

Cameron's historic coalition starts work

UK PM sets up National Security Council

AFP, London

New British Prime Minister David Cameron began yesterday unveiling details of his new historic centre-right coalition government, after finally ending 13 years of Labour rule.

The 43-year-old Cameron -- Britain's youngest prime minister for two centuries -- took office after striking a deal with the third-placed Liberal Democrats late Tuesday.

Cameron, who has radically transformed his Conservative party from the Margaret Thatcher years to prepare it for power, shook hands with Lib Dem head Nick Clegg on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street before getting down to work.

Clegg was joined by four other Lib Dem ministers in Cameron's coalition government, after backing the deal to form Britain's first coalition government since World War II.

"We are going to form a new kind of government," Clegg told his lawmakers, adding he hoped it marked "the start of the new politics I have always believed in."

New Foreign Secretary William Hague insisted the coalition agreement, forged in five days of political deadlock after an inconclusive election, would stand the test of time.

"I don't think it will be a weak coalition. It will be a strong government," said Hague. New Chancellor George Osborne added: "Now's the time to roll up the sleeves, and get Britain working."

London's stock market and the pound recovered after a jittery few days ended with Tuesday's coalition deal.

"Markets had feared a negative start, but as the dawn of a new political era takes place, there appears to be a collective sigh of relief that we have a clearer way forward," ODL Securities trader Owen Ireland said.

Cameron's appointment by Queen Elizabeth II late Tuesday came after Labour leader Gordon Brown finally admitted defeat.

Cameron acknowledged the huge challenges facing him, not least Britain's fragile recovery from the global economic crisis.

"This is going to be hard and difficult work. A coalition will throw up all sorts of challenges," he said in a speech in Downing Street, flanked by his pregnant wife Samantha.

President Barack Obama called Cameron within minutes of his appointment, inviting him to visit the United States in July, Downing Street said.

Other world leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd also quickly called Cameron to congratulate him.

European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso said Cameron's government would face "difficult choices in difficult times", while Russia said it hoped for a "new impulse" in chilly relations.



Britain's new Prime Minister David Cameron (L) and new Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, wave as they pose for pictures on the steps of 10 Downing Street in London yesterday.

REUTERS, London

Prime Minister David Cameron announced yesterday that he was setting up a National Security Council to coordinate his new government's response to all international and domestic threats.

Civil servant Peter Ricketts has also been appointed to the new position of National Security Advisor, with responsibility for coordinating the government's security agenda, Cameron's office said in a statement.

"The Council will coordinate responses to the dangers we face, integrating at the highest level the work of the foreign, defence, home, energy and international development departments, and all other arms of government contributing to national security," the statement said.

The new body, which the Conservatives had promised to set up in their election manifesto, will be headed by Cameron. It will include Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and the secretaries of state for defence, home affairs and foreign affairs.

The first meeting will take place later on Wednesday to discuss Afghanistan and Pakistan and review the current terrorist threat to Britain, the statement said.



Japanese princess gets death threat

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese police said yesterday they had arrested a man for allegedly posting an online threat to kill a royal family member, reportedly Princess Aiko, the eight-year-old daughter of the crown prince.

Kengo Ezaka, a 26-year-old unemployed man, was arrested Saturday, a police spokesman said.

Local media said the man's posting on Japan's biggest Internet forum read: "I shall kill Aiko-sama (her majesty Aiko) by smashing her head with a hammer."

The man reportedly told police he had posted the threat to test the reactions of others online and did not think he would be arrested for it.

Probe reopens against Yulia

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian authorities have reopened a criminal investigation into alleged corruption by former prime minister turned opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko, prosecutors said yesterday.

Tymoshenko met with investigators on Wednesday morning and was handed papers notifying her that the probe had been reopened, said a spokesman for the Ukrainian prosecutor general's office, Yuri Boichenko.

The investigation which was initially opened in May 2004 and then closed in June 2005, prosecutors now consider it as incorrect, Boichenko added.

Russian mine death toll hits 60

AFP, Moscow

The death toll following twin gas blasts in Russia's biggest underground coal mine has risen to 60, an official said yesterday, amid fading hopes for the 30 still trapped underground.

