# INTERNATIONAL

## Israel's Barak holds talks with Palestinian PM

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak was holding a face-to-face meeting with Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad at a hotel in Jerusalem, officials on both sides said yesterday.

The two were meeting at the King David hotel on the eve of talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Barack Obama at the White House.

Palestinians officials insisted the two would not discuss any issues related to the ongoing indirect peace negotiations, and said the focus would be on security coordination on the ground.

Barak said the talks would focus on security coordination and "the situation on the ground" in remarks to reporters on Wednesday, while Fayyad's office said he would demand Israel end the blockade on Gaza and halt incursions into West Bank cities.

"The meeting today doesn't fall within the scope of negotia-tions but aims to make life easier for our people," Palestinian Authority spokesman Ghassan Khatib said in a statement.

"The meeting will focus on the means and ways of ending the Israeli siege on Gaza and stopping Israeli attacks on West Bank cities," he said.

"It aims to enable the Palestinian security services to provide services to citizens outside the cities."

But Hamas, the radical Islamist movement which rules the Gaza Strip, reacted angrily to the talks, saying it proved Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas was violating his own commitment not to engage in direct talks with Israel.

"This meeting proves that Abbas is lying when he says he doesn't want to move to direct negotiations," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum said in a statement.



### Israel eases Gaza blockade

#### But makes blacklist of items

**BBC ONLINE** 

Israel has confirmed details of what goods it will allow to enter the Gaza Strip with the easing of its blockade.

Consumer goods are being allowed but a "blacklist" of items including weapons and materials that could have a military use

will be barred or limited. Hamas, which controls Gaza, dismissed the concessions as of no use and said the blockade should be fully lifted.

Israel says its blockade of the Palestinian territory is needed

to prevent the supply of weapons to Hamas.

Israel came under international pressure to ease its four-year blockade of Gaza after nine Turkish activists were killed in a 31 May Israeli raid on a flotilla that was trying to carry aid to the Palestinian territory.

Palestinian Authority-approved projects that are under the supervision and for the use of the UN or other international agencies. Aid agencies say building materials are badly needed in Gaza

certain fertilisers and chemicals will be allowed in for

Under the new measures, materials such as steel, cement,

as the blockade has prevented much reconstruction taking place since Israel's devastating 22-day military offensive, which ended in January 2009. The blacklist includes so-called "dual-use" items that could be used to manufacture weapons and explosives, such as ball

bearings and fireworks. Meanwhile, exports are not permitted, making it hard for the enclave's devastated economy to pick up, says the BBC's Jon

Donnison in Gaza.

#### Hillary vows support for Georgia, slams Russian 'occupation'

AFP, Tbilisi

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reassured Georgia yesterday with a pledge of continued support and criticised Russia's "occupation" of two breakaway Georgian regions.

On her first visit to the ex-Soviet country as secretary of state, Clinton told a group of women leaders that Washington would also keep pushing for further democratic reforms in Georgia.

"We continue to object to and criticise actions by Russia which we believe are wrong and on the top of the list is the invasion and occupation of Georgia," Clinton said shortly after arriving in the capital Tbilisi as part of a regional tour.

"The United States supports the Georgian people, we support Georgian democracy," she said.

#### Bronislaw Komorowski leads Polish polls

**BBC ONLINE** Bronislaw Komorowski,

Poland's acting president, appears to be heading for victory in a close presidential election after hours of uncertainty. He now has 52.6%, with rival

Jaroslaw Kaczynski on 47.4%, with 95% of votes counted. Kaczynski had initially

accepted defeat based on an exit poll, but Komorowski's camp remained cautious. Kaczynski is the twin of

former President Lech Kaczynski, who died in a plane crash with 95 others in April. This run-off election was

held after neither candidate gained more than 50% in the first round in June.

Poland's electoral commission says final results will not be announced until Monday afternoon.

Komorowski is from the ruling Civic Platform party, while Kaczynski represents the main opposition Law and Justice party.

### UK, Germany, UAE airports refuse fuel to Iran jets

AFP, Tehran

Airports in Britain, Germany and the United Arab Emirates have refused to refuel Iranian passenger planes since Washington imposed unilateral sanctions on Tehran last week, ISNA news agency said yesterday.

