

Morocco votes to curb king's powers

AFP, Rabat

Moroccan authorities pushed for a "yes" vote yesterday on the eve of a referendum on curbing the near absolute powers of King Mohammed VI, who has offered reforms in the wake of uprisings in the Arab world. "Moroccans tomorrow have a date with history," L'Opinion, the newspaper of PM Abbas El Fassi's conservative Istiqlal party, wrote in a front-page editorial. "Participate and vote tomorrow for the new constitution," it wrote. Faced with protests modelled on the Arab Spring uprisings that ousted long-serving leaders in Tunisia and Egypt, Mohammed VI announced the referendum this month to devolve some of his wide-ranging powers to the prime minister and parliament.

LIBYA WAR  
Russia, AU slam France over arms flow to rebels

AGENCIES

Russia strongly criticised France for dropping weapons to Libyan rebels and demanded an explanation from Paris yesterday. "If this is confirmed, it is a very crude violation of UN Security Council resolution 1970," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said. The African Union has also criticised the move, saying it risks causing a "Somalisation" of Libya. AU Commission chairman Juan Ping made the criticism on the eve of a two-day summit of African Union leaders trying to mediate an end to the four-month conflict as rebel fighters backed by Nato strikes advance on Tripoli. "It is simply that these weapons are being given by all parties to all the other parties. These weapons are already reaching al-Qaeda, drug dealers and traffickers. They will be used to destabilise African states and to kidnap tourists for whom you pay ransom," he said. The arms deliveries could backfire on the governments who supply them. "If these arms are found in the desert it is a

problem for everybody, for you (Westerners) as well. The people who are being kidnapped (by terrorists) are Westerners," said Ping. The French military says it has dropped arms to Berber tribal fighters in the mountains south-west of the capital. Lavrov said Russia had formally requested information from France about the move, to check that it "corresponds with reality". Moscow abstained from the UN Security Council vote in March that authorised an international mission in Libya to protect civilians. Russia and China have both criticised the Nato campaign in recent weeks, saying it had gone beyond the remit of UN resolution 1973. Another resolution, 1970, had imposed an arms embargo on Libya. But US and UK officials have argued that resolution 1973 could nonetheless allow weapons to be supplied to rebels fighting to topple Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. French officials have said the arms dropped to rebels earlier this month were supplied for the protection of civilians threatened at the time by pro-Gaddafi forces.

Clashes with militants kill 5 Yemeni troops

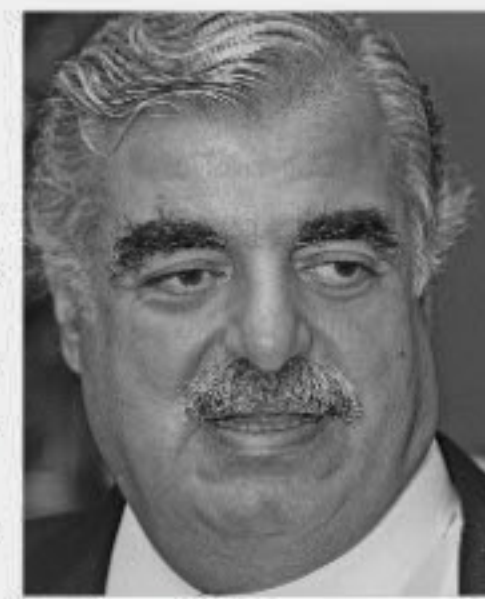
AFP, Aden

Fresh fighting with alleged al-Qaeda militants in restive Zinjibar killed five Yemeni soldiers yesterday as the army regained control of a strategic spot in the southern city, which has almost entirely fallen under the militants' control. "Five soldiers were killed and six others were wounded in heavy fighting with al-Qaeda militants in Zinjibar's east," a military official said, adding that there were also "deaths and injuries in the ranks of the enemy." A medical official in the nearby city of Aden confirmed the toll. Battles have raged since Wednesday in the area surrounding Al-Wahda stadium on the outskirts of Zinjibar, most of which fell to the Islamists a month ago.

