

Perry quits White House race

Gingrich takes lead from Romney in South Carolina; Iowa result upturned

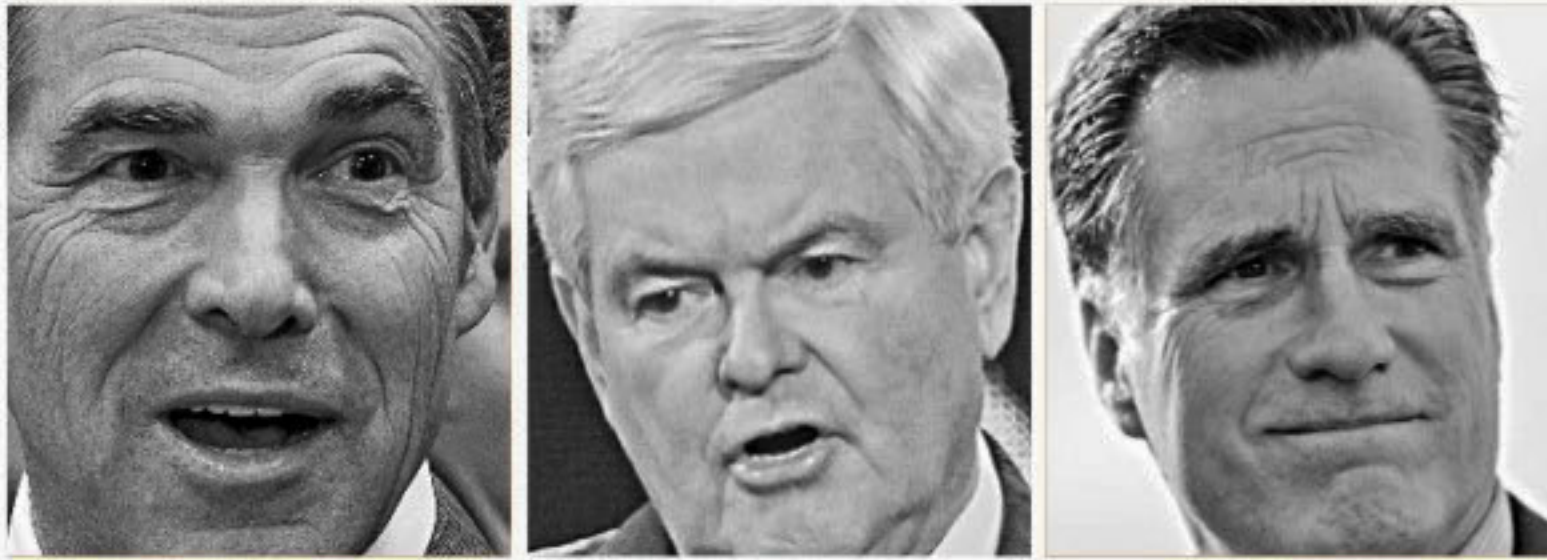
AFP, North Charleston

Texas Governor Rick Perry brought down the curtain Thursday on his gaffe-plagued US presidential campaign and endorsed Newt Gingrich for the Republican nomination.

With Gingrich leading Mitt Romney, the winner of the New Hampshire, ahead of the all-important South Carolina primary, Perry's departure could leave a big imprint on the race to find an eventual nominee to face President Barack Obama in November.

Meanwhile, the Republican Party on Thursday declared Rick Santorum the winner of the Iowa caucuses, upending frontrunner Mitt Romney who was originally said to have won the first US presidential nomination vote two weeks ago.

A certified vote count showed Santorum winning by 34 votes in a sure boost for the social conservative aiming to derail Romney, but the absolute final tally may never be known, as the Iowa Republican Party



Rick Perry

Newt Gingrich

Mitt Romney

reported that results from eight precincts from the January 3 vote were missing.

"I have come to the conclusion that there is no viable path forward for me in this 2012 campaign. Therefore, today, I am suspending my campaign and endorsing Newt Gingrich for president of the United States," Perry said.

"As a Texan, I've never shied away from a fight, particularly when I considered the cause to be righteous, but... I know when it's time to make a strategic retreat," he told reporters in North Charleston.

It was an ignominious end for the tough-talking Texan, who seemed to have answered the prayers of core Republicans when he entered the race in August, vaulting to the front of the pack as the ultimate non-Romney candidate.

He exited just three days after suggesting in a debate that key ally Turkey was run by Islamic terrorists and should be kicked out of Nato, prompting an angry response from Ankara and a ticking-off from the State Department.

Having finished a disappointing fifth on January 3 in Iowa, Perry gave

up on New Hampshire the following week to focus on South Carolina.

