

WORLD LEADERS ADDRESS THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Refer Syria crisis to int'l criminal court

Says UN chief

AP, United Nations

The UN secretary-general for the first time yesterday called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court, as world leaders including President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin were addressing a global gathering with conflict at center stage.

Ban Ki-moon's state of the world address to leaders from the UN's 193 member states came shortly before Obama, Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani were to speak to the UN General Assembly in the morning session alone.

The UN chief insisted on a political solution to the conflict in Syria, now well into its fifth year with more than a quarter of a million people killed.

Ban said five countries "hold the key" to a political solution to Syria: Russia, the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. He said "innocent Syrians pay the price of more barrel bombs and terrorism" and there must be no impunity for "atrocious" crimes.

The Syrian conflict is "driven by regional powers and rivalries," Ban said.

Ban warned that resources to address these crises are dangerously low. "The global humanitarian system is not broken; it is broke," he said. The UN has just half of what it needs to help people in Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen, and just a third of what's needed for Syria.



US President Barack Obama addresses attendees during the 70th session of the UNGA at the UN Headquarters in New York yesterday.

Putin calls for broad coalition against IS

AFP, United Nations

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday called for a "broad coalition" to fight the Islamic State group in Syria, in his address to the UN General Assembly.

Putin likened the coalition to the "anti-Hitler" alliance that fought together during World War II and said Muslim countries "should play a key role."

"We must address the problems that we are all facing and create a broad anti-terror coalition," Putin said in his address, his first to the world body in a decade.

Putin took to the podium after US President Barack Obama offered to work with Russia and Iran on ending the carnage in Syria, but slammed support for



Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

The Russian leader took aim at the West's refusal to cooperate with Assad's forces to stamp out the Islamic State, which now controls huge swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq.

It is an "enormous mistake to not cooperate with the Syrian group which is fighting the terrorists face-to-face," he said.

"We must acknowledge that nobody other than President Assad's armed forces are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria," Putin added.

Washington has insisted that Assad must leave power as a pre-requisite for any settlement to the conflict, while European powers have softened their stance, signalling he could stay on in an interim role.

Obama slams support for Syria's Assad but says open to talks

AFP, United Nations

US President Barack Obama yesterday took a swipe at Russia and Iran for backing "tyrants" like Syria's Bashar al-Assad but declared in his address to the United Nations that he was ready to work with them to end the conflict.

Obama took the podium at the UN General Assembly ahead of President Vladimir Putin and Iranian leader Hassan Rouhani, with the spotlight firmly on ending the carnage in Syria.

"The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict," the US president said.

Obama argued it would be wrong to support a "tyrant" like Assad, "who drops barrel bombs to massacre

innocent children" and challenged the view that the alternative would be "surely worse."

Washington has insisted that Assad must leave power as a pre-requisite for any settlement to the conflict, while European powers have softened their stance, signalling he could stay on in an interim role.

In his address, Obama did not specifically address Assad's fate, a key bone of contention in efforts to relaunch a bid to end a war that has left more than 240,000 dead since 2011.

But he declared that there could be no return to the pre-war status quo, when Assad held sway.

The world's largest diplomatic gathering was shaping up as a showdown between Obama and Putin

over fighting the Islamic State in Syria and pushing for regime change in Damascus.

Moscow has put Washington on the back foot by dispatching troops and aircraft to the war-torn country and pushing reluctant world leaders to admit that Assad could cling to power.

The Kremlin strongman called in an interview ahead of the UN summit for "a common platform for collective action" against Islamic State jihadists that would supersede a US-led coalition and involve Assad's forces.

On the ground, Russia seems to have already started putting the pieces together by agreeing with Iraq, Syria and Iran that their officers will work together in Baghdad to share intelligence on IS.

Thai junta mulls 'Great Firewall'

Faces opposition over plans to introduce a single gateway

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's junta is facing growing opposition over plans to introduce a single Internet gateway for the country to make it easier to monitor the web and block content.

