

## Palestinian refugees granted right to work in Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's parliament adopted yesterday a law granting full employment rights to the roughly 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in the country, a high-ranking official said.

"Parliament approved a bill lifting former restrictions on employment for Palestinian refugees, who will now have the right to work in any field open to foreigners with benefits including social security from their own special fund," the official told AFP.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) estimates Lebanon houses 400,000 Palestinians, though Lebanese officials have said no more than 300,000 refugees actually reside in the country.

For decades, the fate of the refugees has been a thorny issue in Lebanon, dividing Christian and Muslim legislators in the 128-strong parliament, which is equally split between the two confessions.



A picture, originally posted on a Facebook page belonging to Eden Abergil, and taken from the Israeli blog site sachim.tumblr.com, allegedly shows her posing in front of blindfolded men identified in the Israeli news media as Palestinian prisoners. The Israeli military on August 17, 2010 slammed the behaviour of Abergil, who Israeli radio said was 20 years old and from the southern port of Ashdod.

PHOTO: AFP

## Japan heat wave sends over 30,000 to hospital, kills 132

AFP, Tokyo

Scorching summer weather in Japan has led to at least 132 deaths and seen more than 30,000 people rushed to hospital with heatstroke, the government said yesterday.

The mercury has repeatedly topped 37 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit) in recent days in central Tokyo and other locations in Japan, and the sun continued to blaze down as the figures were released.

"Being outside in this heat wave for a long time is quite dangerous," said Yukie Ito, a Fire and Disaster Management Agency official in charge of heat-related incidents. "We should not underestimate the heat wave."

The agency said 31,579 people nationwide were sent to hospital with heatstroke between May 31 and August 15, the highest number since the agency started keeping figures in 2008. Nearly half of them were aged 65 or over.

## Israel has '8 days' to hit Iran nuke site

Says ex-embassy of USA

AFP, Washington

Israel has "eight days" to launch a military strike against Iran's Bushehr nuclear facility and stop Tehran from acquiring a functioning atomic plant, a former US envoy to the UN has said.

Iran is to bring online its first nuclear power reactor, built with Russia's help, next week, when a shipment of nuclear fuel will be loaded into the plant's core.

At that point, former John Bolton warned Monday, it will be too late for Israel to launch a military strike against the facility because any attack would spread radiation and affect Iranian civilians.

"Once that uranium, once those fuel rods are very close to the reactor, certainly once they're in the reactor, attacking it

means a release of radiation, no question about it," Bolton told Fox Business Network.

"So if Israel is going to do anything against Bushehr it has to move in the next eight days."

Absent an Israeli strike, Bolton said, "Iran will achieve something that no other opponent of Israel, no other enemy of the United States in the Middle East really has and that is a functioning nuclear reactor."

But when asked whether he expected Israel to actually launch strikes against Iran within the next eight days, Bolton was sceptical.

"I don't think so, I'm afraid that they've lost this opportunity," he said.

The controversial former envoy to the United Nations criticized Russia's role in the development of the plant, saying "the

Russians are, as they often do, playing both sides against the middle."

"The idea of being able to stick a thumb in America's eye always figures prominently in Moscow," he added.

Iran dismissed the possibilities of such an attack from its arch foes.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said Tuesday that "these threats of attacks had become repetitive and lost their meaning."

"According to international law, installations which have real fuel cannot be attacked because of the humanitarian consequences," he told reporters at a news conference in Tehran.

Iranian officials say Iran has stepped up defensive measures at the Bushehr plant to protect it from any attacks.

## Iran says to unveil array of weapons next week

AFP, Tehran

Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said yesterday that Iran will unveil next week an array of weapons, including missiles, speedboats and a long range drone, the ISNA news agency reported.

Two missiles, Qiam (Rising) and the third generation Fateh 110 (Conqueror) would be tested next week when Iran marks the annual government week, Vahidi said in reference to the Iranian week which starts on Saturday.

Iran will also unveil the long-range drone, Karar, he said using the nickname of revered Shia Imam Ali.

On Sunday Iran launches its annual government week, which runs until August 30 and is an occasion to showcase Tehran's achievements.

## China's military has seen secret expansion

Says US defence dept report

BBC ONLINE

The growth of China's military is shrouded in secrecy which could give rise to "misunderstanding and miscalculation", a US defence department report says.

China has been upgrading its land-based missiles, expanding its submarine force and nuclear arsenal, the Pentagon's annual report to Congress said.

It also said that China has extended its military advantage over Taiwan.

The report confirms US concerns about the rapid growth of China's military.

China has 1,150 short-range ballistic missiles and an unknown number of medium-range missiles, the report says.

The billions of dollars in expenditure has been conducted largely out of the public eye, the report alleges.

"The limited transparency in China's military and security affairs enhances uncertainty and increases the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation," it says.

Recent commentaries from the Chinese military establishment have complained about large-scale military exercises held by the US and South Korea.

They have spoken of an alleged policy of US "encirclement" that threatens China's core interests.

China has also criticised what it sees as unwarranted interference by the US in one of those core interests, China's claim to much of the South China Sea.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently told a regional summit in Vietnam that it supported non-Chinese claimants to the sea.

The US also recently held a week of visits and training exercises with Vietnam.

Washington is also embarking on a new round of exercises with South Korea which it describes as purely defensive.

