



Medvedev defends Putin as president

AFP, Moscow

President Dmitry Medvedev yesterday dismissed criticism that he stripped Russian voters of choices by deciding to step down in favour of his more popular and respected political mentor Vladimir Putin.

The momentous September 24 announcement paved the way for Putin's return next year to a job he held in 2000-2008 and took all suspense out of a vote whose uncompetitive nature reflects the Kremlin's dominance in Russian politics.

But Medvedev -- a lawyer by training who was seen as the more liberal force when hand-picked by Putin to succeed him as head of state -- took pains to defend his democratic credentials in his first comments on the decision.

"How can they be pre-terminated?" a passionate Medvedev said when asked of the upcoming elections in a Russian television interview whose full transcript was released by the Kremlin.

"Such talk is completely irresponsible, misleading and even provocative," he said with emotion in his voice.

The job swap will see Medvedev take on Putin's current role of prime minister and ensure that the same team of ex-security agents and state bureaucrats leads Russia for the next six and possibly 12 years.

Kremlin critics have compared this arrangement to Soviet-era politics.

Protesters 'reclaim revolution' in Egypt

REUTERS, Cairo

Protesters yesterday gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square for what was billed as a mass rally to reclaim the revolution amid anger over the military rulers' handling of the transition.

They demonstrated to press military rulers to speed up the transfer of power to civilians and revoke emergency laws once used by ousted President Hosni Mubarak against his opponents.

Activists said they expected thousands to heed their call to join protests dubbed "Reclaiming the Revolution," amid growing discontent with the way the military council has been managing the country's transition.

The military council has announced that parliamentary elections will start on November 28 with a mixed system of proportional representation and individual lists. Most political groups fear the system will allow Mubarak supporters to return to office.

"This week is different because we feel that our revolution has been stolen from us," said Yasser Fouad, an unemployed 38-year-old, his voice drowned out by loudspeakers

urging people to ensure the protest remained peaceful.

"None of our demands have been achieved. We want them to hand over power immediately through elections," Fouad said.

The ruling military council has warned demonstrators against attacking public facilities. The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest political force, said it would not join the protest.

Six presidential hopefuls joined forces on Thursday in pressing the military council to set March as the deadline for the peaceful transfer of power.

They also declared that the state of emergency legally expired yesterday. The military council has said it will stay in force until next year.

Some 60 political parties issued a joint statement earlier this week with similar demands. They also gave the military council until Sunday to amend election laws to allow political parties to also compete for seats allocated to individuals.

Egypt's Al-Akhabr newspaper reported yesterday that the government was considering the request.

Gaddafi spokesman captured

AFP, Sirte

Muammar Gaddafi's spokesman Mussa Ibrahim was captured on Thursday outside of the former Libyan strongman's hometown of Sirte, field commanders from the new regime told AFP.

"Misrata fighters contacted us and gave us the information that Mussa Ibrahim has been captured," said Mustafa bin Dardef, of the National Transitional Council's Zintan Brigade.

Another commander, Mohammed al-Marimi, said: "Mussa Ibrahim was captured while driving outside Sirte by fighters from Misrata."

He said there were reports that Ibrahim was dressed as a woman, but that he could not immediately confirm that.

Ibrahim had been the public voice of the Gaddafi regime until NTC fighters overran Tripoli on August 23.

Yemeni president refuses to quit

BBC ONLINE

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh said yesterday that he will not stand down as promised if his opponents are allowed to stand in elections to succeed him.

Saleh, who returned to Yemen last week after a three-month absence, warned of civil war in an interview with Time and The Washington Post.

He faces a widespread protest movement as well as an insurrection by renegade army units and tribal fighters.

He has refused to sign a transition deal brokered by Gulf states.

Under the deal, he would hand over to Vice-President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi in return for immunity from prosecution.

Saleh appeared to accept the deal, first presented in March, but he has repeatedly failed to sign or act on it.

"If we transfer power and they [rival forces] are there, this will mean that we have given in to a coup," Saleh said in his first interview since returning to Yemen.

"If we transfer power, and they are in their positions, and they are still decision makers, this

will be very dangerous. This will lead to civil war."

Saleh's rivals for political power are currently Gen Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar, who declared his support for the protest movement in March, and the powerful Ahmar family.