UN-backed court delivers Hariri killing indictments

REUTERS, Beirut

The UN-backed tribunal investigating the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik al-Hariri handed over indictments and four arrest warrants to Lebanon yesterday, the state prosecutor said. The long-awaited move was hailed as a "historic moment" by Hariri's son, opposition leader Saad al-Hariri, who urged the government of Najib Mikati to cooperate with the court. Prosecutor Saeed Mirza did not disclose the contents of the indictments, but they are expected to accuse four Hezbollah members of involvement in the Feb 14, 2005 bombing in Beirut which killed Rafik al-Hariri and 22 others. Hezbollah, both a political movement and guerrilla army, which with its political allies forms a majority in Mikati's new government, denies any role in Hariri's killing



Rafik al-Hariri

and has called the court a tool of Israel and the United States. It has vowed not to hand over any of its members and wants Lebanon to end cooperation with the tribunal, withdraw Lebanese judges and halt its contribution to the court's funding. The indictments triggered a political crisis in January when they were submitted to the pre-trial judge. It brought down Hariri's national unity government when Hezbollah and its allies resigned in protest at his refusal to renounce the court, just days before the tribunal prosecutor filed the still-secret indictments to a pre-trial judge. The indictments have been twice amended while the pre-trial judge assessed whether there was enough evidence to proceed with a trial. International condemnation of the 2005 killing forced neighbouring Syria to end a 29-year military presence in Lebanon.

NEWS IN brief

Taiwan ex-president Lee indicted on graft charges



AFP, Taipei

Taiwanese prosecutors indicted former president Lee Teng-hui on corruption charges yesterday, accusing him of embezzling \$7.79 million from government coffers. Lee, 88, also charged with money laundering in the same case, is accused of pocketing diplomatic funds with his right-hand man Liu Tai-ying while in office between 1988 and 2000, a prosecution spokesman said. He is the second former Taiwanese president to face graft charges, with his successor Chen Shui-bian currently serving a jail term of 17 years and six months on two bribery convictions, with more hearings pending.

US in contact with Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

AFP, Budapest

The United States has been in "limited contacts" with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt following the recent political changes in the country, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday. "The Obama administration is continuing the approach of limited contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood that have existed on and off for about five or six years," she told journalists on a visit to Budapest. "We believe that given the change of the political landscape in Egypt, it is in the interest of the United States to engage with all parties that are peaceful and

Tunisia judges' postpones Ben Ali trial to July 4

AFP, Tunis

Striking judges yesterday postponed a second trial of Tunisia's ousted president until July 4, amid growing concern about the value of legal proceedings against him in his absence. Judge Touhami Hafi announced the postponement of the trial against the exiled Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, on charges of illegal possessions of arms and drugs, in a statement to the court in Tunis.



PHOTO: AFP

Police handle a protester as they try to dismantle their camp at Plaza de Catalunya square in Barcelona yesterday. More than 100 Spanish riot police evicted scores of "indignant" protesters demonstrating against government's austerity measures.

Cops foil left parties' procession

FROM PAGE 1

thrown by the demonstrators towards the police hit him. The other injured are Khan Asaduzzaman Masum, Kazi Sajjad Jahir Chandon, Abul Kalam Azad, Alamin Mahadi and Jilani Shuvo. Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Gono Forum, Samajtantrik Dal of Bangladesh, Samyabadi Dal of Bangladesh, National Awami Party, Ganatantri Party, Ganatantri Majdur Party and Gono Azadi League -- at least seven of them grand alliance components -- organised the march. Different associated bodies of the 11 parties and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti and Jatiya Adibashi Parishad also joined the protest march. As the marchers arrived in front of the museum from Central Shaheed Minar, police put barricade and asked them to leave. When they tried to push through the cordon, police charged baton on the demonstrators who responded with brickbats. The demonstrators also fought a running battle with the law enforcers. Later, leaders of the 11 parties held a protest rally demanding scrapping of the constitutional provision for allowing religion-based politics and Islam as state religion. They also threatened to wage a tougher movement to press home their demands. They announced to hold a grand rally on July 9 at the Shaheed Minar protesting the police action on their march and demanding implementation of their demands. Addressing the rally, Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said the government has legalised the provisions incorporated by Ziaur Rahman and HM Ershad by retaining Bismillah and Islam in the constitution. "Sheikh Hasina will be condemned as Zia and Ershad have been." Kamal Lohani and Comrade Khalequzzaman also spoke at the rally attended by senior leaders of the 11 parties.

German House approves nuke exit

AFP, Berlin

The German parliament approved by an overwhelming majority yesterday plans to scrap nuclear power by 2022, a decision set in motion in the wake of the Fukushima disaster in Japan. The bill on the nuclear exit cleared the Bundestag lower house by 513 votes to 79 but

must still pass the Bundesrat upper house, representing Germany's 16 federal states, next month. Its approval is considered certain. The move to pull the plug on the country's 17 reactors marks a stark about-face by Chancellor Angela Merkel and her centre-right government which last year had approved plans to extend their operation.

The seven oldest reactors were already switched off after Japan's nuclear disaster caused by a massive tsunami triggered by a 9.1 quake. Germany is the first major industrialised power to agree an end to atomic power since the disaster. Other reactors currently on line are due to be turned off between 2015 and 2022.

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