



PHOTO: AFP

Turkish Kurdish women wave a traditional headscarf during a gathering to celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish New Year yesterday in the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir. Newroz, which means "new day" in Kurdish and marks the first day of Spring, is also celebrated in Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Albania, Bahrain, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

11 dead as blasts mar Afghan New Year

AFP, Kabul

Four bomb blasts struck Afghanistan yesterday, killing 11 people and wounding several more as the country marked the first day of its New Year amid a spike in deadly insurgent attacks.

The extremist Taliban militia claimed responsibility for the deadliest blast, in which six people were killed when a suicide bomber blew up a minivan packed with explosives at a police checkpoint in eastern Nangarhar province.

A policeman and five civilians were killed, President Hamid Karzai said in a statement condemning the blast.

"Enemies of Afghanistan, by conducting this terrorist action on a day that Afghans celebrate New Year in peace, showed that they don't have any aim except to destroy Afghanistan," he said.

The attacker had apparently wanted to enter

the bustling city of Jalalabad to carry out the attack but was stopped at a checkpoint set up as part of increased security measures for the New Year, local officials said.

Hours later, a remote-controlled bomb blew up in nearby Khost province among hundreds of men gathered around a small hilltop shrine for picnics to mark the start of the New Year in Afghanistan, which uses the solar calendar.

Two people were killed and four wounded in that attack, provincial police chief Abdul Qayoom Bakizoi told AFP.

The bomb, planted in a road, blew up as a four-by-four vehicle drove over it, he said.

The attack took place near a shrine about seven kilometres (four miles) southeast of the city of Khost, where men had gathered in dispersed groups, perhaps accounting for the low casualty toll.

Obama launches 'YouTube diplomacy'

AFP, Washington

Ping pong diplomacy helped thaw US-China relations and YouTube diplomacy may do the same for US ties with Iran.

President Barack Obama, whose use of the Web helped catapult him into the White House, turned to the Internet again to launch the first major diplomatic initiative of his young presidency.

In recording a video message to the Iranian people marking the Iranian New Year Nowruz and distributing it online, Obama seized one of the Web tools he used so effectively during his presidential campaign.

US plans steps to engage Iran in dialogue

Says White House

AFP, Washington

The White House says it has more steps planned to entice Iran to engage in dialogue after President Barack Obama offered a "new beginning" to turn back the tide on decades of mutual animosity.

Obama's historic online video message marking the Iranian New Year Nowruz was the latest dramatic step in an emerging diplomatic strategy designed to prod Iran to the negotiating table or bring consequences to bear if it refuses.

Asked whether the White House hoped the message would launch an ongoing dialogue with Iran, as Washington and its allies try to halt Tehran's nuclear

programme, the president's spokesman Robert Gibbs said Friday "obviously, there will need to be some evaluation overall with our policies."

He told reporters that a follow-up move had already been penciled out, "and there are many more, but none of which I am going to get into today."

But The New York Times reported Saturday, citing unnamed officials and diplomats, that among other measures being weighed by the administration are a direct communication from Obama to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, and an end to a prohibition on direct contacts between junior US diplomats and their Iranian counterparts

around the world.

Obama's appeal urged an end to decades of animosity and offered "honest" engagement with the Islamic republic.

In a decisive break with his predecessor George W. Bush, Obama called Nowruz celebrations a time of "new beginnings" and said Iran could take its "rightful place" in the world if it renounced terror and embraced peace.

"For nearly three decades, relations between our nations have been strained," he said. "But at this holiday, we are reminded of the common humanity that binds us together."

Thai govt survives no-confidence vote

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's three-month-old government survived a no-confidence vote Saturday, but analysts said it is likely to face continuing street demonstrations by loyalists of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and five of his Cabinet ministers won by comfortable margins, with Abhisit tallying 246-176 ballots with 12 abstentions in the House of Representatives.

The opposition Phuea Thai Party, which supports Thaksin, initiated the no-confidence motion but failed to deliver any knockout punches as it criticised the

government for poor handling of the economy and accused it of supporting the protesters who occupied Bangkok's airports last year.

"The prime minister thinks that the government has gained more stability, and it will help him work with more ease," government spokesman Panithan Wattanakorn said after the vote.

Abhisit's Democrat Party controls a majority ruling coalition in the lower house.

