

Myanmar court hears Suu Kyi appeal

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's Supreme Court yesterday heard democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's final appeal against her house arrest, due to end days after controversial elections next month.

The Peace Prize laureate has kept her off the scene for the country's first polls in 20 years, which have been dismissed by critics as a charade aimed at putting a civilian cloak over military rule.

Suu Kyi's lawyers presented their argument to a panel of judges in the capital Naypyidaw in a hearing that lasted for about two and a half hours.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner did not attend herself and it was unclear when the judgement would be announced.

Koreas exchange gunfire at land border

REUTERS, Seoul

North and South Korea exchanged gunfire over their heavily armed land border yesterday, the South's military said, despite an apparent thaw in tensions on the divided peninsula in the past few months.

The rare exchange of fire took place a fortnight before the leaders of the world's 20 top economies meet for a G20 summit in the South Korean capital Seoul, about 100 km (60 miles) south of the demilitarized zone.

The South's defense ministry said in a statement none of its troops were hurt, and there had been "no more unusual activity by the North." A South Korean military official said the army had put on heightened alert.

It was not immediately clear what was behind the skirmish, but in the past the North has carried out similar provocations around the time the South has hosted prominent international events.

YTN television said, however, it was unlikely that the North had deliberately fired across toward the South only hours

before families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War were due to be reunited for the first time.

The North Korean frontline guard post fired two shots toward a South Korean guardpost across the DMZ and the South returned fire with three shots, a joint chiefs of staff official said.

The South Korean military official said he had not received any communication from the North. A United Nations team will be sent to the area on Saturday, he added.

The North Korean shots were fired at a frontline unit in Cheorwon in the eastern province of Gangwon.

The last time the two Koreas were exchanged fire was in January, the they fired artillery round at disputed sea border.

Relations between the two Koreas, still technically at war after signing only a truce to halt hostilities in the 1950-53 Korean War, sank to the lowest level in years in March with the torpedoing of the South's warship, killing 46 sailors.

South Korea and the United States said the North was responsible for the sinking,

but Pyongyang denied any role.

In the past few months, tensions have eased on the peninsula with the South sending aid to its impoverished neighbor, and on the weekend the two sides will resume the reunions.

But the border skirmish and news that North-South military talks had broken down showed that the two sides were still far apart, and underlined there was little chance of a resumption any time soon of stalled talks on the North's nuclear arms program.

South Korea rejected the North's proposal for more military talks and said it wouldn't return to the negotiating table until its neighbor admitted responsibility for the sinking of the warship.

"When looking back on the history of the North-South relations, it is very hard to find a precedent in which one party rejected the talks proposed by the other party even when the bilateral relations reached the lowest ebb," the North's KCNA state news agency reported.

"This was because the rejection of dialogue precisely meant confrontation and war."



Visitors walk past the Arab Emirates pavilion at the site of the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai yesterday. Shanghai tomorrow shuts the gates to the World Expo -- a six-month exhibition of culture and technology that saw record attendance, a parade of foreign leaders.

Japan and China island row flares at Asean summit

BBC ONLINE

A diplomatic spat between China and Japan over a group of disputed islands has flared up again, hours after an apparently friendly bilateral meeting.

Beijing accused Tokyo of distorting facts over September's collision between two Japanese patrol boats and a Chinese trawler in the East China Sea.

Earlier on Friday, China and Japan's foreign ministers met on the sidelines of a regional summit in Vietnam.

Talks at the Asean summit had focused on next month's elections in Burma.

Asean to bring in US as counterbalance to China

AP, Hanoi

Southeast Asian nations prepared to welcome the United States into their club, a move seen as bringing a counterweight to China following a series of aggressive maritime moves by Beijing.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or Asean, will formally invite the US and Russia to join their annual East Asian Summit on Saturday in the Vietnamese capital.

During a stop in Hawaii en route to Hanoi, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stressed that the US would remain a major power in the Asia-Pacific region and called on China to expand cooperation with the US.

Southeast Asian nations have become increasingly rattled in recent months, accusing China of being a bully following a series of territorial spats on the high seas, including run-ins with Vietnam and a nasty row with Japan.

On Friday, China met with Japan on the sidelines of the summit, seeking to repair relations soured by a maritime dispute. As the two sides called for improved ties, Japan appealed for the

lifting of a block on exports of rare earth metals crucial for its high-tech manufacturing.

China has strongly pushed to keep territorial disputes over islands in the South China Sea out of talks held by Asean, preferring instead to deal with clashes one on one. But the smaller countries have refused to back down.

