

Thai 'Red Shirt' leaders granted bail

AFP, Reuters, Bangkok

Two Thai opposition lawmakers involved in recent "Red Shirt" anti-government protests in Bangkok were granted bail after reporting to court to face charges of terrorism.

Jatuporn Prompan and Karun Hosakul, members of the Puea Thai Party, were released by the Criminal Court on bail of one million bath (31,000 dollars) each, their lawyer Karom Poltaklang told reporters yesterday.

The authorities had opposed their bail.

"I thank the court for giving us justice by granting bail," Jatuporn told the media and hundreds of cheering Red Shirts gathered outside the court.

"We've shown our intention not to escape and the court give us bail with no conditions," he said.

Jatuporn is a top leader of the Red Shirts and regularly appeared on the main rally stage to galvanise demonstrators during two months of street protests in central Bangkok that sparked several outbreaks of violence.

Jatuporn and Karun had enjoyed immunity from arrest until the recent end of the parliamentary session.

Karun said he was optimistic that eight other protest leaders in detention would be bailed soon.

The Thai government appointed a former attorney general on Tuesday to investigate recent political violence in which 89 people were killed, but the opposition rejected the nominee as biased.

New Iraqi parliament to convene June 14

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's new parliament will convene on June 14 for the first time since March 7 elections that have yet to produce a new government, a presidency official said yesterday.

"The president (Jalal Talabani) decided that the parliament will meet on Monday, June 14," Nasir al-Ani, the head of the Iraqi presidency's office, told AFP.

Once parliament is opened, Iraq's constitution states that MPs must first select a speaker for the Council of Representatives, and then choose a new president.

The president will then call on the leader of the biggest parliamentary bloc to form a government, who will be given 30 days to do so.

Iraq's supreme court on June 1 ratified the results of the general election, confirming initial figures which put former premier Iyad Allawi's Iraqiya bloc in the lead, followed closely by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law Alliance.

The court has opined, however, that a coalition agreed before parliament first meets would gain primacy over Iraqiya if it held more combined seats.

Obama would have fired BP chief

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama said yesterday that he would have fired BP CEO Tony Hayward for remarks downplaying the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill, including a much-publicized whine that he "would like my life back."

"He wouldn't be working for me after making any of those statements," Obama said on the NBC "Today Show" program.

Hayward was roundly criticized for recent complaints about the amount of time he has spent dealing with the spill, and for discounting the environmental impact of the spill, which he said was "likely to be very, very modest."

The BP executive has since apologized for those remarks.

Obama also said that he had not spoken to Hayward since the disaster began more than a month and a half ago.

"I haven't spoken to him directly," Obama said.

"When you talk to a guy like a BP CEO, he's going to say all the right things to me. I'm not interested in words. I'm interested in actions."

Japan PM vows action on debt and US ties

BBC ONLINE

Japan's incoming Prime Minister Naoto Kan has vowed to make the country more "vigorous", tackle national debt and improve relations with the US.

Kan was speaking before being sworn in to office by Emperor Akihito.

His appointment on Friday followed the abrupt resignation of Yukio Hatoyama.

Hatoyama named his new cabinet, keeping 11 of the 17 ministers in place and appointing his former deputy Yoshihiko Noda as finance minister.

Hatoyama stepped down last week, amid tensions over a controversial US military base on the island of Okinawa.

Kan, the former finance minister, has assured President Barack Obama that he will relocate the base to the north of the island as agreed, despite anger from locals who want it moved off Okinawa entirely.

Despite the unpopular move, Kan enjoys poll ratings above 60% as his Democratic Party (DPJ) faces an election for the upper house next month.

In his televised remarks, Kan said he wanted to "rehabilitate Japan drastically and create a vigorous country".

He said the national debt - the largest debt of the industrialised world, at nearly twice the country's economic output - should be "handled as the country's biggest topic".

"Rebuilding financial health is essential for Japan's economy," he said.

Kan also pledged to restore the relationship with Washington, saying the Japan-US security alliance was the "cornerstone" of Tokyo's politics.

He said he would honour the agreement reached with the US over the future of the Futenma

base on Okinawa, while seeking to "ease the burden for the people of Okinawa".

