

Mubarak forming new govt to bolster development

CAIRO, Jan 3: Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has said he is forming a new government to bolster the country's development and improve the standard of living, reports AFP.

"I want to give a push to national action in various areas. I am hanging (prime ministers) to promote the process of development. Mubarak told reporters after Prime Minister Atef Sedki resigned with his entire cabinet earlier yesterday.

"My priority and that of the government is to improve living conditions for the poor," Mubarak said. The Egyptian president chose Kamal al-Ganzuri, who has been deputy prime minister and minister for planning for the last 10 years, to form a new government.

The president also urged the new parliament elected on December 6 to work hard for the creation of thousand of new jobs, to maintain state subsidies for basic goods and to continue economic reforms launched in 1991 under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund.

Mubarak said the IMF reforms would be implemented more quickly but not in a way that would adversely affect low-income families.

Egypt is trying to inject free-market reforms into a state-directed economy that has been wracked by high unemployment and a low standard of living, which has

caused violent and social unrest among the country's 60 million people.

Mubarak indicated Sedki's resignation was linked to the prime minister's health: If there was not so much work, I would have kept for a new period.

Ganzuri, 62, and a minister in Sedki's government since it was formed in 1986, is considered one of the principal architects of the economic reform programme launched in Egypt in 1991.

Earlier AP says: By naming a new prime minister, President Hosni Mubarak was apparently trying to head off criticism over Egypt's sluggish economy and accusations of election fraud, analysts say.

The new prime minister, economist Kamal el-Ganzouri, is seen as a government loyalist who, while presenting a new face, won't greatly alter policies.

"He is a man with a lot of integrity but who is not likely to make any big waves. He will continue along the same course... but with more energy," said Saad Eddin Ibrahim of the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Strategic Studies, a think tank named for a famous Muslim thinker.

E-Ganzouri, who promised to quickly form a new government, replaced Atef Sedki, who served for nine years, more than any other Egyptian prime minister.

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Palestinian candidate Hanan Ashrawi (L) waves at supporters in Jerusalem's Old City on Tuesday at the start of her election campaign for a seat in the 88-strong Palestinian Autonomy Council. Ashrawi, who was a leading member in the Palestinian delegation during the first stages of the peace talks with Israel, has since been criticising the self-rule authority for its human rights record. Palestinian elections will be held January 20.

— AFP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

US Gen Graham dead: Retired Army Lt Gen Daniel O Graham, who served as director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency and later championed the development of a space-based missile defense system, has died. He was 70. AP reports from Arlington, Virginia.

Graham died Sunday of cancer, according to High Frontier, a non-profit organization he helped found to advocate for the Strategic Defence Initiative.

Malaysia frees US woman: A US woman was freed Wednesday after prosecutors dropped drug trafficking charges which carry a mandatory death sentence, AP reports from Putrajaya, Malaysia.

Brenda Denise Ferguson, 42, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was charged with trafficking in about 2.4 kilograms (5.29 pounds) of heroin at the airport on September 4.

Rushdie wins Whitbread Prize: The Indian-born British writer Salman Rushdie, who has lived in hiding since an Iranian death edict was passed against him almost seven years ago, Wednesday won the annual Whitbread Prize for the best novel of 1995. APF reports from London.

Rushdie won the prize for his latest novel, "The moor's last sigh," which the judges described as "an outstanding book in an excellent field."

King Fahd in good health: Crown Prince Abdullah said Tuesday that King Fahd is in good health, one day after the Saudi monarch put him in temporary charge of the world's largest oil-exporting nation, AP reports from Riyadh.

Fahd, Saudi Arabia's ruler since 1982 announced Monday he needed time to recuperate from an apparent stroke.

Polls in Chechnya in Mar/Apr likely: National Assembly elections in the Russian republic of Chechnya will take place in either March or April, Moscow-backed leader Doku Zavgayev said Tuesday. APF reports from Moscow.

Speaking on a Moscow radio station, he said the legislature that emerged from the polls would be a legitimate organ of power.

Chinese held with dynamite: Police in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou arrested a disgruntled worker who strapped dynamite to his body to extort money from his boss and then seized a woman as a hostage to make his get-away, it was reported yesterday. APF reports from Hong Kong.

Li Jiansheng, a migrant worker from Hunan, was caught by police on New Year's Eve after he succeeded in getting 3,000 yuan (360 US dollars) from his boss by threatening to blow him to pieces with dynamite attached to his body, the Hong Kong branch of China News Service said.

ROK to discuss aiding PLO: Foreign Minister Chung Ko-kyung will express South Korea's willingness to actively participate in aiding Palestinians in their newly autonomous regions, government officials said Wednesday. APF reports from Seoul.

Gong was to make a key note speech next Tuesday in a Paris conference run by the International Monetary Fund, the UN Development Fund and other organizations and countries that will discuss about 550 million in proposed projects in the Palestinian regions.

