

Protests at UN office in Lanka over war panel

AFP, Colombo

Demonstrators led by a Sri Lankan cabinet minister surrounded the United Nations office in Colombo yesterday to protest against a UN panel set up to probe war crimes allegations.

Housing Minister Wimal Weerawansa shouted anti-UN slogans as crowds broke through police barricades and rallied at the entrance to the building.

"We will not leave. We will sit down and protest here until the secretary-general withdraws the panel," Weerawansa told about 1,500 cheering supporters.

They burnt an effigy of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and carried banners that accused him of being a puppet of the United States.

UN staff were trapped in the building during the day but riot police later arrived to allow them safe passage out, while a few hundred rowdy protesters remained on the scene.

Sri Lanka has refused to cooperate with the panel, which was named by Ban last month to advise on "accountability issues" during the war between government forces and the Tamil Tiger separatists.

The government has also refused to grant visas to the three members of the panel, meaning they will be unable to visit the island.

The Tiger guerrillas were defeated after decades of conflict in May 2009, and the UN has said that at least 7,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed in the first four months of last year.

Many diplomats see the UN panel, headed by Marzuki Darusman, a former Indonesian attorney general, as a precursor to a full-blown war crimes investigation.

Neither the UN office in Colombo nor the government commented on Tuesday's protest.



Sri Lankan traditional dancers perform the "thovil" or a devil dance, which is performed to exorcise evil spirits, outside the UN office during a protest rally in Colombo yesterday. Protesters led by a Sri Lankan cabinet minister surrounded the United Nations office in Colombo to protest against a UN panel due to probe war crimes allegations. PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan opposition protests constitutional changes

IANS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's main opposition party staged a protest yesterday against proposed constitutional reforms that would enable the president to stand for a third term.

United National Party legislators carried placards and chanted slogans at parliament.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa is trying to remain in power forever, party leader Ranil Wickremesinghe said.

Rajapaksa's United People's Freedom Alliance, re-elected in April with a nearly two-thirds majority in the 225-seat parliament, is trying to eliminate the two-term limit for president.

Rajapaksa won his second six-year term in January, largely due to the military defeat of separatist Tamil rebels to end a 26-year civil war.

The ruling party needs 150 votes to approve the amendment, but currently has only 144 members and talks are underway with opposition members to canvass support.

Turkish FM insists on Israeli apology

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's foreign minister yesterday insisted on an Israeli apology for a deadly raid on a Gaza-bound aid ship but did not repeat a threat to break off diplomatic ties.

Israel must apologise for the May 31 bloodshed and pay compensation for the nine Turkish victims or "Turkey will not stay indifferent," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said in a television interview.

Stoking tensions between the one-time allies, the minister told the Hurriyet daily Monday that Turkey would sever ties if Israel failed to meet Ankara's conditions to mend fences.

Australian PM plans an asylum centre

BBC ONLINE

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard has announced plans to create a refugee processing centre in East Timor.

Under the plan people seeking asylum in Australia would be housed in the centre while their credentials were checked.

Ms Gillard said the move was aimed at thwarting traffickers and that talks with East Timor's President Jose Ramos Horta and the UN had already begun.

Treatment of asylum seekers is a contentious issue in Australia, where elections are expected this year.

OPPOSITION PLAN The leader of the opposition, Tony Abbott, also announced a new asylum policy yesterday.

Abbott said he would "turn back the boats" by restoring the Pacific Solution set up by former Prime Minister John Howard, under which new arrivals were placed in detention centres in Pacific

states, such as Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

That system was scrapped by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Australia currently sends asylum seekers to its Indian Ocean processing centre on Christmas Island.

However, the detention centre is overcrowded and many asylum seekers have been moved to the mainland while their applications are assessed.

In unveiling her plan for an East Timor processing centre Ms Gillard said that her government is not interested in pursuing a new Pacific Solution.

However, she claimed that establishing "a regional processing centre removes the incentive, once and for all, for the people smugglers to send boats to Australia".

"The purpose would be to ensure that people smugglers have no product to sell. Arriving by boat would just be a ticket back to the regional processing centre," she told the Lowy Institute think tank in Sydney.

Thai govt extends emergency rule

BBC ONLINE

The Thai government has extended a state of emergency in 19 provinces, including the capital Bangkok, because of fears of renewed violence.

The emergency decree was revoked in five other provinces, after a three-month deadline expired.

The law was imposed during mass anti-government protests earlier this year in which 90 people were killed.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva told the BBC on Monday that there would be a gradual lifting of emergency law.

Under emergency rule, public gatherings of more than five people are banned and security forces have the right to detain suspects for 30 days without charge.