Earlier on Tuesday, Kan unveiled his new cabinet, which will be sworn in alongside him later.

As had been widely expected, he retained many top ministers, including Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and Defence Minister Toshimi Kitazawa.

Noda, his former deputy finance minister and a fiscal conservative, will head the finance ministry.

Among the new faces in the cabinet is Renho, a popular television presenter who goes by one name.

The 42-year-old, known for her tough questioning of bureaucrats in debates over public spending, has been appointed minister of administrative reform.

Announcing the appointments, Yoshito Sengoku, the new chief cabinet secretary, said the ministers were "young, fresh and enthusiastic about their jobs".

"Prime Minister Kan has appointed the ministers mindful of the need to form a government with professionalism, very clean politics and ability to govern," he said.

Later in the day, the ministers will don ceremonial tuxedos and go to the Imperial Palace in central Tokyo to be formally sworn in.

Japanese newspapers have welcomed the "son of a salary man" to the post of prime minister, contrasting his ordinary background to the privileged roots of recent prime ministers.

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PHOTO: AFP

Japan's new Prime Minister Naoto Kan (C) talks with State Minister in charge of Postal Reform, Financial Affairs and the People's New Party leader Shizuka Kamei (R) as Cabinet secretary Yoshito Sengoku (L) and Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada (C - behind Kan) look on during a photo session for Japan's new cabinet after it was inaugurated by Japanese Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo yesterday. Japan's new centre-left prime minister unveiled his cabinet and vowed to create a "vigorous country", restore its public finances and mend strained US relations.

White House reporter quits over Israel comments

BBC ONLINE

Veteran US White House reporter Helen Thomas has retired after making controversial remarks about Israel.

In an interview on 27 May, she said that Israelis should get "the hell out of Palestine" and suggested they went to Germany, Poland or the US.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said her comments were "offensive and reprehensible". She has since apologised.

Thomas, 89, was the longest-serving reporter in the White House.

She has spent most of her career working for United Press International wire service, but had been working as a columnist for Hearst newspapers since 2000.

Observer

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around 11:00am yesterday after a labour court judge handed them cheques as per an agreement signed on October 25 last year between the Observer employees union and owners of the daily.

"As cheques of one third of the dues of working journalists and employees were handed over today, they journalists and employees left the Observer building and subsequently Concord Group which earlier purchased the land and the building took over," said the last editor of the daily Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury.

Journalists and employees of the newspaper early last year had launched a campaign for 78 months' arrears in pay. They had also approached the government to get their dues.

An audit report at the end of 2007 showed the paper had Tk 1.77 crore in cash and Tk 11.11 crore in cheques deposited with banks.

The High Court yesterday issued a ruling asking the authorities concerned of Al-Hejal Printing and Publishers Ltd to explain within four weeks as to why they should not be directed to windup the press.

Chairman of Al-Hejal Printing and Publishers Ltd, which publishes the Observer, Manjur Ahmed Chowdhury and its three directors have been asked to respond to the ruling.

Justice Syed Rafat Ahmed issued the ruling following a petition filed by 31 staff of The Bangladesh Observer who have not been paid for at least 11 years.

The court also fixed July 12 for further order on the petition.

The petitioners stated in the petition that the respondents have been running The Bangladesh Observer without following proper rules and laws.

The daily was first published as The Pakistan Observer by Hamidul Haque Chowdhury in 1949. In 1952, the paper was banned for its stance in favour of the Language Movement and East Pakistan's provincial autonomy.

In December 1971, it was renamed Bangladesh Observer and in 1972 the then government brought it under state control.

In 1984, president Ershad handed over its ownership back to Hamidul Haque Chowdhury.

GAZA FLOTILLA RAID

Israel to hold internal probes

AFP, Jerusalem/ Istanbul

Israel plans to hold internal probes of its deadly raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla that would fall far short of calls for an international inquiry into a commando operation widely condemned abroad.

The probes will look exclusively into the legality of Israel's naval blockade of Gaza and the May 31 raid on an aid flotilla that sought to break it, minister without portfolio Benny Begin told public radio yesterday.

