

UKRAINE

CRISIS

'Truce' holds after deadly violence

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych yesterday demanded an extraordinary session of parliament to ease the crisis in the country after five days of deadly clashes between protesters and security forces.

The three main opposition leaders were to hold crisis talks with Yanukovych, as world boxing champion and UDAR (Punch) party leader Vitali Klitschko brokered a truce in the violence between protesters and police.

Speaker Volodymyr Rybak said parliament would discuss the protesters' demands for the government's resignation and the annulment of a controversial anti-protest law at a session expected next week, the presidency said in a statement.

But he did not mention early presidential elections, a key opposition demand.

Activists say five protesters have died in clashes in recent days, marking a new peak in tensions after two months of protests over the government's failure to sign a deal for closer integration with the European Union.

The fighting raged into the night at the epicentre of the clashes on Grushevsky Street in central Kiev, with demonstrators hurling Molotov cocktails and security forces using stun grenades.

However in the morning Klitschko visited the barricades and agreed a truce that would hold until 1800 GMT when the talks between Yanukovych and the opposition are expected to end.

The leader of the opposition Fatherland party, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, had warned the protesters that Yanukovych had 24 hours to agree a peaceful solution.

"If he does not go down that path then we will go forwards together and if it means a bullet to the head, then it is a bullet to the head," he said.



A Ukrainian demonstrator prepare to throw a stone towards riot police as fellow protesters take cover during clashes between pro-EU opposition supporters and security forces in central Kiev, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NSA phone records programme illegal

Says US privacy board

CNN ONLINE

The National Security Agency programme that collects data on nearly every US phone call isn't legal, a privacy review board said yesterday in a newly released report.

Moreover, the five-member Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board said it's been largely useless in thwarting terrorism. The board said it had identified only one instance in which the program helped authorities identify a terrorist in the last seven years. But the board said law enforcement would have found the suspect anyway, even without the NSA programme.

The board doesn't have any legal teeth, so its recommendations won't change government practices the way a court ruling might.

But the findings are a stinging rebuke of President Barack Obama's legal defense of the program, in which the NSA tracks millions of telephone calls each day, harvesting the telephone numbers involved, the time calls are placed and how long they last.

A majority of the board -- formed as part of the federal government's response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks -- agreed with critics of the NSA that the programme raises constitutional concerns.

"The Board concludes that Section 215 does not provide an adequate legal basis to support the programme," it wrote its report. CNN reviewed a copy of the report.

The board said the law authorises the FBI to collect records related to a specific investigation, but not bulk collection of data that "cannot be regarded as 'relevant' to any FBI investigation."

The law also "does not authorise the NSA to collect anything," the board said.

Last week, after a report by an outside review group appointed by Obama, the President announced changes to the programme. Among other things, the NSA must now ask a judge each time an analyst wants to look at the data, and the agency will eventually lose its role as custodian of the information.

Privacy advocates called the changes "window dressing."

UN pushes for peace amid deep divisions

US says Iran's absence won't impact nuke deal

AFP, Geneva

UN mediator Lakhdar Brahimi meets Syria's warring sides behind closed doors yesterday to gauge if they are willing to negotiate face to face after the first day of a peace conference ended in bitter exchanges.

Brahimi was set to meet separately with delegations from President Bashar al-Assad's regime and the opposition in Geneva before full talks resume on Friday.

The UN-sponsored conference -- the biggest diplomatic effort yet to resolve Syria's devastating civil war -- opened in the Swiss town of Montreux on Wednesday with heated disagreements among the two sides and world powers.

Meanwhile, the United States on Wednesday said that Iran's absence from Syria peace talks would have no impact on the nuclear deal being brokered between Tehran and world powers.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Sunday invited Iran to the talks but withdrew his invitation less than 24 hours later amid reservations from the United States and Syrian opposition groups.

State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf described the diplomatic crisis triggered by the invitation as a "fiasco."

"We have been very clear and the Iranians, I think, have been clear, certainly in our discussions, that these are separate issues," she told reporters.

Brahimi was set to first meet with opposi-

tion chief Ahmad Jarba yesterday afternoon and subsequently with the head of the Syrian regime's delegation, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, the UN said.

It remained unclear if he would be able to coax them to sit down at the same table for direct talks, or if their respective international backers, the United States and Russia, would need to shuttle between them.