Military-to-military contacts between the US and China have been suspended and China refused to meet US Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

"It's been ambiguous over the past several months," a senior defence official told the Associated Press when asked about the Pentagon's view of its relationship with China.

Far reach

The Pentagon suggests that China's purchases show a growing military reach beyond its borders, and beyond Taiwan.

## Smog again creeps into Russian capital

AP, Moscow

Smoke from wildfires around Moscow has returned to some parts of the Russian capital even though fire-fighters have scored successes in containing the blazes, officials said yesterday.

Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry says its teams have cut the area covered by fires around Moscow by more than a quarter over the past 24 hours, but 14 forest and peat bog fires are still burning east and southeast of the city.

Early Tuesday, large sections of the capital were again cloaked by smog, although the concentration of pollutants remained far below their peak levels earlier this month when smog hung over the city for a week.

Alexei Popikov of the Mosecomonitoring watchdog agency said carbon monoxide levels in the air remained within their maximum safe limit Tuesday, but the amount of hydrocarbons is twice the permissible level. He said the situation is expected to improve with a wind change later in the day.

A heat wave of a level not seen since records began 130 years ago has sparked thousands of fires in Russia, mostly in the western part of the country. Officials said that the scorching heat and smog have doubled the number of deaths recorded in the capital.

This file photo taken on March 13, 2006 shows Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (L) receiving flowers from waiting school-children waiving national flags after Commonwealth Day services during a visit to Sydney. Australia should become a republic when Queen Elizabeth dies, Prime Minister Julia Gillard said yesterday in comments, which may revive a long-running debate just days ahead of national polls.

PHOTO: AFP



## Australian PM backs republic after queen's death

AFP, Sydney

Australia should become a republic when Queen Elizabeth II dies or abdicates, Prime Minister Julia Gillard said yesterday, unexpectedly reviving an emotional debate just days ahead of national polls.

Gillard, whose centre-left Labor Party is in a tight electoral race against the conservative opposition, said a new monarch would be an "appropriate" time for Australia to stop having a British head of state.

"I believe that this nation should be a republic. I also believe that this nation has got a deep affection for Queen Elizabeth," the Welsh-born Gillard told reporters.

"What I would like to see as prime minister is that we work our way through to an agreement on a model for the republic, but I think the appropriate time for this nation to move to being a republic is when we see the monarch change."

Australians voted against turning the former colony into a republic in a 1999 referendum, and debate on the issue remains divisive.

"Obviously I'm hoping for Queen Elizabeth that she lives a long and happy life and having watched her mother, I think there's every chance that she will live a long and happy life," Gillard added.

"But I think that's probably the appropriate point for a transition to a republic."

Opposition Liberal/National Coalition chief Tony Abbott, a former leader of Australia's main pro-monarchist movement, said he did not expect any change "at least in our lifetimes".

"While there may very well be further episodes of republicanism in this country, I am far from certain that, at least in our lifetimes, there's likely to be any significant change," he told the National Press Club in Canberra.

The comments reveal one of the few areas of genuine difference between the candidates ahead of Saturday's elections, where Gillard is leading Abbott by four percentage points, according to the latest Newpoll.

Australia's first woman prime minister is fighting to overcome voter unrest over her party coup against elected leader

Kevin Rudd seven weeks ago, and avoid a shock defeat less than three years after Labor regained office.

Abbott, a religious conservative who was born in London and is known as the "Mad Monk" after he once trained for the Catholic priesthood, has reeled in Labor's lead by promising to stop illegal immigrants and slash government debt.

British convicts arrived in Australia in 1788 and the territory's states united in 1901 -- considered the birth of the nation -- but it was not until 1986 that Britain passed an act ending its right to make laws for the country.

Australia includes Britain's Union Jack motif on its flag and has a governor-general who represents and is appointed by the queen. The countries also share widespread cultural similarities and family links.

A January visit by Britain's Prince William, grandson of the 84-year-old queen, proved wildly popular with the public in what some commentators saw as a boon for pro-royals.

## 36 killed in new China flooding

AP, Beijing

At least 36 people have died and 23 others are missing in fresh flooding from torrential rains in China's Gansu province, the latest in a string of natural disasters to strike China.

The official Xinhua News Agency reported that the deaths came Monday from flooding in Longnan city near Zhouqu. Zhouqu is where at least 1,254 people were killed as a mudslide triggered by heavy rain crashed through the city on Aug. 8. The government says another 490 people are still missing from that disaster.

Since Aug. 11, heavy rains have pelted several counties in Longnan city, triggering landslides, Xinhua said. It said the latest flooding left 295 people injured and more than 6,000 homes collapsed. Flooding has cut off electricity and damaged roads.

In Zhouqu on Tuesday, workers used bulldozers and cranes to dig and search for the missing as rains threatened to hinder rescue efforts, Xinhua reported.

## Cameron tops Twitter's list of political trends

BBC ONLINE

David Cameron has been the most discussed political subject among UK Twitter users during the coalition's first 100 days, a study suggests.

Twitterminster, which follows trends on the social networking site, found there had been 11,470 tweets mentioning the Conservative prime minister.

This was almost twice as many as the next most popular subject -- war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The political fallout from the BP oil spill in the US was third.

Following this, the most frequently discussed political subjects were "schools", "jobs", "cuts" and "banks".

Mr Cameron's "big society" project was mentioned in 2,716 tweets, putting it in 10th place, while the Labour leadership contest came 29th, with 1,441 tweets.

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