

Ash delays European flights

AFP, Lisbon

Dozens of flights in France, Italy and Portugal were cancelled as airspace was closed because of an ash cloud drifting over from a volcano in Iceland that caused major air travel chaos last month.

French authorities said yesterday that nearly 70 flights were cancelled at Nice, Lyon, Bordeaux and Paris airports, most of them headed to Italy and Portugal where airspace was closed because of the risks of the ash.

However French airspace remained open, authorities said.

Nice is the nearest international airport to Cannes, which is expecting hundreds of visitors for its flagship international film festival to start in three days' time.

In Portugal, all flights to the northern city of Porto were suspended until 1200 GMT Sunday, airport officials there said, after authorities had cancelled dozens of flights on Saturday.



Ukrainian soldiers, wearing Soviet Army uniforms and holding flags of a Soviet World War II unit, march in Kiev yesterday during a Victory Day parade, marking the 65th anniversary of the end of WWII. PHOTO: AFP

Russian mine blasts kill 12

AFP, Moscow

Over 80 miners and rescuers were trapped in a Russian mine yesterday after twin methane gas blasts killed 12 and then cut off the salvage workers who had descended down the shaft to find survivors.

Traumatized relatives were holding a vigil outside the Rospadskaya mine in the Kemerovo region of Siberia, in an agonizing wait after rescue efforts were completely halted due to the dangerous conditions inside the shaft.

The regional governor warned that ordering any more rescue workers down would be tantamount to a death sentence with the shaft still full of gas and a high risk of new explosions.

A grim-faced Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told a meeting with emergency officials broadcast on state television that the situation at the mine was "tragic".

"The saddest thing is that we cannot send in additional rescuers now as it is very dangerous due to the lack of ventilation. But we cannot sit on our hands and must do everything to save people," he added.

The first blast at the mine went off late Saturday at around 1700 GMT while 370 people were working.

Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu said 12 miners were killed and 55 wounded, the Interfax news agency said. Three hundred miners managed to climb to the surface and to safety.

But around two hours later -- after rescuers had entered the mine to find survivors and bring corpses to the surface -- a second explosion went off, trapping both the remaining miners and the rescue workers themselves.

Five dead on eve of Philippine elections

AFP, Manila

Five people were killed in the Philippines yesterday as tensions flared on the eve of national elections, which are expected to see favourite Benigno Aquino win the presidency in a landslide.

The build-up to the elections has been typically tumultuous for one of Asia's most free-wheeling democracies, with dozens of people killed, ferocious mudslinging and dark rumours of illegal power grabs.

Five people were shot dead on Sunday in two remote parts of the country involving gunmen loyal to local candidates, while communist guerrillas also destroyed five vote counting machines, authorities said.



What next in UK's inconclusive polls?

AFP, London

The British general election failed to produce an overall majority for any party, triggering a scramble to form a government.

The Conservatives, who won most seats, have started talks with the third-placed Liberal Democrats, leaving Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Labour Party out in the cold for now, although a deal is far from certain.

Here are the possible scenarios:
1. CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PACT

The two parties began talks after Conservative leader David Cameron made a "big, comprehensive offer" to Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats.

But the parties have strong divergences on policy, especially over the Lib Dems' key demand on electoral reform to introduce proportional representation, to move the Tories oppose. They could put aside their differences

and agree a full coalition deal, giving them a combined majority of 37 seats in the House of Commons and Liberal Democrats would likely be given cabinet seats.

Failing a coalition deal, they could agree an informal alliance. The Lib Dems would support a Conservative government on the most important issues in parliament in return for having their concerns taken into consideration.

2. LABOUR-LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PACT

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he and his Labour Party were ready to step in and talk to the Lib Dems if they and the Tories fail to reach a deal.

The Lib Dems have not ruled out such a possibility. Labour are more natural political partners for the Lib Dems than the Tories and Brown has offered them the carrot of "immediate legislation" on changes to the electoral system. Their combined 315 seats would fall

short of an overall majority, so they would need the support of the main unionist party in Northern Ireland, who won eight seats, and the three seats of the province's SDLP party to just reach the 326 seats required. The Irish parties would demand a high price in return.

The big question is whether such a government could be formed with Brown at its head. He would be under pressure to stand aside, perhaps to be replaced by current foreign secretary David Miliband.

3. MINORITY CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

Cameron said that if a deal with the Lib Dems proved impossible, he could forge ahead with a minority Conservative government. The Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland could support them.

But as with all minority administrations, it would be inherently weak and such a route could lead to another general election being called within weeks.

Thai PM pleads to end street protests

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister pleaded yesterday for an end to two months of street protests paralysing part of the capital and an acceptance of his reconciliation plan that has been stalled by fresh violence.

