

Pressure rises against IMF chief held at NYC jail

AGENCIES

Pressure built yesterday for Dominique Strauss-Kahn to consider resigning as chief of the International Monetary Fund after he was charged with trying to rape a maid at a New York hotel.

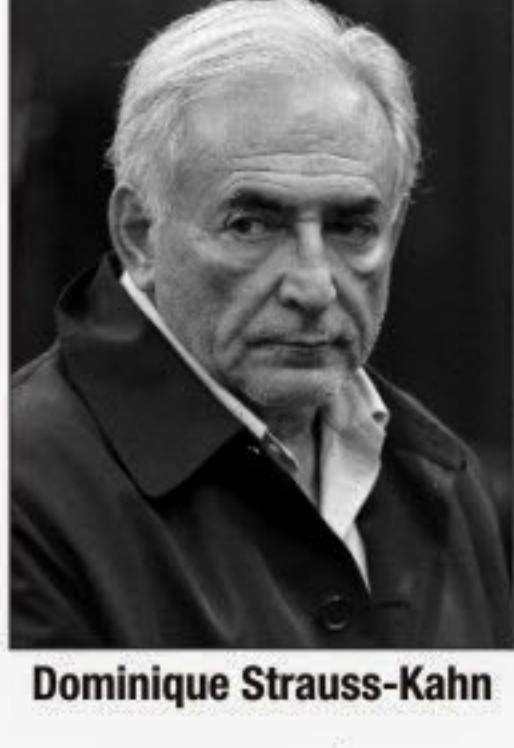
Strauss-Kahn spent the night at the infamous Rikers Island, a 400-acre penal complex in New York, after being denied bail Monday. Prosecutors had warned the wealthy banker might flee to France and put himself beyond the reach of US law like the filmmaker Roman Polanski.

Strauss-Kahn's weekend arrest rocked the financial world as the IMF grapples with the European debt crisis, and it upended French presidential politics. Strauss-Kahn, a member of France's Socialist party, was widely considered the strongest potential challenger next year to President Nicolas Sarkozy.

If sex assault charges against French IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn are true, there can be "no excuse" for his actions, France's Prime Minister Francois Fillon said yesterday.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has so far stayed silent on the arrest of Strauss-Kahn.

Austria's finance minister yesterday suggested that Strauss-Kahn consider stepping down to avoid damaging



Dominique Strauss-Kahn

the IMF.

Meanwhile, the neighbours of the alleged victim said the black woman aged 32, is nice and hard and lives with her daughter.

The victim is still to make a public comment about the incident.

Saying that his sister was a Muslim, her brother said "she was completely devastated."

The 62-year-old Strauss-Kahn was arrested Saturday at Kennedy Airport in New York after the allegations at the Sofitel hotel near Times Square.

Because of his high profile, Strauss-Kahn will be held in protective custody on Rikers Island, away from most detainees, said city Correction Department spokesman Stephen Morello. Unlike most prisoners who share 50-bed barracks, he will have a single-bed cell and will eat all of his meals alone there. He'll have a prison guard escort when he is outside his cell.

Strauss-Kahn was ordered jailed at least until a court proceeding on Friday. He cannot claim diplomatic immunity because he was in New York on personal business and was paying his own way, the IMF said.

He is charged with attempted rape, sex abuse, a criminal sex act, unlawful imprisonment and forcible touching. The most serious charge carries five to 25 years in prison.

Japan to review energy strategies

AFP, Tokyo

Japan is to launch a review of economic and energy policies in the wake of the country's March 11 natural disaster, the cabinet said yesterday.

The government agreed new guidelines on policy-setting that will mean a reassessment of a growth strategy that has relied heavily on the export of large-scale infrastructure systems, including nuclear power plants and high-speed rail.

But yesterday Prime Minister Naoto Kan's government said it "will reexamine the strategy for overseas development of packaged infrastructure systems," an official statement said.

It will also start "studying innovative energy and environmental strategies which will meet the needs for safety, stable supply, efficiency and environment," the statement said.

Pressure piles on Gaddafi as Russia rebukes regime

Oil minister defects; Nato bombs Tripoli

AFP, Tripoli

Pressure piled on Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi yesterday as his oil minister appeared to have defected, Moscow issued a rebuke, Nato jets pounded Tripoli and a leading prosecutor sought his arrest for crimes against humanity.

A Tunisian government source told AFP that Oil Minister Shukri Ghanem, a veteran of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, has left his country and is in neighbouring Tunisia.

In Moscow, meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he held talks yesterday with Gaddafi's envoys and had told Tripoli to obey the terms of UN resolutions on Libya.

The visit to Moscow by Muhammad Ahmed al-Sharif, general secretary of the World Islamic Call Society, the Libya-based group founded by Gaddafi, comes as Russia is also preparing to hold talks with rebels fighting the regime.

"We raised an issue about the need for the Libyan leadership to explicitly embrace and begin the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions in full," Lavrov

said.

"These resolutions demand that any use of military force against peaceful civilians be stopped."

