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Volume 5 Issue 109

Friday, August 3, 2012 www.thenational.ae

Annan quits his role as Syria peace envoy

Security Council disunity is criticised

Former UN secretary general says when the Syrian people desperately needed action there was only 'finger pointing and name calling'

Omar Karmi
Foreign Correspondent

WASHINGTON // Kofi Annan, the United Nations-Arab League special envoy for Syria, yesterday tendered his resignation after failing to convince Syria's warring sides to accept his peace plan.

At a news conference in Geneva, Mr Annan blamed the UN Security Council for "finger pointing and name calling" when the Syrian people "desperately need action". The announcement came 17 months after the start of political upheaval in Syria and as the conflict passed a critical threshold.

It also came after Barack Obama, the US president, reportedly signed a secret order authorising US support for rebels bidding to overthrow the government of Bashar Al Assad, Syria's president. In addition to covert military aid, Washington has set aside US\$25 million (Dh91.8m) for communications equipment and medical supplies for the opposition and yesterday announced an extra \$12m in humanitarian aid for Syrian civilians.

Alongside Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, the moves put a US president running for re-election squarely in the middle of the uprising to unseat Mr Al Assad.

Syria's rebels yesterday shelled an airport near Aleppo in the first reported instance of the Syrian

opposition using heavy weaponry seized from government forces. The battle for Syria's largest city has intensified in recent days.

With the resignation of Mr Annan, the likelihood of any negotiated outcome to fighting that by some estimates has claimed more than 20,000 lives has receded even further.

Speaking in Geneva, the former UN secretary general said the increasing militarisation in Syria and the "clear lack of unity" in the Security Council had "fundamentally changed the circumstances for the effective exercise of my role".

He blamed both sides in the conflict, but said the problems were "compounded by the disunity of the international community".

Mr Annan will retain his position until the end of August, but the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon said he was already in discussions with the Arab League to find a successor.

"Kofi Annan deserves our profound admiration for the selfless way in which he has put his formidable skills and prestige to this most difficult and potentially thankless of assignments," Mr Ban said in a statement.

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Morsi's cabinet strikes a dull thud

Many unknowns, but Tantawi stay on as minister of defence

Bradley Hope
Foreign Correspondent

CAIRO // President Mohammed Morsi of Egypt struck an unambitious tone yesterday with the announcement of a new cabinet that includes a host of technocrats and only a few Islamists.

According to analysts, the swearing-in ceremony was more important for what did not happen.

The cabinet chosen by Mr Morsi's prime minister, Hesham Kandil, retained some ministers from the previous government who had been appointed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), including Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi as defence minister, but there were fewer Islamists than expected.

Observers and members of new political parties in Egypt had

higher hopes for the cabinet. But Mr Morsi, facing his own power struggles with the military, chose a more staid path by appointing relative unknowns from within the ranks of government.

"There will be no warm reception for this government because most of them are completely unknown, but it will not be received negatively either," said Hassan Nafaa, a professor of political science at Cairo University.

"Morsi has chosen at this moment to create a non-political government, which is a positive thing in our environment right now. There is no hegemony of the Muslim Brothers and the presence of Salafists is almost none."

The cabinet reflects Mr Morsi's background and character. An electrical engineer and long-time member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he entered the presidential race as a relative unknown with little charisma but narrowly won with the backing of the Brotherhood's extensive network.

Egypt, continued on 6 →

London 2012



Sheikh Juma bin Dalmouk ejects cartridges from his gun during qualifying for the men's double trap event yesterday. The Emirati shooter finished 13th in the competition. Story, page s5. Rebecca Blackwell / AP Photo

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Comment

The Arab region still has far to go in supporting female athletes, writes Sara Al Boom, a10

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Adam Gemili, of Iranian-Moroccan parentage, is Britain's great sprint hope, a12



Shooting ▲

Sheikh Ahmed bin Hasher's protege, Peter Wilson wins gold for Britain in the double trap, s5

Swimming

Michael Phelps takes medal tally to 20 with gold in 200m individual medley, s5

Online

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Weightlifting

Girl with a big weight on her shoulders

Paul Radley

LONDON // Two years ago, Khadija Mohammed took up the sport of weightlifting. Today, she will represent her country in the Olympic Games.

The 17-year-old schoolgirl from Dubai was chosen by the Emirates Weightlifting Federation to compete in London after the UAE team earned one spot based on their performance at the Asian Championships earlier this year.

"I was surprised [they chose me] but extremely happy," said Mohammed, who will compete in the 75kg weight class. "I have only been doing weightlifting for two years, and I have many colleagues who have a lot more experience than me."

The sport in the UAE has only recently begun to grow among girls and women.

When Najwan El Zawawi, a former Olympian for Egypt, was brought in as coach at the end of 2008, there were so few competitors, she had to scout around schools for girls to coach.

"When I came here four years ago, everyone told me I won't be successful because our girls won't be accepted as weightlifters," El Zawawi said.

Yet today, the UAE will have a competitor on the biggest stage of all.

"This is history in her life and in our life," said Sultan bin Mejren, the president of the weightlifting federation. "She has the accreditation of an athlete at the Olympic Games, 2012, London. She will have her name on that for all of history."

"She is the history-maker, but she has great appreciation from all of the other girls. They are very united."

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→ A difficult decision, s6-7



Khadija Mohammed will make history for the UAE today. Kamran Jebreili / AP Photo

Pirates release seven Pakistani hostages

Tears of joy for families but 15 Albedo crew members are still held

Ramola Talwar Badam

DUBAI // Seven Pakistani hostages have been freed from the *MV Albedo* after a ransom of US\$1.1 million (Dh4m) was paid to Somali pirates, the daughter of the ship's captain confirmed yesterday.

The remaining 15 hostages continue to be held captive aboard

the Malaysian-flagged cargo vessel that was hijacked by Somali pirates in November 2010 in the Gulf of Aden while sailing to Kenya from Jebel Ali Port.

"I am just so grateful to God that my father is alive," said Nareman Jawaid, a Dubai resident and daughter of Jawaid Khan, the ship's captain.

The men flew last night from Nairobi to Karachi with a short stop in Dubai, where Ms Jawaid joined them for the last leg of their flight.

The men and their families were taken from Karachi airport to the Governor House where they met

Ishrat Ul Ebad Khan, the governor of Pakistan's Sindh province.

Ms Jawaid had last seen her father at Jebel Ali Port two years ago.

"The pirates agreed to release only the seven Pakistanis," she said. "We did want and hoped more people would be released with the money we raised, but that did not happen."

Seven Bangladeshi, six Sri Lankans, an Indian and an Iranian are still being held. One Indian sailor died due to lack of medicine.

The wives and children of the Pakistani hostages had successfully launched a fund-raising drive in their home country in front of

mosques and on busy roads to free their relatives.

Initial reports suggested that the Pakistani side and the Malaysian-based Iranian owner of the vessel would contribute half of the US\$2.85m ransom amount demanded by the pirates.

With the help of philanthropists, businessmen and charity groups, the relatives announced on May 15 that they had raised part of the ransom amount of \$1.1m. However, the owner was unable to raise the remaining amount.

Hostages, continued on 3 →