The opposition said the vote was not surprising, but they were "satisfied" with their performance and "will continue to keep close watch on the government," said Phuea Thai Party spokesman Prompong Nopparit.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian supporters of the Great Indonesia Movement Party or Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), for which Prabowo Subianto - the former head of the country's notorious Kopassus special forces - is running for presidency, gather during an election campaign in Jakarta yesterday.

Singapore needs immigrants to survive

AFP, Singapore

Singapore, which is facing its worst recession in history, needs foreigners to survive in the long-term, founding father Lee Kuan Yew said.

The city-state is not reproducing itself fast enough and the government has in recent years opened its doors to attract more talented migrants to avert a serious population shortage.

"Without new citizens and permanent residents, we are going to be 'The Last of the Mohicans'. We will disappear," Lee, 85, told an audience at a local university late Friday.

Lee is the country's first

prime minister and remains an influential figure. He is an adviser in his son Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's cabinet with the title minister mentor.

Singapore needs a fertility rate of 2.1 babies per woman to maintain its population naturally but a string of incentives including monetary ones to encourage Singaporeans to have babies has failed to make an impact.

A report released this month by the Department of Statistics showed 39,935 babies were born in 2008, well short of the 60,000 births the country needs each year.

N Korea says 2 US reporters detained

AP, Seoul

North Korea detained two Americans for illegally crossing its border and is investigating them, the communist country's official news agency said yesterday.

The arrests come at a sensitive time, with the North planning on firing a satellite-equipped rocket into space in early April. A launch some fear will be a cover for testing missile technology.

The two female US journalists were arrested March 17 while "while illegally intruding into the territory" of North Korea after crossing the border with China.

N Korea reconnects military phone lines, reopens border

AFP, Seoul

North Korea Saturday restored military communications lines with the South and reopened the border crossing to a joint industrial complex, as tensions remain high ahead of an expected rocket launch.

The unification ministry in Seoul, which handles relations with Pyongyang, said hundreds of South Koreans were able to travel to and from the Seoul-funded Kaesong industrial estate, nearly two weeks after the border was first shut.

"Border crossings resumed this morning. People are

crossing the border into Kaesong," a Unification Ministry spokesman told AFP.

Pyeongyang had cut the phone lines and sealed the border in protest at a joint US-South Korea military exercise, which it qualified as a prelude to war. The war games, which began on March 9, ended Friday.

The phone lines are used to authorise crossings to and from Kaesong, just north of the border, which opened in 2005 as a symbol of reconciliation on the peninsula, where the North and South are still technically at war.

Russia clashes kill five soldiers, 14 rebels

AFP, Moscow

Five soldiers and about 14 rebel fighters have been killed in the latest clashes in Russia's Caucasus province of Dagestan, news agencies reported Saturday as operations wound down.

The bodies of about 10 fighters were discovered at the close of an operation that began on Wednesday in the mountainous district of Karabudakhkent, 30 kilometres (20 miles) south of the regional capital Makhachkala, officials said.

Five soldiers were killed and three were injured in the

course of the fighting on Friday.

In addition to the 10 rebels killed in the mountains, security forces had also identified the bodies of four fighters intercepted and killed on Friday while driving their car in Makhachkala, the local branch of the interior ministry said, quoted by Interfax.

Overnight, fighting continued in the operation in the hills south of the city.

"A dug-out was identified on Friday evening and intense firing by mortars and helicopters took place throughout the night and into the morning," Interfax quoted a source at the operation's headquarters as saying.

BANGLA LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

BANGLA LANGUAGE INSTITUTE (BLI) is the Center for teaching Bangla Language to students coming from various foreign Universities. Housed in the campus of INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH, Baridhara, Dhaka, BLI has got its own academic and administrative set-up to carry on its Bangla Language teaching programs throughout the year.

BLI is looking for suitable candidates for the positions of Office Manager and an Assistant to Manager.

- For Office Manager, Master's degree in any discipline with impressive academic background from any reputed university;
- Similar experience of 3 - 4 years in any reputed organization / university
- For the other position, Bachelor's degree with a good academic background and at least one year's experience in any reputed organization / university.
- Good command of English and computer literacy are essential prerequisites for both the positions.

In case of an otherwise suitable candidate, any of the above criteria may be relaxed.

Compensation package will be commensurate with qualification, experience and other elements of suitability.

