

# Sarkozy names new govt hours after mass resignation

AFP, Paris

France's President Nicolas Sarkozy was choosing a new cabinet line-up, hoping to reinvigorate his government and set the stage for his undeclared 2012 re-election campaign.

Sarkozy renamed Francois Fillon as his prime minister, just hours after the pro forma resignation of the government, and the premier's office said the new ministerial team was to be announced later in the day or early on Monday.

Fillon promised to boost France's anaemic growth and to cut unemployment, and praised what he said was Sarkozy and the right-wing parliamentary majority's determination to stick by unpopular but necessary reforms.

Sarkozy had first signalled in March that he planned to renew his cabinet, and there has been mounting political tension since he confirmed this

in June, as ministers jostled for seats at the cabinet table.

Since the reshuffle was mooted, two ministers have resigned over expenses scandals and another, Labour Minister Eric Woerth, clung on despite being implicated in a probe into alleged illegal party funding.

The government has stumbled forward stubbornly, but its leader has plumbed new depths of unpopularity and many observers view the reshuffle as Sarkozy's last chance to seize control of the agenda before 2012.

Observers expect the new cabinet to be shrunk from 37 members to 26 and to be dominated by members of Sarkozy's own right-wing majority party, the UMP, as he shores up his conservative support base in time for the election.

Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, a high-profile former Socialist, is expected to go, and right-

wing former prime minister Alain Juppe confirmed Saturday that he expects to rejoin government as defence minister.

In recent weeks there had been widespread speculation that Sarkozy would attempt to mollify the centre-right by appointing his outgoing environment minister, Jean-Louis Borloo, in Fillon's place as prime minister.

But Fillon -- who has consistently enjoyed higher poll ratings than Sarkozy and has support within the majority UMP -- made it clear he wanted to stay, and it was he who met twice with the president on Saturday.

Saturday's drama marked the first time in the history of France's fifth republic that a prime minister has resigned over the weekend, and came as a surprise to some observers, who had expected Fillon to wait until Monday.

# Suu Kyi freed, but future uncertain

NEWS ANALYSIS

REUTERS, Bangkok

The figurehead of Myanmar's fight against dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi, was freed from house arrest on Saturday, a move seen as an attempt by the military junta to gain some credit for its much-criticised political process.

The release of the Nobel Peace Prize winner will be welcomed by the international community and could be the first step towards a relaxing of Western sanctions on the regime because of its atrocious human rights record.

But the 65-year-old pro-democracy leader faces an uncertain future in a changing political landscape in which loyal comrades have defied her by courting public support and participating in last Sunday's election, which Suu Kyi's allies have long rejected.

Below are key issues relating to her release.

- Although Suu Kyi's freedom has long been a demand of the international community, it is unlikely to lead to any near-term easing of sanctions, especially while an estimated 2,100 other political prisoners remain in detention.

- Western governments have welcomed her release but will probably wait for the new military-dominated political system to take shape before reviewing embargoes. They know Suu Kyi has been released and re-arrested before and there's nothing to suggest this won't happen again.

- Immediately after her release, several governments urged Myanmar to free more political prisoners.

- Her release is almost certain to sharpen the sanctions debate behind the scenes. Some US and European investors are keen to tap into Myanmar's vast resources, including rich natural gas reserves. Myanmar's neighbours, Thailand, China and India, are already snapping up contracts.

- Some senators in Washington also warn that Myanmar will fortify its political and economic ties with China if the United States continues to ostracise the regime. It might decide a re-think of its policy is in order.

- It is not known if Suu Kyi will continue her role as de facto leader of Myanmar's pro-democracy campaign. Few doubt she will fade from the scene, but by staying involved she will remain on a collision course with the powerful generals. Her first comment when emerging from her home on Saturday was a call for unity, adding: "only then can we achieve our goal".

- The pro-democracy camp is now divided between an old clique who are rebelling against the new system and progressives who believe a tiny role in a flawed process is better than decades longer on the sidelines. If Suu Kyi retains her political role, she might have more than the military to contend with.

- Freeing her is a double-edged sword for the generals: while it could earn them some credibility after an election tainted by widespread fraud allegations, it could easily steal domestic attention away from a political transition the junta

has struggled to sell to its sceptical people. In the eyes of the power-hungry generals, Suu Kyi is still a threat.

- Suu Kyi rarely cooperates with the regime and has gained notoriety for her provocative and rousing speeches that won her the hearts of the public but have contributed to her long periods of incarceration.

- It is possible she will agitate them again, and there is a chance the junta will cook up another dubious reason to confine her to her home. While she remains free, the military is likely to follow her every move and wait for her to slip up.

