



Workers prepare to lift a statue of German political philosopher Friedrich Engels (L) off of its base separating it from a statue of Karl Marx, in Berlin yesterday. The two statues are being moved, one by one to allow for work on the new U55 underground line. They were made by east German sculptor Ludwig Engelhardt and inaugurated in 1986 by then Communist supremo Erich Honecker.

They talk about me like a dog: Obama

US President Barack Obama has caused quite a flutter by accusing his Republican opponents of talking about him 'like a dog' at a rally to launch his embattled Democratic party's election campaign.

'Some powerful interests who had been dominating the agenda in Washington for a very long time and they're not always happy with me,' he said addressing a union crowd on Labour Day Monday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

'They talk about me like a dog. That's not in my prepared remarks, but it's true,' he told the union crowd straying from his prepared remarks to take a more aggressive tone in campaign mode.

'They're betting that between now and November, you'll (voters) come down with a case of amnesia,' Obama said in the speech less than two months ahead of midterm elections where Democratic majorities in the House and Senate are on stake.

'They (Republicans) think you'll forget what their agenda did to this country.'

Pressure on new Australian govt over mining tax

Australia's controversial mining tax remained alive but open to change yesterday after independent lawmakers crucial to the victory of Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard insisted on a review.

The government's proposed levy on mining profits has triggered intense debate with the country's most important export sector, but Julia has clung to the plan, which is designed to help fund a reduced business tax.

Rob Oakeshott, one of two key independents whose support was crucial to Julia reaching the 76-seat majority needed to hold power, said the government needed to re-examine the tax.

'Let's have a meaty debate about tax reform in this country,' he said.

But Oakeshott said the minerals resource rent tax, under which coal and iron ore producers would face a 30 percent tax on profits, was still likely to go ahead.

Julia has only a slim majority in the 150-seat lower house of parliament and another independent lawmaker Bob Katter, from the resource-rich state of Queensland, described the impost as "disastrous".

Head of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies Simon Bennison backed Oakeshott's call for a tax summit to examine the proposal, which miners feared would kill investment at its initial proposed rate of 40 percent.

'The government has got a clear message from the Australian electorate that it has no mandate to run with this tax,' Bennison told Australian news agency AAP. 'I hope they drop it.'

'We should start again from scratch and do something that is going to be far more... fair and equitable.'

Australian stocks closed flat but the heavyweight miners were lower, with BHP Billiton down 0.29 percent at 38.44 dollars and Rio Tinto losing 0.87 percent at 74.35 dollars.

Putin hints at return to Russian presidency

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin says he has not ruled out standing for president again at the 2012 elections.

Putin said he would share power with current President Dmitry Medvedev until the election, when they would decide "what would be best for Russia".

Putin has previously served two terms as president.

Speaking in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, he drew a comparison with US President Franklin Roosevelt, who was elected four times in a row.

The BBC's Steve Roxenberg said Putin looked relaxed as he fielded questions on a range of issues from a select group of foreign journalists and academics.

He said he was in no rush to see the body of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin removed from its mausoleum in Red Square.

He also accused small groups of anti-government protesters in Russia of deliberately provoking police brutality. Some people, he said, just wanted to be beaten by truncheons.

Putin stood down in 2008 after two consecutive four-year terms as president.