Please send your resume together with a cover letter, latest by April 1, 2009, to:

Deputy Director, Human Resources,
Independent University Bangladesh,
58 Park Road, Baridhara Dhaka
E-mail: hrdept@iub.edu.bd



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian school children, holding national flags, take part in a parade in the streets of the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday to celebrate Jerusalem's designation as the 2009 "capital of Arab culture". Celebrations in the West Bank were held after Israel banned such activity in the disputed Holy City.

'Jerusalem as Arab cultural capital' marked in West Bank

AFP, Bethlehem

Events were being held in the West Bank on Saturday to mark Jerusalem's designation as the 2009 "capital of Arab culture" while Israel banned them in the disputed Holy City itself.

The streets of Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem, were bedecked with the flags of Arab countries for the cultural festival to be launched by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas at 5 pm (1500

GMT).

It was there that Abbas and prime minister Salam Fayyad received officials from Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Jordan.

The Palestinian Authority had organised cultural activities in several locations -- including annexed, mostly Arab east Jerusalem -- to celebrate the city's proclamation as this year's capital of Arab culture.

'Change you can eat:' First lady starts White House garden

AFP, Washington

As US President Barack Obama hopes for green shoots of economic recovery, his wife Michelle is seeking a different return to growth, from the first White House kitchen garden in 60 years.

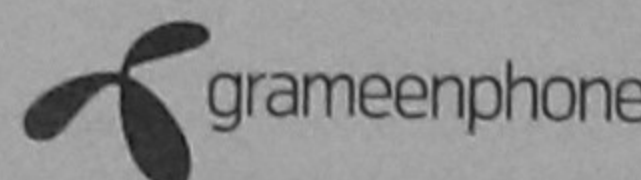
The first lady grabbed a shovel and joined local school kids on Friday to break ground on the first presidential vegetable patch since Eleanor Roosevelt's "victory garden" in World War II, as part of her crusade to promote healthy eating.

The organic plot, on a secluded part of the White House's south lawn, is tipped to produce a bumper harvest of spinach, lettuce, kale, shell-peas, broccoli and radishes, as well as verdant traditional herbs.

Attention Valued Subscribers

We are pleased to extend the night time tariff benefit from 12 am to 8 am (Previously from 12 am to 7 am). Now you can talk from 12 am to 8 am to any GP number only at 49 paisa/minute and to any operator's number at Tk.1/minute. Also enjoy an attractive Friends & Family (F&F) rate of 49 paisa/minute, 24 hours a day.

> Conditions apply



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Katalyst, a market development project under Ministry of Commerce and funded by a consortium of donors, requests proposals from interested consulting firms/research firm/advertising agencies/publishing companies/development organizations and other relevant entities for implementing the following assignment(s):

Assignment 1: Facilitating Introduction of Rural Marketing Course in Selected Universities

Universities have expressed interest to incorporate Rural Marketing into their course programs. The contracting organization is expected to work with Katalyst and selected universities to facilitate the launching of the course in the Universities. Tasks include among others,

- Liaising, following up with selected universities and faculty
- Coordinating to build capacity of faculty and local case development
- Building linkages with private sector and academia, where applicable
- Organizing interaction programs, seminars
- Monitoring and documentation of activities

Assignment 2: Developing and Launching of an Advertising pamphlet to help promote small businesses

There are opportunities in the market to launch an advertising pamphlet that can be commercially sustainable and appealing to a cross section of businesses and readers. The concept involves developing a pamphlet, containing classified advertisements of various businesses, which will be circulated to the readers for free. Organizations interested to tap into this opportunity are expected to cost share in launching such initiative.

Assignment 3: Identifying the key success factors that ensure the viability of Community Information Centers in different locations

The pilot project of Grameenphone Community Information Centers (CIC's), started with 16 centers in February 2006. Katalyst has since then partnered with GP in these CIC to help more rural farmer and business get access to required information and services in a timely and efficient manner. Currently there are over 500 CICs running in around 450 Upazillas'. With the success of majority GP-CICs, GP is planning on scaling up this initiative in new locations. Hence a study needs to be done to determine the key factors that ensure the viability of these existing centers.

Organizations can bid for one or multiple assignments and are expected to submit their final proposals consisting of a separate technical and financial bid, by 5.00pm April 02, 2009. The proposal should be based on the terms of reference that can be collected by e-mailing to services.division@swisscontact-bd.org along with a brief profile of your company and specific assignment(s) being bid for.