Tens of thousands of people have signed a petition against the proposal, which has been dubbed the "Great Firewall of Thailand" -- a play on China's draconian Internet censorship programme -- by commentators, analysts and netizens.

News of the proposal first emerged last week when a cabinet order was unearthed by a Thai programmer and spread on social media.

By yesterday afternoon more than 72,000 people had signed a petition on Change.org calling on the government to abandon the proposal.

The cabinet statement, published quietly on a government news website, ordered the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology to "set up a single gateway in order to use it as a tool to control inappropriate websites and information flows from other countries via the Internet."

A ministry spokesman yesterday confirmed to AFP that they were working on the plans and aimed to update the public on the proposals within a week.

Internet gateways are the points on a network where a country connects to the worldwide web.

Initially Thailand's Internet flowed through a single gateway owned by the government.

But the sector was deregulated in 2006, allowing dozens of companies to open their own access points -- resulting in dramatically increased Internet speeds and Thailand emerging as a regional IT hub.

Taliban overrun key Afghan city

Free hundreds of fighters from jail

AGENCIES

The Taliban seized control of half of a major Afghan city yesterday, witnesses said, the first time they have done so since being ousted from power by a US-led invasion.

The hardline Islamist group hoisted its flag over key buildings and the main square of the northeastern city of Kunduz, offering a potentially powerful image in a country that laboured under its rule until 2001.

Meanwhile, Taliban insurgents broke into the main prison in Kunduz, freeing hundreds of fellow Islamist fighters hours after militants captured much of the city, two security officials said.

Armed with rocket-propelled grenades, Taliban militants overwhelmed security guards at the jail in Kunduz city centre, according to two officials there who spoke on condition of anonymity, reports Reuters.

"The Taliban have taken over our neighbourhood, which is part of Kunduz city, I can see their fighters all around," said an AFP journalist in the city, Afghanistan's fifth largest.

He added that some were racing police vehicles around the city and had raised the black and white flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the group's official name) over the homes of government officials.

The Islamist group has been largely absent from cities since being driven from power by the US and its allies.



Migrants and refugees stand in line as they wait to board a train at the registration camp after crossing the Macedonian-Greek border near Gevgelija yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli police, Palestinians clash at Al-Aqsa compound

AFP, Jerusalem

New clashes broke out yesterday between Palestinians and Israeli police who stormed Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, as an expected increase in Jewish visitors to the site over the Sukkot holiday boosted tensions.

Police fired tear gas and stun grenades while young protesters who had pledged a day earlier to "defend" Al-Aqsa threw stones before barricading themselves inside the mosque itself, an AFP journalist said.

According to police, the young protesters had slept overnight at the mosque and also threw petrol bombs at security forces during the clashes which caused a small fire at the entrance to the building.

Sources with the Jordanian-run organisation that administers the site, the Waqf, told AFP that police stun grenades provoked four fires inside the building that were brought under control.

Muslim worshippers who were at the compound after morning prayers as the raid began were forced to leave by police and all gates used by Muslims to enter the site were closed. Some remained near the gates and chanted in protest.

Regular visits by non-Muslims permitted

between 7:30 am and 11:00 am were then allowed to go ahead, according to police.

The compound has been the scene of repeated clashes in recent weeks, provoking international calls for calm. The highly sensitive site is the third holiest in Islam but is also known to Jews as the Temple Mount, the most sacred in Judaism.

Recent weeks have seen a series of Jewish



holidays which have led to an increase in visits by Jews that have sparked clashes. The same situation is feared over Sukkot, an eight-day religious feast that began on Sunday night.

Jews are allowed to visit the site, but cannot pray there to avoid provoking tensions. Muslims fear Israel will seek to change rules governing the compound, which is located in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem.

Saudi coalition raid kills 31 at Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

A Saudi-led coalition air strike hit a wedding in southwest Yemen yesterday, killing at least 31 people including children, medics and witnesses said.

