



Arnie bows out as California governor

AFP, Los Angeles

Arnold Schwarzenegger steps down as California governor yesterday, defending his record to the last -- and keeping fans and others guessing about his next move.

After seven years at the helm of the Golden State, the former champion body builder turned "Terminator" movie megastar and businessman is leaving his adopted home mired in huge financial woes.

But as he prepared to hand over power to Democrat Jerry Brown two months after November 2 polls -- Arnie stood by all his decisions.

"History will be the final judge of my administration's record," he said in his last weekly radio address.

US diplomats pushed Boeing deals

AFP, Washington

US diplomats have on several occasions intervened to convince foreign governments to buy aircraft from Boeing rather than its European rival Airbus, newly released diplomatic cables show.

The cables, obtained by the New York Times from the whistleblower website WikiLeaks, document several incidents in which diplomats were involved in haggling over the billion-dollar deals seen as key to US economic growth.

One cable describes Saudi King Abdullah responding favourably to a personal request from then-president George W Bush in 2006 that he buy as many as 43 Boeing jets for Saudi Arabian Airlines and another 13 for the royal fleet.

But the king "wanted to have all the technology that his friend, President Bush, had on Air Force One," the cable said.

Once the king's own plane was outfitted with the world's most advanced telecommunications and defence equipment, "God willing," he will make a decision that will "please you very much," the cable said.

In November, state-owned Saudi Arabian Airlines said it had signed a contract for 12 new Boeing 777-300ER jets worth some 3.3 billion dollars.

Diplomats were involved in haggling over the billion-dollar deals seen as key to US economic growth.



The State Department confirmed to the Times that it had authorized an "upgrade" to the king's plane but declined to provide further details on security grounds.

The Times said such practices have continued despite decades-old agreements between US and European leaders to keep politics out of airline deals.

But State Department officials interviewed by the newspaper defended their involvement, saying such high-value exports were crucial to US President Obama's efforts to pull the country out of its economic slump.

"That is the reality of the 21st century; governments are playing a greater role in supporting their companies, and we need to do the same thing," Robert Hormats, under secretary of state for economic affairs, told the Times.

Airbus may receive similar aid: other US cables cited by the Times describe the Bush administration and French President Nicolas Sarkozy's government scrambling to win a jet deal from oil-rich Bahrain in 2007.

In the end, US diplomats convinced Bahrain to buy from Boeing after linking the signing of the deal to an upcoming visit by Bush in January 2008, the first-ever by a sitting US president, the Times said.

Washington has been infuriated by WikiLeaks and launched its own criminal investigation into the disclosure of the documents.

US-Germany developing secret spy satellites

AFP, Oslo

The United States and Germany are jointly developing secret spy satellites under the guise of a commercial programme despite opposition from France, leaked US diplomatic cables showed yesterday.

The project, named HiROS, envisions the construction of an undetermined number of high-resolution observation satellites capable of spotting any object on the planet down to a size of just 50 centimetres (about 1.5 feet), according to classified cables from US embassy in Berlin leaked to WikiLeaks and obtained by Norwegian daily Aftenposten.

The satellites will have the capacity to take infrared images at night and to send images much quicker back to earth than the satellites currently in service, the cables showed.

Due to the controversial nature of the programme, US and German officials have decided it should be presented as a civilian project with environmental aims, run by commercial entities.

SC won't send

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The decision came as the parliamentary body on November 29 last year decided to ask the SC registrar to appear before its next meeting to clarify alleged irregularities in appointment of the district and sessions judge, Dhaka.

Yesterday's meeting also rejected a government proposal for setting up a circuit bench of the High Court division in Chittagong for speedy disposal of pending cases in the region, the sources added.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has recently sent a proposal to the SC for constituting such a bench in Chittagong.

The meeting was held at the conference room of the SC with Chief Justice Khairul Haque in the chair.

Some judges told the meeting that as per the provisions of the Constitution only the chief justice can constitute the HC circuit bench if he desires.

The full court meeting of the SC cannot take a decision over setting up the circuit bench, and the SC cannot act upon the government advice as per the Constitution, they argued.

As the issue of the parliamentary body's call for sending the registrar came up, some judges opined that the SC will not be accountable to the parliamentary body for the sake of independence of the judiciary, the sources said.

The judges said as per the Constitution both parliament and the SC are independent organs of the state and the SC judges are not accountable to anybody except the Almighty and the conscience.

Chief Justice Khairul Haque at the meeting urged all the judges to submit their wealth statements to him for the sake of transparency of the judiciary.

The chief justice himself on December 30 submitted his wealth statement to President Zillur Rahman in a move that is expected to encourage other judges.

The judges present at the meeting also apparently consented to submit their wealth statements to the CJ.

The CJ urged his colleagues to discharge their judicial duties and not to pass any order without applying their judicial mind.

Without mentioning the survey report of the

Transparency International Bangladesh the CJ said the judiciary has been shown as the most corrupt sector and he was to blame as he is the head of the judiciary.

He said as the head of the judiciary he must take the responsibility of this scandal, the meeting sources said.

Justice Khairul urged the judges to perform their duties with honesty, morality and concentration to restore the faith of people on the judiciary.

He also asked all junior judges to dispose of five jail appeals each in their extra times every week in order to reduce the huge backlog of such appeals.

Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, said, "It was alleged that the Dhaka district and sessions judge was appointed superseding a number of judges. The committee will seek clarification from the SC registrar on the issue."

Suranjit was talking to reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on November 29.

Shift SQ Chy

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Research Institute (ICHRI) for treatment by the next two days.

The HC bench of Justice Miftah Uddin Choudhury and Justice Jahangir Hossain also issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why it should not be directed to send SQ Chowdhury abroad for better treatment.

The bench passed the order and the rule following a petition filed by Salauddin's wife Farhat Quader.

The BNP lawmaker's wife filed a petition with the HC on Sunday, praying for directives for her husband's treatment in Singapore.

SQ Chowdhury was arrested on December 15 last year in connection with violence before and during the June 27 hartal. Later he was shown arrested on charges of war crimes.

He is now detained in Narayanganj jail.

Advocate Khandker Mahub Hossain appeared for the petitioner, while Attorney General Mahubey Alam opposed the petition.

Japan, US discussed measures against anti-whalers

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese and US officials discussed possible measures against the anti-whaling Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.

Monica Medina, US representative to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), held talks with Katsuhiro Machida, director-general of Japan's fisheries agency and other officials in November 2009, cables show.



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