

Saleh proposes early polls, power transfer

Protesters reject offers; general killed

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's opposition held mass protests Monday, escalating demands for the immediate departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh after the ailing leader said his future should be determined at the ballot box.

On Sunday, Saleh said he is ready to quit through early elections and is committed to a Gulf-brokered power transfer deal, without committing to sign it himself, in his first speech since returning from a months-long absence.

Tens of thousands of protesters marched in two demonstrations, one for men and another for women, from Change Square, epicentre of anti-regime protests which have rocked Yemen since late January, an AFP correspondent reported.

In Ta'ez, Yemen's second largest city, hundreds of thousands marched from Jamal street to the protest encampment at Freedom Square.



Mohammed Qahtan, spokesman for the parliamentary Common Forum of opposition parties, said Saleh clearly had no intention of stepping aside.

"Saleh has shown in his address that he is still clinging to power, and that he refuses the Gulf initiative that provides for a political transfer," Qahtan said.

"After the speech of the president, there is no way to reach a political solution, and the revolution will intensify," he added.

Saleh, who unexpectedly returned Friday to Yemen after a months-long

stay in Saudi Arabia for treatment from bomb blast wounds, late on Sunday challenged the opposition to head to early elections.

"You who are running after power, let us head together toward the ballot boxes. We are against coups," Saleh said in a speech aired on state television on the 49th anniversary of the September 26, 1962 revolution that saw Yemen proclaimed a republic.

The 69-year-old president has repeatedly refused to sign a power transfer deal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in terms of which he would hand power to Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi in return for immunity from prosecution.

At Change Square, youth protesters were prompt in rejecting Saleh's speech.

"The youth will not accept," said Walid al-Amari, a leading member of the youth protest committee, addressing demonstrators at the square during the night.



PHOTO: AFP

Libyan families fleeing the city of Sirte wait in line with their vehicles to be searched by National Transitional Council (NTC) fighters, some 20 kilometres west of Sirte yesterday as anti-Gaddafi fighters encircled the ousted leader's hometown from the east, south and west and Nato warplanes pounded the city for a third straight day.

NEWS IN brief

Imran Khan calls for UK to cut aid to Pakistan

BBC ONLINE

Pakistani opposition politician Imran Khan urged the UK yesterday to cut aid to his country, saying it fuels corruption.

Khan, leader of the Pakistan Movement for Justice (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) party, said aid money propped up corrupt governments and that reforms were what would save Pakistan.

"Unfortunately, aid has been a curse for Pakistan. Total aid is about \$20bn. This \$20bn is not helping the people of Pakistan," Khan said.

The former cricketer told BBC Radio 4 that Pakistan was more poverty-stricken than ever but little international aid money reached its intended target.

Oman to hold polls on Oct 15

AFP, Muscat

More than 1,000 candidates, among them 77 women, will compete in Oman's consultative council elections to be held on October 15, the sultanate's deputy interior minister told reporters Sunday.

Mohammed al-Bousaidi urged all eligible voters to confirm their registration before Wednesday to participate in the polls in which 1,133 candidates will compete for seats in the council for the term that ends in 2015.

Rights groups will not be invited to monitor the elections which will be covered by local and international media as well as civil society organisations, he said.

The 84-member advisory council, which was created in 1991 and has a four-year term, questions ministers and advises the government on socio-economic issues but has no legislative power or role in defence, internal security or foreign policy. Political parties remain banned.

Delhi metro first railway to earn UN carbon credits

BBC ONLINE

Delhi Metro become the world's first railway network to earn carbon credits from the United Nations yesterday for helping cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The transport system has helped reduce pollution levels in the city by 630,000 tonnes a year, a UN release said.

It will now get \$9.5m (£6.1m) in carbon credits annually for seven years.

Carbon credits are generated by a UN-run scheme called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The mechanism gives firms in developing countries financial incentives to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

First female African Nobel laureate dies

AFP, Nairobi

Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai who became the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize has died of cancer at the age of 71, her family announced Monday.

Tributes flowed in for Maathai, who died on Sunday at a Nairobi hospital while undergoing treatment, lauding her outstanding struggle against environmental degradation.

"It is with great sadness that the family of professor Wangari Maathai announces her passing away on 25th September 2011 at the Nairobi hospital after a prolonged and bravely borne struggle with cancer," a statement said.

Achim Steiner, director of the UN environment programme, described her as a "force of nature."

"While others deployed their power and life force to damage, degrade and extract short term profit from the environment, she used hers to stand in their way," Steiner said in a statement.

Maathai became a key figure in Kenya since founding the Green Belt Movement in 1977, staunchly campaigning for environmental conservation and good governance.

She won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize for her reforestation work in Kenya, the first African woman, the first Kenyan and the first environmentalist to receive this honour.



