

Syrians go to polls amid strikes, killings

AFP, Damascus

Syrians were voting yesterday in municipal elections held amid a general strike called by the opposition and as security forces killed another seven people as they pursued a crackdown on dissent.

The elections committee, in a statement received by AFP, said "voting is proceeding in a democratic spirit," adding that voting turnout was "good." It did not elaborate.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said seven people were killed in the flashpoint regions of Homs and Idlib yesterday, while strikes were observed in Daraa, cradle of nine months of anti-regime protests, and near Damascus.

Opposition activists have urged citizens to intensify a civil disobedience campaign launched on Sunday in a bid to bring down the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

Polling stations opened at 0600 GMT, with 42,889 candidates vying for 17,588 seats, and were due to close at 2000 GMT.

Information Minister Adnan Mahmud told AFP the elections were part of a reform

package pledged by the authorities to promote democracy and would be followed by legislative polls in February.

"These elections are taking place on time in line with a reform programme," Mahmud told AFP.

"They are taking place although some are trying, in vain, to stop them through terrorist acts carried out by armed groups who are terrorising the citizens," he said.

Last week local administration minister Omar Ghalawani said a special indelible ink would be used for the first time in the municipal elections "to prevent any fraud."

"I voted because we want to contribute to the reforms (pledged by Assad) and choose the best" candidates, said Zeina, a 35-year-old woman, as she emerged from a polling station in the central Umayyad Square of Damascus.

Ahmad, a pro-regime taxi driver, said the vote was essential "as a response to those calling for a strike."

But a regime opponent, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he did not expect a huge turnout.

AL-QAEDA JAIL BREAK
Twelve alleged inmates escape
Yemen prison

AFP, Aden

Twelve alleged al-Qaeda militants plus two other inmates have tunneled their way to freedom from a prison in the south Yemen city of Aden, a security official said yesterday.

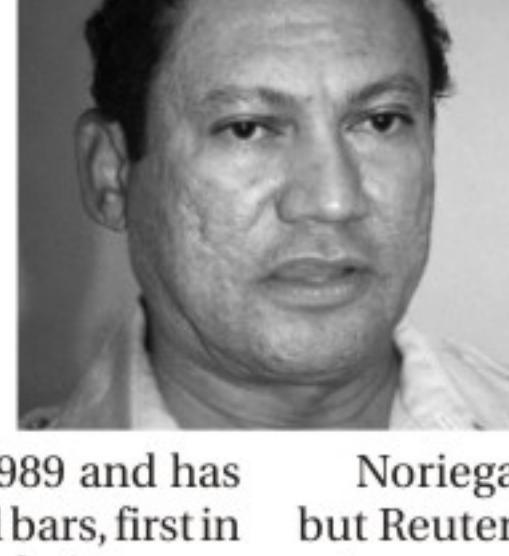
The prisoners fled through a six-metre tunnel they dug at the western end of Aden's central prison, the official said.

None of the escapees was serving a jail sentence. Some were being tried over a 2009 robbery of a bank in Aden, while others were facing charges of being involved in various assassinations of intelligence officers, security sources said.

In June, heavily-armed al-Qaeda fighters raided the central jail in the southern city of Mukalla.

Noriega returns home to prison

REUTERS, Panama



Manuel Noriega, Panama's drug-running military dictator of the 1980s, was extradited back to the country on Sunday and taken straight to prison to serve a 20-year sentence for the murders of opponents during his rule.

Noriega, now 77, was toppled in a US invasion of Panama in 1989 and has spent the last two decades behind bars, first in Florida and then in France after being convicted for drug trafficking and money laundering.

Accompanied by Panama's attorney general and a doctor, he was extradited from France to Panama on a commercial flight and flown in a helicopter to the outskirts of a jungle-surrounded penitentiary beside the Panama Canal.

The former strongman arrived at the prison in a police convoy and was whisked into the building in a wheelchair. About half an hour earlier, another convoy had arrived

with a wheelchair-bound passenger in an apparent decoy manoeuvre.

"We had to be sure of his security," Interior Minister Roxana Mendez told reporters outside the prison. The doctor who accompanied Noriega on the plane said he was suffering from hypertension and could not walk unassisted.

Noriega did not speak to waiting media, but Reuters photographs showed him at the prison reception area, in a wheelchair and wearing a red shirt.

