

Thai protesters kill 2 cops

Govt warns of stern action

AP, AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's government warned protesters yesterday that more violence could erupt if the entrenched demonstrations that have paralysed areas of the capital for nearly two months did not end soon.

The warning came in the wake of double night time attacks that killed two policemen and wounded 13 people, denting hopes that a reconciliation plan offered by the government last week would resolve the crisis peacefully.

Both sides, Red Shirts and government said the attacks were the work of groups intent on derailing embattled Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's reconciliation "roadmap" aimed at ending a two-month confrontation by holding elections on November 14.

The Reds have signed up to the peace process but are demanding a firm date for the dissolution of parliament before dispersing their protest base, where they are barricaded behind piles of fuel-soaked tyres and razor wire.

European Union envoys in Bangkok called Saturday for a quick and peaceful resolution to Thailand's crippling political crisis in the wake of further deadly unrest.

Government spokesman Panithan Wattanayagorn said that if the so-called Red Shirts didn't end their occupation of Bangkok's prime commercial district "some people who don't wish to see reconciliation take place may take this opportunity to launch another attack."

He described the unknown assailants responsible for several attacks in the capital as "ill-intentioned people who used terror to try to ruin the conciliatory atmosphere." Violence tied to the protest including clashes between demonstrators and security forces has killed 29 people and wounded nearly 1,000.

On Friday, protest leaders had signalled they generally agreed with the reconciliation plan and might soon end the protracted demonstrations. Protest leaders denied Red Shirt involvement in the attacks and urged security forces be withdrawn from the streets, noting they only served as "lightning rods" for those trying to provoke violence.



British opposition Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg (L), British opposition Conservative party Leader David Cameron (C) and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (R) attend a VE Day memorial service at the Cenotaph in central London yesterday. British newspapers urged Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg to seal a power-sharing pact without delay after inconclusive elections.

PLO approves indirect peace talks with Israel

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas secured the approval yesterday of the Palestine Liberation Organisation for indirect peace talks with Israel, despite opposition from several factions.

Fatah deputy secretary general Jibril Rajub said the decision was taken after a meeting of the PLO's executive committee.

"The Palestinian leadership has approved the proximity talks," Rajub told reporters.

The Palestinians were expected to give their formal acceptance later Saturday to President Barack Obama's special Middle East envoy George Mitchell, who has been shuttling between Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Abbas had balked at again entering talks with Israel until first getting backing from the Arab League and now the PLO, an umbrella group of Palestinian factions.

Ahead of the meeting, the PLO appeared split between Abbas's dominant Fatah faction and other groups.

Dalai Lama included in Indian census

ANI, Dharamsala

Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, endorsed his relevant details in the form for the 2011 census.

His inclusion in the census has paved the way for bona fide Tibetan refugees residing in India to be reckoned in the census.

"We visited Dalai Lama and he signed the census form with great happiness. He said that he is staying here for the last 50 years and is very happy to be included in the 2011 census count of India," said B R Chauhan, Census Officer.

"He also assured that all Tibetans in-exile would include their names in the census so that they can get their ensuing UID (Unique ID Card) that is at par with any authentic document of an individual," he added.

Protesters insist UK parties on voting reform

AFP, INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London

Some 1,000 protesters staged a noisy rally outside a meeting of Britain's third-placed Liberal Democrat party yesterday, pressing them to insist on voting reform in tense power-sharing talks.

Chanting "fair votes now," the demonstrators rallied outside the central London venue where Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg was holding talks with his party over their stance in talks with the main opposition Conservatives.

Conservative chief David Cameron launched negotiations with the Lib Dems on Friday following a general election which produced a hung parliament, forcing the Tory leader to seek allies to try to form a viable government.

Cameron is firmly opposed to switching Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system for proportional representation, which the Lib Dems have long demanded as they seek a fairer share of power.

Police estimated that some 1,000 protesters -- chanting "We want to speak to Nick" -- marched



on the Lib Dem talks' venue from nearby Parliament Square, outside the House of Commons.