Moscow, which has been strongly critical of the international campaign against Gaddafi's regime, had agreed to talk to both Gaddafi's envoys and rebels who had also planned to come to Moscow but had to delay their trip.

Overnight, air strikes by Nato set fire to two buildings near Gaddafi's compound in the Libyan capital, according to an AFP reporter who along with other journalists was taken by the Libyan authorities to the site, where firefighters battled the flames.

Regime officials had identified the targets as a security services building and the headquarters of Libya's anti-corruption agency.

International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Moreno-Ocampo appealed on Monday to the court to issue warrants against the three, saying there was evidence "that Muammar Gaddafi personally ordered attacks on innocent Libyan civilians."

A panel of ICC judges will now decide whether to accept or reject the prosecutor's application.

Syria denies mass grave allegation

AFP, Damascus

Syrian authorities yesterday denied the existence of a mass grave in the southern town of Daraa, which the army had raided to put down anti-regime protests, while acknowledging that the bodies of five people had been found in the flashpoint town.

"This information is totally false," an interior ministry official told the state news agency, referring to reports about the mass grave.

"These reports are part of a campaign of incitement and lies against Syria," the official added.

The SANA agency, quoting a local official in Daraa, said five bodies had been discovered in the town on Sunday and that the local attorney general had launched a probe.

It did not specify how the bodies were found or how the victims died.

ISRAEL BORDER VIOLENCE US accuses Syria of inciting clashes

REUTERS, Aboard Air Force One

The White House accused the Syrian government on Monday of inciting deadly border clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian demonstrators, saying Damascus was trying to distract attention from its own violent crackdown on protests.

White House spokesman Jay Carney expressed regret for the loss of life in confrontations on Israel's frontiers with Syria, Lebanon and Gaza on Sunday but said the Jewish state "has the right to prevent unauthorised crossing at its borders."

"We urge maximum restraint on all sides," Carney told reporters on Air Force One as President Barack Obama flew to Tennessee.

Israeli troops opened fire at three separate border locations to prevent crowds of demonstrators from crossing, killing at least 13 people.

Syrian media reports said Israeli gunfire killed two people after dozens of Palestinians infiltrated the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights from Syria, along a front line that has been largely tranquil for decades.

Carney said the administration was "strongly opposed to the Syrian government's involvement in inciting yesterday's protests in the Golan Heights."

The Obama administration has tightened sanctions on senior Syrian officials to try to pressure Damascus to halt its crackdown on pro-democracy protests, but international human rights groups have criticised Washington for not taking stronger action.

Queen begins historic Ireland visit

AFP, Dublin

Queen Elizabeth II arrived in Dublin yesterday for the first visit by a British monarch to the Irish Republic as the discovery of a bomb near the capital underscored the threat posed by republican hardliners.

The queen touched down at Casement Aerodrome -- named after an Irish revolutionary executed by the British -- for a landmark four-day trip surrounded by the biggest ever security operation mounted by the republic.

She is the first British sovereign to visit Ireland since it won independence from Britain in 1922, while the last monarch to come to the country was King George V, the queen's grandfather, in 1911.

"This is an historic and symbolic visit and it is dealing with the conclusion of the past and a message for the future," Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny said.



PHOTO: AFP

Britain's Queen Elizabeth (R) and Irish President Mary McAleese walk along the Francini corridor at the Aras an Uachtarain, the president's official residence, in Dublin on the first day of her four-day visit to Ireland yesterday.

IRAN NUKE TALKS Ball in court of major powers: Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday that the ball was in the court of the six major powers that have been trying to resolve concerns over Tehran's nuclear programme after it expressed readiness for new talks.

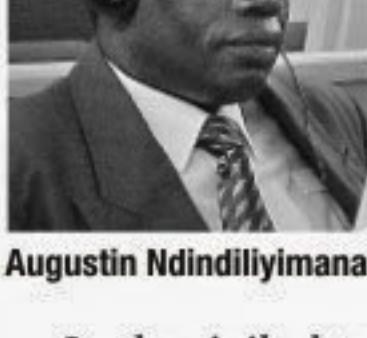
"Our talks with the 5+1 depends on the other side, we've announced our readiness," foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said, referring to the five veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany.

"The condition for the talks has been outlined by our negotiating team.

"Our stance has been defined... to Catherine Ashton. Any time they are ready, we are ready to continue," Mehmanparast added.

NEWS IN brief

Rwanda ex-army chief jailed for 30 years over genocide



Augustin Ndindiliyimana

The UN court for Rwanda yesterday handed the general who was army chief for most of the 1994 genocide a 30-year jail term for his role in the mass killing, including calling for the murder of ethnic Tutsis.

It also jailed two senior officers for ordering their men to assassinate the prime minister at the start of the weeks-long rampage, when they also killed 10 Belgian UN troops protecting her.

Denmark to lay claim to Arctic

APP, Copenhagen

Denmark, which already counts Greenland and the Faroe Islands as its Arctic territories, is planning to lay claim to the North Pole, a daily reported yesterday, quoting a leaked foreign ministry paper.

