

US AIR BASE ISSUE

Socialists leave Japan coalition

BBC ONLINE

Japan's socialist party has voted to leave the ruling coalition because of a row over a US base in Okinawa.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) had opposed PM Yukio Hatoyama's decision not to move the US Futenma airbase off the southern Japanese island.

On Friday Hatoyama fired SDP chief Mizuho Fukushima from her ministerial post over her stance on the issue.

The SDP has few seats in parliament but the coalition deal secured the ruling party a majority in the upper house.

The decision came at a meeting of senior party officials.

"We will leave [the coalition] but we will explore relations with other parties in both houses of parliament," SDP secretary-general Yasumasa Shigeno told journalists.

The ruling Democrats have a large majority in the lower house, which they can use to force legislation through the upper house.

But the SDP's departure will come as a blow to Hatoyama, whose approval ratings have been plummeting.

He also faces his first electoral test in July since last year's election, with polls for the upper house.

Ms Fukushima was fired as consumer affairs minister after she refused to sign off on the Futenma deal.

'Thai state of emergency may be lifted'

CNN ONLINE

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said the country was calm morning after the first night without a government-imposed curfew in 10 days, state media said yesterday.

In his weekly television address, Abhisit said the state of emergency could be lifted, but did not say when a relaxation or removal of emergency regulations would take place, the Thai News Agency reported.

Officials implemented the state of emergency on April 7 in Bangkok and nearby provinces, when thousands of anti-government protesters had amassed in the capital's central shopping district. They imposed a curfew in Bangkok and 23 provinces May 19.

Violent clashes between the demonstrators and government troops broke out earlier this month, killing at least 50 people and injuring nearly 400, government officials said.

Comparing salaries leads to blues

BBC ONLINE

Comparing your income with those of family and friends is a recipe for unhappiness, a study has suggested.

Researchers analysing data from a Europe-wide survey found three-quarters of those asked thought it important to compare their incomes with others.

But those who compared salaries seem less content, especially if they looked at those of friends and family rather than work colleagues.

The paper in the Economic Journal also found the poor were most affected.

The researchers, from the Paris School of Economics, used data from the European Social Survey covering 19,000 participants in 24 countries.

They found that those who compared their incomes with others tended to be less happy.

No technical fault in Libya jet crash

Says investigators

REUTERS, Tripoli

Investigators have so far found no evidence that mechanical failure caused an Airbus aircraft to crash in Libya this month killing 103 people, a Libyan commission studying the crash said. The Airbus A330 operated by Libya's Afriqiyah Airways crashed on May 12 as it prepared to land at Tripoli airport after a flight from Johannesburg, killing everyone on board except a nine-year-old Dutch boy.



PHOTO: AFP

Photo taken on Saturday showing (From L) Wife of former Graca Machel, former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former US president Jimmy Carter, former Irish President Mary Robinson, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, former Indian parliamentarian Ela Bhatt and former South African President Nelson Mandela (seated) pose prior to a meeting of the Elders in Johannesburg yesterday.

China gives no sign of punishing N Korea

THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE

Resisting pressure from South Korean and Japanese leaders during two days of talks, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of China gave no public hint yesterday that his government was ready to join the two neighbours in reproaching North Korea over the sinking of a South Korean warship.

Instead, in a joint news conference with President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea and Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan, Wen said that China's top priority was still ensuring stability and avoiding tensions and a possible military clash between the two Koreas.

Both Wen and Hatoyama offered condolences for the 46 South Korean sailors killed in the March 26 sinking of the ship, the Cheonan, which an international team of investigators has blamed on a North Korean torpedo attack.

But during their joint appearance before the media, none of the three leaders blamed North Korea by name an indication of subtle yet fundamental differences between China and its two capitalist neighbours in responding to

North Korea.

"Most urgent is to dispel the impact of the Cheonan incident, gradually ease tension and especially avoid a clash," Wen said in the southern Korean resort island of Jeju, the venue of the three-way summit.

"We must put all our efforts without fail to boost peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Without this, we cannot talk about development, and the achievements we have made with difficulty will evaporate."

During the talks, Lee argued that letting North Korea go unpunished for the Cheonan sinking and its development of nuclear weapons is tantamount to keeping a blind eye to the biggest threat to the very peace and economic and political stability China champions, according to his aides.

"In order to make North Korea find a right path, we should not leave this matter half-finished," Lee was quoted as saying by his chief spokesman, Lee Dong-kwan. The North "must promise not to repeat a military provocation, admit to wrongdoing and take appropriate measures," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria, Queen Silvia of Sweden and Daniel Westling arrive at the reading of the banns of marriage between Crown Princess Victoria and Daniel Westling yesterday in the Royal Chapel, in Stockholm. The wedding will take place on June 19.

Fierce storm lashes Australia

AFP, Sydney

Homes were damaged and thousands of people were without power as a fierce storm lashed Australia's south east coast, officials said yesterday.

Winds gusting at up to 120 kilometres (75 miles) per hour had smashed into coastal areas near the New South Wales town of Moruya and were now moving north towards Sydney, some 300 kilometres away.

The government has warned people living in coastal regions south of Sydney to be prepared for the storm.

"We just reiterate the warning to people not to go into flooded waterways or creeks, make sure they're staying a bit back from the coast, obviously the waves on the coast are pretty severe," state Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said.

Agatha leaves 12 dead in Guatemala

AP, Guatemala City

Torrential rains brought by the first tropical storm of the 2010 season pounded Guatemala and southern Mexico, triggering deadly landslides. The death toll stood at 12 yesterday but authorities said the number could rise.

Agatha made landfall near the border of Guatemala and Mexico on Saturday as a tropical storm with wind speeds of up to 45 mph (75 kph), then weakened into a tropical depression as it pushed inland.

