



(From left, clockwise) Students hold a sit-in in front of City Hall protesting the election of Republican Donald Trump as President of the United States in San Francisco, California on Thursday; Trump (L) meets with Speaker of the House Paul Ryan on Capitol Hill in Washington; and First Lady Michelle Obama meets with Melania Trump for tea in the Yellow Oval Room of the White House.



PHOTO: REUTERS, CNN

OFFENSIVE AGAINST IS IN IRAQ, SYRIA

Elite forces seize Mosul district

Elite Iraqi troops battled the Islamic State group in the streets of Mosul yesterday, as the UN reported IS jihadists had executed dozens of people inside the city for alleged "treason".

With IS also on the defensive in neighbouring Syria, US-backed forces pressed an advance on jihadist bastion Raqqa after a sandstorm eased.

The high winds in the desert which separates the Syrian Kurdish-Arab militia alliance from the jihadists' stronghold in the Euphrates Valley had slowed their advance on Thursday as visibility levels plummeted.

Iraqi forces too had regrouped after meeting stronger than expected resistance from IS fighters on the east bank of the Tigris River which runs through Mosul after thrusting into the built-up area last week.

Commanders of Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) said that troops were advancing on two eastern neighbourhoods of the city.

Inside Mosul itself, IS fighters reportedly shot dead more than 60 people this week and hung some of their bodies from poles after claiming they had collaborated with Iraqi troops, the UN human rights office said.

UN says IS killed scores in Mosul, stockpiling chemicals

Forces advance on Raqqa after sandstorm

Russia accuses rebels of using chemical weapons in Aleppo



A Syrian woman carries her child at a temporary refugee camp near Raqqa, yesterday.

The battle to retake Mosul is now in its fourth week, and while troops have entered the built-up area, there are weeks, if not months, of fighting still to go.

In Syria, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said their advance on Raqqa was back on track after a sandstorm which swept through the area on Thursday eased.

Fighting has focused on the IS-held village of Al-Heisha, around 40 kilometres north of Raqqa. An AFP correspondent reported heavy air strikes on Friday morning by the US-led coalition supporting the SDF forces.

The military in Russia, which has sided with the Damascus regime, said Friday it had evidence of the use of chemical weapons by rebels in Syria's besieged eastern city of Aleppo, a charge denied by the opposition. "Experts from the Russian defence ministry have found unexploded artillery ammunition belonging to terrorists which contains toxic substances," the military said in a statement.

Trump to work for 'lasting' ME peace

US president-elect Donald Trump yesterday pledged to work for a "just, lasting peace" between Israel and the Palestinians, in his first public message on the issue since his upset victory.

"I believe that my administration can play a significant role in helping the parties to achieve a just, lasting peace," Trump said in a message published by the Israel Hayom newspaper.

He also said that any peace deal "must be negotiated between the parties themselves, and not imposed on them by others".

France is currently pushing for an international conference to revitalise the moribund peace process, but Israel has said it will not take part -- saying any peace talks should be bilateral between the two sides.

Russia has also offered to host direct talks between the two sides that have so far yet to take place.

The Palestinians have called for international involvement, accusing Israel of renegeing on past agreements.

Israeli PM Netanyahu was among the first leaders Trump spoke to after his election victory, and the president-elect's message called Israel a "beacon of hope".

Israeli right-wingers have hailed Trump's up as an opportunity to consolidate control over the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem.

Anti-Trump protests continue

The president-elect calls demos 'very unfair', blames media

Donald Trump has accused the media of "inciting" protests against his election victory as demonstrations continue days after the shock result.

Thousands of people have taken to the streets in cities including New York, Chicago and Portland for two consecutive nights, with some rallies seeing clashes with armed police and arrests.

The President-elect took to Twitter to respond on Thursday night.

He said: "Just had a very open and successful presidential election. Now professional protesters, incited by the media, are protesting. Very unfair!"

As polls predicted an emphatic victory for Hillary Clinton in the run-up to the vote, Trump repeatedly suggested he would contest the election result and accused the system of being "rigged".

Mr Trump previously called on Americans to "march on Washington" after Obama's victory four years ago, calling for a revolution against the electoral system.