"The country is expected to lay claim to the continental shelf in five areas around the Faroe Islands and Greenland, including the North Pole itself," the strategy paper reads, according to the online version of the Information daily, which said it obtained a copy of the

DNA test to tell how long you'll live

THE DAILYMAIL ONLINE

A test that tells you how long you will live for is to go on sale in Britain later this year.

The blood test, which will offer the alluring possibility of estimating your lifespan, will cost £435.

Critics said the controversial new technology opens a Pandora's box, whereby insurance companies may demand tests before offering someone a policy.

However, some scientists said the test could also provide vital insights into a range of age-related disorders, from cardiovascular disease to Alzheimer's and cancer.

Medical researchers working on the technology said they will be able to read a person's 'biological age', by the length of structures on the ends of a person's chromosomes, called telomeres.

Nobel winners put humanity on trial

APP, Stockholm

Planet Earth and humanity were set to face each other in a mock trial yesterday, with around 20 Nobel Prize winners figuring as judges, organisers of a global sustainability symposium in Stockholm said.

"It's a civil court case to see whether we've breached our relations with the planet, and to see how to restore that relationship," symposium chair Johan Rockstroem told reporters at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The "trial" is a part of the sessions at the third biennial Nobel laureate symposium on global sustainability -- a three-day event that opened in the Swedish capital Tuesday.

In addition to the Nobel laureates, leading scientists and environmental research group heads were on site to draft a Stockholm Memorandum on the findings of the meeting, which will be presented Wednesday to the United High-level Panel on Global Sustainability.

Mario Molina of Mexico, the winner of the 1995 Nobel Chemistry Prize who is a science and technology advisor to US President Barack Obama, told the news conference he hoped rationality, common sense and wisdom would strengthen the planet's case in the "symbolic" trial.

The Stockholm Memorandum will be considered by the UN panel, which was appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and includes South Africa's President Jacob Zuma and his Finnish counterpart Tarja Halonen and has been tasked with putting together a "new vision" on sustainable growth.

The panel will draw up a report with suggestions before the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

Mubarak to apologise to people for amnesty

Wife released after surrendering assets to state

APP, Cairo



Hosni Mubarak, 83, is said to be preparing to hand over his assets and apologise to the Egyptian people in return for an amnesty from the military rulers after his wife was released after handing over her assets to the state.

The former president is said to be drafting a letter which will be broadcast on Egyptian and Arabic channels "apologising on behalf of himself and his family for any offence caused to the people," independent daily Al-Shorouq said.

He is also to apologise "for any acts which may have stemmed from false information passed on to him by his advisers," Al-Shorouq said, citing Egyptian and Arab officials.

Suzanne Mubarak had been held on corruption charges in a hospital in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh hospital, along with her husband, who is also being investigated for possibly ordering the shooting of anti-regime protesters.

On Monday, the former first lady gave three powers of attorney to Assem al-Gohari, the head of the illicit gains department, authorising him to withdraw the cash from accounts in two banks and to sell a luxury villa she owns in Cairo.

Mubarak and his wife are in hospital after both reportedly suffered heart attacks during questioning in a graft probe.

A military source told the paper "many parties, some Egyptian and some Arab, have been mediating on this matter, to take place within an acceptable legal framework."

Russia delays Khodorkovsky trial

APP, Moscow

A Russian court yesterday unexpectedly delayed the appeal hearing for ex-oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky against his conviction in a fraud trial that aroused international condemnation.

Judge Vladimir Usov at Moscow City Court said that the appeal was adjourned until May 24 as the defence had submitted additional objections against the verdict for Khodorkovsky to stay in jail until 2017.

Berlusconi suffers in local polls

REUTERS, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has suffered a significant setback in local elections that has punctured his image of invincibility and could usher in a period of political instability.

Berlusconi was uncharacteristically silent yesterday after the vote, but aides said he was "surprised and saddened" by results that will force his centre-right

UN bid for Palestinian state no 'stunt': Abbas

APP, New York

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas said yesterday that his bid to secure international recognition for a Palestinian state was no "stunt" and would contribute to peace efforts with Israel.

Plans to demand UN recognition of a Palestinian state in lands occupied by Israel in 1967 have drawn criticism from the United States and Israel, which have insisted the decades-old conflict be resolved through negotiations.

"Our quest for recognition as a state should not be seen as a stunt; too many of our men and women have been lost for us to engage in such political theatre," Abbas said in an op-ed in the New York Times.

"We go to the United Nations now to secure the right to live free in the remaining

22 percent of our historic homeland because we have been negotiating with the state of Israel for 20 years without coming any closer to realizing a state of our own," he wrote.

He was referring to the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, territories seized by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War.

"We cannot wait indefinitely while Israel continues to send more settlers to the occupied West Bank and denies Palestinians access to most of our land and holy places, particularly in Jerusalem."

"Neither political pressure nor promises of rewards by the United States have stopped Israel's settlement program."

Abbas said a Palestinian state would be ready to negotiate the "core issues" of the conflict with Israel.

Winklevosses taking case to top US court

APP, San Francisco

Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss are taking their beef against Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg to the US Supreme Court.