But authorities warned that trouble was far from over as the remnants of Agatha continued to dump rain on vulnerable hillside and riverside settlements in Guatemala and southern Mexico.

US OIL SPILL

BP's 'top kill' oil operation fails

GUARDIAN ONLINE

BP has failed to stop the oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico using so-called top kill and junk shot techniques, prompting an exasperated response from Barack Obama.

After three days of pumping drilling mud over the leak and an attempt to plug the flow by blasting tyres, golf balls and other debris at it, BP admitted defeat last night. In its latest attempt to contain the worst oil spill in US history, it is to launch a four- to seven-day operation that will involve more oil leaking into the Gulf even if it works.

Obama described the setback as "enraging" and "heart-breaking", as documents emerged showing that BP engineers were concerned about the safety of the Deepwater Horizon rig months earlier than the company has admitted.

Papers obtained by the New York Times show that issues were raised as far back as last June. The problems involved the well casing and blow out preventer, considered critical pieces in the chain of events that led to the disaster.

On 22 June last year, BP engineers were worried that the casing the company wanted to use might collapse under high pressure.

"This would certainly be a worst-case scenario," Mark Haffe, a senior drilling engineer at BP, warned in an internal report. "However, I have seen it happen so know it can occur."

Creative minds 'mimic schizophrenia'

BBC ONLINE

Creativity is akin to insanity, say scientists who have been studying how the mind works.

Brain scans reveal striking similarities in the thought pathways of highly creative people and those with schizophrenia.

Both groups lack important receptors used to filter and direct thought.

It could be this uninhibited processing that allows creative people to "think outside the box", say experts from Sweden's Karolinska Institute.

In some people, it leads to mental illness.

But rather than a clear division, experts suspect a continuum, with some people having psychotic traits but few negative symptoms.

Some of the world's leading artists, writers and theorists have also had mental illnesses -

the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh and American mathematician John Nash (portrayed by Russell Crowe in the film A Beautiful Mind) to name just two.

Creativity is known to be associated with an increased risk of depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Similarly, people who have mental illness in their family have a higher chance of being creative.

Associate Professor Fredrik Ullen believes his findings could help explain why.

He looked at the brain's dopamine (D2) receptor genes, which experts believe govern divergent thought.

He found highly creative people who did well on tests of divergent thought had a lower than expected density of D2 receptors in the thalamus - as do people with schizophrenia.

NPT MEET

Israel rejects ME nuclear talks plan

BBC ONLINE

Israel says it will not take part in a conference aimed at achieving a nuclear-arms free Middle East, proposed at a UN meeting in New York.

Nearly 200 nations, signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), backed plans for the meeting in 2012.

In a document agreed at the talks, Israel was singled out for criticism.

Israel, which has not signed the NPT, dismissed the document as "deeply flawed" and "hypocritical".

"It ignores the realities of the Middle East and the real threats facing the region and the entire world," the Israeli government said in a statement quoted by the AFP news agency.

Chinese school attacker executed

BBC ONLINE

A man who attacked 29 children and three teachers at a nursery school in east China has been executed, state media says.

Xu Yuyuan, 47, knifed his victims at the Zhongzhen preschool in Taiping city in the Jiangsu province on 29 April.

He was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to death at a court earlier this month.

It was one of a series of school attacks that have rocked China over the past two months.

Xu, who was unemployed, reportedly said his motive was to vent his rage against society.

All 32 victims survived the attack.

Confusion over Gaza aid flotilla

BBC ONLINE, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES ONLINE

Hundreds of human rights activists aboard a flotilla of ships trying to break Israel's blockade of Gaza say they hope to arrive later yesterday.

But Israel's navy remains adamant that this will not be allowed to happen.

There is also confusion about whether the ships are actually moving.

The Palestinian territory has been under an Israeli and Egyptian economic blockade for almost three years, with only limited humanitarian aid allowed in.

The blockade was imposed after the Islamist movement Hamas - which over the past decade has fired thousands of rockets into Israel - took power in Gaza.

Ships carrying 10,000 tons of supplies and hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists to blockaded Gaza were being held up near Cyprus on Saturday, as organizers tried to get nearly two dozen high-profile supporters on board.

The flotilla was to set sail toward Gaza on Saturday afternoon, in any event, and approach the territory on Sunday; about 24 hours behind schedule, said Greta Berlin, one of the activists.

A showdown with the Israeli navy appeared inevitable. Israel's deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, reiterated Saturday that the ships would be intercepted, denouncing the sea convoy as a provocation and violation of maritime laws.

Israel and Egypt imposed a blockade on Gaza after the Islamic militant Hamas seized

the territory by force three years ago.

In Gaza, Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas said the flotilla signals the end of the blockade.

"If the ships reach Gaza, it's a victory for Gaza," Haniyeh told some 400 supporters Saturday, after touring Gaza City's small fishing harbour where several smaller vessels breaking the blockade have docked in the past.

"If they are intercepted and terrorized by the Zionists, it will be a victory for Gaza, too, and they will move again in new ships to break the siege of Gaza."

In Cyprus, organizers were trying to find a way to have two dozen would-be passengers, including 19 European legislators and an elderly Holocaust survivor, join the ships anchored in international waters off the island.

The Cypriot government did not allow smaller boats to ferry the group to the flotilla, Berlin said.

Authorities in Cyprus said the decision was made to protect the island's "vital interests" including economic ties with Israel.



PHOTO: AFP

Protestors walk in commemoration of the Tiananmen crackdown, in Hong Kong yesterday. Hundreds of people took part in the annual demonstration to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the victims of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Beijing.