

Greece crisis talks turn ugly

No clear progress; new elections likely

AGENCIES

Greek politicians traded insults and accusations yesterday following an effort by President Karolos Papoulias to broker a coalition government, increasing the possibility of new elections in the debt-stricken country. Papoulias called together the leaders of the three biggest parties yesterday, a week after indecisive elections and three failed attempts to form a government.

After the meeting, the leader of the radical leftist Syriza coalition said other parties wanted Syriza to be their "partners in crime," adding: "We can't do that."

Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras suggested the two other largest parties, New Democracy and PASOK, were going to form a coalition with a smaller group, the Democratic Left.

But the Democratic Left issued a statement calling Tsipras's remarks "a disgrace," and accusing him of lying and slandering the smaller party.

Europe is keeping a nervous eye on Greece, fearing that the political chaos there could lead to defaults on debt that could threaten the future of the



Antonis Samaras

Karolos Papoulias

Alexis Tsipras

euro. Greek failure -- or refusal -- to make debt payments could hurt banks across Europe.

If no government can be cobbled together by May 17, new elections must be called. They would take place next month.

Polls suggest that Syriza, which came second in voting last week, would come first if another round of elections is held. The party has opposed any austerity measures.

Before meeting Papoulias, conservative chief Antonis Samaras said Greece should aim for a two-year interim coalition government that would keep the country in the eurozone amid growing threats from Athens' EU peers and creditors.

The president will hold talks with the leaders of smaller parties later in

the day to find a solution.

The country's lenders have said that if Greece does not comply with the bailout terms then payments will stop.

Deep uncertainty surrounds the political situation in Greece after large numbers of voters in last Sunday's election backed parties opposed to the country's bailout deal.

Severe austerity measures are required under the terms of the bailout, agreed to by the outgoing coalition government of PASOK and New Democracy.

A default by Greece also could drag down other troubled governments such as Spain and Portugal. The eurozone economy is fragile, and any financial shock could plunge the region into a deep recession, a development that

Fresh clashes kill 23 in Syria

AFP, Beirut

Security force raids on protest hubs and clashes with armed rebels yesterday left 23 people dead, 16 of them civilians, monitors and activists said, as a tenuous UN-backed ceasefire entered its second month.

And in neighbouring Lebanon, sectarian clashes in the northern city of Tripoli between factions supporting and opposed to the Syrian revolt left one person dead yesterday, a security source said.

The fresh wave of blood-letting came as the UN mission in Syria said it now has 189 military observers on the ground, nearly two-thirds of its planned strength of 300.

The observers are tasked with shoring up a ceasefire brokered by UN-Arab League peace envoy Kofi Annan that was supposed to take effect on April 12 but which has been broken daily by both sides to the conflict.

Dalai Lama fears China poison plot to kill him

GUARDIAN ONLINE

The Dalai Lama has revealed he fears Chinese agents have trained bogus female devotees to kill him with poison while seeking blessings.

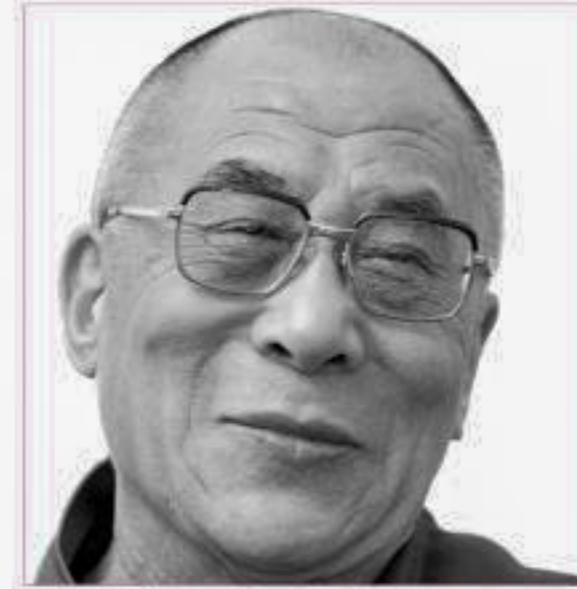
The Tibetan Buddhist leader told the Sunday Telegraph that he had been passed reports from inside Tibet warning of the plot, using Tibetan women.

The 76-year-old Nobel laureate said he now lives in a high security cordon in his temple palace grounds in Dharamsala, in the Himalayan foothills, on the advice of Indian security officials.

