

Syria regime, IS used chem weapons: UN

US vows to 'seek accountability' for attacks

AFP, United Nations

A UN investigation has established that President Bashar al-Assad's forces carried out at least two chemical attacks in Syria and that Islamic State jihadists used mustard gas as a weapon, according to a report seen by AFP on Wednesday.

The panel was able to identify the perpetrators of three chemical attacks carried out in 2014 and 2015, but was unable to draw conclusions in the other six cases that it has been investigating over the past year.

The report from the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found that the Syrian regime dropped chemical weapons on two villages in northwestern Idlib province: Talmenes on April 21, 2014 and Sarmin on March 16, 2015.

In both instances, Syrian air force helicopters dropped "a device" on houses that was followed by the "release of a toxic substance," which in the case of Sarmin matched "the characteristics of chlorine." The panel found that the Islamic State

"was the only entity with the ability, capability, motive and the means to use sulphur mustard" in an attack on the town of Marea in northern Aleppo province on August 21, 2015.

The Assad regime has repeatedly denied that it has used chemical weapons in Syria, but the report said that in all three cases, it had "sufficient information to reach a conclusion on the actors involved."

The findings prompted immediate calls for the perpetrators to face justice.

US Ambassador Samantha Power called for "strong and swift action" by the Security Council to follow up on the findings of the report.

The Security Council is due to discuss the report on Tuesday and could decide to impose sanctions on Syria or ask the International Criminal Court to take up the matter as a war crime.

Syria agreed to get rid of its chemical stockpile and to refrain from making any use of toxic substances in warfare when it joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, under pressure from Russia.



Turkish Army tanks driving to the Syrian Turkish border town of Jarabulus, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

YEMEN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

UN rights chief urges int'l probe

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday called for the creation of an independent international body to investigate an array of serious violations in war-torn Yemen.

In a new report, the UN laid out a long line of allegations of grave human rights abuses by all sides in Yemen's bloody conflict, which has left nearly 4,000 civilians dead.

"Civilians in Yemen have suffered unbearably over the years from the effects of a number of simultaneous and overlapping armed conflicts," UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

"And they continue to suffer, absent any form of accountability and justice, while those responsible for the violations and abuses against them enjoy impunity," he said.

"Such a manifestly protracted unjust situation must no longer be tolerated by the international community," he insisted.

The report listed numerous attacks on residential areas, market places, hospitals and schools, pointing out that in several cases investigators were "unable to identify the presence of possible military objectives."

As of August 23, an estimated 3,799 civilians had been killed and 6,711 injured since a Saudi-led Arab coalition began air raids in March last year in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government.

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S'pore trials driverless taxis for the first time

AFP, Singapore

The world's first driverless taxis went into operation yesterday in Singapore in a limited public trial, beating giants like Uber in the race to roll out the revolutionary technology.

The "robo-taxi service" is being tested at a small research campus well away from the thrum of the Asian business hub.

Data from the experiment will feed into the roll-out of driverless taxis across the city-state in 2018.

The six taxis -- Renault Zoe and Mitsubishi i-MiEV electric vehicles -- will operate in a 2.5 square mile area, with set pick-up and drop-off points. Trips have to be booked through the company's smartphone app.

Ride-sharing giant Uber said last week that it would be launching driverless cars in the US city of Pittsburgh by the end of August. It has also established a \$300 million venture with Volvo to develop self-driving cars for sale by 2021.

Separately, Google parent Alphabet announced in May that it is partnering Fiat Chrysler in expanding its fleet of self-driving vehicles, which it hopes will hit the road by end-2016.



Trump suggests major shift on deportations

Assange warns of more 'significant' Clinton leaks

AGENCIES

Donald Trump suggested Wednesday that he would allow exceptions to let some undocumented immigrants to stay in the US, vowing he wouldn't grant them citizenship but telling Fox News, "there's no amnesty, but we work with them."

For Trump, whose rise to the Republican nomination was based in large part on his hardline immigration policies, the comments are the clearest sign yet that he is reconsidering his pledge to deport all of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US, a key part of his campaign platform.

"No citizenship. Let me go a step further -- they'll pay back-taxes, they have to pay taxes, there's no amnesty, as such, there's no amnesty, but we work with them," Trump told Sean Hannity when asked if he would allow for exceptions to his long-held position.

At the same event, Trump also indicated an openness to "softening" his immigration policies, which also includes building a wall on the border with Mexico.

A Trump campaign source confirmed the real estate mogul will outline his immigration policies in a speech next Wednesday in Phoenix.

Meanwhile, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has warned that his anti-secrecy campaign will release new documents concerning Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, which could be "significant" for the election.

Speaking to Fox News on Wednesday, Assange, who has been sheltering in the Ecuadorian embassy in London since 2012 while fighting extradition, said WikiLeaks was combing through thousands of pages of material.

Assange reported the documents would "absolutely" be released before the November 8 election.



Colombians celebrate the signing of agreement of conclusion of the peace talks between the Colombian Government and FARC guerrilla, on Wednesday, in Bogota.