IRNA, the official state news agency, said in a separate report that Kuwaiti airports have also turned down fuel for Iranian passenger planes.

"Since last week, after the passing of the unilateral law by America and the sanctions against Iran, airports in England Germany, the UAE have refused to give fuel to Iranian planes," ISNA quoted Mehdi Aliyari, secretary of Iranian Airlines Union, as saying. The decision by the airports in these countries comes at a

those in Europe, travel to and from Iran for summer holidays. Aliyari said their refusal has so far impacted Iran Air, the national carrier, and a leading private airline, Mahan Air, as both operate several flights to Europe.

time when a large number of expatriate Iranians, especially

Pervez Sorouri, a lawmaker and member of Iranian parliament's committee on foreign policy and national security, warned of a retaliatory action by Tehran, especially towards the United Arab Emirates.

He said Iran was an important trade partner of the UAE which is emerging from a financial crisis and "this (UAE's refusal) can

have some reaction from Iran," ISNA reported. Last Thursday, US President Barack Obama signed into law the toughest ever US sanctions on Iran, which he said would strike at Tehran's capacity to finance its nuclear programme and deepen its isolation.

#### Thailand urged to lift emergency

**BBC ONLINE** 

Thailand's government has been urged to lift a state of emergency and drop terrorism charges against leaders of recent

anti-government protests. The International Crisis Group (ICG) warned the "legitimate frustrations" of protesters were "being forced underground and possibly towards illegal and violent actions".

The decree has been in place since a bloody military crackdown on 19 May.

Thailand's prime minister told the BBC the situation was being addressed.

Ninety people died and 2,000 were injured during the two months of protests, which blocked off the commercial centre of Bangkok. More than 400 people have

been arrested under emergency law, which has handed sweeping powers to the police and military. The leaders of the so-called

"red-shirt" anti-government movement are still in prison on charges, which carry the death penalty.

### Turkey threatens diplomatic break with Israel over raid

**BBC ONLINE** 

Turkey has for the first time threatened to break diplomatic ties with Israel over its raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla in May.

Turkey's foreign minister said a break could only be averted if Israel either apologised or accepted the outcome of an international inquiry into the raid.

The Israeli government said it had nothing to apologise for.

Ankara curtailed diplomatic relations with Israel after the naval raid, in which nine Turks were killed. Turkey - which until recently was Israel's

most important Muslim ally - withdrew its ambassador and demanded that the Israelis issue an apology, agree to a United Nations inquiry and compensate the victims' families. A Turkish foreign ministry official told the

BBC relations with Israel had hit rock bottom. but Ankara would not rush into cutting ties.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Turkey would be satisfied with the ongoing Israeli inquiry if that found Israel to be at fault. Davutoglu told Hurriyet newspaper: "[The

Israelis] will either apologise or acknowledge an international, impartial inquiry and its conclusion. Otherwise, our diplomatic ties will be cut off."

He also said there was now a blanket ban in

place on all Israeli military aircraft using Turkish airspace, not just on a case-by-case

AIR SPACE BAN

The BBC's Jonathan Head in Istanbul says that Turkey appears to be hardening its stance towards Israel, just five days after a surprise meeting between Davutoglu and Israeli Trade Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer in Switzerland.

Reacting to the new Turkish stance, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said: "We don't have any intention to apologise." Foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor

told AFP news agency: "When you want want

an apology, you don't use threats or ultimatums." Israel says its commandos acted in self defence after being attacked by activists wielding clubs and knives as the troops boarded one

of the aid convoy ships. Activists on board the Mavi Marmara say lethal force was used from the start of the raid

by Israeli forces. The vessel was part of a flotilla trying to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent the supply of arms to Islamist group Hamas, which controls the territory.

Turkey and Israel forged strong military and trade ties following Ankara's recognition of Israel in 1949.

