

Thai protesters defy deadline to leave Bangkok

Bullet hit general dies, hospitals getting ready for crackdown

AFP, Bangkok

Thousands of protesters in the Thai capital defied a deadline to leave their fortified encampment yesterday despite the threat of a crackdown after street clashes that left at least 35 people dead.

A renegade Thai general allied with the anti-government Reds died in hospital, days after he was shot during an interview with a foreign reporter on the edge of the demonstrators' main rally base.

Major-General Khattiya Sawasdiapol, a key Red supporter known as Seh Daeng, died in hospital on Monday as the toll from three days of street violence hit 35 dead, excluding the general, and 244 injured, officials said.

About 1,000 people attended a funeral for the slain general at a pagoda in the city's historic district. Some mourners wept as his body was carried in an open casket in his distinctive camouflage hat.

The escalating violence has turned parts of the city into no-go zones as troops use live ammunition against protesters, who have blocked streets with burning tyres and fought back, mainly with homemade weapons.

Protesters were ordered to leave by 3:00 pm (0800 GMT) Monday. Authorities dropped leaflets from a small plane flying overhead asking people to evacuate the area, which remained calm soon after the deadline passed.

Normally bustling streets in much of the capital almost emptied. Thai hospitals and medical officials said yesterday they were on alert for heavy casualties if security forces attempt to disperse anti-government "Red Shirt" protesters from the capital.

Hospitals in Bangkok and more than 20 provinces under state of emergency were prepared "24-hours to handle a massive emergency," said Pansiri Kullanartsiri, Thailand's deputy public health minister.

Chatree Chareoncheewakul, secretary general of the Emergency Medical Institute of Thailand, said 44 hospitals had been put on alert in anticipation of a crackdown on the demonstration camp.

"More than 1,000 beds and more than 1,000 of our staff are working in the field," he said.

"But after two rescue workers were shot dead, our staff are discouraged, so I want to say that we are neutral and work to save peoples' lives."



From L to R: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan pose for a picture with their hands together after the Islamic republic inked a nuclear fuel swap deal in Tehran yesterday under which 1,200 kilos of low enriched uranium will be shipped to Turkey, potentially ending a standoff with world powers gearing for new sanctions against Tehran. The agreement, under which Iran will in turn receive nuclear fuel for a Tehran reactor, was signed in the Iranian capital by the foreign ministers of Iran, Brazil and Turkey.

US says BP move to curb oil leak 'no solution'

BBC ONLINE

The success of a move by oil giant BP to curb a leak in the Gulf of Mexico is "not clear" and the technique provides "no solution", the US has said.

It was responding to BP's move to siphon oil from the leaking well head to a tanker on the surface.

A government statement said it would not rest until the leak was permanently sealed and the spill cleaned up.

BP executive Kent Wells earlier said that the siphoning process was "working extremely well".

This was the third attempt it had made to insert a long narrow tube into the leaking pipe, using underwater robots.

It is thought that BP's six-wide (15cm) tube and stopper could capture more than three-quarters of the leak, although a smaller spill nearby also has to be contained.

Mr Wells said on Sunday at the firm's US headquarters in Houston, Texas, that over the next few days the company planned to slowly increase the amount of oil and gas flowing through the pipe to the tanker.

COMMITMENTS

But a joint statement by Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said the latest technique was "not a solution to the problem and it is not yet clear how successful it may be".

It added: "We will not rest until BP permanently seals the well head, the spill is cleaned up, and the communities and natural resources of the Gulf Coast are restored and made whole."

Thousands face ash cloud delays

BBC ONLINE

Flight restrictions have been lifted at Heathrow, Gatwick and other airports after closures prompted by the return of a volcanic ash cloud to UK airspace.

After many airports faced restrictions over the weekend and into yesterday, just four are closed currently: Belfast City, Londonderry, Shetland and Orkney.

The industry has warned that knock-on disruption could last for some hours.

The ash poses the threat of turning into molten glass as it hits the heat of plane engines, crippling aircraft.

EXTRA TRAINS

In the Netherlands, Amsterdam's Schiphol, Rotterdam and Groningen airports are closed until 1400 local time (1300 BST). Flights in and out of Dublin, in the Irish Republic, are also grounded until at least noon.