"Rescue workers have found eight other bodies today. The death toll has risen to 60," a spokesman for the emergency situations ministry told Ria-Novosti news agency.

The two blasts at the Rospadskaya pit on Saturday trapped dozens of miners and rescue workers.

The mine has more than 400 kilometres (250 miles) of tunnels, a bigger network than the entire Moscow metro, according to Vladimir Goryachkin, the deputy general director of Rospadskaya's owner.

103 dead in Tripoli plane crash

Sole survivor an eight-year-old boy

AFP, Tripoli

A Libyan plane arriving from South Africa disintegrated on landing at Tripoli airport yesterday, killing 103 people but leaving an eight-year-old boy as the sole survivor, officials said.

Libyan Transport Minister Mohammed Ali Zidan would not immediately say what caused the Afriqiyah Airways Airbus A330 to break up massively as it was landing at around 6:00 am (0400 GMT) but ruled out terrorism.

Libyan television showed teams of emergency workers sifting through the wreckage of the plane, which was scattered in a wide arc across the landing area.

"There were 104 people on board -- 93 passengers and 11 crew members," Zidan told a media conference, adding that the remains of

96 victims had already been recovered.

There was only one survivor, an eight-year-old Dutch boy, he said.

"His life is not in danger," Zidan said, adding that "the sole survivor" was in a Tripoli hospital.

The Dutch government said that "several" Dutch nationals were on board the Libyan plane but had no information on the boy survivor.

"We have at this moment clear indications that there were several Dutch nationals on board the crashed" plane, foreign ministry spokesman Christoph Prommersberger told AFP.

"Our embassy in Tripoli has sent representatives to the airport to get more information and to assist any Dutch citizens who need to be helped."

Witnesses spoke of the plane inexplicably breaking up as it came down to land in clear weather.

Yemeni Qaeda wing claims attack on UK envoy

REUTERS, Dubai

al-Qaeda's Yemen wing has claimed a suicide attack on the British ambassador to Sanaa, accusing him of leading a war on Muslims in the Arabian peninsula on Britain's behalf, a monitoring group said on Wednesday.

The British envoy survived the April 26 attempt on his life, carried out by a suicide bomber who targeted his convoy in Sanaa in an attack Yemen said bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda. The bomber was killed and three people were wounded.

Thai govt plans to cut water, power in protest zone

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thai authorities plan to cut water, electricity and food supplies to thousands of protesters occupying Bangkok's main shopping district for nearly six weeks and said they might resort to force if they fail to disperse.

The threats follow the unravelling of a peace plan proposed last week by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to end a political crisis that has killed 29 people, paralysed parts of Bangkok and slowed growth in Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy.

Leaders of the mostly rural and urban poor protesters remained defiant on Wednesday, refusing to leave their 3 sq km (1.2 sq mile) encampment in Bangkok's main shopping district and challenging the government from behind medieval-like walls built of tires, sharpened bamboo staves and large trucks.

"Whatever measure you use, we are not scared," Weng Tojtrakarn, a protest leader, told Reuters.

At midnight, authorities will shut off power, cut supplies and seal entrances to the protest site, said army spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd at the government's crisis control centre.



Philippines' Arroyo picks CJ as probe looms

REUTERS, AFP, Manila

Outgoing Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo appointed an ally as Supreme Court chief justice; a move critics said was aimed at shielding her from graft investigations promised by her likely successor.

Philippine president-elect Benigno Aquino pledged a new era of clean government as he railed yesterday against outgoing leader Gloria Arroyo and her corruption-tainted administration.

The son of late democracy heroine Corazon Aquino trounced his rivals by a landslide in national elections on Monday and has since unleashed a barrage of criticism of his long-time rival.

In an interview with AFP on Tuesday, Aquino vowed to probe Arroyo for allegedly trying to rig the 2004 presidential election and accused her of using her time in power to enrich herself.

"She could have brought significant changes to this country but she chose to advance her personal interests and those who were supporting her personal interests to the detriment of the country," he said.

8 killed in China school rampage

REUTERS, Beijing

Seven children and a teacher were hacked to death in an attack on a kindergarten in north-west China yesterday, the latest in a string of assaults on schools that has stoked public alarm about the government's grip on order.

