

Egypt names vice president for 1st time

AP, Cairo

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak named a vice president yesterday for the first time since coming to power nearly 30 years ago. It was a clear step toward setting up a successor in the midst of the biggest challenge ever to his rule from tens of thousands of anti-government protesters.

Mubarak named his intelligence chief and close confidant Omar Suleiman, state television reported.

Mubarak was widely seen as grooming his son Gamal to succeed him, possibly even as soon as in presidential elections planned for later this year. However, there was significant public opposition to the hereditary succession.

Suleiman has been in charge of some of Egypt's most sensitive foreign policy issues, including the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and inter-Palestinian divisions.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters hold flag of Egypt during demonstrations calling for the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (centre) outside the Egyptian Embassy in central London (upper left) and in France (lower left) yesterday. Smoke rises from the burnt headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party (upper right) and demonstrators carry an army officer who joined them in protest yesterday. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak refused yesterday to bow to demands that he resign after ordering troops and tanks into cities in an attempt to quell an explosion of street protests against his 30-year rule.



Saudi King supports Mubarak

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi King Abdullah has expressed his support for embattled President Hosni Mubarak and slammed those "tampering" with Egypt's security and stability, state news agency SPA reported yesterday.

The Saudi ruler, in Morocco recovering from back surgery performed in the United States, telephoned Mubarak early yesterday, the report said.

During the conversation, Abdullah condemned "intruders" he said were "tampering with Egypt's security and stability ... in the name of freedom of expression."

Saudi Arabia, he added, "stands with all its means with the government and people of Egypt."

SPA said Mubarak had responded by assuring King Abdullah that "the situation is stable in Egypt."

Obama warns Egypt against violence

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama has called on Egyptian authorities not to use violence against raging political protests, and drove home his message in a 30-minute phone call to President Hosni Mubarak.

His warning came Friday as the United States toughened its line on Mubarak's government, a key Middle Eastern ally, warning it would review billions of dollars in aid to Egypt based on the behavior of the security forces.

Obama urged Mubarak to take "concrete" steps towards political reforms, saying he must turn "a moment of volatility" into "a moment of promise" after a day of rage in Egyptian cities on which the death toll from protests hit 27.

"I want to be very clear in calling upon the Egyptian authorities to refrain from any violence against peaceful protesters," Obama said, after aides said the White House was readying for any possible politi-



cal scenarios in Egypt.

"The people of Egypt have rights that are universal. That includes the right to peaceful assembly and association. The right to free speech and the ability to determine their own destiny."

Obama said he talked to Mubarak after he made a broadcast to the Egyptian people, in which he gave no sign of standing down, but promised to move towards

democracy and more economic opportunity for his people.

"I told him he has a responsibility to give meaning to those words," Obama said, in a statement in the State Dining Room of the White House.

"Violence will not address the grievances of the Egyptian people. And suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away."

Egypt is the second highest beneficiary of US foreign aid, so the US warning that an average of \$2 billion in annual assistance could be in play appeared to be a significant attempt to deploy American leverage.

Tunisia clashes as cabinet sworn in

AFP, Tunis

Riot police and hundreds of protesters clashed in the Tunisian capital Friday, as a new cabinet was sworn into office in a bid to end the unrest that has followed president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's ouster.

Security forces fired warning shots and tear gas, as some groups threw stones in the main government quarter where protesters have remained camped out in front of Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi's offices for five days.

Some 15 protesters were injured in the clashes, according to a doctor who treated some of the casualties and a spokesman for some of the demonstrators.

Protesters had demanded a clean break with the old regime, calling for Ghannouchi himself to step down.

The premier has been in office since 1999 and has stayed on despite the end of Ben Ali's 23-year iron-fisted rule on January 14.

Ben Ali fled in disgrace to Saudi Arabia amid a wave of social protests.

The ripples of Tunisia's revolution have been felt across the Arab world, having helped inspire the deadly protests against Egypt's veteran ruler Hosni Mubarak that have raged this week across the country.

The US-monitoring group SITE said Al-Qaeda had hailed Tunisia's revolt in a message saying: "Your revolution was no ordinary uprising, rather it was a devastating earthquake that struck the throne of the tyrant Ben Ali."

