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines was the deadliest single disaster, killing more than 7,000 people, Swiss Re noted.

But despite the devastation wreaked, insured losses are expected to be modest as few people are insured in the Philippines and other developing nations.

India adopts anti-graft law

Lok Sabha passes historic bill; Hazare ends fast

TIMES OF INDIA ONLINE

After eight unsuccessful attempts over the last five decades, India yesterday took the historic step of enacting the Lokpal law by which an anti-corruption watchdog would be established that will have in its purview even the office of the Prime Minister.

The Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill, 2013, was passed by voice vote amid din created by members from Seemandhra region who were protesting against division of Andhra Pradesh to create Telangana state.

The bill was already passed by the Lok Sabha in December 2011 but it came to the house again as it underwent amendments before being approved by the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

Anna Hazare broke his nine-day fast yesterday, shortly after Lok Sabha passed the Lokpal Bill, and announced he would form "watchdog bodies" comprising people of "impeccable integrity" to keep an eye on how the law is enforced.

Looking a bit frail yet brimming with enthusiasm after the landmark bill was passed by the Lok Sabha, Hazare thanked all parties, barring Samajwadi Party, for their support, but obliquely criticised his former protégés in the Aam Aadmi Party, his fellow travellers in the Jan Lokpal movement, who have dubbed the new legislation as "Jokpal" bill.

Hazare, who had been crusading for anti-corruption



ombudsman for long and had forced passage of the bill in the Lok Sabha in 2011 through his fast at Ramlila Maidan, hoped the bill is signed into a law within 1-2 months.

The 76-year-old Gandhian, however, said mere enactment of the law would not serve the purpose and announced he would form "watchdog bodies" in states and districts to keep an eye on how the law was being enforced.

Samajwadi Party and Shiv Sena members, opposing the bill, staged a walk-out in protest, as their counterparts from other parties, including Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi and leader of the opposition

Sushma Swaraj, supported the measure.

Gandhi sought extension of the winter session to pass six more bills which were "part of the comprehensive anti-corruption framework" of the UPA government.

Noting that Lokpal Bill was part of this comprehensive framework, he said the RTI law was the first on the UPA list. The others which remain pending are Prevention of Corruption amendment, right to citizens for time-bound delivery of goods and services, public procurement, foreign bribery, judicial accountability and the whistleblowers bills.

Swaraj supported the measure but attacked the Congress for clamouring to take credit for it, saying "the people of this country and the old man (Anna Hazare) who has undertaken fast several times deserve the credit."

Earlier, Speaker Meira Kumar allowed the bill, as amended by the Upper House, to be laid and taken up for

Turkey leads in jailing journos

AFP, New York

The number of journalists killed and imprisoned fell in 2013 but it was still the second worst year on record for reporters in prison, a US-based watchdog said yesterday.

So far this year, 52 journalists have been killed as a direct result of their work, down from 73 last year, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), based in New York.

For the second consecutive year, Turkey was the world's leading jailer of journalists, followed closely by Iran and China. Those countries accounted for more than half of the 211 journalists imprisoned around the world in 2013.

"Jailing journalists for their work is the hallmark of an intolerant, repressive society," said CPJ executive director Joel Simon. "It is disturbing to see the number of jailed journalists rise in countries like Vietnam and Egypt," he added.

"But it is frankly shocking that Turkey would be the world's worst jailer of journalists for the second year in a row."

CPJ said it was the second worst year since records began in 1990 in

Ukraine PM hails 'historic' Moscow deal

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's prime minister said yesterday that Kiev had avoided bankruptcy and social collapse thanks to a "historic" bail-out deal with Russia, as protesters accused the government of selling out to Moscow.

President Viktor Yanukovych faced angry criticism after Tuesday's deal from Ukraine's opposition who fear it will rob the country of a European future. But Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said it was the only way to rescue the economy.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday agreed to buy \$15 billion of Ukraine's debt in eurobonds and slash its gas bill by a third, a move economists said would stave off the risk of a Ukrainian default for now.

The opposition to Yanukovych fears there must be hidden strings attached to the package, and vowed to keep pushing for early elections and a shelved deal with the European Union.

But Azarov said there was no way Ukraine could have signed the Association Agreement with the European Union as Kiev would have had to have accepted unfeasibly stringent IMF conditions for economic reform.

"The agreements that were signed offer good perspectives for the Ukrainian economy," Azarov said of the Moscow talks, while giving a warning to the thousands still occupying Kiev's Independence Square by saying the government "will not allow anyone to destabilise" the country further.