He hopes that the prolonged protests by so-called Red Shirt demonstrators would end without further bloodshed when two attacks Friday night killed two policemen and wounded 13 people. The violence happened just outside the protest occupation zone in Bangkok's prime commercial district, where upscale shopping centres and hotels have been shuttered for weeks.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva went on nationwide television to ask all parties to accept his five-point reconciliation plan, which includes new elections Nov. 14.

"Don't hesitate. If you agree with the reconciliation, quit the demonstration and start working together," he said. He described those instigating violence to undermine peace efforts as "terrorists" who would not be granted amnesty. He also promised to address some of the grievances of the protesters, including rural poverty and social injustice.

The Red Shirts say their own proposal will be unveiled in coming days and would be open to negotiations. They are refusing to leave the protest site until their demands are met, and an estimated 5,000 reinforcements from north-eastern Thailand arrived Saturday.



al-Qaeda threatens Prince Harry

ANI, London

Supporters of Osama Bin Laden's terrorist organization al-Qaeda have threatened to kidnap Prince Harry if he flies an Apache attack helicopter in Afghanistan.

The members of the terrorist group have posted several direct warnings on a known al-Qaeda Arabic website used by followers in Britain, reports The Daily Express.



Costa Rica's first female president takes oath

BBC ONLINE

Costa Rica's first female president has been sworn into office in San Jose after winning elections in February.

Laura Chinchilla, 51, took her oath of office at an open-air ceremony in front of thousands of supporters.

The former vice-president has pledged to continue the free-market economic policies of her predecessor, Nobel laureate Oscar Arias.

She becomes the third female president in Central America after a landslide victory in elections.

Leading the centre-left National Liberation Party, she won 47% of the vote and had a 22-point lead over contender Otton Solis in February's election.

Italy holds divorce fair

BBC ONLINE

Italy is holding its first divorce fair, to help couples facing marriage break-ups.

Organisers say the event in Milan aims to help divorcing couples with legal proceedings and how to start afresh.

Services include life coaching, beauty tips and advice on how to get rid of ex-spouses who turn into stalkers.

DIVORCE LEVELS IN THE TRADITIONALLY CATHOLIC COUNTRY HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY LOW UNTIL RECENTLY, BUT THERE HAS BEEN A DRAMATIC RISE IN THE LAST FEW YEARS.

The fair, Ex? Punto e a capo, meaning "turning over a new leaf", includes workshops and stalls on not just the process of divorce, but how to adapt to living alone again.

There will be a special speed-dating evening, as well as art therapy and spa offers to raise self-esteem, say organisers.

Chancellor Merkel faces election test

BBC ONLINE

Voters in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), are voting in a regional election that could change national politics.

A defeat for Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives and their liberal allies would end the coalition's majority in the upper house of parliament.

The campaign has been overshadowed by the government's decision to contribute to a huge rescue package for Greece.

Meanwhile many cities in NRW are on the brink of bankruptcy.

Angela Merkel is not standing in this

regional election, but she has campaigned here until the last minute.

It is the first political test for her centre-right coalition since it came to power six months ago.

North Rhine-Westphalia matters: home to 18 million people, it is Germany's industrial heartland and a weathervane for national politics.

The regional coalition between Chancellor Merkel's conservatives and the pro-business Liberal Democrats, which mirrors the one at the federal level, is struggling.

With the economic crisis dominating the campaign, Merkel tried to delay a decision on the hugely unpopular rescue package for Greece until after the poll, but failed.



North Rhine-Westphalia State Premier Juergen Ruettgers (CDU) casts his vote as his wife yesterday in Pulheim. A survey shows that voters are angry at the bail-out for Greece which could hand Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU party a bitter defeat.

Gates to cut Pentagon costs

BBC ONLINE

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has ordered a far-reaching review of administration costs at the Pentagon.

Gates said 40% of his department's budget went on bureaucracy, and that he wanted to save more than \$10bn that would be spent on combat operations.