But opinion polls here showed him trailing the four remaining contenders by a significant margin and he clearly decided against staying in the race to endure what promised to be another embarrassing result.

The four remaining candidates -- Gingrich, Romney, Christian conservative Rick Santorum and veteran Texas congressman Ron Paul -- will battle it out on Thursday night in the final debate before Saturday's vote.

Meanwhile, a poll released Thursday showed Newt Gingrich has a six-point lead in South Carolina.

Public Policy Polling (PPP) released the survey as Gingrich put in a strong performance in a debate with rivals aiming to secure the nomination.

The survey put Gingrich (35 percent) clear of former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney (29 percent), with Texas congressman Ron Paul and former senator Rick Santorum tied for third on 15 percent.

Thailand recognises Palestine

AFP, United Nations

Thailand said Thursday that it has recognized a Palestinian state, in a move hailed by Palestinian leaders eager to boost their international standing amid a stalemate with Israel.

Thailand has "officially recognized the state of Palestine and officially informed all permanent and observer missions to the United Nations in New York of this development," a press officer for Thailand's mission said.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in a statement thanked Thailand for the move and said that procedures would begin to establish diplomatic relations.

The announcement brought to 131 the number of countries that recognise a Palestinian state along 1967 lines.

US faces hackers fury over site shutdown

BBC ONLINE

Hackers have targeted the US government and copyright organisations following the shutdown of the Megaupload.com, a file-sharing website.

The Department of Justice (DoJ), FBI and the Motion Picture Association of America have been bombarded with internet traffic.

Web links have been distributed which, when clicked, make the user's computer part of the attack.

A statement attributed to Anonymous claimed responsibility.

The DoJ announced on Thursday that it had taken action to force Megaupload.com and related domain name offline, and had charged the firm's co-founders and others with violating piracy laws.

Four of the employees have been arrested in Auckland, New Zealand.

Police also seized cash, valuable cars and a short-barrelled shotgun from the residence of the website's German founder, Kim Dotcom, formerly known as Kim Schmitz.

They appeared in court yesterday. One of their lawyers initially objected to media requests for photographs, but the accused said that they did not mind "because we have nothing to hide".

Their Hong Kong-based site had around 150 million users and 50 million daily hits. It had received celebrity endorsements from the model Kim Kardashian and singers Alicia Keys and Kanye West making it one of the net's most high-profile file sharing sites.



Iran intervention Sarkozy warns of war, chaos

AFP, Paris

French President Nicolas Sarkozy warned yesterday that any foreign military intervention against Iran's nuclear programme would trigger "war and chaos" across the Middle East and beyond.

"Time is limited. France will do everything to avoid military intervention, but there is only one way to avoid it: a much tougher, more decisive, sanctions against the regime," Sarkozy told an audience of diplomats in Paris.

He called on all countries to freeze Iranian central bank assets and halt imports of Iranian oil.

"Those who do not want to reinforce sanctions against a regime which is leading its country into disaster by seeking a nuclear weapon will bear responsibility for the risk of a military breakdown," he warned.

"And I say to our Chinese and Russian friends: Help us guarantee peace in the world ... we clearly need you," he added.

"A military intervention would not solve the problem but would unleash war and chaos in the Middle East and perhaps, alas, the world," he warned.

France has been one of the loudest Western voices pushing for economic sanctions to force Iran to abandon its nuclear programme.

But it remains opposed to calls from some hawks in the US and Israel for air strikes against Iranian facilities.

Iran warns region over crisis

US military chief in Israel for talks amid tensions

AFP, Jerusalem

Iran's foreign minister warned Arab neighbours yesterday not to put themselves in a "dangerous position" by aligning themselves too closely with the United States in the escalating dispute over Tehran's nuclear activity.

Meanwhile, US military chief General Martin Dempsey held talks with top Israeli defence officials yesterday on a 24-hour visit expected to focus on Iran issue.

"We want peace and tranquility in the region. But some of the countries in our region, they want to direct other countries 12,000 miles away from this region," Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said in English during a visit to Turkey.

The remark was an apparent reference to the alliance of Iran's Arab neighbours with Washington, which maintains a big naval force in the Gulf and says it will keep the waterway open.

"I am calling to all countries in the region, please don't let yourselves be dragged into a dangerous position," Salehi told Turkey's NTV broadcaster.

Saudi Arabia, the world's No. 1 oil exporter, riled Iran earlier this week when it said it could swiftly raise oil output for key customers if needed, a scenario that could transpire if Iranian exports were embargoed.

Salehi denied Tehran had ever tried to close the Strait of Hormuz, the vital shipping route at the centre of increasing international tension.

In line with his comments, US-based experts also said that Iran is unlikely to close the Strait of Hormuz because doing so would damage the regime's own interests.