Expectations are very low for a breakthrough at the conference, which officials have said could last up to 10 days, but diplomats believe that simply bringing the two sides together for the first time is a mark of some progress and could be an important first step.

With no one appearing ready for serious concessions, mediators will be looking for short-term deals to keep the process moving forward, including on localised ceasefires, freer humanitarian access and prisoner exchanges.

In the Swiss ski resort of Davos yesterday, Iranian President Hassan Rohani said elections would be the best way to end Syria's civil war.

"No outside party or power should decide for the Syrian people and Syria as a country," Rouhani told the World Economic Forum.

so far, Syria's civil war has claimed more than 130,000 lives and forced millions from the homes.

Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri late Wednesday called for a halt to the clashes, which according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have killed nearly 1,400 people since January 3.

Iran, Israel cross swords at Davos

AFP, Davos

Iran yesterday stepped up attempts to normalise its relations with the West with a Davos charm offensive that was immediately attacked by Israel as a confidence trick.

On a visit to the Swiss resort aimed at enticing international investors back to Iran, President Hassan Rohani told the World Economic Forum his government was sincere in its desire for a new relationship based on mutual trust and a rebuilding of economic ties that have been shattered by international sanctions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, also speaking at the prestigious gathering, warned the West not to take the media-friendly Iranian's offer at face value, insisting there was no concrete evidence of any fundamental change in the nature of the Islamic regime.

"Hassan Rohani can say something but it doesn't make real," Netanyahu said. "It's false."

He said the Iranian president's claim that Tehran wanted to promote stability and security in the Middle East had "no connection with what is going on the ground," notably in Syria, where he said Iranian Revolutionary Guards and its Hezbollah allies were fighting and killing alongside government forces.

Rohani was making his first international outing since he created a stir at the United Nations in New York in September by outlining his new government's desire for a fresh start in relations with the US and other Western powers.

In his speech, described as a message of friendship and hope by the Forum organisers, he unveiled a proposal to create a new multilateral body tasked with stabilising global energy supplies.

Rohani said Tehran was ready to put some of its extensive oil and gas reserves at the disposal of the proposed new body.

"We are prepared to engage in a serious process to establish a reliable institution for this long-term partnership," he said.

An agreement on a modest easing of the sanctions took effect this week in line with an interim accord on Iran's nuclear capacity agreed between Tehran and major world powers in November.

The interim agreement is intended to pave the way for a fuller accord and a further lifting of sanctions.

In his speech, Rohani described the nuclear accord, which limits his country's ability to enrich uranium and provides for inspections of its facilities, as marking the start of a new phase in relations with the United States.

He said Iran believed a full deal was achievable but also reiterated that the regime would never give up its right to join some 40 other countries in acquiring the capacity to generate nuclear power and use nuclear technology for other peaceful ends.

"We have never sought anything other than peaceful use of nuclear technology and we will not accept obstacles being put in the way of our scientific progress," he said.

Israel believes Iran remains dangerously close to the capacity to build a nuclear missile which would threaten the Jewish state's existence.



Hassan Rohani

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MIDEAST PEACE

EU warns of 'price to pay' if talks fail

AFP, Jerusalem

A top European Union official warned on Wednesday that both Israel and the Palestinians would have a "price to pay" if US-led peace talks collapse.

Speaking to reporters in Jerusalem, Lars Faaborg-Andersen, the EU's ambassador to Israel, also rebuffed charges by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Europe was showing a pro-Palestinian bias.

And he warned that persistent Israeli construction on land seized during the 1967 Six Day War was fuelling private European moves to boycott products and services linked to the settlements.

"It is obvious, and we have made it clear to the parties, that there will be a price to pay if these negotiations falter," he said.

US Secretary of State John Kerry coaxed the two sides back to the negotiating table in July with the aim of securing an agreement within nine months. But the talks have shown very little visible progress, overshadowed by disagreements on security and a flurry of settlement announcements.

Since January 1, Israel has pushed ahead with plans for another 2,791 new settler homes in the West Bank, including annexed east Jerusalem, sparking a wave of international condemnation.

ALTERATION OF PICTURE

Two side-by-side photographs of a Syrian rebel fighter. The left image shows the fighter holding a rifle with a video camera attached to the side. The right image is the same photo but with the camera removed, illustrating the alteration mentioned in the article.