Network Rail has pledged to do everything possible to help stranded travellers make journeys by train.

Virgin Trains said 7,000 extra seats would be made available on Monday, mainly on routes between Birmingham and Glasgow and Edinburgh, and between London Euston and Glasgow.

Eurostar is also laying on extra services through the Channel Tunnel.

The latest dense patch of ash disrupted the travel plans of tens of thousands of people over the weekend, mainly in northern parts of the UK.

Iran, Brazil, Turkey sign nuclear swap deal

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran, Brazil and Turkey signed a nuclear fuel swap agreement yesterday designed to allay international concern over the Islamic Republic's atomic ambitions and avert fresh UN sanctions against Tehran.

It was not immediately clear whether the terms of the deal, hammered out in talks between leaders of the three countries in Tehran, would fully satisfy major powers which have been discussing a new round of punitive UN measures against Tehran.

Iran said it had agreed to transfer 1,200 kg (2,646 lb) of its low-enriched uranium to Turkey within a month in return for higher-enriched nuclear fuel for a medical research reactor.

No more than one year later, Iran will get 120 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium under an arrangement involving the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as the United States, France and Russia.

"Iran expressed its readiness to deposit its LEU within one month. On the basis of the same agreement the Vienna Group should deliver 120 kg fuel required for Tehran research reactor in no later than one year," said a joint declaration posted by Turkish news channel CNN Turk on its website.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said Iran's LEU would be under IAEA supervision in Turkey, state Press TV reported.

Iran, which says its atomic program is purely for peaceful purposes and not to make bombs as the West suspects, had earlier insisted any such exchange must take place on its territory.

Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on six world powers, which have been discussing further UN sanctions on the major oil producer,

to start new negotiations with his country.

"Following the signing of the nuclear fuel swap deal, it is time for the 5+1 countries to enter talks with Iran based on honesty, justice and mutual respect," he said, referring to the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu hailed the deal as a "historic turning point" and said there was no need for the world to consider any further punitive measures against Iran.

"The swap deal, signed by Iran today, shows that Tehran wants to open a constructive path," he told reporters. "There is no more ground for new sanctions and pressures."

There was no immediate comment from Washington, which has been leading a Western push to impose extra sanctions on Iran, or from the IAEA in Vienna.



UN picks new climate change chief

BBC ONLINE

Costa Rica's Christiana Figueres is to be the new head of the UN climate convention, BBC News understands.

The UN is expected to confirm her appointment to take over from outgoing chief Yvo de Boer later in the week.

Sources close to the UN said she emerged as front-runner after an intervention from small island states.

Hatoyama, Hillary to meet on US base

AP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who will reportedly meet with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton this week, vowed yesterday to do all he can to resolve an impasse over the future of a major American Marine base by the end of the month.

Hatoyama is under increasing pressure to come up with a plan to move operations off the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma on the southern island of Okinawa in keeping with a pledge he made before becoming Japan's leader last September.

He has promised to resolve the issue by the end of this month, though that goal now seems unrealistic because Okinawans oppose his suggested solutions and the United States is holding firm to an earlier agreement that Hatoyama wants to revise.

Medvedev in Ukraine to boost ties

BBC ONLINE

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is due in Ukraine for a visit Moscow hopes will further boost ties with Kiev.

Relations have improved since pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich was elected in February.

But Mr Yanukovich has already dismissed a proposal for Russia's state gas monopoly Gazprom to take control of Ukraine's gas pipeline network.

Other deals, on borders, banking, a GPS-type navigation system and nuclear co-operation are due to be signed.

Last month, Ukraine did approve one controversial deal with Moscow, extending the lease for Russia's Black Sea fleet at its base on the Crimean peninsula in exchange for cheaper Russian gas imports.

The deal has proved unpopular with Ukraine's opposition, which sees it as undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. Mr Yanukovich defended it as reducing the country's budget deficit.

Ahead of his visit, Mr Medvedev said the navy deal would benefit the security of the whole of Europe.