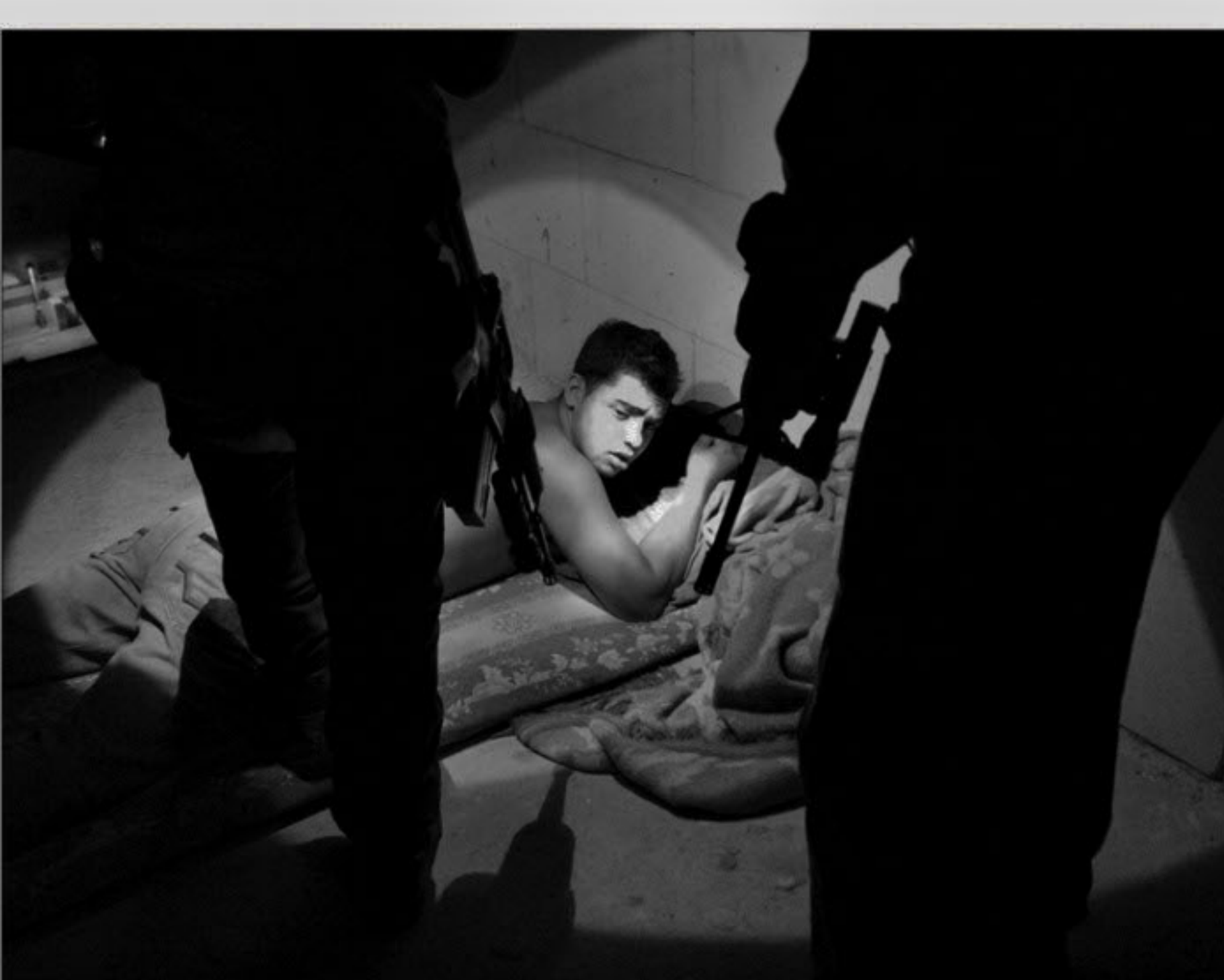
Abbas asks US to step into settlement dispute

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said he has asked the US to settle a dispute with Israel over settlement expansion that is threatening to derail Mideast peace talks.

Israel's 10-month partial freeze on new construction in West Bank settlements ends Sept. 26, and Israeli officials have indicated they will not extend the freeze as is. Abbas has said he'll quit peace talks with Israel unless the restrictions remain in place.

Abbas said late Monday that he has asked the US "to intervene in the settlement issue."

The Obama administration has promised an active role in the talks, Abbas told reporters accompanying him on his way back from Washington, where talks were launched last week after a hiatus of nearly two years.



Israeli border policemen point their flashlights at an illegal Palestinian worker from the West Bank sleeping outside a construction site in the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon early yesterday during an operation to find illegal Palestinian workers in Israel.

Iran claims right to vet IAEA inspectors

Iran said yesterday that it was within its rights to vet UN inspectors who monitor its nuclear facilities after the UN watchdog said its work was being hampered by the barring of some of its staff.