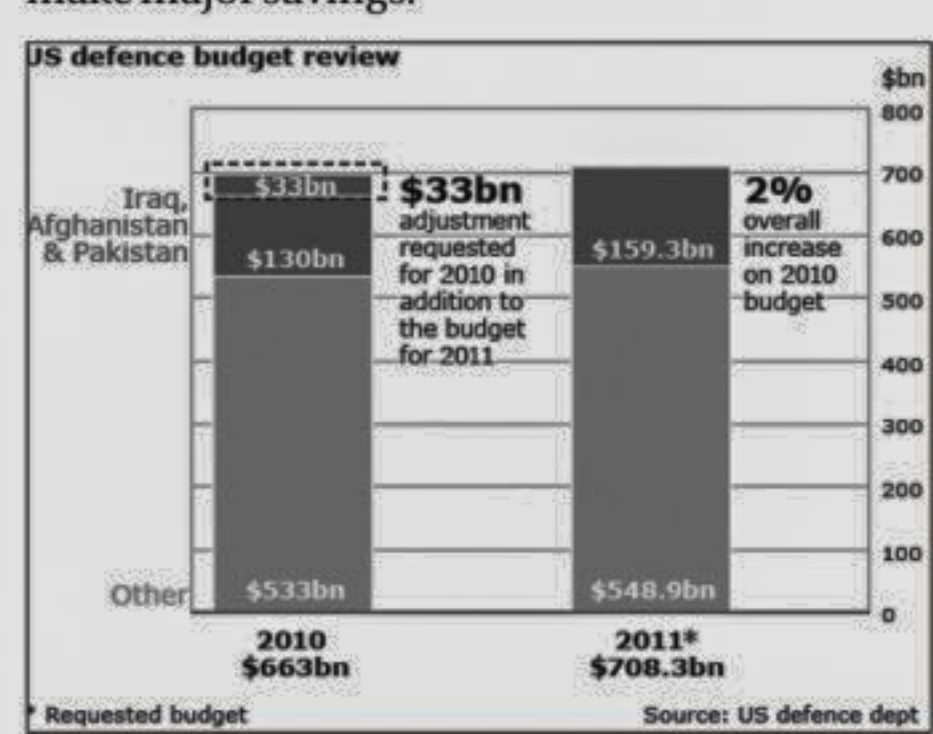
He compared US defence spending to an oil gusher that had to be turned off. Gates described one example of waste, where requests for dog-handlers in Afghanistan had to be approved by no fewer than five Pentagon departments.

The current defence budget, not counting the cost of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, is \$535bn. Gates wants \$549bn for 2011.

In a speech at the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, Gates said the Department of Defense had to "take a hard look at every aspect of how it is organised, staffed and

operated - indeed, every aspect of how it does business".

He said he had recently come to the conclusion that in the wake of "difficult economic circumstances and parlous fiscal condition" of the US, the Pentagon would be required to make major savings.



EOI for hiring of Event Management Company for the REHAB SUMMER FAIR 2010

1. Job Description & Responsibilities:

The REHAB FAIR Standing Committee is seeking an International event Management Company to:

- Create and execute the REHAB Summer Fair 2010 and work with the Fair Standing Committee.
- Showcase the industry perspective and promote the fair in all possible media of Bangladesh incorporating latest event management tools and methods.
- Deliver all the logistics required for the fair as well as conducting PR of the entire program.

2. Eligibility

- The company must be a direct international registered company having experience in conducting events internationally and have a registered office in Bangladesh.
- References for (a) above with details of name, address and contact number.
- The company must have 03 (Three) years work experience.
- The company must establish project office within the premises of the REHAB Secretariat / venue of ceremony within 15 days of receipt of appointment.
- The company must submit the updated trade license, TIN Certificates & VAT registration.
- The Company must provide the bank solvency certificate with the bid document.

3. Submission of expression of interest: The respondent must submit their proposal in one large sealed envelope containing two separate sealed envelopes of Technical & Financial bids. "Bid for Event Management Company for the REHAB SUMMER FAIR 2010" to be written on the envelope.

a. Technical bid:

- Must contain hard and soft copy of the presentation for the execution Plan for the REHAB SUMMER FAIR 2010.
- Manpower planning for the event.
- Details of the references who may be contacted by the REHAB FAIR Standing Committee.
- The respondents must provide presentation for technical proposal. Presentation must not exceed duration of one hour. 10 minutes will be kept aside for Q & A.
- The REHAB FAIR Standing Committee will allocate a maximum of 70 % marks for technical bid.

b. Financial bid:

- Only bids of parties qualified in the technical bid would be eligible to continue for the financial bid.
- The party scoring highest in the technical bid would have the right to revise its offer on the basis of the best financial offer presented.
- Financial bid will be opened in the presence of the short listed respondents.
- The respondent will be selected by the REHAB FAIR Standing Committee after scrutinizing the proposals.

4. Timing: The respondent company must present the technical proposal in power point on 20 May 2010 at 2:30 pm in the office of REHAB, National Plaza, 5th & 6th Floor, 1/G, Free School Street, Sonargaon Road, Dhaka 1205. The short-listed respondents will be notified soon.

5. The short listed respondent has the most suitable qualities, capabilities and to the satisfaction of the Fair Standing Committee that the event to be produced will be of world class and has high marks in both the technical and financial bid.

Sd /-

Murad Iqbal Chowdhury
Acting General Secretary, REHAB



REAL ESTATE & HOUSING ASSOCIATION OF BANGLADESH