



Police use water cannon to disperse demonstrators during a protest organised by India's main opposition Congress party in Chandigarh, to demand scholarships to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes students in various institutions in Punjab, India, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Obama, Duterte clash over human rights

AFP, Vientiane

US President Barack Obama yesterday urged Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte to conduct his crime war "the right way", as the pair clashed at an Asian summit over the crackdown that has claimed 3,000 lives.

The showdown was a fitting climax to a brutal few days of diplomacy that began with the famously acid-tongued Duterte branding Obama a "son of a whore".

After warnings from Duterte that he would not be lectured on his crime war -- which is seeing police and shadow assassins kill an average of 44 people a day -- Obama urged the Philippine leader to respect the rule of law.

Duterte has said the Philippines is in danger of becoming a "narco state", and eliminating drugs in society is the top priority of his administration.

Obama's call came shortly after Duterte gave what diplomats said was a "fiery" address to leaders of the 18-nation East Asia group, including Obama.

Veering off his prepared speech, Duterte launched into a tirade about US military killings in the Philippines when

it was an American colony from 1898 to 1946, according to three diplomats AFP spoke with who were in the room.

"The Philippine president showed a picture of the killings of American soldiers in the past and the president said: 'This is my ancestor they killed. Why now we are talking about human rights,' an Indonesian delegate said.

Duterte set the tone for the week when, just before flying to Laos on Monday, he launched a barrage of insults at Obama in response to the US president's plans to question him over his war on drugs.

"You must be respectful. Do not just throw away questions and statements. Son of a whore, I will curse you in that forum," Duterte told reporters shortly before flying to Laos.

At the press conference marking the end of his trip to Laos, Obama said he was unfazed by Duterte's slur. He added that such choice words were "a habit, a way of speaking for him".

Duterte has branded Pope Francis, the US ambassador to Manila and the United Nations as "sons of whores".



Iraq, Syria might splinter: CIA chief

AFP, Washington

Iraq and Syria have been so thoroughly damaged by warfare, sectarian conflict and killing that it is unclear they "can be put back together again," CIA Director John Brennan said.

In an interview this week with the CTC Sentinel, a publication from the West Point military academy's Combating Terrorism Center, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency said the current system of governance in the two countries might change altogether.

"I don't know whether or not Syria and Iraq can be put back together again. There's been so much bloodletting, so much destruction, so many continued, seething tensions and sectarian divisions," Brennan said.

"I question whether we will see, in my lifetime, the creation of a central government in both of those countries that's going to have the ability to govern fairly."

He added that he could envision some type of a federal structure governing autonomous regions.

Meanwhile, more than 70 Syrian aid groups are suspending cooperation with the United Nations, accusing UN humanitarian agencies and their partners of being manipulated by the regime, according to a letter released yesterday.

In the letter to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the 73 signatories



DEVELOPMENTS
US pushes Russia on 'true' Syria peace deal
Syrian aid groups accuse UN of bias, suspend ties

demand an investigation of the UN agencies' work in Syria and called for a monitoring body to be set up to oversee the relief effort.

"Our goal is to deliver as much aid as possible," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, who rejected suggestions that UN aid workers were influenced by the government in Damascus.

The US yesterday pressed Russia for a "true cessation of hostilities" in Syria ahead of expected high-level peace talks in Geneva, warning that its patience is running thin.

Foreign ministers from the two powers, which support opposite sides in the five-year conflict, were poised to hold a "personal meeting" in the Swiss city to push for a peace agreement, according to the Russian side.

And US Defense Secretary Ash Carter told BBC radio there was "quite a long way to go" before a final deal could be struck.

The development came after US President Barack Obama held talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G20 summit in China but failed to bridge their differences.

Pro-regime forces also overran a strategically important district on the southern outskirts of Aleppo Thursday, rolling back nearly every gain from a major month-long rebel offensive there, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

'It is scary, it is dangerous'

Clinton slams Trump for 'Putin better than Obama' comment; vows to hunt IS chief

AFP, Charlotte

Hillary Clinton yesterday sought to polish her image as a strong leader with a command of major global challenges -- the IS jihadist group first among them -- while discrediting Republican rival Donald Trump as unfit for the White House.

With just 61 days before America chooses a new commander in chief, the Democrat delivered a withering takedown of the brash billionaire at a rare impromptu press conference, assailing his praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin as "scary" and insisting Trump has no real plan to defeat the Islamic State group.

Seeking to strike a commanding tone, Clinton called for the United States to track down and kill IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as it did Osama bin Laden.

"We should make it a top priority to hunt down the leader of ISIS," Clinton told reporters on a tarmac in White Plains, New York.

"Getting al-Baghdadi will require efforts at the top levels, but it will send a resounding message

that nobody directs or inspires attacks against the United States and gets away with it."

Clinton, 68, and Trump, 70, have clashed repeatedly over foreign policy, but their battle rose to a new level Wednesday night when the two were separately grilled over their national



security credentials at a New York forum.

Instead of laying out a Middle East strategy, Trump "bizarrely" praised Putin and suggested the strongman is a better leader than US President Barack Obama, she said.

"Even I was shocked by this," Clinton said later

at a rally in Charlotte, in the battleground state of North Carolina.

"That is not just unpatriotic, it's not just insulting to the office and to the man who holds the office. It is scary, it is dangerous."

With the campaign now in the final two-month stretch, Clinton was wasting no opportunity to harangue her rival over his missteps, particularly over how he has "trash-talked" America's generals.