Crackdown on homeless in Moscow: Police have been given authority to keep Moscow's streets clear of the city's 250,000 to 300,000 beggars and homeless people, with the authorities pledging to help find them jobs and crack down on loitering, Interfax news agency reported Tuesday. APF reports from Moscow.

Homeless people will be taken to special shelters that are to be opened in every Moscow district, city authorities told the agency.

US backs change in KSA leadership

WASHINGTON, Jan 3: The United States on Tuesday backed the leadership change in Saudi Arabia, saying the country was "in good and stable hands" with Crown Prince Abdullah running the government while his brother King Fahd recovers from a stroke, reports Reuter.

In terms of the kingdom and its governance, we think it's in good and stable hands," State Department deputy spokesman Glyn Davies told reporters.

Davies said the United States believed the transfer of power to be temporary, not permanent.

According to a royal order on Monday the 73-year-old Fahd handed over the running of the government to Abdullah, who is reputed to take a less pro-Western line than his elder brother.

Serbs' unity shattered as realities of peace deal sink in

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jan 3: The Bosnian Serb military commander, Gen Ratko Mladic, says he wants to give peace a chance. At least that's what listeners to "independent" Radio Krajina are hearing, reports AP.

Radio Krajina, run by men loyal to Mladic, is campaigning hard for the US-backed Bosnian peace deal. But Bosnian Serb state radio, loyal to political leader Radovan Karadzic, is lukewarm at best about the plan.

As the effects of the Dayton peace plan start being felt, cracks are appearing in the Bosnian Serb leadership that could help make or break the deal and decide the fate of Karadzic and Mladic, both indicted as war criminals.

Disagreement between the two men are not new. Last year, Mladic defied efforts by

Karadzic to fire him. But the rift is now focused on two key points of the peace plan: the re-unification of Sarajevo under Muslim-Croat rule; and the decision to refer to international arbitration control — a northern sliver of Bosnia that links the Banja Luka region to other Serb territories.

Karadzic loyalists, such as Bosnian Serb parliament speaker Momcilo Krajisnik, focus on their power base around Sarajevo. They want to delay or prevent altogether the handing over of Serb-held Sarajevo suburbs to the Muslim-led Bosnian government.

But Mladic, who continues to be the most popular public figure among Bosnian Serbs, has teamed up with Karadzic's deputy Nikola Koljevic to back Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's drive for peace.

Although spokesman would not say where Mladic was, there is no doubt that Karadzic and others in Pale, Karadzic's small-town capital of Sarajevo speak for him. The radio director, Gen

Milovan Milutinovic, also is Mladic's spokesman.

"There is no alternative to peace. We must support the NATO forces," Milutinovic said in an interview.

Radio Krajina supported the Dayton accord and broadcast live from Paris the December 14 treaty signing. "State radio (Karadzic's station) didn't even announce it," said Milutinovic.

In early December, Mladic roundly criticised the peace deal. But observers say he is now trying to shift his position, and Serb public opinion, gradually toward acceptance.

Milutinovic makes no bones about the leadership split. His radio encourages live phone-ins that criticise Krajisnik and others in Pale, Karadzic's small-town capital of Sarajevo.

Serbs now are divided along political, military and

20 civilians killed in Kabul rocket attack

KABUL, Jan 3: Twenty civilians, including five children, were killed and 48 injured in the first rocket attack of 1996 on the besieged Afghan capital, witnesses and hospital staff said today, reports AFP.

Ten of the victims died instantly when a hail of rockets struck the southern Kabul suburb of Karte Seh late Tuesday, while the remaining 10 died on the way to hospital or after admission, they said.

The salvo of about 20 Soviet-built BM 21 rockets, which the government said was fired by the Taliban militia, struck a busy bazaar area claiming more victims than any similar attack here is recent months, locals claimed.

The barrage struck two tailors' shops, a private home and bustling market streets, showering the area with shards of twisted aluminium that sliced into stall holders and passers-by.

"I was standing behind a wall when the rockets started landing all around the area. When it ended, I saw bodies everywhere and the wounded were moaning and crying," local resident Mohamed Ali told AFP.

Pools of congealed blood which had seeped into the dusty earth still marked the scene of the carnage today.

Government officials blamed the attack on the Islamic Taliban who have been encamped around Kabul for nearly three months, saying state forces had later launched a retaliatory attack south of the city.

Kabul has come under almost daily rocket and artillery barrages over recent months, with the loss of scores of lives.

Nigeria frees 4 more political prisoners

LAGOS, Nigeria, Jan 3: Four more Nigerian political prisoners have been freed, including the senior aide to the country's most prominent political detainee, reports AP.

Three independent Lagos newspapers on Tuesday quoted government security officials as saying they had released Fred Eno, the most senior aide to Moshood Abiola.

Eno is the third aide to Abiola to be freed in the last two weeks. On Sunday, the government released Ademola Aminu-Adele, a leader of the opposition National Democratic Coalition and aide to Abiola.