Hundreds of protesters had arrived in Tunis on Sunday from impoverished regions in central Tunisia where the anti-Ben Ali movement began last month.

Darfur rebel alliance says ready for talks

AFP, Khartoum

The most heavily armed Darfur rebel group said yesterday that it was ready for serious negotiations with the Sudanese government and that it would meet in Doha next week to prove its commitment to peace.

"We are ready for serious negotiations with the government and we are very confident that we have the support of our people," Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) spokesman Ahmed Hussein Adam told AFP.

"We have a new movement that consists of nine groups... Now we are inviting them to come to Doha. We don't want to exclude anyone," he said.

"This is the first effort on the side of the Justice and Equality Movement to open up to all the movements," the rebel spokesman added.

The UN chief mediator for Darfur, Djibril Basso, called the announcement a "breakthrough" and an "unprecedented agreement" by the main Darfur groups that gave new reason to hope for a lasting peace.

Sudan recalled its delegation to peace talks in Qatar in late December, citing a lack of progress, and the war-ravaged western Darfur region has since seen heavy fighting

between the Sudanese army and the rebels.

President Omar al-Bashir had earlier said Sudan would organise its own negotiations if no agreement with the rebels was reached.

Yesterday, JEM and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM), an alliance of rebel splinter factions, said they would meet in Qatar on February 5 to demonstrate their commitment to peace, but insisted that any talks must address the conflict's root causes, including political marginalisation and refugees.

They slammed Bashir's proposal to move the negotiations to Sudan.

"The government's new strategy of 'Khartoumisation' which is supported by (former South African president Thabo) Mbeki is going to create a new phase of fighting," Adam said.

"(This strategy) is unacceptable to us and represents an unconscionable move to grant the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity control over their victims," the rebel groups said in a joint statement.

Adam acknowledged that some key rebel groups, including the Abdelwahid Nur branch of the Sudan Liberation Army, had still not joined the alliance that had committed itself to talks.

Sector in grip of evil genie

FROM PAGE 1

The minister was speaking as chief guest at a view-exchange meeting titled "Preservation of the Environment: Role of the Industrialists and Businessmen" organised by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at its conference room in the port city.

The minister said the present government is sincere about protecting the interests of the ship breaking industry.

"You know how sincerely I am working to save the industry," he said.

Owners of ship-breaking yards and the CCCI president at the meeting sought the minister's cooperation in resumption of dismantling of ships that remains suspended following a High Court ruling.

They urged the government to formulate a policy immediately for the sector.

"The government is not putting any obstacle to the industry. It's the evil genie that created some problems after getting some High Court verdicts in its favour," Mahmud said.

"We will try to get rid of it, but you

should move immediately to make all ship-breaking yards environment-friendly," he said.

The minister, however, did not mention anything about the deaths and injuries of a number of workers in several accidents at some ship-breaking yards.

According to newspaper reports, at least 30 workers died and 16 others were maimed in accidents in 16 ship-breaking yards in the last 21 months.

On January 18, four workers died and another suffered burns in an explosion at a ship-breaking yard in Sitakunda while scrapping a tanker that entered the country in breach of the HC directive.

He underlined the need for industrial development while conserving the environment, and said the businessmen should take the responsibility for protecting the environment.

The minister said the present government has started the culture of rewarding the critics of its handling of environmental pollution. The government gave the National Environment

Award to The Daily Star for its role in portraying the status of environmental pollution in the country, he said.

Mohammad Hatem, second vice president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, urged the government to give financial assistance for setting up effluent treatment plants in small industries.

The businessmen at the meeting criticised Md Munir Chowdhury, director (Monitoring and Enforcement) of the Department of Environment (DoE), for fining different industries "excessively" during drives against polluters.

DoE Director General Monwar Islam presented the keynote paper at the meeting presided over by CCCI President Morshed Murad Ibrahim.

CCCI Vice President Md Nurun Newaj Selim, directors Mahfuzul Hoque Shah and Shafi Chowdhury, Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association President Hefazetur Rahman, former CCCI leaders SM Abul Kalam and MA Salam also spoke.