But Israeli media criticised hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for restricting the probe's mandate to theoretical legal questions, saying it would be little more than a "committee light," and an "investigative committee without investigators."

"It is not supposed to investigate whether the blockade policy as a whole is either effective or justified... And that is the recipe by means of which the government is trying to ensure the failure of the investigation into the flotilla events," the mass-selling *Yediot Aharonot* said.

Meanwhile, Turkey sought a fresh condemnation of Israel over its deadly raid on Gaza-bound aid ships as regional leaders gathered in Istanbul Tuesday to discuss security in Asia.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan as well as Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin attended the talks, expected to begin with a joint declaration later Tuesday.

"There will probably be a condemnation of Israel in the final declaration," a Turkish diplomat said.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said

Tuesday his country would raise the controversial issue of who should investigate Israel's deadly raid on a Gaza aid flotilla at the United Nations.

"Unfortunately, this act happened in international waters, which is another source for concern," Putin said during a press conference on the sidelines of an Istanbul summit on security in Asia.

Putin stressed the need for calm and for a thorough and comprehensive investigation at the press conference also attended by Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"We will raise the issue at the United Nations, we're working at it," said Putin, who discussed the raid with Erdogan "in detail".

Putin said the "tragic incident with the humanitarian flotilla for the Gaza strip, the loss of peaceful civilians has caused a new exacerbation of the situation."

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak has made it clear that the commandos who carried out the deadly raid should not be put on the stand.

"I insist that the combatants, who carried out a task that we imposed on them and who had to make decisions in split seconds about whether to pull the trigger without taking legal considerations into account, not be questioned," he said.

Israel is reportedly considering a team made up of Israeli jurists and former diplomats as well as two foreign observers.

This would fall far short of the independent, international investigation several world leaders have called for in the wake of the commando raid in which nine Turkish activists were killed.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said

All about epithets

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"Through the ages, people have been known by their first names or their nicknames," said Alex Bellos, author of *Football, the Brazilian Way of Life*. "They're seen as slightly charming and Brazilians are quite proud of it. You can see it from the football team."

The use of first names and nicknames stems from Brazil's days as a Portuguese colony. In the Portuguese tradition, Wiedemann said many people have four names: their given name, which is often two to include a saint's name; the mother's last name; and then the father's.

Learning just one name can be tough on a kid, so imagine the meltdown that mouthful could cause.

"If you were to use the last name, it's kind of more complicated," Wiedemann said.

So, too, when there's more than one person with the same name. Sometimes they're distinguished by using second names -- look at Brazil's squad for South Africa, there's a Gilberto and a Gilberto Silva.

Other times, an "inho" (meaning small) or an "ao" (meaning big) is tacked on to a name.

That's how there came to be a Ronaldo, a Little Ronaldo and a Little Ronaldo from southern Brazil.

Back when Ronaldo, he of

the record for most goals scored in the World Cup, joined the Brazilian team, the squad already had a Ronaldo, a defender. So Ronaldo became Ronaldinho. Then another Ronaldinho came along, and they called him Ronaldinho Gaucho, for the area in Brazil where he was from.

While Brazilians don't see anything unusual in their use of first names and nicknames, it makes Brazil's team all the more appealing to those not used to being on such familiar terms. There's something about cheering for a team of regular Joes and Michaels and Luises rather than one filled with sterile sounding last names.

"It feels like they're friends," Bellos said. "It feels like they're one of your gang."

Which is exactly the point, Wiedemann said. When you look at Brazil's team, she said, it reflects the country's makeup, whether the measure is socio-economic status or race or geography.

"Nicknames, of course you would use them mostly with the people that you are very familiar with," Wiedemann added. "We feel we are so familiar with the national team because it's us. It's the poor, the rich, the south, the north."

"It's very personal for a Brazilian."



PHOTO: AFP

US President Barack Obama (3rd R) talks to the media during a meeting with cabinet members to discuss the administration's response to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill at the White House in Washington on Monday. Obama also ramped up pressure on BP to streamline its claims process for Gulf coast residents seeking compensation for lost livelihoods and promised them "constant, vigilant attention" from his administration.