Saleh spent three months in Saudi Arabia for treatment after his presidential palace was shelled in June.

Journalists said Saleh's face was marked by "deep scars" and he had trouble hearing. No close-up photographs were published with the articles.

Anti-government protesters have been camped out in an area of the capital Sanaa - dubbed Change Square - since January, demanding an end to President Saleh's rule.

Many have been killed, but in the interview Mr Saleh blamed army units that have defected to the opposition and tribal fighters who support the protesters.

"They assassinate protesters from behind so they can blame the state," he said.

However, he said he remained committed to the deal brokered by the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and blamed the opposition for delays.



US actor and activist Sean Penn (R) walks with Egyptian actor Khaled al-Nabawi (C) as they join Egyptian protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square yesterday during a mass rally to reclaim the revolution amid anger over the military rulers' handling of the transition.

New clashes kill 11 in Syria

AFP, Nicosia

Clashes between Syrian security forces and deserters killed at least 11 people in a village in Hama province yesterday, while 250 tanks and armoured vehicles entered a town to the south, activists said.

The tanks and armoured vehicles entered the flashpoint town of Rastan where there has been fighting between government forces and deserters for four days, the Britain-based Observatory said.

Thousands of Syrians were demonstrating yesterday, the Muslim weekly day of prayer that is a lightning rod in the six months of anti-regime protests in which the United Nations says 2,700 people have been killed.

There were calls for the downfall of the regime and solidarity with the people of Rastan.

NEWS IN brief

YouTube service stumbles

AFP, San Francisco

YouTube service stumbled on Thursday, leaving some visitors frustrated that they couldn't watch videos at the popular website.

"We know some of you are having trouble watching YouTube videos," the Google-owned online video venue said in a message fired off on Twitter.

"Our engineers are working on it; we'll let you know when things are fixed," the missive promised.

Those who encountered problems at the website got an error page with an apology and playful assurance that "a team of highly trained monkeys has been dispatched to deal with this situation."

Former Rwandan ministers get 30 years for genocide

AFP, Arusha

Two former Rwandan ministers were jailed yesterday for 30 years by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for involvement in the central African country's 1994 genocide which took some 800,000 lives.

Former public service minister Prosper Mugiraneza and his then trade counterpart Justin Mugenzi were convicted of complicity to commit genocide and incitement to commit genocide. Two other ministers charged with similar offences was

Maids win right to apply for Hong Kong residency

AFP, Hong Kong

A Hong Kong court ruled yesterday that a law banning foreign maids from permanent residency is unconstitutional in a landmark case that could pave the way for a flood of applications.

The legal action brought by Evangeline Banao Vallejos, a domestic helper from the Philippines who has lived in the city since 1986, has cast a spotlight on the treatment of Hong Kong's army of 292,000

Taiwan renews call for US sale of new jets

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou yesterday renewed a call for the United States to sell new advanced fighter jets, despite a recent US decision to help the island upgrade existing aircraft instead.

Ma made the appeal for a US sale of sophisticated F-16 C/D fighter jets in a meeting with visiting US Congressman Hank Johnson, a Democrat, the state-run Central News agency reported.

"I'm glad that (the United States) is still seriously considering (selling the F-16 C/Ds)," Ma was quoted

Success or failure, for Einstein it's all relative

AFP, Paris

Poor old Einstein has had a rough few days. It all began with an experiment last week that bizarrely found sub-atomic particles called neutrinos appear to move faster than the speed of light. The finding was a shock.

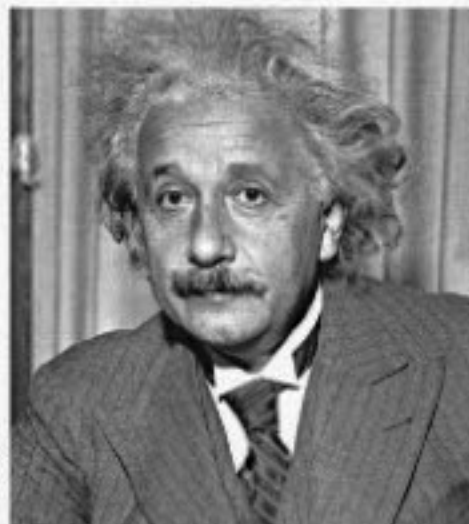
The speed of light was enshrined in 1905 by Einstein as the Universe's speed limit. Today, physicists almost everywhere accept it as such. Could the great man have got it terribly wrong?