"Mr Clegg has the opportunity of a generation," said Pam Giddy of campaign group Power 2010, calling on the Lib Dems to "stay strong" in pushing for a change in the voting system.

"People want electoral reform," she said.

The Liberal Democrats were disappointed after winning only 57 seats in the election -- five fewer than in the previous parliament -- despite winning nearly a quarter of the popular vote.

VOTING RIGHT COMPENSATION AT £ 750 Britons denied the right to vote due to chaos at polling booths could be entitled up to 750 pounds compensation each, a lawyer has said.

Voters in at least 14 constituencies in eight cities including London, Sheffield and Birmingham were affected by the chaos.

Long queues formed outside polling stations as returning officers were overwhelmed by the numbers wanting to vote. Several were turned away after queuing for hours.

Kerala quizzes Lankans ahead of Rahul's visit

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kollam

Ahead of Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi's visit here on Monday, 36 Tamils from Sri Lanka have been detained and questioned to know how they reached Kerala, an official said Saturday.

They were staying in a lodge here since Wednesday. On Friday, they were spotted in areas where fishing boats are berthed.

Kollam Superintendent of Police Harshita Ataloori told IANS that they have not found anything of concern so far.

"We do not want to take any chance. They are being questioned on how they reached here. So far it appears there is nothing suspicious," she said.

Japan rallies against US base

AFP, Tokyo

Thousands of people rallied in southwestern Japan yesterday to protest against a government plan to move part of an unpopular US airbase to Kagoshima prefecture.

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has faced heavy criticism since he backtracked Tuesday on an election pledge made last year to move the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma entirely off the larger island of Okinawa in the far south.

Instead, the centre-left leader conceded that most of the American base operations will have to be moved within Okinawa, as originally agreed by previous conservative governments in Washington and Tokyo in 2006.

As part of his effort to "ease the burden" on Okinawa, Hatoyama is still considering moving 1,000 Marines and their aircraft from Futenma to Tokunoshima, a remote island in Kagoshima prefecture.

Saturday's demonstration was held at a park in Kagoshima city, a day after Hatoyama pleaded with three mayors from Tokunoshima to allow in US Marines.

"I clearly told Prime Minister Hatoyama that Tokunoshima will never host the US base at all," Akira Okubo, one of the mayors, told the rally. "There should be a way to resolve it not by sharing the base but reducing it."

Demonstrators marched through central Kagoshima, chanting: "We don't need the base."



Spain's king undergoes lung surgery

AP, Madrid

King Juan Carlos of Spain is undergoing surgery to remove a growth from a lung, the Royal Palace said yesterday.

The palace said the 72-year-old monarch was being operated on in a hospital in the north-eastern city of Barcelona.

A statement issued by head of the palace's medical team, said doctors carrying out a routine check-up on April 26 and 27 found problem in king's right lung.

I will contest next elections

Says Musharraf

ANI, Lahore

Former Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf has said that he will contest the country's next general elections even if mid-term polls are announced.

Addressing members of his newly launched party, the All-Pakistan Muslim League (APML) through a video, which was screened at one of his close associates' Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif's residence here, Musharraf said he still enjoys great public support in Pakistan.

The former general said he has over 200,000 followers on Facebook, who have asked him to return back to Pakistan.

Seeking people support, Musharraf said Pakistan has the ability to progress as a developed state, and if given an opportunity he could transform the fate of the country.

"If you'll support me, InshaAllah, I won't let you down," The Daily Times quoted Musharraf, as saying.



In this image obtained from the US Coast Guard (USCG), shrimping vessels Gulf Rambler (L) and Mark and Jace slowly pull a hydro oil boom during a controlled fire in the Gulf of Mexico on Friday. The complex, unprecedented operation to drop the 100-ton (90-tonne) chamber some 5,000 feet (1,500 meters) below the surface to cap the leak from the fallen rig was expected to be completed later on Saturday.