A millionaire businessman, Abiola was jailed when he declared himself president on the anniversary of the annulled election.

He reportedly has been moved to more relaxed quarters in a government "guest house," another sign his 17-month detention may be ending.

Tigers attack air force base, 1 killed

COLOMBO, Jan 3: Tamil Tiger guerrillas launched a major attack against an air force base in eastern Sri Lanka today, killing one airman and wounding at least 12 others, defence officials said, reports AFP.

Guerrillas from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mounted the pre-awn raid against the small training facility near the town of Morawewa but the air force was able to resist the assault, officials said.

The Tigers used a heavy concentration of cadres. They obviously wanted to overrun the camp but failed in their mission, a military spokesman here said adding that rebel casualties were not immediately known.

The latest LTTE attack further intensified violence in the island's eastern region, where at least 23 people have died in clashes since the New Year.

It comes a month after the Tigers' lost their northern citadel of Jaffna to the army.

And what about Zhirinovsky's habit of punching out his comrades in the Russian parliament?

He's "emotional." And he was provoked.

US govt shutdown turns into emergency for State Dept, embassies

WASHINGTON, Jan 3: The partial US federal government shutdown is turning into an emergency for the State Department and US embassies, the Washington Post reported in today's editions.

It said there was a mounting sense of crisis among senior officials as undone paperwork piled up, the backlog of unprocessed visa and passport applications grew, travel plans were cancelled and embassy officials scrambled for funds to pay local employees.

"We just don't have any cash," Richard Mosse, Undersecretary of State for Management, was quoted as saying.

The budget impasse between President Bill Clinton and Republican congressional leaders has led to a record 18-day partial government shutdown that has idled 280,000 employees and left another 580,000 working without pay.

Meanwhile AP adds, about 600,000 homebound elderly people who depend on a government programme for meals may be forced to go without by next week if the government shutdown continues, officials said Tuesday.

Up to 1 million elderly Americans a day get meals through nutrition pro-

grammes financed by the US Administration on Aging.

But money is drying up quickly because Health and Human Services is among nine departments for which the US Congress has not passed appropriations bills.

Eight American presidential candidates split more than 22 million dollars in taxpayer-provided federal matching funds made available to them Tuesday.

The infusion of cash comes as the contest enters one of its most costly phases — a period of cross-country campaign swings, expensive media buys and costly fundraising efforts, with the first primary contests just over a month away.

Nobody is going to get all the cash he's entitled to — at least, not immediately. That's because of a requirement that the Federal Election Commission put aside money for each party's convention and the general election campaign.

Because revenues from a tax return checkoff fund total less than the amount for which candidates have qualified, each campaign got only a pro-rated 60 per cent payment Tuesday and will receive the remainder over the next five months.

Off the Record

Ordered to make court appearance



Not always misrepresented

HELSINKI, Finland, Russia's rowdy Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who would redraw the borders of Europe without batting an eye, is so meek at home that he asks permission before changing TV stations, his wife said Tuesday.

Galina Lebedeva calls her mate "very quiet and peaceful," a warm, loving, romantic man who is "crazy about his work" and misrepresented in the biased media.

Well, not always misrepresented.

Lebedeva, on a social visit to Helsinki, said her husband of nearly 25 years did actually say that Baltic nationalists should "get in boats and start rowing" if he wins Russia's presidential election this year.

And what about Zhirinovsky's habit of punching out his comrades in the Russian parliament?

He's "emotional." And he was provoked.

Fall of Ho Mong signals Khun Sa's end of career

BANGKOK, Jan 3: Myanmars troops have taken over the headquarters of opium warlord Khun Sa in what some former associates said on Tuesday signalled his surrender and the end of his career as one of the world's most infamous drug barons.

Civilians in the strongholds of Ho Mong on the edge of Myanmar's eastern Shan state, about 30 km (19 miles) from the Thai border, told Reuters by telephone Myanmars troops met no resistance when they entered the town on Monday morning.

The whereabouts of the 61-year-old Khun Sa were not known but former associates were convinced the wily guerilla commander had cut a deal with Myanmar authorities.

Khun Sa seems to have reached a secret deal with the Myanmars, first to hand over his troops and territory to them, then announced a surrender which would mean he would be granted an amnesty and live peacefully for the rest of his life," said one veteran Shan nationalist politician.

Khun Kyaw Oo, until recently an official in Khun Sa's guerilla organisation, told Reuters from northern Thailand: "Khun Sa is making a dirty move at the end of his career by selling the Mong Tai Army to Myanmar."

"Thousands of Myanmars soldiers have been trucked into the town since Monday."

Travellers said Tuesday that Iraqi border officials also were delaying the departure of Jordanians and thoroughly searching cars and visitors from the kingdom.

"Iraq is no longer safe for us because many Jordanians are unjustly thrown in jail," said a Jordanian businessman who exports food to Iraq.

"Iraqi security officials tell Jordanians as they arrest them that they are paying for the 'misdemeanor' of their government," said the trader who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

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