

Arabs mourn Fahd as great leader

AFP, Cairo

Arab leaders yesterday mourned the death of Saudi King Fahd as a major loss for the Muslim world, remembering him as a great monarch who will go down in history as a tireless defender of Arab causes.

From Egypt to Yemen, tributes poured in for the man who ruled Saudi Arabia during the most turbulent period in its history while an Arab summit due to be held on Wednesday was postponed for three-day mourning periods across the region.

While Fahd may be remembered most for the close relationship Riyadh forged with the United States, he was also active in foreign policy within the region, promoting peace plans for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However perhaps his greatest achievement in this respect was bringing Lebanese MPs to the western Saudi mountain resort of Taef in 1989 to hammer out an accord which ended 15 years of civil war.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who called for the Arab summit in Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss the threat of regional terrorism after deadly bombings last month in the Egyptian resort, ordered three days of mourning nationwide.

Mubarak "deplores the death of an honourable brother and dear friend and expresses on behalf of the Egyptian people his sincerest condolences to the Saudi people and the deceased's family," a statement said.

"The kingdom has lost an honourable son and one of its dearest leaders ... History will remember the great and numerous achievements he accomplished for the sake of the holy sites, his people and his nation," it added.

Mubarak compared Fahd to a "knight".

Jordan's King Abdullah, who was on his way to London for talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair when Fahd's death was announced, decreed a 40-day period of mourning at the royal court.

"The Arab and Muslim world has lost an exceptional leader who did not spare any effort in order to unify Arab and Muslim ranks and defend their identity," King Abdullah said in a message of condolence.

"The royal Hashemite court ... expresses the deep sadness and sorrow of King Abdullah II and the

Jordanian people and mourns King Fahd whose death is a huge loss," a statement said.

A court official accompanying the King Abdullah to London told AFP that the Jordanian monarch would lead a big delegation Tuesday to Saudi Arabia to attend Fahd's funeral.

The Jordanian government meanwhile held a special session and ordered three days of mourning nationwide as well as a one-day closure Tuesday of all public institutions, including government ministries.

In Beirut, the government ordered three days of mourning and the closure of public buildings on Tuesday to "honour the memory of a great man who always gave support to Lebanon."



Picture taken on November 25, 2001 shows former Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat (L) meeting with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh. Saudi King Fahd died yesterday.

Bush often faced fire for ties with Saudis

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush has often faced charges that longstanding ties between his family and the family of Saudi King Fahd, who died yesterday after a long illness, clouded his judgement on issues like oil and terrorism.

The White House has flatly denied such accusations, which grew louder after 15 Saudis were among the 19 hijackers who carried out the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on behalf of Osama bin Laden.

"Before September 11, in Saudi Arabia, terrorists were raising money and recruiting and operating with little opposition. Today, the Saudi government is taking the fight to al-Qaeda, and America and the world are safer," Bush said in August 2004 during his successful reelection campaign.

But the official commission that investigated the failures that led up to the attacks said in its final report, released in July 2004, that "Saudi Arabia has been a problematic ally in combating Islamic extremism."



Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh (R) speaks with King of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuk during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Wangchuk is in India on a four-day visit.

British, Italian cops grill 21 suspects

Probe puts focus on bombing networks

AP, London

Police in Britain and Italy questioned 21 suspects as they sought to piece together the networks behind the London bombings, probing for possible links between the two sets of attacks and for connections to any accomplices overseas.

Investigators arrested seven people Sunday at a four-story brick apartment building in Brighton, on England's southern coast, and also searched another home in the city. They gave few details about what role the six men and seven women were suspected of playing in the failed July 21 attacks on the capital's transit system.

So far, 18 people are in custody in Britain and three in Italy.

Police say the four suicide bombers who carried out the July 7 attacks, which killed 52 victims, are all dead. And they believe they have arrested all the failed July 21 bombers, whose explosives detonated only partially and took no lives.

Now they are searching for those who may have recruited and directed the attackers and built the explosives, anxious to catch them before they or other would-be bombers they command strike again.

New king won't change Saudi direction

REUTERS, London

Monarch in all but name for 10 years already, Saudi Arabia's new reformist King Abdullah can wield full authority after succeeding his half-brother Fahd but will not wrench the conservative kingdom onto a different path.