"We have this right ... to change the inspectors as per their record," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters.

"We insist that the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) accomplish its legal activities regarding member states by disregarding political pressure."

The UN atomic watchdog, in a new restricted report released on Monday, said Iran was complicating a long-running investigation into its controversial nuclear drive by vetoing the nomination of some inspectors.

Earlier this year, Iran banned two IAEA inspectors from entering the country, accusing them of filing a "false report."

Speaking to the ISNA news agency late on Monday, atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran had barred the two inspectors because they had filed reports that "were contrary to reality."

He charged that the IAEA itself had privately acknowledged there was some legitimacy to Iran's complaint but had refused to admit it publicly.

"It is our right to choose inspectors as it is the right of all members of the IAEA," ISNA quoted Salehi as saying.

Salehi said that even the IAEA was of the "opinion that the two inspectors gave reports contrary to reality but it does not want to admit it."

He stressed that Iran had accepted both replacement inspectors that the IAEA had nominated.

In its report, the IAEA said "repeated objection by Iran to the designation of inspectors with experience in Iran's nuclear fuel cycle and facilities hampers the inspection process."

It "detracts from the agency's capability to implement effective and efficient safeguards in Iran," the UN watchdog said.

The vetoing of certain inspectors "makes our work more difficult" because new inspectors need time to gain knowledge and experience of Iran's nuclear programme, said a senior diplomat familiar with the IAEA's Iran investigation.

4m poor children dying 'of neglect'

Save the Children says there have been four million preventable child deaths over the past 10 years because states have failed to help the poorest.

In another report, the UN children's agency Unicef also highlights a huge divide between children from rich and poor backgrounds.

The hard-hitting reports come two weeks before a summit in New York on the Millennium Development Goals.

The goal of drastically cutting child mortality is one of the most off-track.

The message of both reports is that helping a country to become wealthier doesn't necessarily mean more children's lives will be saved.

Save the Children says many developing countries

N Korea asks South for flood aid

North Korea requested a shipment of rice, cement and heavy equipment days after rival South Korea offered relief aid to its communist neighbour to help it recover from recent flooding, Seoul's Unification Ministry said yesterday.

Word of the communication between the two Koreas on aid came a day after the North announced it would release the crew of a seized South Korean fishing boat, in a sign that the divided countries may be talking behind the scenes in what could lead to a resumption of formal talks.

Tensions between the two countries, which are still technically in a state of war, have been exceptionally high in recent months following the sinking of a South Korean warship that Seoul blamed on Pyongyang.

EU calls 'barbaric' plans to stone Iranian woman

The European Union yesterday condemned the stoning to death sentence passed against an Iranian woman convicted for adultery, saying it was "barbaric beyond words."

In his first State of the Union address to parliament, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso said he was "appalled" by the news of the sentencing, and called it "barbaric beyond words."

The sentence against Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani was put on hold in July after an international outcry over the brutality of the punishment, and it is now being reviewed by Iran's supreme court.

Ashtiani's lawyer has said there are still worries the delayed execution could be carried out soon with the end of a moratorium on death sentences for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The Ashtiani's case points to larger divides between the West and Iran, which staunchly defends its legal codes and human rights standards as fully developed and in keeping with its traditions and values.

Iran tells world: don't make stoning a rights issue

Foreign countries should not interfere in Iran's legal system and stop trying to turn the case of a woman sentenced to be stoned to death for adultery into a human rights issue, Tehran said yesterday.

The case of the 43-year-old mother of two, condemned to death for illicit sex and charged with involvement in her husband's murder, provoked an international outcry, with Brazil offering her asylum and the Vatican speaking out against the "brutal" punishment.

A government spokesman said the furore was based on false information about Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani's case.

"Unfortunately, (they are) defending a person who is being tried for murder and adultery, which are two major crimes of this lady and should not become a human rights issue," Foreign Ministry Ramin Mehmanparast told a news conference.

"If releasing all those who have committed murder is to be perceived as a human rights issue, then all European countries should release all the murderers in their countries."

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