- Myanmar's people tolerated an election in which they did not really believe, but some robust rhetoric from the charismatic Suu Kyi and her party might be enough to spark some kind of mass protest against a political process that will entrench military rule and continue to deny the people freedoms and economic development.



Flares are seen past the corvette INS Vibhuti in the waters off the Bay of Bengal near Paradeep, some 150 kms from the eastern Indian city of Bhubaneswar yesterday. Ships from the Eastern Fleet demonstrated their capabilities as part of Navy Week. PHOTO: AFP



The regime has spent years carefully plotting a water-tight transfer of power that bears some resemblance to democracy and is supported by its allies. It will use all means possible to uphold this and in Myanmar, that could mean brutal suppression of dissent. It has happened several times before and each time, the military prevailed.

- Although unlikely, there is an outside chance of a power grab by another faction inside Myanmar's massive military. Resentment could be simmering, especially since many generals were overlooked for promotion in a recent reshuffle and forcibly retired by junta strongman Than Shwe.

- Former soldiers among the National Unity Party may also have an axe to grind. Many have attributed their thrashing in Sunday's election to cheating by their opponents in the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party.

## West cannot defeat Qaeda

Says UK forces chief

BBC ONLINE

The West can only contain not defeat militant groups such as al-Qaeda, the head of the UK's armed forces has said.

General Sir David Richards, a former Nato commander in Afghanistan, said Islamist militancy would pose a threat to the UK for at least 30 years.

But he told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper a clear-cut victory over militants was not achievable.

The BBC's Frank Gardner said the comments reflect a "new realism" in UK and US counter-terrorism circles.

Our security correspondent said such an admission five years ago might have been considered outrageous and defeatist.

Gen Richards, 58, took over as chief of the defence staff last month, after a spell as head of the British army.

# Karzai: US should reduce military operations

AFP, Washington

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said that the United States must reduce the visibility and intensity of its military operations in Afghanistan, The Washington Post reported.

The United States should end special operations forces that aggravate Afghans and could exacerbate the Taliban insurgency, Karzai said in an interview with the Post.

"The time has come to reduce military operations," the president told the paper.

"The time has come to reduce the presence of, you know, boots in Afghanistan ... to reduce the intrusiveness into the daily Afghan life."

Karzai also said he wanted US troops off the roads and out of Afghan homes and that the long-term presence of so many foreign soldiers would only worsen the

war, the Post reported.

However, a unnamed Nato military official expressed scepticism in comments to the paper.

"We understand President Karzai's concerns, but we would not be as far along as we are pressuring the network had it not been for these very precision operations we do at night," the official told the Post.

"I don't see any near-term alternative to this kind of operation."

Karzai told the Post he was speaking out not to criticize the United States but in the belief that candour could improve what he called a "grudging" relationship between the countries.

He described his own deep scepticism with US policy in Afghanistan, beginning with last year's presidential election, which he said was manipulated by US officials, the papers said.

He also expressed his conviction that

government corruption had been caused by billions of US dollars funnelled to unaccountable contractors, the Post noted.

Afghans had lost patience with the presence of American soldiers in their homes and armoured vehicles on their roads, Karzai told the paper.

"The raids are a problem always. They were a problem then, they are a problem now. They have to go away," Karzai said.

"The Afghan people don't like these raids, if there is any raid it has to be done by the Afghan government within the Afghan laws. This is a continuing disagreement between us."

He acknowledged that an abrupt withdrawal would be dangerous, but said that US soldiers should confine themselves more to their bases and limit themselves to necessary operations along the Pakistani border, the Post said.

# Stray clashes mark hartal

FROM PAGE 1

Khandaker Delwar Hossain thanked the countrymen and his party activists for successfully observing the hartal and said that they would announce tougher anti-government programme after the Eid.

However, the ruling party Joint Secretary General Mahbul Alam Hanif said the people outright rejected the hartal and public life was normal yesterday.

Movement of traffic in the capital was thin till noon. Most shops, business houses and educational institutions were closed. Long-distance bus and launch services were badly hindered by the hartal.

Pickets clashed with police, vandalised at least 30 vehicles and set fire to three others including a police van at different parts of the capital during the hartal hours. At least 25 pickets were injured as police charged truncheons on them. Police arrested over 60 people during the clashes.

Law enforcers clashed with pro-hartal activists in front of BNP's central office at Nayapaltan several times and picked up at least six persons from the spot.

Police also charged truncheons and used water cannons on a procession of the Supreme Court lawyers in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

Two pick-up vans including a police van were set on fire at Johnson Road in Old Dhaka around 10:30am and a bus at Nur Jahan Road in Mohammadpur.

