

Israel resumes fuel supplies to Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli company that provides fuel to the West Bank and Gaza Strip resumed supplies Friday after a three-day stoppage that led some gas stations to run dry, a Palestinian official said.

"Supplies have resumed. We have already received 1.5 million litres (330,000 gallons) at our depots this morning," Mujahid Salameh, head of the state-owned General Petroleum Corp (GPC) told AFP.

Dor-Alon, the main supplier of fuel to the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, had stopped supplies early Tuesday, on the grounds of an unpaid debt of 120 million shekels (27 million dollars).

If post-dated Palestinian Authority cheques to Dor-Alon were added to the amount in arrears, the debt would climb to 88 million dollars, Salameh said.

"They promised to continue daily supplies in keeping with our needs, which are two million litres a day," he added.

Dor-Alon decided on Thursday to resume supplies after receiving assurances from Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas that a first tranche of 132 million shekels (29 million dollars) would be paid in the next few days, said Salameh.

How the rest of the arrears will be paid will be decided during a meeting scheduled on Sunday between Palestinian officials and representatives of the Israeli company.



PHOTO: STAR

The publication ceremony of a book titled 'Pashchatyer Chitrashlipider Katha' by Kabir Chowdhury, second from right, was held at National Press Club in the city yesterday. On his right are Dr Anisuzaman and Prof Syed Manzurul Islam while on his left is Lion ANM Mizanur Rahman.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN US Debate likely to resume next week

AFP, Washington

The debate over immigration reform and legalising the status of illegal immigrants in the United States, stalled for over a month, is likely to resume next week in the Senate, Majority Leader Bill Frist said Thursday.

Frist said senators should commit "full session days" to the bill, "with a considerable number of amendments debated and voted on each day," though he would not specify whether the process would take one or two weeks.

The announcement came after

Frist reached an agreement with Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid on the makeup of the House-Senate committee that will be charged with reconciling the two chambers' different versions of the bill and coming up with a unified piece of legislation.

Reid, for his part, said he welcomed the bill's return to the Senate floor.

"America's immigration system is broken, and our national security depends on Republicans and Democrats finding common ground to fix it. The assurances I have received from Senator Frist make

me hopeful we can finally move forward on real comprehensive reform," Reid said.

The immigration issue has divided the Republican Party, with some members of Congress pushing for strict penalties against illegal immigrants and those who employ or assist them.

Proposed legislation passed in the House of Representatives in December would criminalise illegal residency and construct a fence along a vast section of the southern US border.

Third term debate shows cracks in African democracy

REUTERS, Dakar

A crop of African leaders changing constitutional rules to cling to power -- from Uganda to Chad and perhaps also Nigeria -- shows democracy is still struggling to take root in many parts of the world's poorest continent.

As multiparty politics sprung up across Africa in the 1990s, in the wake of the Cold War and the collapse of apartheid, it stirred hopes of an "African Renaissance" -- an end to the "Big Man" politics, which dominated the continent since independence.

But while economic reform flourished, the democratic promise of a new generation of African leaders -- aware of the continent's problems but tolerant of dissent -- has dwindled amid authoritarian measures and a thirst for power from some.

"There were hopes for a democratic renewal in Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Congo," said Patrick Smith, editor of London-based Africa Confidential.

"But there is no question if you look at the last couple of years the democracy-meter has shifted back into the negative."

Among the starkest examples is Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, who promised a change from the bloodsoaked regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin when he seized power in 1986.

Named by former US President Bill Clinton as the leader of the "African Renaissance", the 62-year-old former rebel won re-election to a third term in power in February after scrapping term limits and persecuting his rival for treason.

He joined leaders from Guinea, Gabon, Burkina Faso and Chad who have used constitutional changes to extend their rule.

The reputations of other members of the "new breed" such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Eritrea's Isaias Afwerki and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia -- a member of Tony Blair's Commission for Africa -- have also suffered as they repressed or silenced opponents.

