



Indian Bengali women apply Sindoor (vermillion, an indication of a married women) on each other's faces on the occasion of the Dusshera or Vijaya Dashami Festival in Siliguri yesterday, on the final day of Durga Puja. PHOTO: AFP

Paris ME summit postponed: Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

A planned October 21 summit in Paris between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has been postponed, the premier's office said on Saturday.

"Following consultations, the parties concerned have agreed to decide on another date," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

On Friday the French presidency had raised the possibility of the meeting previously announced by President Nicolas Sarkozy not going ahead next Thursday as planned, following the suspension of direct peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat on Saturday implicitly confirmed the postponement of the Paris gathering.

"The continuation by Israel of settlement activity ruins all peace efforts, be they those of (US) President Barack Obama or those of President Nicolas Sarkozy," he told AFP.

He added that in any case the Palestinian Authority "has not received an official invita-

tion, giving a date, for such a meeting."

Earlier on Saturday, the French foreign ministry said it was "deeply disappointed" with Israel's plans to resume building homes for settlers in east Jerusalem, and urged Netanyahu's government to reconsider.

"This decision is inopportune. France is deeply disappointed," ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said in a statement. "France calls on the Israeli authorities to reconsider this decision."

On Friday, Israel announced plans to build 238 new homes in east Jerusalem, provoking anger from the Palestinian Authority and criticism from its key ally the United States.

US-brokered direct peace talks launched in early September ground to a halt within weeks after the expiry of a 10-month moratorium on the construction of new settler homes in the occupied West Bank.

Abbas has refused to hold further negotiations while settlement construction in the West Bank continues, and a week ago Arab League foreign ministers gave US negotiators a month to try to resolve the impasse.

Rescuers fear worst for 11 trapped Chinese miners

AP, Yuzhou

Frantically working rescuers feared the 11 Chinese miners trapped by a deadly gas blast may have suffocated or been buried by coal dust, as loved ones kept a vigil yesterday and the death toll rose to 26 with five more bodies recovered.

The Chinese mine drama unfolded as the world still was celebrating Chile's successful rescue of 33 miners trapped for more than two months. Chinese media had detailed coverage as the Chilean men emerged to cheers.

Du Bo, deputy chief of the rescue headquarters, told the state-run Xinhua News Agency that hopes that the others were still alive after Saturday's early morning blast were slim.

Rescuers had to clear tons of coal dust from the mine shaft to reach the trapped workers, and they faced dangerous gas levels and the risk of falling rocks as they worked their way into the mine pit.

Ahmadinejad endorses nuke talks with West

AP, Tehran

Iran's president yesterday endorsed the resumption of talks with the international community about his country's nuclear program, the latest in Tehran's recently intensified push to get those negotiations going again.

The talks foundered a year ago and months later, a fourth round of UN sanctions was imposed on Iran over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment a program the West is concerned might lead to making nuclear weapons.

Iran denies the charge and says its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes. It insists it wants to enrich uranium to make fuel for a planned reactor network and denies accusations that it will use the program to make fissile warhead material.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Iran is ready to resume the talks and added that the West had made the first step.

"They have come and said, 'We will negotiate,'" Ahmadinejad told a crowd of supporters in the northwestern city of Ardebil, about 370 miles (600 kilometers) northwest of Tehran.

"We say, 'All right, we will negotiate with you.'" He gave no timeframe for the talks.

EU's foreign affairs and security chief, Catherine Ashton, suggested last Thursday the talks be held in Vienna "over three days in mid-November," with the participation of the United States, Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany.

Ashton issued the statement soon after meeting US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in Brussels.

At the rally in Ardebil, Ahmadinejad warned the West the talks with Iran would not make progress unless the West clarifies its stance over Israel's alleged nuclear arsenal - an apparent attempt to deflect attention from Iran's nuclear program.

If this doesn't happen, the West will show it "supports the Zionist regime's atomic bomb and is not seeking to have a friendship (with Iran) through the talks," Ahmadinejad added.

Israel is widely believed to have a nuclear arsenal but has never confirmed or denied it. As Iran's archenemy, the Jewish state fears it will be targeted by Iran and Ahmadinejad has repeatedly made references to Israel's destruction.