"I cannot imagine there will be any particular change in that (foreign) policy undertaken by the late King Fahd," the Saudi ambassador to London, Prince Turki al-Faisal, said. Asked whether the same applied to oil policy, he said: "Absolutely."

Abdullah has run Saudi Arabia's day-to-day affairs since Fahd suffered a stroke in 1995 and has been the central decision-maker on issues ranging from oil and the Middle East to the country's two-year battle against al-Qaeda militants.

He has been a driving force behind economic reform in the world's biggest oil exporter and initiated modest political change when Saudis voted in men-only elections this year for local councils. Four months later these have yet to be set up.

Abdullah was named king on Monday as soon as Fahd's death was announced.

"There will be no real change in relations with the United States and no change over oil policy or in the security crackdown," predicted Mai Yamani, a Saudi analyst at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.

Even leading an absolute monarchy, Abdullah will still have to take into account views of other senior royals, including his half-brother Prince Sultan, the new crown prince, Yamani added.

Fahd's tilt towards US fuelled Islamist anger

REUTERS, Riyadh

King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz of Saudi Arabia, who died yesterday, forged strong ties with Washington to steer his conservative kingdom through two turbulent decades but a violent Islamist backlash clouded his final, ailing years.

Fahd ascended one of the world's richest thrones in June 1982 during a petrodollar boom, which transformed Saudi Arabia from a poor desert country into a global economic power and pushed its isolated tribal society into the modern world.

He used the huge oil revenues to back Saddam Hussein's Iraq in its eight-year war with Shia Muslim Iran, but when Saddam invaded neighbouring Kuwait, Fahd invited US forces to Saudi Arabia to launch their recapture of the tiny emirate in 1991.

His decision to let half a million non-Muslim fighters into Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and home to its holiest sites, angered Saudi scholars and a Saudi-born Mujahideen fighter in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden turned against the royal family and its US allies. Ten years later his al-Qaeda network, using mainly Saudi hijackers, carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks which plunged Saudi-US ties, a cornerstone of Fahd's reign, into crisis.

The attacks revealed strains between Fahd's foreign policy, which linked his country inextricably to the world's sole superpower, and the royal family's alliance with largely anti-American and ultra-conservative religious scholars at home.

In 2003, al-Qaeda launched a violent campaign inside Saudi Arabia, targeting Westerners, security forces and oil sites.

By then an ailing King Fahd, weakened and wheelchair-bound after a stroke in 1995, had already passed day-to-day control of the kingdom to his younger half-brother, Crown Prince Abdullah.

Iran to resume nuke acts

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran said it would resume nuclear fuel activities yesterday after the European Union failed to respond in time to its offer of new talks.

Two years of hard bargaining over a nuclear program that Tehran had kept secret for 18 years appeared to be heading toward a crisis that could see Iran's case sent to the United Nations Security Council for possible sanctions.

The EU "Big Three" of Britain, France and Germany has been trying to mediate between the United States, which insists Iran is trying to produce nuclear weapons, and the Islamic Republic which says it has a right to develop peaceful atomic technology.

"We had given them a chance until midday (0730 GMT), but (EU Foreign Policy chief Javier) Solana has not announced any decision," the spokesman of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Aghamohammadi told state television.

"In the next half hour we will hand a letter to the UN nuclear agency saying we will restart activities today," he said.

Aghamohammadi said Iran was ready to restart work at a uranium conversion plant near the central city of Isfahan.

The European Union said on Sunday a resumption of work at the Isfahan plant would be "unnecessary and damaging."

It said it could derail talks over the package of economic and political incentives it intended to offer Tehran in return for Iran's indefinite suspension of nuclear fuel activities.

It was unclear whether the EU would still send Iran its proposals.

The EU, represented by Britain, France and Germany, has said if Iran went ahead and resumed work, then as a first step it would urgently consult the board of the IAEA.

The UN's nuclear watchdog can recommend referring Iran to the UN Security Council, which could decide whether to impose sanctions.

Aghamohammadi insisted the EU should negotiate Iran's right to enrich uranium.

The EU has always said Iran must permanently suspend all uranium enrichment activities and instead buy in fuel for a nuclear power station Iran is building near the southern port of Bushehr with Russian help.