"This is not just a third term issue. This is about protecting democratic institutions, NGOs and civil society, which are increasingly coming under attack," said Stephen Morrison of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

**ALARM BELLS** But it is the campaign by supporters of Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to allow him a third term in Africa's most populous country that has rung alarm bells loudest. Obasanjo has ruled the oil producer since its return to democracy in 1999.

"The ethnic and religious divisions in Nigeria threaten chaos if Obasanjo wins a third term," said Sebastian Spio-Garbrah, Africa analyst with Eurasia Group. "It will be very hard for Nigeria to provide leadership on democratic issues if Obasanjo changes the constitution."

The third-term campaign has stirred violent opposition from Muslims and ethnic groups in Nigeria opposed to another four year term for Obasanjo, a Christian from the southwestern Yoruba tribe. It is symptomatic of ethnic tensions across Africa.

"At the moment, democracy in Africa is really just juggling regional, ethnic interests. It is regarded as democracy but it does not give people any ideological options," said Smith.

Ruling cliques often hold a president in power because they fear a loss of economic benefits or even persecution. From veteran strongman Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe to Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, ethnic interests underpin governments.

International conditions, meanwhile, have eased the pressure for democratic reform. The increasingly voracious appetite of China and India for African resources has provided trading partners who analysts say are

less fussy about rights abuses.

Washington's concern over the spread of radical Islam in the Horn of Africa and the arid Sahel belt has also encouraged it at times to turn a blind eye to governments and leaders with chequered rights records, analysts say.

"In many ways this is like a return to the Cold War -- African countries can play foreign powers off against one another," said Smith. "Only it is 'Cold War plus' ... There are ideological, political and economic interests at stake."

With many African governments relying on foreign aid for much of their budget, observers say donors should use their leverage to encourage reform.

"Easy foreign money is the very basis of bad government here," said

Ugandan political commentator Andrew Mwenda. "If a government depends on resources collected from its own people, it will be forced into dialogue."

MANDELA'S EXAMPLE

The picture is not entirely negative, particularly in southern Africa, where Nelson Mandela's resignation after one term as president in 1999 was widely seen as a sign to other leaders to limit their tenure.

In Mozambique and Namibia, veteran leaders quietly stepped aside last year after decades in power. While in Zambia and Malawi, the people rejected attempts to reform the constitution to allow leaders a third term.

South African President Thabo Mbeki also won praise for his decision to step aside after two terms. Some

commentators criticised his failure to groom an heir apparent but others point to Western examples where no such succession is prepared.

"The question of lack of a successor or lack of a designated one is far-fetched. Look at the United States. Can you tell who will succeed George W. Bush?" said Prince Mashele, senior researcher at Pretoria's Institute of Security Studies.



A discussion on 'Galposamogra' of Khairukl Alam Sabuj was organised by Alokito Nagari at National Press Club in the city recently with eminent educationist Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid in the chair.

Former Fiji PM charged with inciting military mutiny

AFP, Suva

A former Fijian prime minister and coup leader appeared in court yesterday accused of inciting a military mutiny in 2000 in which eight soldiers were killed, as voting neared an end in parliamentary elections.

Military strongman Sitiveni Rabuka entered no plea when he appeared in court in the South Pacific islands' capital Suva, but told journalists outside he was not guilty. He was released on bail to appear again on June 30.

Rabuka was arrested and charged late Thursday on his return from India where he had knee surgery.

Rabuka was alleged to have incited a former senior military officer, Lieutenant Colonel Viliame Seruvakula, in July 2000 to oust military commander Voreqe Bainimarama, who still leads the armed forces, Fijian media reports said.

Iran urges Russia to speed up N-plant work

AFP, Tehran

Iran has pressed Russia to speed up work and quickly finish constructing a controversial nuclear reactor that it is building in the south of the Islamic republic, a top nuclear official said yesterday.

Mohammad Saeedi, deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Agency, said that during talks in Moscow on Thursday Tehran also complained to Russia about the lack of fuel delivered for the Bushehr plant, Iran's first nuclear reactor.

"During our discussions with the Russians we told them that since 92 percent of the Bushehr plant has already been completed, they can speed up building the equipment and also they can work in three shifts, so the plant could be completed soon," he said.