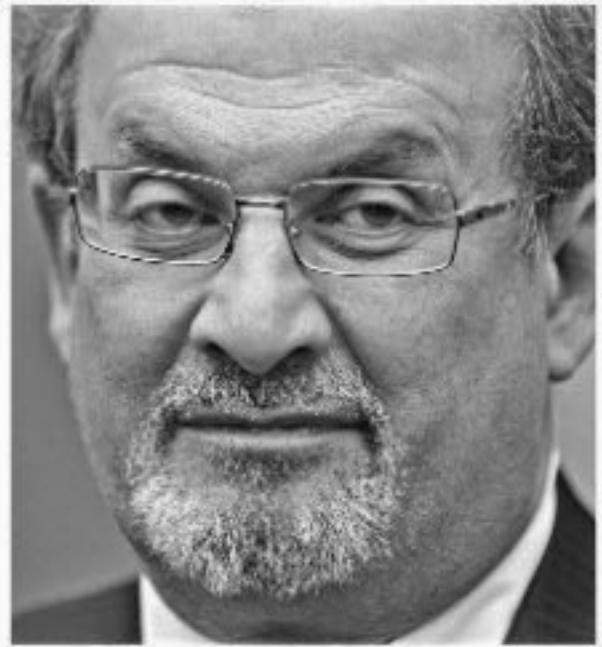
Iran threatened in December to close the narrow and strategic waterway in the event of a military strike or the severe tightening of international sanctions.

Dempsey arrived late on Thursday for his first to Israel since taking up the post of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October.

He had dinner with armed forces chief of staff Lieutenant General Benny Gantz after arriving and held early talks with him before meeting Defence Minister Ehud Barak in Tel Aviv.

After the talks with Barak, the US defence chief was to travel to Jerusalem to meet President Shimon Peres and visit the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum ahead of talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

There was no immediate word on the agenda for that meeting but Israeli press reports said the two would discuss Netanyahu's complaints that Western sanctions against Tehran do not go far enough and talk in Israel of the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear facilities.



Rushdie pulls out of Indian festival

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Author Salman Rushdie has called off his visit to India to attend a literary festival, which began yesterday, due to security concerns triggered by protests from influential Muslim clerics.

The organisers of Jaipur Literature Festival read out a statement by Rushdie, which said, "I have been informed by intelligence sources in Indian states that paid assassins from Mumbai underworld might be on their way. While I have doubts about these but it would be irresponsible for me to come and endanger the life of fellow authors and others," the author said.

Rushdie won the Booker Prize for his novel "Midnight's Children" in 1981. But his novel the Satanic Verses is banned in India. The publication sparked a wave of protests around the world after Iranian leader Khomeini said that the novel's portrayal of the prophet Mohammad insulted Islam.

Last week, the influential seminary Darul Uloom of Deoband and various other Muslim groups had opposed Rushdie's visit to the country.

Where men fight for their rights

BBC ONLINE

In the small hilly Indian state of Meghalaya, a matrilineal system operates with property names and wealth passing from mother to daughter rather than father to son - but some men are campaigning for change.

It appears that some age-old traditions have been ruffling a few feathers of late, causing the views of a small band of male suffragettes to gain in popularity, reviving some rather outspoken opinions originally started by a small group of intellectuals in the 1960s.

Keith Pariat, President of Syngkhong-Rympei-Thymmai, Meghalaya's very own men's rights movement claims they "do not want to bring women down". "We just want to bring the men up to where the women are."

Pariat, who ignored age-old customs by taking his father's surname is adamant that matriliney is breeding generations of Khasi men who fall short of their inherent potential, citing alcoholism and drug abuse among its negative side-effects.

"If you want to know how much the Khasis favour women just take a trip to the labour ward at the hospital," he says.

"If it's a girl, there will be great cheers from the family outside. If it's a



Meghalaya's Khasis have a women dominated social system

boy, you will hear them mutter politely that, 'Whatever God gives us is quite all right.'"

Pariat cites numerous examples of how his fellow brethren are being demoralised. These include a fascinating theory involving the way that gender in the local Khasi language reflects these basic cultural assumptions.

"A tree is masculine, but when it is turned into wood, it becomes feminine," he begins.

"The same is true of many of the nouns in our language. When something becomes useful, its gender becomes female. Matriliney breeds a culture of men who feel useless."

Patricia Mukkam, the well-respected editor of Shillong's daily

newspaper says that her heritage is only one of the reasons why she has risen to the level she has and points out that the tradition of excluding women from the political decision making process is still very strong in their culture.

As a mother of children by three different Khasi fathers however, she admits that their societal anomaly has afforded her ample opportunities to be both a mother and a successful career woman.