PHOTO: AFP

Colombia announces historic peace deal

AFP, Havana

Colombia's government and the Farc rebels have reached a historic peace agreement to end their half-century civil war that cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

After nearly four years of negotiations in Cuba, the two sides announced a final deal Wednesday, which President Juan Manuel Santos said would be put to a decisive referendum on October 2.

"We don't want one more victim in Colombia," the two sides said in a joint statement read out in Havana by Cuban diplomat Rodolfo Benitez.

Santos immediately launched his campaign for a "Yes" vote in the referendum, which he said would be the most important election of voters' lives.

Colombians welcomed the announcement with both skepticism and joy, as many took to the streets late Wednesday night, waving the national flag and carrying balloons emblazoned with the word "yes" to show their support for peace.

"It's hard to believe that we have lived to see such things, it's historic for the country," 24-year-old Marcela Cardenas said, before adding that she believes the transformation will be extremely difficult.

The conflict began with the founding of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 1964, at a time when leftist guerrilla armies were fighting to sow revolution throughout Latin America.

Over the years, it has killed 260,000 people, uprooted 6.8 million and left 45,000 missing. Three previous peace processes with the Farc ended in failure.

The peace deal comprises six agreements reached at each step of the arduous negotiations.

They cover justice for victims of the conflict, land reform, political participation for ex-rebels, fighting drug trafficking, disarmament and the implementation and monitoring of the accord.

Under the peace deal, the FARC will begin moving its estimated 7,000 fighters from their jungle and mountain hideouts into disarmament camps set up by the United Nations, which is helping monitor the ceasefire. The Farc will then become a political party. Its weapons will be melted down to build three peace monuments.

Special courts will be created to judge crimes committed during the conflict. An amnesty will be granted for less serious offenses. But it will not cover the worst atrocities, such as massacres, torture and rape.

LIGHTNING OFFENSIVE AGAINST IS IN SYRIA

Turkey sends more tanks

Defends intervention, demands Kurd fighters' withdrawal

AGENCIES

Turkey yesterday sent more tanks into Syria and sternly warned a Kurdish militia to withdraw from frontline positions, a day after pro-Ankara Syrian opposition fighters captured a key border town from jihadists.

The tanks joined those which crossed the frontier on Wednesday in the so-called Operation Euphrates Shield, which Turkey says aims at ridding the northern Syrian border area of both Islamic State (IS) extremists and Kurdish militia.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that the offensive had expelled IS from the Syrian town of Jarabulus. Military sources said 100 IS militants had been killed in the offensive.

But Defence Minister Fikri Isik warned the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia -- who also had designs on Jarabulus -- to move back east across the Euphrates or also face intervention from Turkey.

The operation, the most ambitious launched by Turkey during the five-and-a-half-year Syria conflict, has seen Turkish special forces deployed on the ground and jet fighters striking IS targets.

They are supporting a ground offensive by hundreds of Syrian rebels who on Wednesday marched into Jarabulus

and a neighbouring village after meeting little resistance.

It was not immediately clear if the deployment of the new tanks on Thursday was aimed at securing Jarabulus or helping the rebels move into new territory.

But a Turkish official said on Wednesday that Ankara would "continue operations until we are convinced that imminent threats against the country's national security have been neutralised."

In another development, UN officials yesterday said Russia has agreed to a 48-hour humanitarian ceasefire in the divided Syrian city of Aleppo to allow aid deliveries, but security guarantees are awaited from other parties on the ground.

In Iraq, forces backed by coalition air strikes yesterday pushed the IS

group from Qayyarah, a northern town considered strategic for any future offensive against the jihadists' last stronghold of Mosul. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi issued a statement hailing what he said was a key step towards reclaiming Mosul, IS's de facto Iraq capital.

Meanwhile, China's military will provide training for Syrian armed forces, a spokesman for Beijing's defence ministry said yesterday, adding it would take place on Chinese soil.

China says will train Syrian troops
Kerry in Saudi talks on Yemen, Syria, Libya
Russia agrees to 48-hour Aleppo truce: UN
Iraq retakes key town south of Mosul

Post Arab Spring, lifespan drops across region: study

AFP, Paris

The conflict and civil strife that has erupted across the eastern Mediterranean region since the Arab Spring began in 2010 has shortened lifespans and damaged health, according to a study released yesterday.

Yemen, Tunisia and Egypt all lost about three months in life expectancy between 2010 and 2013, with deteriorating conditions threatening health gains made over the previous two decades, researchers said.

In Syria -- ravaged by a civil war that has left more than 290,000 people dead and displaced millions since March 2011 -- average life expectancy has been cut by six years, they reported in the journal The Lancet Global Health.

Men in Syria typically lived to about 75 on the eve of conflict. By 2013, the average age of death was about 69. For Syrian women, the decline was from 80 to 75 over the same period.

"Recent conflicts have shattered the basic

infrastructure in a number of countries," said lead author Ali Mokdad, a professor at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

"As a result, millions of people are facing dire water shortages and poor sanitation that will lead to disease outbreaks."

Infant mortality is also rising in some countries, the study found.

Health conditions are likely to have gotten worse since then not just in Syria, but in Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia too, the researchers warned.