But soon after this shadow fell across Einstein's reputation, another experiment came along which has validated -- magnificently and on a cosmological scale -- another of his landmark ideas.

According to Einstein's general theory of relativity, light emitted from stars and galaxies is slightly tugged by gravity from celestial bodies.

Danish astronomers have put the theory to the test in measuring light emitted by galactic "clusters."

University of Copenhagen cosmologist Radek Wojtak and colleagues analysed light



from around 8,000 of these clusters.

They were looking for variations in "redshift," a measurement of the shift in light. As the Universe expands, light from a star becomes slightly redder as its wavelength lengthens, indicating a widening distance between the star and Earth.

"We could measure small differences in the redshift of the galaxies and see that the light from galaxies in the middle of a cluster had to 'crawl' out through the gravitational field, while it was easier for the light from the outlying galaxies," said Wojtak. "In that way, our observations confirm the theory of relativity."

On September 22, physicists reported that neutrinos can travel faster than light, a finding that -- if verified -- would blast a hole in Einstein's theory of special relativity.

In experiments conducted between the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland and a laboratory in Italy, the particles were clocked at 300,006 kilometres per second, about six km/sec faster than the speed of light, the researchers said.

Blast kills 18 Shias in Iraq

REUTERS, Hilla

At least 18 people were killed when a large car bomb exploded among mourners crowding into a Shia funeral in Iraq's Hilla city yesterday, local authorities and witnesses said.

The blast left burned bodies and damaged vehicles near a Shi'ite mosque where relatives had gathered in a tent for the funeral of a local sheikh, witnesses said. Ambulances ferried three or four people at a time from the scene.

At least 18 people were killed and 48 more wounded, a police official at the scene said.

Hilla, 100 km south of Baghdad, is a mainly Shia city on a route used by pilgrims visiting Shia holy sites in the south of the country.

Violence in Iraq has eased since the sectarian strife took the country to the brink of civil war a few years after the US invasion.

Vietnam, China lashed by tropical storm

AFP, Hanoi

Thousands of people in Vietnam sheltered from a powerful tropical storm that lashed its northern coast yesterday after slamming into southeast China and killing 43 people in the Philippines.

Schools shut and flights were cancelled ahead of the storm, which weakened from a typhoon after devastating the Philippines' main island of Luzon earlier in the week.

Beijing, which had issued its first red typhoon alert of the year, downgraded Nesat to a "strong tropical storm" which slowed at sea after forcing 300,000 people to evacuate on the tourist island of Hainan.

Gale force winds and torrential rain continued to lash China's southern coast yesterday.

High winds buffeted Hanoi and surrounding northeastern provinces, where Nesat made landfall in the afternoon at speeds of 62-88 kilometres an hour, the weather bureau said.

More than 70,000 residents in the port city of Haiphong and 7,000 others in coastal Nam Dinh province sheltered in more secure locations, state television reported.

Voice of Vietnam radio said the storm had visibly weakened after reaching land, but warned of a landslide risk in several northern provinces.

In Hong Kong, life was returning to normal after the city was shut down by the typhoon on Thursday. Three people were reported injured by falling scaffolding and tree branches.

In the Philippines, tens of thousands of people battled neck-deep floodwaters after Nesat's deadly path across Luzon.

Morning is world's happy time

AFP, Washington

People around the world are happiest in the morning, according to a US study on Thursday that analyzed hundreds of millions of messages on the microblogging site Twitter.

Cornell University sociologists used language software to detect the presence of positive words in 509m tweets from 2.4m users in 84 countries over a two-year period.

Another positive peak was witnessed around midnight, followed by a "sharp drop in NA (negative affect, including distress, fear, anger, guilt, and disgust) during the overnight hours," said the study in the journal Science.



PHOTO: AFP

A South Korean K-1 tank fires live rounds during a joint military exercise with the US on the Seungjin Fire Training Field in Pocheon, 30 km south of the border with North Korea yesterday. South Korea's military held the joint live-fire drill involving tanks, artillery and jet fighters to commemorate the 63th Korea Armed Forces Day.

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