#### Somalian president appeals for help

AFP, Addis Ababa

Somali President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed pleaded for help yesterday at a regional summit, as an al-Qaedainspired insurgency closed in on his Mogadishu palace. "Somalia is in the hands of

al-Qaeda and extremist groups. The whole issue needs urgent treatment," he told leaders from the six-nation Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Addis Ababa. "I would like to tell you that

Somalia is going through its most dangerous phase in recent times and we are asking for intensified efforts in order to set up an effective military strategy," he added.

IGAD leaders met in the intensified clashes in

### Sarkozy sacrifices ministers to save key ally

AFP, Paris

By sacrificing two ministers mired in expenses scandals, French President Nicolas Sarkozy hoped to protect a bigger target, Labour Minister Eric Woerth, observers said yesterday.

International development secretary Alain Joyandet resigned after he was criticised for spending 116,500 euros (157,000 dollars) on a private plane to take him to the Caribbean for a meeting on the Haiti earthquake.

Christian Blanc, who is responsible for the Paris region, was under fire for spending 12,000 euros (14,700 dollars) on Cuban cigars. Virtually the entire press and political class

saw Sunday's resignations as an attempt to take the spotlight off Woerth who is at the centre of a controversy over alleged tax avoidance by France's richest woman.

Sarkozy's approval ratings are at an all time low of 26 percent, and a poll conducted by Vivavoice and the daily Liberation just before the resignations found 64 percent of voters think the political class corrupt.

"The French government has run out of breath. It can't go on like this. Anywhere else, the government would have fallen and they'd have elections," said Socialist opposition lawmaker Pierre Moscovici on France Info radio.

Green Party leader Cecile Duflot called for the "out-of-touch" government to be reshuffled. "We can't be governed by leaders that no-

one thinks are beyond reproach," she declared. The populist daily Le Parisien showed Woerth the direction of the door with a front page splash, "Two resignations to show an

example". The Liberation daily asked if their sacrifice would "put out the fire under Woerth?" "To sacrifice two people in order to save a third is a sign of great panic at the summit of power," warned the western daily Le

Telegramme. Woerth, minister for work and pensions, is a key figure in Sarkozy's plans to get government

reforms back on track after the financial crisis and prepare for his own 2012 re-election battle. Next week, Woerth is to present a proposed law to reform France's pension rules and push

back the legal retirement age, the centrepiece of Sarkozy's legislative programme. He is also treasurer of Sarkozy's party, the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), and thus charged with raising many of

the funds that will be needed to pay for his boss's upcoming campaign. These two roles make Woerth dear to the president, but a perceived conflict of interest between them -- and between the treasurer's job and his previous post as budget minister --

have undermined his position. As budget minister, Woerth was charged with clamping down on tax evasion by France's richest personalities -- many of whom are UMP donors.





(Files) A combo of file photos shows French politicians Christian Blanc (L) smoking a cigar during an electoral campaign meeting in 2002 in Paris and Alain Joyandet disembarking from his jet plane on Comoros island in 2009. Two French ministers, Blanc and Joyandet resigned on Sunday after rows over the spending of thousands of euros of taxpayers' money on a private jet and cigars at a time when budget cuts are hitting the public. International development secretary Alain Joyandet resigned after he was criticised for spending 116,500 euros (157,000 dollars) on a private plane to take him to the Caribbean for a meeting on the Haiti earthquake and Christian Blanc, who is responsible for the Paris region, was under fire for spending 12,000 euros (14,700 dollars) on Cuban cigars.

### BP oil spill costs pass \$3b mark

**BBC ONLINE** 

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has so far cost BP a total of \$3.12bn (£2bn), the company has said.

of containing the spill and cleaning up the oil, and the cost of drilling relief wells. It also includes the \$147m

The total includes the cost

paid out in compensation to some of those affected by the But BP again warned that

likely to be much higher. The cost is already signifi-

cantly higher than the \$2.65bn cost reported a week ago. BP said there were now

the total cost of the spill is

44,500 people working on the spill response - nearly 5,000 more than a week ago.

### Obama risks party face-off on South Korea deal

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama is risking a revolt within his own party as he presses ahead on a free trade agreement with South Korea, setting the stage for a showdown after November legislative elections.