BNP men clashed with law-enforcers and damaged vehicles at Mohakhali, Mirpur, Paltan, Jatiya Press Club, Sutrapur, Kotwali, Jatrabari, Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi. Police picked up over 60 people during the clashes.

According to witnesses and police, pickets vandalised six buses and two private cars at Mirpur Section-14 and Section-10 around 8:00am. Later, police picked up 30 picketers from the areas.

Police officials at Mirpur police station said of them, 17 were shown arrested for vandalising vehicles on Saturday night.

In Mohakhali, police fired at least 10 teargas shells and charged truncheons when picketers clashed with them

and damaged 14 vehicles at about 10:30am. Police also picked up two persons from the spot.

Pickets set fire to a pickup van in front of Jagannath University around 10:00am and police detained 13 persons in this connection.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Walid Hossain said police detained 34 others from the capital on charge of vandalising vehicles and attacking policemen.

According to the reports from our correspondents outside the capital, at least 210 people were injured in clashes between BNP activists and law enforcers and ruling party men during yesterday's hartal.

Pro-hartal activists blocked the Bogra-Bonarpara rail line for about one and a half hours near Chelopara in the district town yesterday morning. In Gaibandha, pro-hartal activists ransacked at least 15 long-route buses at Palashbari injuring over 50 passengers.

**DELWAR'S BRIEFING**  
At a press conference held at party's Nayapaltan office, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain said people expressed their hatred by observing the hartal as Khaleida Zia was "evicted" from her residence forcefully.

"The government tried its best to foil hartal by unleashing its cadres," he said, adding it filed false cases against the BNP leaders and activists in the incident of setting vehicles on fire on Saturday night.

Thanking the people and party activists for making the hartal a success despite the government's ill effort to foil it, Delwar said the party would announce tougher anti-government programme after the Eid as people have showed their no-confidence in the government through the hartal.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the briefing, journalists vowed to boycott it in protest of assaulting some of their colleagues by a BNP leader centring his sitting in a chair reserved for the journalists.

At one stage of the row with the BNP leader, journalists came down in the street and informed the BNP high-ups that they will not cover the

briefing unless the BNP secretary general seeks apology for the 'rough' behaviour of the BNP leaders.

After getting assurance from the BNP senior leaders, journalists attended the briefing where BNP secretary general regretted for the 'misunderstanding' and 'untoward' situation with newsmen.

**AL'S REACTION**  
Awam League (AL) Joint Secretary General Mahbul Alam Hanif said, "BNP declared the dawn to dusk hartal just before two days of holy Eid-ul Azha. It is nothing but a heartless, inhuman and autocratic decision."

At a press briefing at party's Dhanmondi office, he condemned the opposition for not thinking about the sufferings of thousands of homebound people and businesses ahead of the Eid. "People have rejected the hartal," he added.

He also denied BNP's allegation that pro-AL men launched attacks on opposition men during their protest in favour of hartal at various places in the country.

## Kushtia

FROM PAGE 16

"Siddiqur and Ahadul entered the living room of the lawmaker at about 8:15pm and blew themselves up," Jahid said.

Four people, including the lawmaker, his son Arif Ahmed and two schoolteachers, were in the room during the attack, he said.

Siddiqur died on the spot while Ahadul succumbed to his wounds on the way to Kushtia General Hospital.

Police denied giving the names of the detained persons for the "sake of the investigation."

Kushtia Superintendent of Police Ekramul Habib said a probe into the incident was going on. He declined to comment further on the matter.

AL lawmaker Afaz Uddin told The Daily Star at his residence that the bomb attack was undoubtedly targeted at him.

The lawmaker's son, Mamun, who filed the two cases with Daulatpur Police Station, denied giving the names of all eight accused that include the two suspected attackers.

## Greeks vote under threat of more austerity

REUTERS, Athens

Greeks vote in a local election run-off yesterday which could further complicate Prime Minister George Papandreou's drive to meet tough deficit targets agreed in exchange for a 110 billion euro rescue from the EU and IMF.

The vote comes as the government braces for tough negotiations with its lenders, who could seek additional austerity pledges from Athens when they begin an inspection visit on Monday.

A poor result for Papandreou's ruling PASOK party on Sunday could make it harder for him to sell further belt-tightening to a population already struggling to digest deep spending cuts and tax hikes.

Greece committed back in May to reducing its budget deficit to 8.1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) this year but tax revenue shortages and an upward revision to the 2009 deficit mean Athens will only manage to cut it to 9.2-9.3 percent, a government source told Reuters last week.



A child casts her father's vote for the second round of the local and regional elections in a polling station in Athens yesterday. PHOTO: AFP