"We can't let this happen," read a tweet posted on 7 November 2012. "We should march on Washington and stop this travesty. Our nation is totally divided!"

But he has not repeated the sentiment following his own election victory, when the Electoral College system he once called a "disaster for democracy" allowed him to beat Clinton despite her winning more votes.

A second night of protests against the shock result saw violence break out in the city of Portland, Oregon, when police responded to riots with pepper spray and stun grenades.

Hundreds of people marched through the streets, chanting: "We reject the President-elect!" before a small group started to vandalise shop windows, set fire to rubbish bins, smash car windows and set off firecrackers.

As clashes continued into the early hours of Friday morning, police warned that blocking motorways and roads amounted to unlawful assembly and would be met with force, ordering crowds to disperse.

At least 26 people have been arrested in connection with the disorder.

In Denver, Colorado, protesters briefly shut down the Interstate 25 motorway, while in San Francisco students marched through the city centre chanting: "not my President" and holding up signs demanding Trump be removed from office.

Meanwhile, The Ku Klux Klan announced it will host a victory parade in a North Carolina town in celebration of Donald Trump's win, bringing white nationalism and the alt-right movement to mainstream politics.

Breaking a long tradition, Trump on Thursday refused to allow journalists to travel with him to Washington for his historic first meetings with President Barack Obama and congressional leaders. The Republican's top advisers rebuffed news organisations' requests for a small "pool" of journalists to trail him as he attended the meetings.

Arab Spring cost region \$614b: UN

The so-called Arab Spring of 2011 has cost the region's economies an estimated \$614bn of growth because of governmental changes, continuing conflict and falling oil prices, according to a UN agency.

The figure from the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), equivalent to six percent of GDP up to the end of last year, is based on growth projections made before the revolutions started.

Published on Thursday, it is the first estimate of its kind by a global economic body.

The uprisings, which started in Tunisia, saw leaders toppled in four countries, and led to war in Libya, Syria and Yemen.



The UN says Arab states have faced economic and social stagnation since the uprisings in 2011. The report describes social progress as "grim" and says the rights of citizens have regressed in some countries.

The data also says conflicts have worsened debt, unemployment, corruption and poverty, and exacerbated the refugee crisis.

Economic analysis was done using growth projects made before the uprisings.

Protests in Tunisia acted as a catalyst for revolts and protests in

several other Arab states, including Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Jordan and Morocco.

Much of the protests centred on calls for more democratic freedoms and an end to corruption. But many Arab protesters were met by violence and strong government crackdowns.

Libya, Yemen and Syria, remain locked in civil wars, which have cost tens of thousands of lives, and have left these countries without a functioning central government.

In Syria, where anti-government protests spiralled into a conflict that has drawn in foreign powers, GDP and capital losses are equal to \$259bn since 2011, according to ESCWA's National Agenda for the Future of Syria.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe shake hands during a joint press conference at Abe's official residence in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday.

How Clinton is doing? Young mom runs into her during morning walk

A mother from New York who was left "heartbroken" by the US presidential election result was given a shock when she ran into Hillary Clinton during a morning hike.

Margot Gerster was strolling with her young daughter in the woods in Chappaqua, New York, when she unexpectedly encountered the Democratic candidate walking her dogs.

"I've been feeling so heartbroken since election and decided what better way to relax than take my girls hiking. So I decided to take them to one of favorite places in Chappaqua," Gerster wrote on Facebook.

"As we were leaving, I heard a bit of rustling coming towards me and as I stepped into the clearing there she was, Hillary Clinton and Bill with their dogs doing exactly the same things as I was.

"I got to hug her and talk to her and tell her that one of my most proud moments as a mother was taking Phoebe with me to vote for her.

"She hugged me and thanked me and we exchanged some sweet pleasantries and then I let them continue their walk."

The Clintons are known to own a property in Chappaqua, situated around 30 miles north of New York City.

Clinton delivered an emotional concession speech in New York on Wednesday morning, urging voters to keep an "open mind" and telling young women not to "lose hope".



CURRENCY BAN Two Indians die at bank queue

The scramble by millions of panicked consumers to exchange banned currency or deposit them turned tragic today when two people died in separate incidents in Maharashtra and Kerala amid chaos and confusion for the second straight day with poor cash flow.