PHOTO: AFP

An opposition activist hangs pictures of injured protesters to a Christmas tree during an action in front of the government office in Kiev, yesterday. President Viktor Yanukovych faced angry criticism from Ukraine's opposition who accused him of selling out its interests to Russia and robbing the country of a European future after a landmark bail-out deal.

The Rosenberg Diary

A link to Decipher Hitler's 'final solution'

AFP, Washington

The US Holocaust Memorial Museum took possession Tuesday of a Nazi war criminal's long-lost diary and posted it online (www.ushmm.org) to help researchers decipher the thinking behind Adolf Hitler's "final solution."

The Rosenberg Diary, kept by a confidant of Adolf Hitler whose racist theories underpinned Nazi Germany's annihilation of six million Jews and five million others, had been missing since the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials ended in 1946.

For years the museum had been working with US judicial officials and law enforcement agents to recover Alfred Rosenberg's writings, most recently in the hands of an upstate New York publisher.

"Today that search ends," said museum director Sara Bloomfield at a ceremony where the US government formally transferred possession of the 425 pages of typed and handwritten papers.

Juergen Matthaeus of the museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies noted that a chunk of 1942 is missing from the diary and said that the diary on its own contains no stunning revelations. Rather, its



Alfred Rosenberg

real value comes when it is put into the context of Holocaust documentation.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency says it was first taken in the late 1940s by a Nuremberg prosecutor, Robert Kempner, "contrary to law and proper procedure."

Kempner, a German-Jewish lawyer who escaped to the United States during World War II and settled in Pennsylvania, held on to the diary until his death in 1993.

The diary was ultimately traced to the home of outside Buffalo, New York; he had apparently received it from one of Kempner's assistants.

Rosenberg was executed with several other convicted Nazi leaders on October 16, 1946. He was 53.

Shooting at US medical center kills 2

AFP, Los Angeles

A gunman killed one person and critically injured two others before taking his own life Tuesday at a medical center in Nevada, police and witnesses said.

The incident occurred on the third floor of a building connected to the Renown Regional Medical Center in Reno, reports said.

Reno police department deputy chief said: "We have two people confirmed deceased in the building. The shooter is one of the deceased," adding that the fatal wound "appears to be self-inflicted." He gave no other details.

The incident came days after the anniversary Saturday of the Sandy Hook massacre which killed 26 people including 20 children in Newtown, Connecticut.

Ready to act 'with or without' West

Says Saudi Arabia on Syria, Iran

AFP, Washington

The West's policies on Iran and Syria are a "dangerous gamble" and Saudi Arabia is prepared to act on its own to safeguard security in the region, a top Saudi diplomat said Tuesday.

"We believe that many of the West's policies on both Iran and Syria risk the stability and security of the Middle East," the Saudi ambassador to Britain, Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf Abdulaziz, wrote in a commentary in the New York Times.

"This is a dangerous gamble, about which we cannot remain silent, and will not stand idly by," he wrote.

The bluntly-worded warning was the latest in a series of public statements by senior Saudi figures expressing displeasure with US and Western diplomatic initiatives towards Syria and Iran.

Until recently, Saudi leaders rarely voiced public criticism of their Western allies in a decades-long partnership.

But Washington's decision to pull back from military action in Syria and its backing for an interim nuclear deal with Iran has dismayed the oil-rich Saudi kingdom, which views Tehran as a dangerous regional rival.

The Gulf monarchy had "global responsibilities," both political and economic, and he said: "We will act to fulfill these responsibilities, with or without the support of our Western partners."

Tech giants call for major NSA reforms

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The top leaders from world's biggest technology companies called on the US to "move aggressively" to reform the National Security Agency's controversial surveillance operations after discussions with President Obama on Tuesday, resisting attempts by the White House to portray the encounter as covering a range of broader priorities.

Executives from 15 companies, including Google, Apple, Yahoo and Twitter, used a face-to-face meeting with Obama and vice-president Joe Biden to express their concern that the NSA's wide-ranging surveillance activities had undermined the trust of their users.

The meeting came a day after a federal judge ruled that the NSA's bulk collection of Americans' phone records was "almost Orwellian" in scope and probably a violation of the US constitution.

Specific topics that were raised included Prism, an NSA program that collects and mines internet communications, bulk collection of telephone records and reform of the secret Fisa courts. They also discussed the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, a 27-year-old law that allows emails and digital communications older than six months to be seized without a warrant.

The president and his advisers were already considering the recommendations of an NSA review panel set up in the wake of Snowden's revelations. They are also considering the future leadership of the agency, whose director and deputy director are stepping down.