AP sacks Pulitzer winner

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

The Associated Press has announced they have "severed ties" with a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Narciso Contreras after he doctored a photo taken of the conflict in Syria.

News agency AP said it has ended its relationship with Contreras and will remove all of his images from its publicly available photo archive. Contreras was among of a team of five photographers who shared the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news photography from the Syrian war.

The news agency said Contreras recently told its editors he had manipulated a digital picture of a Syrian rebel fighter taken last September, using software to remove a colleague's video camera from the lower left corner of the frame.

A review led by Santiago Lyon, the vice president and director of photography, of 494 other pictures taken by Contreras found this was an isolated incident and no other images had been altered since he joined AP in 2012.

But AP said the alteration breached its requirements for truth and accuracy even though it involved a corner of the image with little news importance.

South Sudan rivals sign ceasefire

AFP, Addis Ababa

South Sudan's government and rebels yesterday signed a ceasefire agreement, pledging to halt fighting within 24 hours and end five weeks of bitter conflict that has left thousands dead.

The United States welcomed the deal as a "critical first step" and called on both parties to implement it swiftly.

The agreement was signed in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa by representatives of South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and rebel delegates loyal to ousted vice president Riek Machar, and was greeted by cheers from regional peace brokers and diplomats.

Mediators from the East African regional bloc IGAD, which has been brokering the peace talks, said the deal will put in place a verification and monitoring mechanism for the truce and allow unrestricted access to aid workers.

South Sudan's government also agreed to free 11 officials close to Machar who were detained after fighting between rival army units broke out on December 15, although no timeline for their release was given.

The fighting has been marked by atrocities committed by both sides, and more than half a million people have been forced from their homes amid a wave of ethnic violence in the already impoverished nation. Aid workers and analysts believe up to 10,000 people have died.

গাজীপুর সিটি কর্পোরেশন

বিশ্ব ইজতেমায় আগত সম্মানিত মুসল্লীদের প্রতি আবেদন

- ❖ পরিষ্কার-পরিচ্ছন্ন পরিবেশ ইমানের অঙ্গ।
- ❖ যত্রতত্র ময়লা-আবর্জনা ফেলবেন না।
- ❖ চলাচলের রাস্তায় রান্না-বান্নার কাজ করবেন না।
- ❖ চলাচলের রাস্তায় ও খোলা স্থানে দোকান-পাট বসাবেন না।
- ❖ হোটেল রেস্তোরাঁয় পচা-বাসি খাবার পরিবেশন করবেন না।
- ❖ সিটি কর্পোরেশন কর্তৃপক্ষ মুসল্লীদের সার্বিক সেবাদানে প্রস্তুত রয়েছে।
- ❖ বিশ্ব ইজতেমার পূর্ণ সফলতা কামনা করি।
- ❖ জরুরি প্রয়োজনে সিটি কর্পোরেশনে যোগাযোগ করুন।

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অধ্যাপক এম.এ. মান্নান
মেয়র
গাজীপুর সিটি কর্পোরেশন

জিডি-৩৭৬

Trierweiler stands by Hollande

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The French first lady Valérie Trierweiler wants to stand by her man when he visits the White House next month, despite his love affair with 41-year-old actress Julie Gayet, Closer magazine reported yesterday.

The magazine -- which exposed the alleged affair almost two weeks ago -- brought forward its normal Friday publication day by 24 hours to make what it claimed were "new revelations".

It alleged that Trierweiler, 49, now resting at the presidential retreat La Lanterne in Versailles, wanted to remain President Hollande's romantic partner and First Lady.

The publication also suggested that she has told friends that she expects to accompany him on a trip to Washington from 9 February.



Valérie Trierweiler

Elysée Palace sources have strongly hinted in recent days that Hollande plans to end their eight year partnership and live alone.

Hollande told a press conference last week that he would "make a statement" before the Washington visit.

The news blog Economie Matin had reported that Trierweiler went on a wrecking spree after he admitted to her that he was having an affair with the actress Julie Gayet. Mobilier National said that there was no truth in these reports.

A former French First Lady, Bernadette Chirac, said in a radio interview that she had sent a "note" of commiserations to Trierweiler.

In a book of autobiographical interviews in 2002, Chirac admitted that the infidelity her husband, Jacques Chirac, had caused pain in her own life.