Organized labour, a critical support base for Obama's Democratic Party, and several Democrats have already vowed to fight the deal, which they say would hurt workers. "To try and advance the Korean FTA when so many workers

are still struggling to find work would simply move our economy backward," said Representative Louise Slaughter, a Democrat who leads the powerful Rules Committee. The deal would be the largest for the United States since the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico in 1994. The United States and South Korea completed painstaking negotiations in 2007 but neither nation's legislature has ratified it.

Obama himself criticized the deal as a senator. But as president, Obama has found South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak to be one of his closest allies and has said he is convinced of the benefits of boosting trade with Asia's fourth largest economy.

#### Govt seeks to fix details on MRP **FROM PAGE 16** director of MRP, referring to the decision

of an inter-ministerial meeting at the foreign ministry. The foreign minister called the meet-

ings as the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

for over a week has been refusing to issue

visas to the Bangladeshi jobseekers without MRPs. The UAE also refused visas in some cases as MRPs do not contain legal guardians' names and detailed address of the passport holders, officials con-

cerned say. Most Gulf countries require guardians' names, they note.

Bangladesh Ambassador in the UAE Nazmul Quaunine earlier told The Daily Star the country was irritated as the jobseekers were submitting photocopies of both manual passports and MRPs.

After introduction of MRPs in April this year, the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) has been issuing emergency manual passports with three years' validity alongside MRPs.

However, as problems arose, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni held the meeting with the envoys of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Malaysia, the Maldives and South Korea and requested them to accept both types of passports.

She wanted rectification of certain things in passports and sought opinions of the labour-receiving countries in this regard. Brig Gen Refayet Ullah said validity of the emergency passports would be

increased to five years, while the Bangladesh missions abroad will also issue manual passports or renew the old ones with validity of five years if the labour-receiving countries want. This will, however, continue only until

MRP system is introduced in the missions, he said. Besides, they can incorporate legal

guardians' names and detailed addresses of the passport holders in the MRPs either in handwritten or in printed form, he added.

mation immediately if it is handwritten. But for printed form it will take some time, because we have to redesign the software," Refayet Ullah said.

"We can incorporate additional infor-

Asked what will happen to those who have already received MRPs that do not contain guardians' names, he said they would incorporate additional information if MRP holders have any problems. For this, they will not charge any fees,

he said, adding, no-one has so far come up with such problems. Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas

**Employment Secretary Zafar Ahmed** Khan said they expect feedback from the envoys in a week. Asked if it was a problem for

Bangladesh if some hold manual passports after 2015 by which Bangladesh wanted to turn all manual passports into MRPs, he said there would be no problem if any particular country has no objections.

According to Refayet Ullah, now the government has capacity to issue 1,000-1,600 MRPs a day and they receive some 600-1,000 applications.

By December this year, 34 regional passport offices could be equipped to issue MRPs and gradually Bangladesh missions will also be similarly equipped, he noted.

Ethiopian capital for emergency talks in the wake of Mogadishu pitting Islamist insurgents against Somali government troops backed by African Union forces.

# Ponytail for

men gets the

chop in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran's culture ministry has given its blessing to a number of "Islamic" haircuts for men, with ponytails failing to make the list, the ILNA news agency reported yester-

day. ILNA and other agencies carried pictures of mostly clean-shaven male models sporting short hair, some styled with gel, in a "journal of Iranian hairstyles approved by the ministry of (culture and Islamic) guidance.'

"The proposed styles are inspired by Iranians' complexion, culture and religion, and Islamic law," said Jaleh Khodayar, who is in charge of a "Modesty and Veil Festival" later this month where they are to be promoted.

#### Cambodia preparing 'freedom parks'for rallies

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodia is making way for "freedom parks" across the country for people to hold demonstrations, a move local activists fear could limit rights of expression, the government said yesterday.

"All provinces and

cities are preparing loca-

tions for the freedom parks," interior ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheak told AFP, adding that local authorities nationwide had been informed about the move. He said the planned parks, which would pro-

vide "safety and allow people to express their opinions freely" from 6am to 6pm, were required according to a controversial law passed last year.