A physically diminished shadow of the man once known for waving a machete while delivering fiery speeches, Noriega's return is unlikely to have a major political impact on a country that has enjoyed an economic boom in recent years.

Widely reviled when he was Panama's de facto leader from 1983 until 1989, his small cadre of remaining supporters has kept a low profile and even bitter opponents dismiss Noriega as part of a distant, shadowy past.

DURBAN CLIMATE DEAL: THE VERDICT

Reaction from world leaders on the climate change deal struck in the early hours of Sunday at the COP17 talks in Durban.

CHRIS HUHNE

UK's energy and climate secretary



CONNIE HEDEGAARD

European commissioner for climate action



CHRISTIANA FIGUERES

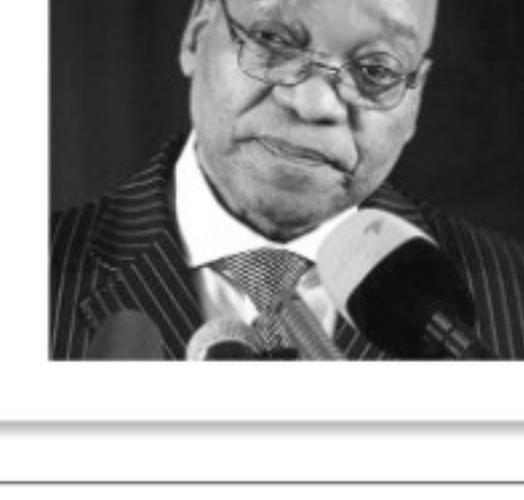
UNFCCC executive secretary



I salute the countries who made this agreement. There are still many details to be hammered out, but we now need to start negotiating the new legal agreement as soon as possible and there are still many details to be hammered out.

JACOB ZUMA

President of South Africa



We are very happy and proud of the South African team that worked so hard with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to make Durban succeed.

SOURCE: theguardian

NEWS IN brief

Villepin to run for French presidency

AFP, Paris

Former French prime minister and conservative politician Dominique de Villepin announced Sunday he would take on his right-wing rival President Nicolas Sarkozy in next year's presidential vote.

"I have decided to be a candidate in the 2012 presidential election," he told TF1 television.

Villepin, a suave diplomat best remembered for leading the charge against the Iraq war at the United Nations in 2003, is a protege of former president Jacques Chirac.

Philippine Supreme Court chief justice impeached

AP, Manila

The Philippine House of Representatives impeached the Supreme Court chief justice yesterday over alleged corruption and favouritism toward arrested ex-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

A majority of the 284 members of the powerful House signed a resolution to impeach Chief Justice Renato Corona, who will now be tried by the Senate in an impeachment tribunal. Corona, who became the only known Supreme Court chief to be impeached in Philippine history, vowed to fight back.

The surprise move is the latest twist in the Philippine political drama pitting Arroyo against her popular, reformist successor Benigno Aquino III, who has blamed her for a decade of corruption scandals that eroded public trust in government and held

Nato announces end of training mission in Iraq

AFP, Brussels

Nato Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen yesterday announced that a mission to train Iraqi security forces will end at the turn of the year.

"The North Atlantic Council has decided to undertake the permanent withdrawal of the Nato Training Mission-Iraq personnel from Iraq by 31 December 2011," Rasmussen said in a statement.

The news provided confirmation after Iraq's top security adviser Falah al-Fayadh told AFP of the decision in an interview aboard a flight transporting Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to Washington.



Israel closes access ramp to Al-Aqsa compound

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel has closed a controversial wooden access ramp to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound over public safety concerns, police said yesterday, in a move that quickly sparked Palestinian anger.

"Based on an order from the city council, they have closed the ramp," police spokeswoman Luba Samri told AFP, referring to the Western Wall Heritage Foundation responsible for the upkeep of the Mughrabi ramp.

Hamas warned that Israel's closure of a wooden access ramp to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound is tantamount to a declaration of war on Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem.

The ramp was closed just three days before a deadline imposed by the Jerusalem city council, which had threatened to enforce a closure order if the Foundation failed to close off the structure because of fears it could collapse.

"The police and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation decided yesterday to close the temporary Mughrabi ramp," municipal spokesman Stephan Miller told AFP.