Child abuse whistleblower becomes first Aussie saint

AFP, Sydney

Mary MacKillop, who was canonised as Australia's first saint, was a pioneering educator who touched thousands of lives and clashed with the church after exposing a paedophile priest.

MacKillop taught poor children in a disused stable before founding her own order of nuns and establishing scores of schools and homes for the needy during the young nation's rough-and-tumble colonial days.

"She dedicated herself to the education of the poor in the difficult and demanding terrain of rural Australia," Pope Benedict XVI said in front of tens of thousands of pilgrims at the ceremony in the Vatican.

Strong typhoon roars toward Philippines

AP, Manila

Hundreds of wary residents fled coastal villages as emergency officials prepared for a powerful typhoon roaring toward the northeastern Philippines yesterday.

Typhoon Megi, the strongest of 10 storms so far to have affected the country this year, had sustained winds of 140 miles (225 kilometers) per hour and gusts of 162 mph (260 kph) but could get stronger as it moves at 14 mph (22 kph) over the Philippine Sea. Forecasters said it's expected to slam into Cagayan province Monday morning.

German multicultural society has failed Says Merkel

BBC ONLINE

Attempts to build a multicultural society in Germany have "utterly failed", Chancellor Angela Merkel says.

She said the so-called "multikulti" concept - where people would "live side-by-side" happily - did not work, and immigrants needed to do more to integrate - including learning German.

The comments come amid rising anti-immigration feeling in Germany.

A recent survey suggested more than 30% of people believed the country was "overrun by foreigners".

The study - by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation think-tank - also showed that roughly the same number thought that some 16 million of Germany's immigrants or people with foreign origins had come to the country for its social benefits.

Merkel told a gathering of younger members of her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party on Saturday that at "the beginning of the 60s our country called the foreign workers to come to Germany and now they live in our country."

She added: "We kidded ourselves a while, we said: 'They won't stay, sometime they will be gone', but this isn't reality."

Thai Red Shirts stage mass rally


AFP, Ayutthaya

Thousands of Thailand's anti-government "Red Shirts" joined a mass rally yesterday in the latest large demonstration by the movement in recent weeks.

Police estimated 3,000 people had joined the gathering in the football stadium in the town of Ayutthaya about one hour's drive north of Bangkok.

Over 1,000 police were deployed to provide security for the event but authorities said the mood remained calm.

"The situation so far is normal, there is no sign of any trouble," said police Colonel Sombat Choochaiya.



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With flawless rescue, Chile hopes for transformation

AP, Copiapo

As the capsule carried the first rescuer down to the 33 trapped miners, President Sebastian Pinera closed his eyes, made the sign of the cross and then smiled at Mining Minister Laurence Golborne.

The men shook hands and shared a look that said "We did it!" And when all 33 men had been safely rescued about 23 hours later, Pinera emerged as more than just a president who oversaw a flawless rescue watched by millions worldwide.

He has become a potentially transformational figure who could change the political landscape of Chile and bring the South American nation closer to the developed status it deeply covets.

Pinera was not shy about laying out this vision moments after the first miner was pulled out.

"Chile is not the same country today as it was 69 days ago," he said Wednesday. The nation is "more united and respected than ever and I believe that today Chile is a more united and respected and valued in the entire world."

On a national level, Pinera made good on a central campaign promise: to govern with the obsessive efficiency of a business. More important, he showed the model can work.

While always appearing in charge, Pinera empowered Chile's most experienced mining engineers to do whatever necessary to get the job done. The team he assembled quickly brought in some of the world's best engineers, drillers and scientists, along with powerful drilling rigs worth millions of dollars.

Like any effective CEO, Pinera delegated and then got out of the way, visiting the rescue effort only a few times before the triumphant finale.

"The instruction from President Pinera was always: Get them out using all available resources," said Interior Ministry official Cristian Barra, who oversaw the logistics.

Pinera's handling of the timeline was particularly artful. Soon after the miners were discovered alive on Aug. 22, Pinera and top rescue officials repeatedly said it would take up to four months to drill deep enough to reach the men. Pinera even went so far as to say he "hoped" to have them out by Christmas.

The lengthy timeline never squared with experts' shorter estimates or the capacity of the three drills that raced to reach the men. However, the strategy allowed Pinera to avoid unmet expectations and over deliver in a huge way. The government has repeatedly denied claims that it manipulated the timeline, arguing that drilling is an imperfect



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