The New York real estate mogul's campaign swiftly shot back, with Trump spokesman Jason Miller calling Clinton's remarks "the desperate attacks of a failing campaign sinking in the polls."

Trump has gained on Clinton over the past 10 days, but the former secretary of state still maintains an advantage of 2.8 percentage points, according to the RealClearPolitics poll average. Clinton is also holding leads in battleground states.

Clinton's address to reporters marked the first podium press conference in nine months for Clinton, who broke a long media drought by speaking to journalists at length on her campaign plane this week.



'Islam can co-exist with French values'

AFP, Paris

President Francois Hollande yesterday said that Islam could co-exist with secularism, warning in a speech seen as preparing the ground for a re-election bid that the anti-terror fight should not undermine French values.

In a passionate plea for tolerance, he defended the country's Muslim minority following a vitriolic debate on the banning of the Islamic burkini swimsuit.

"Nothing in the idea of secularism opposes the practice of Islam in France, provided it respects the law," Hollande said.

Secularism was not a "state religion" to be used against other religions, he said in the speech in Paris, denouncing the "stigmatisation of Muslims".

Mayors in around 30 towns this summer cited France's century-old secular laws in banning head-to-toe swimwear on their beaches, unleashing a furore.

Hollande warned that France could not sacrifice its core values of liberty, equality and fraternity. "The declaration of human rights is not some old scroll to be framed and hung in reception rooms," he said.

Polls predict a drubbing for the 62-year-old Socialist if he throws his hat in the ring again after five years marked by stubbornly high unemployment and only timid attempts at reform.

US-trained sniper is IS's war minister

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

An American-trained sniper has been given the position of minister of war by IS.

Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov received training by the US when he was the head of Tajikistan's special police force and has been given a promotion by the militant group.

The 41-year-old replaces Abu Omar al-Shishani, who was killed in a US airstrike.

Khalimov has been given the name "Tajik", after his home nation and appeared in an Isis propaganda video where he pledged to carry out attacks on Russia, the US and Tajikistan, New York Post reported.

The US have placed a \$3 million (£2.2m) reward for any information that could lead to Khalimov's capture.



Opposition supporters take part in a rally to demand a referendum to remove Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, in Los Teques near Caracas, Venezuela, on Wednesday. Thousands of protesters staged rival demonstrations Wednesday for and against Maduro in a new test of strength. PHOTO: REUTERS



Russian river turns bright red

AFP, Moscow

Russia's environment ministry on Wednesday ordered a probe into a possible industrial accident after a river in the far north of the country turned bright red.

In a statement, the ministry said it had received complaints from local residents over "pollution of the river Daldykan in the region of the city of Norilsk by an unidentified chemical that turned the water a bright red colour."

"According to preliminary information

the possible reason for the pollution of the river may be a breakage in a slurry pipe at a Norilsk Nickel plant," it said.

Pictures circulated online earlier by local activist groups showed what they claimed was the blood-red river running through forests in the Russian far north.

Norilsk Nickel -- the world's largest producer of nickel and palladium -- said it had seen the images of the alleged spillage but insisted there was so far no evidence of any leak. The mining giant said it was monitoring the situation.

Migrant-kicking journo indicted

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Hungarian prosecutors have filed charges against a camerawoman who was filmed kicking and tripping refugees fleeing police near the country's southern border with Serbia last year.

Petra Laszlo was charged on Wednesday for disorderly conduct after "she kicked a young man in the shin with a swift kick of the sole of her right foot, and also kicked young girl around the knee with her right foot", prosecutors said in a statement, according to Reuters news agency.

According to prosecutors, there was no evidence of a racially motivated hate crime. The incident, which occurred in September 2015, caused international outrage after footage of her actions went viral on social media.



Abbas was a KGB agent!

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli researchers say they have uncovered a document showing Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas was a Soviet agent in the 1980s, but his office called it a smear campaign and pointed to suspicious timing.

The claim first emerged in a report by Israeli public television on Wednesday night citing two researchers studying documents from the so-called Mitrokhin papers stored in Britain at Cambridge University's Churchill Archives Centre.

The researchers, Gideon Remez and Isabella Ginor of the Truman Institute at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, said he was named as a KGB agent in Damascus in 1983 under the codename "Mole".

Remez said Abbas was not simply labelled a "source or collaborator."

"It says explicitly regarding Abbas that he was a KGB agent," said Remez.

Abbas spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh told AFP it "falls under the framework of Israeli absurdities which we have got used to," calling it a "smear campaign."

"It is clear Israel is troubled by the (Palestinians') strategic relationship with Russia and by the clear and announced Russian position, which is to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of an independent Palestinian state and the right of self-determination for our people," Abu Rudeineh said.

Abbas was born in what was then British mandate Palestine, but his family fled to Syria during the 1948 war surrounding the creation of Israel.

In 1980, Abbas was selected to sit on the Palestine Liberation Organisation executive committee. He had been in Moscow in 1982, where he studied for his doctorate, according to his online biography.

The Mitrokhin Archive, where the document was said to have been found, is based on files of the Soviet spy agency KGB that were smuggled to Britain. Major Vasili Mitrokhin was a senior archivist in the KGB's foreign intelligence archive from 1972 until his retirement in 1984, and, disillusioned with domestic Soviet oppression, secretly copied information by hand, before defecting to Britain with it in 1992.

The report comes as Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to organise a face-to-face meeting between Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