"The Arab uprising has evolved into complex wars," Mokdad said in a statement.

"Along with population growth and ageing, these ongoing conflicts have dramatically increased the burden of chronic diseases and injuries."

Many doctors and nurses, he added, have fled to safe havens, adding to the health woes.

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সম্প্রতি ইউজিসি প্রতিনিধি দলের মানারাত ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ইউনিভার্সিটি পরিদর্শন ও মিডিয়ায় প্রকাশিত বক্তব্য প্রসঙ্গে মানারাত ভার্শিটির কর্তৃপক্ষের ভাষ্যঃ

সম্প্রতি বাংলাদেশ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় মঞ্জুরি কমিশনের এক প্রতিনিধি দল মানারাত ইউনিভার্সিটির গুলশান ও মিরপুর ক্যাম্পাস আকস্মিক পরিদর্শন করেন। পরিদর্শনকালে ইউজিসি প্রতিনিধি দলের চাহিদা অনুযায়ী ইউনিভার্সিটির শ্রেণী কক্ষ, লাইব্রেরী, ল্যাবরেটরি, পরীক্ষারহল ও অন্যান্য অফিস কক্ষ পরিদর্শন করার ক্ষেত্রে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের পক্ষ থেকে আন্তরিকভাবে সহযোগিতা করা হয়।

তারা যেসব বিষয়ে জানতে চেয়েছেন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় কর্তৃপক্ষ সবগুলো বিষয়েই যথাযথ জবাব দিয়েছেন। বিভিন্ন মিডিয়ায় প্রকাশিত সংবাদে দেখা যায় প্রতিনিধি দলের কোন কোন সদস্যের বরাত দিয়ে মানারাত লাইব্রেরীতে "জিহাদি বই" পাওয়া গেছে বলে উল্লেখ করা হয়। প্রকৃতপক্ষে জিহাদি বই কেউ সঙ্গায়িত করেনি। ইসলামের ইতিহাসে এ পরিভাষা ব্যবহার করা হয় নাই। ইতিহাসে পাওয়া যায় তাফসির, হাদিস, ফিকাহ, আকিদা, ইসলামের অর্থনীতি এ ধরনের বই। একেই

আমরা অভ্যন্তরীণ দৃঢ়তার সাথে বলতে চাই, সরকার কর্তৃক নিষিদ্ধ বই,যুক্তি, গোষ্ঠী বা নিষিদ্ধ কোন সংগঠন সংশ্লিষ্ট বই আমাদের লাইব্রেরীতে নেই বরং অন্য বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় গুলোর মত সব ধরনের বই আমাদের লাইব্রেরীতে রয়েছে।

মানারাত ভার্শিটির লাইব্রেরীতে একাডেমিক রেফারেন্স বই, বাংলাদেশের মুক্তিযুদ্ধ ও স্বাধীনতার ইতিহাস সংশ্লিষ্ট বইসহ দেশী বিদেশি জার্নাল, ম্যাগাজিন, সাময়িকী, দৈনিক বাতিকা পত্র-পত্রিকা রাখা হয়। এই বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে ইউজিসির অনুমোদনের বাইরে কোন বিষয় বা কোর্স পড়ানো হয় না। অভিব্যবক এবং ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের চাহিদার বিষয়টি বিবেচনায় রেখে মানারাত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় কর্তৃপক্ষ প্রতিষ্ঠালগ্ন থেকেই ছাত্রছাত্রীদের আলাদা আলাদা ব্যাচে পাঠদান করে আসছে। এটা কোন আইন বিরুদ্ধ কাজ নয়। এ বিষয়ে প্রশ্ন উত্থাপন করায় আমরা ব্যস্ত।

মানারাত ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ইউনিভার্সিটি ট্রাস্ট গণ-প্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের

প্রতিবৎসা সাবেক সচিব, পাবলিক বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সাবেক ও বর্তমান অধ্যাপকবৃন্দ, বিশিষ্ট আইনজীবী ও বিনুৎসাহী ব্যক্তিদের সমন্বয়ে গঠিত।

মানারাত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় কোন রাজনৈতিক দল দ্বারা পরিচালিত নয়। বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের নিরাপত্তা নিশ্চিত করার লক্ষ্যে এবং সাম্প্রতিক পরিস্থিতিতে বিবেচনায় রেখে গঠন করা হয়েছে সন্ত্রাস ও জঙ্গিবাদ বিরোধী মনিটরিং সেল। যারা সার্বজনীন ভাবে ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের মনিটরিং করে থাকেন। তাছাড়া সার্বজনিক সিসিটিভির মনিটরিং এর ব্যবস্থা এবং চৌকস নিরাপত্তা কর্মীবাহিনী দ্বারা নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা অধিকতর জোরদার করা হয়েছে।

মানারাত ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ইউনিভার্সিটি কর্তৃপক্ষ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ভাবমূর্তি, সুনাম বৃদ্ধি ও সমৃদ্ধির জন্য সকলের সহযোগিতা আন্তরিকভাবে কামনা করছে।

মানারাত ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ইউনিভার্সিটি কর্তৃপক্ষ