

IVORY COAST CRISIS

Gbagbo 'expels UK and Canada envoys'

BBC ONLINE

Ivory Coast's incumbent leader Laurent Gbagbo is expelling the British and Canadian ambassadors, a statement on state television has said.

It said the action was being taken as a reciprocal measure. Both countries said the move was not valid.

The international community has recognised Alassane Ouattara as the winner of November's presidential election and urged Mr Gbagbo to quit.

Mr Ouattara has urged West African special forces to remove Mr Gbagbo.

The West African regional body Ecowas has threatened to force Mr Gbagbo out but has said it wants to

try mediation efforts first.

Mr Gbagbo still has the public backing of the army and control of state media.

The UK and Canada are among the nations who have expelled ambassadors appointed by Mr Gbagbo in order to replace them with diplomats chosen by Mr Ouattara.

The BBC's John James, in Ivory Coast's main city Abidjan, says the expulsions are largely symbolic.

The UK ambassador, who acts as envoy for several countries in the region, is based in neighbouring Ghana, and the Canadian embassy will still be able to carry out their normal functions, our correspondent says.

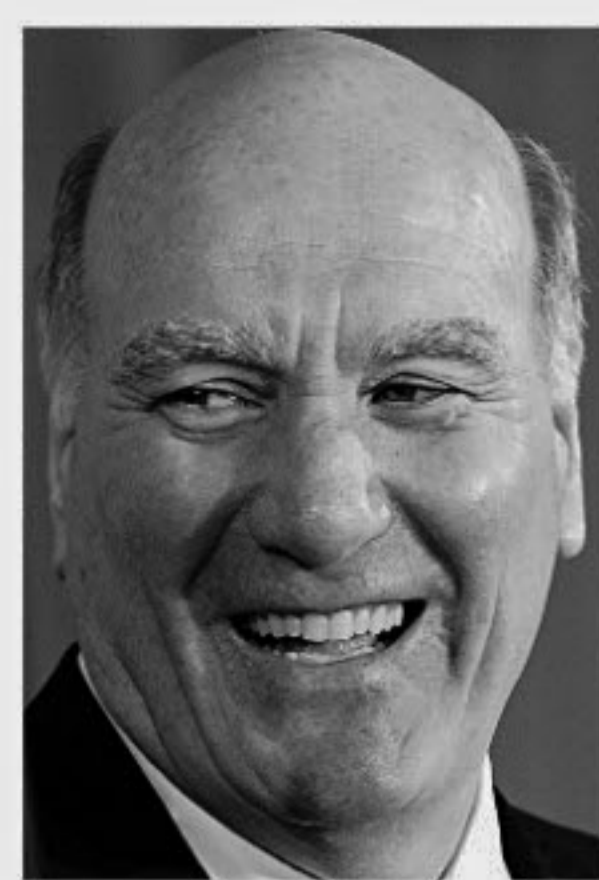
The state television statement said the UK and Canadian envoys

were being expelled as their countries no longer recognised Mr Gbagbo's ambassadors.

"Through the application of the principle of reciprocity governing diplomatic relations, the ministry informs Madame Marie Isabelle Massip that her accreditation as Canadian ambassador in Ivory Coast is ended.

"For the same reasons, the Foreign Ministry informs ambassador Nicholas James Westcott that his accreditation as United Kingdom and Northern Ireland ambassador is also ended."

The UK Foreign Office responded by saying: "The British government has recognised Mr Alassane Ouattara as the democratically elected president of Cote D'Ivoire.



William Daley the new US chief of staff

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama chose former commerce secretary William Daley as his new chief of staff Thursday, bringing a renowned powerbroker on the wavelength of Wall Street into his retooled administration.

Obama has embarked on a reshuffle of his White House braintrust as he faces fresh challenges from Republicans who this week formally took over the House of Representatives following their mid-term election triumph in November.

He has also made clear he wants an early start on his 2012 reelection bid, with several members of his inner circle planning to leave the White House in the next few months to fire up the Obama campaign machinery.

Daley, 62, is seen as a centrist, and an ideological ally of ex-president Bill Clinton. His appointment may be seen as an olive branch by Obama towards the business community, with which he has had a rocky relationship.

Britain raises terror threat level at airports

AFP, London

Britain has raised its terrorist threat level specific to major transport hubs, including airports and London railway terminals, from substantial to severe, a report said yesterday.

There was no suggestion of any intelligence of an imminent attack and security officials are stressing the change is precautionary, said the BBC.

The overall terror threat to Britain remained at the second-highest level of "severe" yesterday, where it has been for

around a year and which means an attack is considered highly likely.

The highest level in the five-stage grading is "critical" which means an attack is expected imminently.

Beneath this overall system are threat levels for particular sectors of the national infrastructure which are not normally made public, reported the BBC.

But the broadcaster said the threat level for major transport hubs, including airline terminals and major railway stations in London, had been increased from substantial to severe.

EU to spurn Iran's offer of atomic site tour

REUTERS, Budapest

The European Union will turn down an offer from Iran to tour its nuclear facilities, EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton said yesterday, but remains optimistic about talks with Iran later this month.

Ashton said she had consulted with Russia and China before deciding that the invitation should be turned down.

The West suspects Iran's nuclear program is directed at developing bombs. Tehran says it is for peaceful energy only.

TENSION IN KOREAN PENINSULA

Korea, US troops lower alert status

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has lowered its military alert status, prompting similar moves by Seoul and US forces as tensions on the Korean peninsula showed signs of easing, a report said yesterday.

The apparent moves came as South Korea held its latest war games to simulate an infiltration by North Korean troops across the disputed Yellow Sea border, officials said.

Tensions have been high since the North shelled South Korea's frontline Yeonpyeong island on November 23.

Yonhap news agency quoted unidentified South Korean government sources as saying that the North recently lifted a

special alert it issued on November 21 for its military forces on the coast near the tense sea border.

"The North Korean military recently withdrew an order for special military readiness it had issued in connection with our Hoguek military drills (in November)," a source was quoted as saying.

The South Korean military and US forces in South Korea had consequently reduced their own alert status by one notch to a normal level, the source said.

South Korean troops have lowered "the level of their alert status by one notch in some areas due to fatigue", a defence ministry spokesman told AFP, adding the move was not related to any political development.

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