Iran insists it has the right to develop the full nuclear fuel cycle and that any EU proposal that denied them this right would be unacceptable.

New King Abdullah an effective reformer

AP, Riyadh

King Abdullah, who succeeded his half brother King Fahd yesterday, is a popular leader who has been the kingdom's effective ruler for 10 years and is the main force behind an unprecedented reform drive.

The 81-year-old Abdullah, sticking to tradition, immediately appointed his half brother, Defence Minister Prince Sultan, 77, as his crown prince and successor.

The choice of Sultan is a sign that deep-rooted reform which diplomats and analysts say is the only way the ruling al Saud dynasty can ensure its survival has been placed on the back burner as Abdullah pursues change at his own pace.

Sultan like Abdullah, Fahd and all the 42 sons of Saudi Arabia's founder, Abdul-Aziz, had only a rudimentary education in the era before oil wealth flooded the kingdom. Sultan is likely to appease the religious establishment, which gives the monarchy its legitimacy, rather than continue to reform its institutions.

The newer generation grew up in riches, with greater technology and contact with the West typified by Sultan's son, Prince Bandar, who was Saudi Arabia's urbane ambassador to the United States until he stepped down to return home two weeks ago.

Saudi Arabia faces the challenges of liberalising its ailing economy and satisfying many Saudis' desire for greater freedom and more say in politics.

Britain may pay \$1m to Brazilian's family

AFP, London

Britain's Metropolitan Police could pay up to one million dollars in damages to the family of the innocent Brazilian who was shot dead in a bungled anti-terror chase in London, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The Daily Mail said John Yates, deputy assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard, was expected Monday to make an initial payment to the family of electrician Jean Charles de Menezes, 27.

However, legal experts quoted by the Daily Mail believe the force could end up paying up to one million dollars to the impoverished family. Police officials were quoted as saying the final figure will be "very substantial."



A Nepalese student (L) throws a stone at riot policemen as he takes part in a protest in Kathmandu yesterday. At least a dozen students were injured when they clashed with riot police demanding release of their jailed colleagues.

Emails suggest US terror trials rigged

AFP, Sydney

Leaked emails from two former prosecutors suggested the US military commissions set up to try detainees held at Guantanamo Bay are rigged, fraudulent and thin on evidence, Australian national radio reported yesterday.

In one of the emails obtained by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, prosecutor Major Robert Preston wrote to his supervisor in March last year that the process was perpetrating a fraud on the American people.

"I consider the insistence on pressing ahead with cases that would be marginal even if properly prepared to be a severe threat to the reputation of the military justice system and even a fraud on the American people," Preston wrote, according to the ABC.

"Surely they don't expect that this fairly half-assessed effort is all that we have been able to put together after all this time."

Of the 510 detainees being held at the Guantanamo Bay US naval base in Cuba, most of them captured during the US attack on Afghanistan in late 2001, a dozen have been declared eligible to be charged before the military commissions.

One of those facing trial is Australian David Hicks, who was allegedly fighting for the former Taliban rulers when he was captured in Afghanistan.

RUMSFELD SAYS US pullout from Iraq won't end attacks

REUTERS, AFP, London/ Washington

The withdrawal of US-led troops from Iraq and Afghanistan would do nothing to end attacks such as the London bombings, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in an article published yesterday.

Writing in Britain's Financial Times newspaper, Rumsfeld said "extremists" had been killing people in attacks around the world for at least 20 years before the arrival of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"The extremists do not seek a negotiated settlement with the west," he wrote. "They want America and Britain and other coalition allies to surrender our principles."

"Some seem to believe that accommodating extremist demands, including retreating from Afghanistan and Iraq, might put an end to their grievances, and, with them, future attacks," he added.

"But consider that when terrorists struck America on September 11 2001, a radical Islamist government ruled Afghanistan ... and Saddam Hussein tightly clung to power in Iraq."

Rumsfeld said those behind such attacks would always offer "empty justifications" to try to explain their actions.

"They seek to destroy things they could never build in 1,000 years and kill people they could never persuade," he wrote.

His comments echo those of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who said last week there was no justification for attacks which killed 52 people along with the four bombers in London on July 7 and second wave of bombs two weeks later which failed to explode.