Nuke talks can resume in Sept if conditions met: Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday set September 1 as a possible date for the resumption of nuclear talks with six world powers which have been stalled since October, but insisted conditions set by Tehran must first be met.

The Islamic republic at the same time rejected claims by some of its officials that airports in Britain, Germany and the United Arab Emirates had refused to refuel its passenger planes, in line with latest US sanctions on Tehran.

Iran's state news agency IRNA reported that the country's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, in a letter to European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, said that Tehran needed three issues clarified by the world powers before it could consider resuming talks.

Ashton, who is negotiating with Iran on behalf of the so-called P5+1 powers -- Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany -- had invited Tehran for talks soon after the UN Security Council imposed new sanctions on the Islamic republic on June 9.

Jalili said the world powers must answer whether the talks are aimed at "engagement and cooperation or continued confrontation and hostility towards Iranians."



Sarkozy linked to L'Oreal cash scandal

AFP, Paris

President Nicolas Sarkozy was directly linked for the first time to L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt's murky finances, with claims his presidential campaign received 150,000 euros in cash.

An aide to Sarkozy dismissed yesterday the latest reports as "totally false", as the French government was drawn deeper into a series of scandals that had already embroiled his labour minister and seen two other ministers resign.

An accountant, identified by the investigative website Mediapart as Claire T, said Eric Woerth, a Sarkozy ally and treasurer of his UMP party, received the donation in March 2007, ahead of Sarkozy's election victory in May.



Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama (top L), poses with a group of children during his 75th birthday celebrations at Tsuglagkhang temple in the northern Indian hill town of Dharamsala yesterday.

Gulf oil spill reaches Texas as tar balls wash ashore

BBC ONLINE

Tar balls have landed on a Texas beach, meaning oil from the Gulf of Mexico spill has hit all five US Gulf states.

Tests identified the small amount of tar balls found near Galveston as coming from the BP spill.

But officials said it was unclear if the tar balls drifted hundreds of kilometres from the leaking oil well or fell from ships that have worked on cleaning up the spill.

Oil has been leaking from a blown-out sea floor well since 22 April.

The US Coast Guard commander for the Galveston region, Capt Marcus Woodring, said about five gallons (19 litres) of tar balls were found on Saturday on a beach near Galveston and determined to be from the Deepwater Horizon leak.

But he said it was impossible to confirm whether they drifted from the site of the leak or dropped off one of the ships carrying collected oil to Texas to be processed.

The joint BP-US government response team said there were doubts the oil had drifted all the way from the spill.

DIFFERENT bites



FACEBOOK RECORD Lady Gaga with 10m fans!

BBC ONLINE

Lady Gaga has become the first living person to have more than 10 million fans on Facebook with her tally standing at 10,673,476 (5 July).

According to new research by online site Famecount, the star recently overtook Barack Obama (9,824,885) to claim the number one spot.

Despite setting the new record, she's still only in sixth place overall.

Tallest tent in the world opens in Kazakhstan

BBC ONLINE

The world's tallest tent has opened to the public in the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan.

Designed by the British architects Foster & Partners, the Khan Shatyr Entertainment Centre in the capital Astana is 150m (490ft) high.

It opens on the day the city celebrates 13 years as the capital and President Nursultan Nazarbayev his 70th birthday.

The centre has a huge indoor leisure park, designed to be protected from the region's harsh climate.

Standing on a 20m concrete base, Khan Shatyr is the city's highest structure and the world's tallest tent.

UK to hold inquiry into torture claims

AP, London

The British government is set to formally announce an inquiry into whether its spy agencies colluded in the torture of terrorism suspects overseas -- a probe that could complicate intelligence-sharing with the United States.

Prime Minister David Cameron's office said he would make a statement on the treatment of detainees in the House of Commons later yesterday.

Foreign Secretary William Hague announced in May that there would be a judge-led inquiry, but said details were still being worked out.

Downing Street would not give advance details of Cameron's statement or say whether an inquiry would be held in public. But it is likely to arouse fears in Washington that secret information could be released.

Advertisement for Akhtar Zaman Center featuring a building image and text in Bengali: 'চট্টগ্রামের প্রান্ত কেন্দ্র আত্মবিশ্বাস ম্যাডে সম্পূর্ণ শীতাতপ নিয়ন্ত্রিত শপিং সেন্টার AKHTARU ZAMAN CENTER শুভ উদ্বোধন ৮ জুলাই ২০১০'.

Advertisement for Eastland Insurance Company Limited, featuring a logo, '24 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS', and text: 'EASTLAND INSURANCE RATED AS "AA-" Eastland Insurance Company Ltd. has been rated "Double A-minus" (AA-) by Credit Rating Information Services Limited (CRISL) basing on its financials ended December 2009.'