Akheri Munajat

FROM PAGE 1 (concluding prayer).

The concluding prayer is expected to start any moment before the Johar prayers following sermons by eminent Islamic scholars on various aspects of the religion for two days.

The vehicular movement on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway and Tongi-Kaliganj road will remain suspended for hours during and after the concluding prayers, said Tongi police.

Many visitors yesterday were seen taking treatment from the free medical service centres for their different physical problems while 38 devotees were admitted to Tongi General Hospitals in

last two days, reports a Gazipur correspondent.

To participate at the concluding prayers, thousands of devotees are now heading towards the ijtema from 33 districts, apparently turning the venue of the second largest gathering of Muslims into a human sea.

Political leaders and foreign diplomats are also expected to join today's prayer.

Meanwhile, law-enforcers have established tight security to ensure peaceful observance of the event.

Unlike the previous occasions, this year's gathering is limited to the Ijtema field due to holding of the event in parts.

For the first time since its inception in 1967, Ijtema is being held in two phases. The first phase of the event ended on January 23. The second phase started on January 28 after a four-day break.

Devotees from districts of Dhaka, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Netrakona, Tagail, Jamalpur, Madaripur, Gopalganj, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Laxmipur, Comilla, Barahmanbaria, Molvibazar, Sunamganj, Chapainabganj, Noagaon, Pabna, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Bogra, Satkhira, Jhenidah, Magura, Meherpur, Barisal, Pirojpur and Patuakhali will join today's prayers.

Sudan calls for Sunday protests

AFP, Khartoum

Thousands of people have joined a Facebook group calling for anti-government protests across Sudan on Sunday, the day preliminary results are due out on the vote on southern independence.

Entitled "January 30, a word to the Sudanese youth," the Facebook site shows an angry protestor holding an Arabic placard that reads: "A better Sudan."

With more than 10,000 followers so far, the Sudanese site calls for peaceful demonstrations in Khartoum.

MOSCOW AIRPORT BLAST

Authorities revealed hands behind the blast

Bomber tried to kill foreigners

AFP, Moscow

The Moscow airport bombing that killed 35 people this week was carried out by a suicide bomber from Russia's turbulent North Caucasus region, the Investigative Committee said yesterday.

"We have established the identity of the terrorist suicide bomber who set off the explosive," the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

"He turned out to be a 20-year-old native from one of the North Caucasus

republics," the Investigative Committee said.

The statement added that investigators knew the name of the suicide bomber but would not disclose it because officials were still trying to "identify and detain the organisers and accomplices of this act of terror."

Meanwhile, the Investigative Committee said yesterday the suicide bomber who killed 35 people at Moscow's main international airport was trying to kill as many foreigners as he could.

"I would especially like to note that it was by no means an accident that the act of terror was committed in the international arrivals hall," Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin said in a statement.

"According to investigators, the act of terror was first and foremost aimed against foreign citizens."

At least eight foreigners were killed in Monday's Domodedovo airport blast, which officials blamed on a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus.

Titian Madonna and Child sells for record \$16.9m

BBC ONLINE

A 450-year-old Madonna and Child work by Titian has sold for \$16.9m (£10.7m) in New York, setting a new auction record for the Renaissance master.

A Sacra Conversazione: The Madonna and Child with Saints Luke and Catherine of Alexandria was sold at Sotheby's to a European telephone bidder.

It beat the previous Titian auction record of £7.5m (\$11.9m) paid at Christie's in London in December 1991.

That was the price achieved for the artist's Venus and Adonis painting.

A spokeswoman for Sotheby's said A Sacra Conversazione was "one of only a handful of multi-figured compositions by Titian that remain in private



hands".

It was also, she added, "the most important to appear at auction in decades".

Sotheby's said the oil on canvas work - painted around 1560 - had changed hands only six times during its life.

Prior to recent exhibitions in London, Paris and Amsterdam, it had not been seen publicly for 30

years. In 2008 the National Gallery in London and the National Galleries of Scotland launched a joint appeal to buy a pair of Titian paintings for £50m each.

Enough was eventually raised to buy one of the paintings, Diana and Actaeon, for the nation. Funds are currently being sought to secure its partner, Diana and Callisto.