US oil spill may cause cancer, expert warns

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Los Angeles

The massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico may cause cancer and other health hazards, a US-based environment watchdog has warned.

Healthcare workers and general public could face risks by inhaling various components of crude oil such as benzene, toluene and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, all of which may cause cancer, the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC) said.

Crude oil also contains mercury and lead, both of which can be dangerous if inhaled or swallowed, the group said in a statement.

Short-term effects include skin and respiratory problems while longer-term risks are uncertain, the NRDC said.

It said some people living along the coast were already reporting headaches, nausea, coughing and throat irritation.

"There are significant health risks associated with this oil spill, and the risks aren't just to wildlife, they are also to humans," Gina Solomon, a senior scientist with the NRDC, was quoted as saying by Xinhua.

The immediate worry, said Solomon, is what are called volatile organic compounds, which include chemicals like benzene that can be released in vapour form from the oil floating in the water.

"These chemicals can cause acute health effects such as headache, nausea, vomiting, cough, dizziness. The chemicals can also cause longer-term effects, including the potential for miscarriage or low birth weight in pregnant women and risk of cancer over the longer term," he said.

Since the BP offshore oil-rig explosion April 20, at least 200,000 gallons of oil a day have been pouring into the Gulf of Mexico.

Four missing in Gaza tunnel collapse

AFP, Gaza City

Four Palestinians were injured and four others went missing yesterday when a smuggling tunnel on the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt collapsed, medics said.

Rescuers were searching for the missing men who were reportedly in the tunnel at the time of the collapse, said Muawiya Hassanein, who heads the Gaza Strip's emergency services.

Witnesses the tunnel near the border city of Rafah collapsed for "technical" reasons and was not targeted by Israeli or Egyptian forces.

The impoverished territory of 1.5 million people has largely relied on the vast network of tunnels on the border since Israel and Egypt sealed Gaza off to all but vital aid for the Islamist movement Hamas seized power in June 2007.

Iran positive on fresh nuke talks

AFP, Ankara

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has welcomed a proposal for new talks with Western powers over his country's nuclear programme, possibly in Turkey, media reported late Friday.

"This idea has been accepted by Iran. If we agree on a date, this meeting may be held in a short time," Anatolia news agency quoted Mottaki as saying after talks with the Turkish foreign minister in Istanbul Friday evening.

"The venue of the meeting will be very probably Turkey. This proposal is a good proposal for us," he said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said he had proposed the meeting in Turkey during his visit to Tehran last month.

He had suggested talks between Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, as a representative of powers in the so-called P5+1 group working on the Iran nuclear standoff.

"We have offered a meeting with P5+1 in Turkey. Iran is positive on this proposal. A reply is being awaited from Ashton," he said.

"The resumption of talks between the P5+1 and Iran is a must. The way for diplomatic efforts should be opened," he said.

The P5+1 group consists of permanent UN Security Council members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, plus Germany.

Turkey and Brazil, both non-permanent members of the Security Council opposed to fresh sanctions against Iran, have recently stepped up efforts for a diplomatic solution of tensions over the Islamic republic's nuclear activities.

World powers and Iran have been at loggerheads for months over a proposed deal to supply nuclear fuel for a Tehran research reactor in exchange for low-enriched uranium from Iran.

The deal stalled after Iran insisted the two materials be exchanged simultaneously within its borders. That was rejected by the world powers, who accuse Iran of masking a weapons drive under the guise of what Tehran says is a purely civilian atomic programme.

The United States has been spearheading a drive for a fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran.

Generation change will not affect NKorea-China ties: Kim

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il told Chinese President Hu Jintao relations between the two nations will not be changed by the "replacement of one generation by a new one," KCNA reported yesterday.

"The long-standing DPRK (North Korea)-China friendship will remain unchanged despite the passage of time and the replacement of one generation by a new one as it stood amidst and test of history," he said.

Hu said that the traditional friendship is an asset to both countries, which both have a historic responsibility to maintain and improve it "along with the passage of time and convey it down through generations."

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