Vishwanath Vartak, 73, who was standing in the queue before an SBI branch for exchanging currency, collapsed and died on the spot at Navghar in Mulund in eastern suburbs of Mumbai, police said.

Vartak had been standing for hours in the queue to exchange Rs 1000 and Rs 500 denomination notes.

In another incident, a 48-year old man, who came to deposit Rs five lakh worth scrapped high denomination notes in a bank in Thalassery in Kerala, died after he fell down from the second floor of a building.

Running out of money for the last two days, men and women across the country had thronged the ATMs since early morning while in many places, to their disappointment, they found the machines not working.

Afghan Taliban hit German consulate; at least 6 killed

The death toll from a powerful Taliban truck bombing at the German consulate in Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif city rose to at least six yesterday, with more than 100 others wounded in a major militant assault.

The Taliban said the bombing late Thursday, which tore a massive crater in the road and overturned cars, was a "revenge attack" for US air strikes this month in the volatile province of Kunduz that left 32 civilians dead.

The explosion, followed by sporadic gunfire, reverberated across the usually tranquil northern city, shearing off the facades of nearby buildings and blowing out windows several miles away.

"The suicide attacker rammed his explosives-laden car into the wall of the German consulate," local police chief Sayed Kamal Sadat told AFP.

All German staff from the consulate were unharmed, according to the foreign ministry in Berlin.

The city's hospitals received six dead bodies, including two killed by bullets, said local doctor Noor Mohammad Fayeze. At least 128 others were wounded, some of them critically and many with shrapnel injuries, he added.

Deputy police chief Abdul Razaq Qadri gave a death toll of seven, including two motorcyclists who were shot dead by German forces close to the consulate after they refused to heed their warning to stop. A suspect had also been detained near the diplomatic mission on Friday morning, Qadri added.

"The consulate building has been heavily damaged," the German foreign ministry said in a statement. "Our sympathies go out to the Afghan injured and their families."

A diplomatic source in Berlin said Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier had convened a crisis meeting soon after the attack.

The carnage underscores worsening insecurity in Afghanistan as Taliban insurgents ramp up nationwide attacks despite repeated government attempts to jumpstart stalled peace negotiations.

President Ashraf Ghani condemned the "barbaric" attack, calling it a crime against humanity.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the "martyrdom attack" on the consulate had left "tens of invaders" dead. The insurgents routinely exaggerate battlefield claims. Posting a Google Earth image of the consulate on Twitter, Mujahid said the assault was in retaliation for American air strikes in Kunduz.

The latest attack in Mazar-i-Sharif comes just two days after a bitter US presidential election. Afghanistan got scarcely a passing mention in the election campaign -- even though the situation there will be an urgent matter for the new president.

India, Japan sign civil nuke deal

Japan and India signed a civilian nuclear accord yesterday, opening the door for Tokyo to supply New Delhi with fuel, equipment and technology for nuclear power production, as India looks to atomic energy to sustain its rapid economic growth.

It was the first time Japan, the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack, has concluded such a pact with a country that is not signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The accord stipulates nuclear fuel and equipment provided can only be used for peaceful purposes, and a separate document signed alongside the nuclear agreement has a clause allowing Japan to terminate the pact if India conducts a nuclear test.

Friday's accord was signed after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's meeting with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

India says the NPT is discriminatory and it has concerns about nuclear-armed China as well as its long-time nuclear-armed rival, Pakistan.

India is in advanced negotiations with U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric, owned by Japan's Toshiba Corp, to build six nuclear reactors in southern India, part of New Delhi's plan to ramp up nuclear capacity more than ten times by 2032.

For Japanese nuclear plant makers such as Toshiba and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd, it is crucial to expand their business overseas as the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster chilled domestic demand for new nuclear plants.

The nuclear agreement with Japan follows a similar one with the United States in 2008 which gave India access to nuclear technology after decades of isolation.

That step was seen as the first big move to build India into a regional counterweight to China.

Modi earlier on Friday praised the "growing convergence" of views between his nation and Japan, saying strong ties will enable them to play a stabilising role in Asia and the world.