"This follows a letter from the municipality that expressed the concern and gave the foundation seven days to appeal against the order," he said.

The city says the ramp poses a fire hazard and could collapse onto the women's prayer section by the Western Wall.

But Muslim leaders fear the demolition could have a destabilising effect on the mosque compound and accuses Israel of failing to coordinate the renovation with the Waqf, which oversees Islamic heritage sites.

The closure prompted a swift and angry response from Palestinian officials, including Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

"We condemn and reject this Israeli escalation and we believe that these practices, whether in Jerusalem, the closure of the Mughrabi gate, settler attacks or the decision to build 40 new settlement homes confirm Israel's attacks... on the efforts of the Quartet for Democracy (NLD)."

"In our new seal, the white star represents the revolution. It was used many years ago as revolutionary symbol," he told AFP.

Deadly attack on Nato convoy in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Gunmen attacked Nato oil tankers stranded in southwest Pakistan for the second time in days as Islamabad warned it could enforce its blockade of the US lifeline into Afghanistan for weeks.

The attackers shot dead a driver and destroyed seven tankers in a blaze of fire late Sunday, the second attack in four days in Pakistan's volatile region of Baluchistan, rife with separatist and Taliban insurgency.

There was no claim of responsibility but Pakistan's fragile alliance with the United States crashed to new lows after November 26, when Nato air strikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in what Pakistan called a deliberate attack.



PHOTO: AFP
Outgoing 13th king of Malaysia, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin and Queen Nur Zahirah, wave to their subjects before boarding a flight to their home state of Terengganu, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang yesterday. Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin stepped down from his post after a five-year reign to make way for the next monarch.

Suu Kyi's party unveils logo in politics bid

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's party said yesterday it has chosen the image of a fighting peacock gazing at a white star as its new voting emblem, as it prepares to re-enter the political fray.

The image, which is similar to the party's flag and will be its official insignia at the ballot box, is a symbol of the country's struggle for change, said Win Htein, a senior member of the National League for Democracy (NLD).

"In our new seal, the white star represents the revolution. It was used many years ago as revolutionary symbol," he told AFP.

On the other hand, ruling Congress accused Hazare of insulting Parliament with his campaign at Jantar Mantar and said the congregation at the fast venue was nothing but coming together of detractors of the party and the government.

Major opposition parties join Hazare's fast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Anti-graft crusader Anna Hazare's day-long hunger strike here Sunday had brought almost all major opposition parties, including right-wing BJP and two key Left parties, on the same dais which backed his call for inclusion of the Prime Minister and the entire bureaucracy within the ambit of the proposed Lokpal (anti-corruption ombudsman).

However, the parties also urged Hazare and his associates to show flexibility and leave the nitty-gritty of the anti-graft law to Parliament.

Among those who shared the dais with Hazare were senior BJP leader Arun Jaitley, CPI(M) politburo member Brinda Karat and CPI general secretary AB Bardhan besides leaders of BJP allies Janata Dal (United) and Shiroianami Akali Dal, Telugu Desam Party, Samajwadi Party and Biju Janata Dal.

This was the first time that leaders of so many major opposition parties shared the dais with him on Sunday.

On the other hand, ruling Congress accused Hazare of insulting Parliament with his campaign at Jantar Mantar and said the congregation at the fast venue was nothing but coming together of detractors of the party and the government.

TENDER NOTICE FOR HIRING OF MICROBUSES

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North South University is inviting sealed offer from the bona fide vehicle rental service provider to hire 09 Microbuses for providing pick and drop facilities to the Faculty Members and Officials of NSU as per the terms and conditions stipulated in the tender schedule.

Interested bidders may collect schedule of tender from the Finance and Accounts Department of the NSU from 10:00a.m. to 4:00p.m. Sunday through Thursday on all working days till December 15, 2011 by paying non refundable taka 500.00(Five Hundred) only in cash for each schedule.

The bidders must submit **earnest money @ 2.5%** of quoted rent in the form of pay order issued from any scheduled bank drawn in favor of North South University along with their offer. The sealed offer must be submitted on December 19, 2011 within 12.00p.m. at the office of the undersigned. The offers will be opened at 12:15p.m. on the same day. Representatives of the participating bidders may remain present at the time of opening the bids. NSU authority reserves the right to accept any or all the tenders without showing any reason.

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