Wangari Maathai

Two killed at Kabul CIA station

AFP, Kabul

A United States citizen has been shot dead by an Afghan employee at an annex to the US embassy in Kabul used by the Central Intelligence Agency, officials said yesterday.

The attack at the Ariana Hotel compound late Sunday also wounded another US citizen, and the gunman was killed in the incident, an embassy spokesman said.

It was the latest eruption of violence to hit supposedly secure sites in Kabul after last week's assassination of Afghan peace envoy Burhanuddin Rabbani and a 19-hour assault targeting the US embassy earlier this month.

US embassy spokesman Gavin Sundwall said the Afghan employee had carried out the shooting and that he had acted as "a lone gunman."

India tests nuke capable missile

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday successfully test-fired its nuclear capable 'Prithvi-II' ballistic missile, with a range of 350 km, as part of user trial by the armed forces.

The indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile was flight tested at around 8.50am from a mobile launcher from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) launch complex off the coast of Bay of Bengal in eastern state of Orissa, I. ITR Director SP Dash said.

The trial, conducted as part of operational exercise, was "fully successful," he said.

Today's test firing came 2 days after India had successfully test fired its surface-to-surface ballistic missile 'Shourya'.

Worries for Sarkozy as left capture Senate

BBC ONLINE

French President Nicolas Sarkozy's conservative government lost its majority in the Senate for the first time in recent French history after the French left won the majority on Sunday.

The Socialist Party and its Communist and Green allies have won enough seats to gain control of the upper house.

Their victory comes just seven months before the country's presidential election in April.

Right-wing parties have controlled the Senate since the Fifth Republic was founded in 1958.

Early results from the indirect elections showed left-wing candidates took at least 23 seats from the governing conservative party, giving them an absolute majority.

"The 25th of September, 2011, will go down in history," Jean-Pierre Bel, head of the Socialist group in the Senate, said on French television.

"The results of this Senate election represent a real come-uppance for the right."

France's conservative Prime Minister Francois Fillon has said the right had suffered from its divisions and that the left had made a "strong breakthrough".

"The moment of truth will come next spring. The battle begins tonight," he said in a statement.



Libyan forces enter Gaddafi hometown

Mass grave of 1,700 prisoners found

AGENCIES

Libyan provisional government forces backed by Nato warplanes raced into the eastern outskirts of Sirte yesterday and fought street battles with Muammar Gaddafi loyalists.

Earlier, anti-Gaddafi fighters encircled the ousted leader's hometown of Sirte as Nato warplanes pounded the city for a third straight day.

The siege of one of Muammar Gaddafi's last bastions comes as Libya's new rulers said they had unearthed a mass grave in Tripoli of 1,700 prisoners slain by his regime in a 1996 uprising, a massacre that helped trigger the revolt that ousted the despot.

Thick black smoke billowed into the air as National Transitional Council (NTC) fighters battled loyalist troops at a roundabout about 2 km from the centre of the deposed leader's home town, Reuters journalists said.

The thud of large explosions could be heard as Nato aircraft roared overhead. NTC fighters said the jets were striking the posi-

tions of Gaddafi loyalists.

Nato would not comment on its operations in Sirte yesterday. It said its planes hit eight targets on Sunday, including ammunition stores and rocket launchers.

NTC fighters fought with machineguns and rifles and moved tanks and heavy artillery into the town.

Anti-Gaddafi fighters west of Sirte had driven to within a few hundred meters (yards) of its center on Saturday before pulling back on Sunday to make way for Nato strikes.

On the west of Sirte yesterday, NTC tanks shelled loyalist positions in the center.

Interim government forces have previously retreated from Sirte and the other remaining Gaddafi stronghold, Bani Walid, after poorly organized attacks met fierce resistance from loyalists.

As fighters loyal to the new leadership tightened the vice around Gaddafi loyalists in Sirte, civilians fleeing the city of some 70,000 spoke of rapidly deteriorating conditions for the remaining residents.

Putin 'will not end Russia impasse' Says Gorbachev

BBC ONLINE

Ex-USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev yesterday warned Russia risks wasting six years if PM Vladimir Putin returns to the presidency in March as expected.

Reacting to the news Putin will run for office in 2012, Gorbachev said Russia was at an "impasse" and that he doubted Mr Putin could bring change.

Putin told a ruling United Russia party congress on Saturday he would stand again.

If he is elected, current President Dmitry Medvedev may replace him as PM.

Putin served two terms as president before Medvedev took over in 2008. He was barred by the constitution from running for a third consecutive term.

Gorbachev said he hoped Putin's move would provide an incentive for the leadership to get Russia out of the "impasse" it was in, but that this was unlikely as it was he who had created the current situation.

"We can assume that there will be no movement forward if there are not serious changes along the lines of a replacement of the entire system," he wrote in the opposition Novaya Gazeta newspaper, which he partly owns.

"Without this we could lose six years. I think that the future president needs to think about this very seriously."

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