Making reference to the routine problems facing women just over the border in West Bengal, Mukkam is resolute.

"Our culture offers a very safe sanctuary for women," she declares.

Murdoch group in mass hacking payouts

AFP, London



Rupert Murdoch's media empire on Thursday agreed huge payouts to 37 phone-hacking victims including British actor Jude Law, footballer Ashley Cole and former deputy prime minister John Prescott.

The High Court in London heard details of new settlements amounting to more than £645,000, including £130,000 for "Alfie" star Law, for hacking by the News of the World tabloid.

Lawyers for the victims said the deals were an admission of the scale of the practice, and accused senior newspaper staff of a cover-up -- an allegation the company denied.

Among the other payouts, Prescott, who was deputy prime minister under Tony Blair, received £40,000; Law's ex-wife Sadie Frost received £50,000; Law's personal assistant Ben Jackson received £40,000; and rugby player Gavin Henson, the ex-husband of singer Charlotte Church, also got £40,000.

Guy Pelly, a close friend of Prince William and Prince Harry, won £40,000, while Chelsea and England star Cole and Australian singer Dannii Minogue won undisclosed settlements.

Among those it settled with last year were British actress Sienna Miller, Law's ex-girlfriend, who received £100,000, and James Hewitt, the former lover of Diana, Princess of Wales.

Israel detains Palestine's speaker

AFP, Ramallah

The Israeli army on Thursday arrested the Palestinian parliamentary speaker, Hamas member Aziz Dweik, in the West Bank, a senior colleague told AFP.

Dweik was detained by soldiers at a checkpoint in Jabaa, between Ramallah and Jerusalem, as he was travelling to Hebron in the southern West Bank, the leader of the cabinet, Bahaa Yusef, told AFP.

Last May, Dweik was held at an Israeli military checkpoint in the West Bank along with three other Hamas parliamentarians. One of them, Nizar Ramadan, was detained while the others were allowed to proceed.

MIDEAST TALKS

Medvedev meets with Abbas

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev held talks yesterday with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas focused on efforts to kickstart stalled peace negotiations with Israel.

Abbas told Medvedev in opening remarks at the Russian president's suburban Moscow residence that the Palestinians "will always draw upon your advice and the favourable approaches proposed by the Russian Federation."

He added that the local leadership of Jericho had recently named one of the West Bank city's main streets after Medvedev in honour of his visit there in January 2011.

"I see this as a symbol of Russian-Palestinian friendship, which stretches back not decades but centuries," Medvedev said.

"This is proof of the fact that our relations remain on an excellent level."

Abbas arrived in Moscow on Thursday on the final leg of a European tour that also saw him visit London and Berlin.

Medvedev reaffirmed Russia's commitment to an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital during his January trip to the West Bank -- a position first established by the Soviet Union in 1988.

NEWS IN brief

Musharraf likely to delay return

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's former dictator Pervez Musharraf came under mounting pressure Thursday to delay his return from exile as he admitted he would be in danger if he goes back to the crisis-ridden country.

Friends and supporters

advised Musharraf to put off a homecoming scheduled for January 27-30 after Islamabad said he would be arrested if he returned from more than three years of self-imposed exile in London and Dubai.

Aides fear Pakistan's civilian government, under massive pressure from the military and the judiciary, may exploit Musharraf's return to divert attention from a series of crises likely to force early elections within months.

Jackson doctor evades money claim

AFP, Los Angeles

Michael Jackson's family has dropped a claim for compensation from the King of Pop's former doctor Conrad Murray over the star's sudden death in 2009, a spokeswoman said Thursday.

Prosecutors were due in court next week to press a claim against Murray -- who was jailed for four years in November after being convicted of involuntary manslaughter -- to pay over \$100 million in damages to the family.

But that court date has been cancelled after the Jackson family decision.

Amnesty for Saleh's aides scrapped

AFP, Sanaa

The Yemeni government has tweaked a contested bill that would have granted legal immunity to aides of President Ali Abdullah Saleh implicated in criminal affairs, a government source said yesterday.

The new version "grants complete immunity to president Saleh" but his assistants will only benefit from "political immunity" and will be eventually held accountable for criminal or terrorist acts, the same source told AFP.



6th Death Anniversary



We pray for **Marhuma Khorshedi Alam** on her 6th death anniversary today on January 21, 2012. She was the Founder General Member of North South University (NSU) Foundation and also the wife of Mr. Iftekhharul Alam, Founder Life Member of NSU Foundation, which has established Holy Cross and University Women's Colleges, President of University Women's Foundation and Founder President of Gulshan Ladies Community Club. Beside an eminent educationist, she was also an active social worker and great philanthropist.

May Almighty Allah bless her departed soul and give the members of her family the strength to bear the loss.



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