Mr Yanukovich's power base is in mainly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, the former Soviet republic's industrial heartland, where ties to Russia remain especially strong.



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev takes traditional bread and salt upon his arrival to Kiev yesterday. Medvedev paid homage to the victims of a mass famine in Soviet Ukraine, in a rare Russian tribute to the victims of a catastrophe that has caused tensions in modern times.

Replicate 'red-shirt' movement

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of ousting a government. "We want to make the people united, so the government can be forced to change its anti-people policies," he said.

The meeting sources said Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, and Mirza Abbas were among the leaders who preferred a Bangkok-style movement, where the opposition and the army are engaged in street fights. They urged the leadership to declare a programme for a tough anti-government movement.

"We can turn Dhaka into Bangkok if we want," a member of the standing committee was quoted by the sources, as telling the chairperson.

Some other committee members however suggested announcing programmes like laying sieges to courts, and hartals, the sources added.

Former Minister MK Anwar suggested that the chairperson

announces a hartal, as he feels it is the only language this government understands, the sources claimed.

Echoing him, Dr Abdul Moeen Khan said the party should definitely announce a hartal, because otherwise the people will think BNP is afraid.

Moudud Ahmed, and Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman however emphasised on programmes that will involve a large number of citizens, instead of destructive programmes like hartals and blockades.

They also drew the chairperson's attention to the possibility of the party losing its image in the international arena, if it announces a movement involving destructive activities.

According to the sources, Khandaker Delwar Hossain said, "We have to engage the public. We also have to observe the government's reaction," adding that the party is currently not well organised, there are group-

EC plans to use video cameras

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finalise the plan of deploying the cameras for recording," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

The EC yesterday at a meeting with the senior officials of the law enforcement agencies disclosed its plan in a written document for the use of video cameras.

"Necessary measures can be taken for video recording of polling irregularities and violence in the polling stations vulnerable on ground of security. So, actions can be taken against irregularities [basing on video recording]," the working paper of the meeting said.

The EC first used video cameras in April 24 by-election to Bhola-3 parliamentary constituency.

At the meeting, the EC directed the law enforcement agencies to ensure peaceful atmosphere conducive to holding the CCC election in free and fair manner.

Emerging from the meeting at the EC Secretariat premises, Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters that 22 members from police, Ansar and VDP would be deployed at each polling station vulnerable on ground of security while 20 of them would be deployed to other polling stations.

Police and Rab would identify polling stations vulnerable on ground of security, he said.

At the meeting the EC asked the Chittagong police administration to strengthen

their drive to recover illegal arms and arrest criminals in the CCC areas, EC officials said.

It also asked the senior officials of law enforcement agencies to maintain proper coordination between them to ensure peaceful atmosphere in the election.

The officials informed the EC that the law and order situation in the electoral area is now under their control and they would take all necessary measures to further improve the situation.

Senior officials of home ministry, Armed Forces Division, police, BDR, Rab, Chittagong metropolitan police, Chittagong divisional police administration and officials concerned were present at the meeting.

Local crocs find

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Crocodile meat and hide also have huge global demand. The meat is consumed widely in Australia, Japan, Singapore, China, and the US. A kilogramme of crocodile meat is sold for seven to eight dollars on the international market.

"We also have orders for meat and hide," said Mustaque adding that they have export orders from other European countries and Japan as well.

Bangladesh is the first country in South Asia to export farm grown crocodiles, he said.

Mustaque and his business partner Mesbahul Hoque, who is also the chairman of the farm, started working on the project in 2002, and got the government permission in May 2004.

They imported 75 adult crocodiles from Malaysia in December 2004, and now the farm has over 700 of the reptiles.

Some other local companies are also taking initiatives to set up crocodile farms, Mustaque said.

Crocodiles are being commercially farmed in 40 countries including China, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Fashionable items made of crocodile hide also have great global demand. Well to do people pay high prices for those.

A good quality crocodile leather bag is sold for \$50,000 to \$55,000, and the clients are even willing to wait for two to three years for delivery.

Crocodile teeth, and other by-products are used for making ornaments including garlands, and showpieces, which also enjoy high international demand.

Charcoal made from crocodile bones is used in production of perfumes.