"Asean should have one voice before we venture (into) talking to other claimants," Philippine President Benigno Aquino III said, adding that he and other Southeast Asian leaders aired concerns during a dinner Thursday centered around maintaining peace and keeping busy shipping lanes open in the South China Sea.

At another meeting in Hanoi this summer, Clinton enraged China by announcing that the US has a national interest in seeing territorial disputes in the South China Sea resolved, ensuring vital shipping lanes remain open for everyone.

China has laid claim to strategically placed and potentially oil-rich islands in the South China Sea, but parts of the territory are also claimed by several Southeast Asian countries.

Haiti cholera deaths rise above 300

AFP, Petite Riviere

Haiti's cholera death toll rose above 300 Thursday, as medical teams sought to contain an outbreak overwhelming the quake-hit nation's crumbling hospitals with desperate patients.

One week after cholera was confirmed in Haiti for the first time in decades, the death rate is slowing, but 305 people have lost their lives so far and nearly 5,000 others have been infected. Officials warn it could be years before it is eradicated.

Clinics were beyond capacity, with patients lying on the floor of a radiology department in Saint-Marc, the outbreak's epicentre some 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of the capital Port-au-Prince.

A five-bed maternity centre, ill-equipped to treat the virulent diarrhoeal disease, housed 300 patients.

The source of the outbreak remains unclear, although the UN peacekeeping force MINUSTAH is probing claims its septic tanks leaked into the Artibonite river and contaminated it with fecal bacteria.

At the Charles Colimon hospital in Petite Riviere, a small community along the Artibonite, up to 400 patients were packed in every available space -- in the corridors, on floors and in tents surrounding the facility.

Residents in this rural town rely heavily on the infected river for their daily chores. The low-lying land is water-logged and irrigation ditches from the river run right past homes where people wash and cook.

Their waste and plastic roofing of the hospital, the main medical center for a large swath of the infected area, failed to stop a midday downpour, prompting doctors to rush patients away from leaks.



A woman waits for her son suffering from cholera to be treated at the Charles Colimon hospital in Petite Riviere, on the Artibonite River, believed to be the source of Haiti's cholera outbreak, 140km north of Port-au-Prince, on Thursday.

Argentines mourn ex-president

BBC ONLINE

Thousands have converged on Argentina's government palace to pay their respects to ex-President Nestor Kirchner, who died on Wednesday at 60.

His body is lying in state to allow people to file past in honour of the man who was president from 2003 to 2007.

His wife Cristina Fernandez and their children have been attending the wake.

Mr Kirchner, succeeded by his wife as president, was expected to run in the 2011 election.

Relatives, government ministers and politicians have participated in the wake, while a steady stream of Argentines have been filing into the government palace to pay their respects.

Many were carrying candles, flags and flowers. Some applauded, others shouted "Nestor, Nestor" and "Nestor is not dead, he will live on in the people," while walking past the coffin.

President Fernandez, dressed in black and wearing dark glasses, was joined at the wake by South American presidents and friends, including former soccer player Diego Maradona.

She placed a hand on her husband's flag-draped coffin, with their son and daughter standing next to her.

It was the leader's first appearance in public since her Mr Kirchner died of a heart attack Wednesday aged 60.

On Wednesday night, thousands took to the streets of Buenos Aires to voice their grief.



Brazilian President Lula Da Silva, centre, embracing Argentina's President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, right, next to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez during the wake of late former Argentine President (2003-2007) Nestor Kirchner, Thursday.

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Chinese court upholds 11-year jail sentence for peace prize winner

AP, Beijing

A spokesman for the Beijing court that upheld an 11-year prison sentence for Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo denounced the award yesterday in the latest indication China will brush aside international calls for his release.

The unidentified spokesman for the Beijing Municipal Higher People's Court, quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency, said giving the peace prize to Liu was a rude interference in China's judicial sovereignty.

His comments are the latest in a series in China's state-run media denouncing the prize and accusing Western countries of trying to interfere in China's internal affairs.

China has accused the West of using the Nobel Prize to undermine China and called Liu a criminal. Liu, a literary critic and activist, is serving an 11-year sentence for subversion after co-authoring a bold appeal known as Charter 08 calling for reforms to the country's single-party Communist political system.

The peace prize was awarded Oct. 8, Liu's wife, Liu Xia, has been under house arrest and her phones have been cut off. Dozens of activists have reported being detained or harassed by police over the award and warned not to use it to make trouble.

"China's judicial organs will strictly follow Chinese law and the court verdict, which has come into effect, to execute the punishment given to Liu," the spokesman was quoted as saying.

President Barack Obama and other world leaders and Nobel laureates have called for Liu's release. The spokesman rejected that, saying Liu had been fairly tried and sentenced.

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