"The bodies of 31 people, including children, have been taken to a hospital in Mokha city," a medical source said, adding that dozens more were wounded in the bombardment of a wedding hall in the Red Sea city.

Most of the wounded are in serious conditions, the medic said. Witnesses reported that warplanes struck the wedding hall in Mokha, which is controlled by Shiite Huthi rebels.

The Saudi-led coalition launched an air campaign against the rebels in late March in support of embattled President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, who fled to Riyadh.

Maldives president unhurt in boat blast

Wife, aides injured

AFP, Male

An explosion ripped through a speed boat carrying Maldives President Abdulla Yameen yesterday, injuring his wife and two others but leaving him unhurt.

It remains unclear what caused the explosion, which came at a time of heightened political tensions in the atoll nation after the controversial jailing of Yameen's predecessor Mohamed Nasheed.

Unconfirmed reports suggested the blast, which occurred as the tightly-guarded vessel docked in the capital island Male, came from the engine room below deck.

"The first lady Fathimath Ibrahim, a senior protocol officer and a bodyguard of the president were hurt and taken to hospital," said Mohamed Hussain Shareef, minister at the President's Office.

"The president was unhurt and he escorted the first lady to hospital where she is under observation following a minor injury," he told AFP.

The Maldives has launched an investigation into the incident and is seeking help from the United States and Australia to determine what happened.

Reporters had gathered at the presidential jetty to receive Yameen, who had landed a few minutes earlier at the nearby Hulhule airport after a visit to Saudi Arabia for the hajj pilgrimage.

State television footage showed the president being escorted off the boat and onto a police launch, while witnesses said they saw an ambulance rush to the jetty and authorities immediately cordoned off the area.

Modi hails social media power

Visits Facebook HQ
BBC ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hailed the political power of social media, as he visited the headquarters of Facebook in California.

"To leaders all over the world: you are not going to gain by running away from social media," he said in Hindi during a question-and-answer session.

Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg moderated the hour-long event. Later on Sunday, Modi was welcomed by more than 20,000 people at a stadium in nearby San Jose.

The SAP Center event also drew protesters against Modi's human rights records among other issues.

Speaking at Facebook's campus in Menlo Park, Modi said: "The strength of social media today is that it can tell governments where they are wrong and can stop



them from moving in the wrong direction."

"We used to have elections every five years and now we can have them every five minutes," he added. Modi, 65, regularly uses both Facebook and Twitter to communicate with millions of his followers.

Both Zuckerberg and Modi shared emotional moments during the discussion. After Zuckerberg pointed out his parents in the audience, Modi welled with tears speaking about his own.

He recounted stories from his childhood in a poor family, selling tea at a railway station and doing hard chores to earn money.

NEWSIN brief

Iran ready for prisoner swap with US: Rouhani

AFP, New York

Tehran will work to free three Americans from its prisons if the United States releases jailed Iranians, President Hassan Rouhani said Sunday. "If the Americans take the appropriate steps and set them free, certainly the right environment will be open..." Rouhani told CNN.

Lebanese journalist fined in Hariri case

AFP, The Hague

The tribunal set up to try the killers of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri yesterday fined a journalist 10,000 euros for obstruction of justice. "I hereby sentence Ms Karma Khayat to a fine of 10,000 euros to be paid in full no later than October 30," Judge Nicola Lettieri told a hearing at the Hague-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Google to provide Wi-Fi at 100 Indian stations

THE HINDU ONLINE

Google CEO Sundar Pichai yesterday announced a proposal for introduction of broadband connectivity, through Wi-Fi hotspots, at 100 railway stations. He said it will be expanded to 400 next year. The search engine giant also announced the rollout of ten-language vernacular typing for Android users.

300 million elderly not receiving care: ILO

AFP, Geneva

More than half the world's elderly lack access to long-term care, the International Labour Organization said in a report yesterday, condemning the "deplorable" situation facing a rapidly ageing population. A new report from the UN agency showed that some 300 million people over the age of 65 cannot easily access long-term care when needed.