Eleven children and an adult were wounded in the attack that happened at about eight in the morning, soon after the school day started, in Nanzheng county, a rural corner of Shaanxi province, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Two children were in serious condition. A 48-year-old man, Wu Huanmin, used a kitchen cleaver to kill five boys, two girls and their teacher, Xinhua said.

Wu then returned home and committed suicide, Xinhua said, citing a statement from the province emergency office. "His motive for the attack was not immediately known."

One local man, Zheng Xiulan, said the attacker had rented out the rooms for the privately run kindergarten.

"Only about two of the children in the kindergarten were not injured, but I don't know how many died in the end. There was blood everywhere," Zheng told Reuters by telephone.

"I don't know why he did it...I hadn't heard that he was mentally ill. He wasn't poor either."

Officials in Nanzheng would not comment on the attack.

The rampage is sure to stoke public disquiet and demands for stricter school security after five attacks on school children in recent weeks.

Even before the latest bloodshed, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao had demanded action, the top law-and-order official, Zhou Yongkang, told officials to beef up school security, and police vowed to identify disturbed people who could pose a threat to children.

"Of course, we're scared," said a resident of a village several kilometres from the kindergarten where the latest attack happened. She gave only her surname, Li.

Recent attacks

April 30
Weifang city, Shandong
5 children and 1 adult injured

April 29
Taixing city, Jiangsu
29 children and 3 adults injured

March 23
Nanping city, Fujian
8 students killed, 5 injured

April 28
Leizhou city, Guangdong
15 students and 1 adult injured

AFP

Arizona boycotted over immigration law

AFP, San Francisco

San Francisco lawmakers on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a boycott of Arizona after the state passed a strict immigration law critics say would promote racial profiling.

The resolution, which cleared the San Francisco Board of Supervisors by a 10-1 vote, calls for the northern California city to refrain from entering into new contracts with companies based in Arizona.

It also demands that San Francisco avoid sending city officials and employees to conferences in Arizona and explore discontinuing existing contracts with companies based in the southwestern border state.

"This is really about sending a very clear message that when a state passes a law that is as egregious as this law is, that people of good conscience in other parts of the country have an obligation, a responsibility to speak up and not remain silent," said Supervisor David Campos, who sponsored the measure.

Last month, Arizona's Republican Governor Jan Brewer signed a bill into law that would make it a crime to be in the United States illegally.



Workers work at the site of an underground explosion, at the Rospadskaya mine in Western Siberia yesterday. The death toll following twin gas blasts in Russia's biggest underground coal mine has risen to 60, an official said, amid fading hopes for the 30 still trapped underground.

PHOTO: AFP

100 killed in Darfur clashes since March

AFP, Khartoum

Clashes between rival Arab tribes have claimed 107 lives since March in Darfur, the UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan said, warning of a build-up of government and rebel troops in the region.

"The security situation in North Darfur is tense following reports of an increase in the presence of government troops and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) forces in the Shangil Tobaya region," UNAMID said in a statement late Tuesday.

UNAMID, the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force, said fighting between the Misseriya and Rizeigat Nawaiba tribes broke out in early March near Nerititi in West Darfur and calmed briefly after a peace accord was signed on March 28.

But fighting resumed on May 4, it said, adding: "It is estimated that since March, the clashes have claimed the lives of 107 people on both sides and have caused many more to flee their homes."

According to the United Nations, 300,000 people have died and more than 2.2 million have fled their homes since rebels in Darfur rose up against the Khartoum government, which was aided by local Arab militias, in February 2003.

The Sudan government puts the death toll at 10,000. Several local forces have reported an increase of government troops around El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, after deadly clashes this month over a fraudulent pyramid scheme in which up to 10 people were reportedly killed.

The fraud is estimated at 25 million dollars, according to the authorities, but investors say they were swindled out of a total of about 100 million dollars, a large sum in a region so poor.

Justice Minister Abdel Bassit Sabdarat said the scheme, which led some to sell land to invest quickly, was set up by two regional councilmen from Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir's party.

The Ponzi scheme began in early 2009, but the bubble burst only recently.