His aides had not been able to confirm the reports, but had recommended his need for high security, the Dalai Lama said.

"We received some sort of information from Tibet," he said. "Some Chinese agents training some Tibetans, especially women, you see, using poison the hair poisoned, and the scarf poisoned they were supposed to seek blessing from me, and my hand touch."

Despite being one of the world's most



Dalai Lama

widely revered spiritual leaders he has enemies in China and among some Buddhist sects.

The relationship between China and the Tibetan government-in-exile in India remains poor and mutual suspicion is high following more than 30 self-immolations in the last year by Tibetans in protest against

Chinese moves to marginalise their language and culture.

The Dalai Lama said suspicion of Chinese interference in the search for his reincarnation after his death meant he could be the last Dalai Lama. A number of young Buddhist monks, including the Karmapa Lama, could emerge as the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, he told the paper.

He added that he believed China would change its hardline stance within his lifetime and adopt democratic reforms to safeguard Tibet's economic growth.

He said the Chinese should use Buddhist logic to overcome their anger, but admitted

Yemen, US assault on Qaeda kills dozens

AFP, Aden

Yemen forces yesterday pressed with an assault to recapture the al-Qaeda-held southern city of Zinjibar, advancing on two fronts amid air cover in fighting that killed six soldiers in two days, military officials said.

The offensive takes place as US drones have intensified raids against al-Qaeda militants in other parts of the country, killing 12 in two attacks on Saturday.

Six fighters of the al-Qaeda-linked Partisans of Sharia (Islamic law), were also killed in the attack on Zinjibar, said a tribal source in Jaar, to where the gunmen evacuate their casualties.

Meanwhile, US drones killed 12 militants in two separate attacks on Saturday east of the capital Sanaa.



Police grab a photojournalist as he and others are evicted during the early hours from Puerta del Sol square in Madrid yesterday. Spanish police cleared out Madrid's central square of hundreds of 'indignant' activists early yesterday who had spent the night as part of demonstrations to mark one year since the start of a global protest movement.

PHOTO: AFP

Gulf leaders mulling EU-style union

CNN ONLINE

The leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council will hold a meeting today in Saudi Arabia to discuss transforming their six nations into a union, similar to the European Union.

The idea of the GCC nations to integrate into one entity -- and replace what exists now as simply a cooperative -- was first floated by Saudi Arabia in December. Monday's meeting in Riyadh will lay out the timetable for it.

The GCC is comprised of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

"The threats of all kinds require the hard works of the GCC countries to shift from a current formula of cooperation to a union formula acceptable to the six countries," Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said last month.

He didn't specify what threats he was referring to. But some analysts have said the GCC move could be an effort to counter the growing influence of Shia Iran.

The GCC was formed in 1981, soon after Iran instituted a Shia theocracy and went to war with primarily Sunni Iraq.

Iran and Iraq have enjoyed closer ties in recent years, especially as Iraq's Shia Muslim majority has solidified its power in the absence of former leader Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim.

After US forces pulled out of Iraq last year, Tehran has expanded military and security cooperation with Baghdad.

Iran is engaged in a long border dispute with the UAE over three Persian Gulf islands. Bahrain blames Iran for fueling the anti-government unrest that continues to roil the

Storms, heavy rain kill 40 in China

AFP, Beijing

Forty people were killed when a brief but violent hailstorm and torrential rain swept through a mountainous region of northwest China, the local government said yesterday.

Eighteen others remained missing in Min county, a disaster-prone area of Gansu province, while 87 had been sent to hospital, the county government said in a statement on its website.

Officials said 29,300 people had been evacuated after rain and hail battered the county for just 60 minutes late Thursday afternoon.

It had "wreaked havoc" on all of the county's 18 townships and had affected more than two-thirds of its 450,000 residents, the state-controlled Xinhua news

Israel 'nothing more than a mosquito'

Says Ahmadinejad

CNN ONLINE

Ahead of upcoming nuclear talks, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad downplayed the threat Israel poses to Iran, comparing it to an annoying bug.

"Israel is nothing more than a mosquito which cannot see the broad horizon of the Iranian nation," he said Saturday in northeastern Iran's Khorassan province, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

Ahmadinejad said "regional states" were being duped into buying billions in arms from "arrogant and imperial powers," driven in part by all the talk surrounding a potential war involving Iran and Israel, the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

Such military purchases, he said, are unnecessary because there is no war on the horizon between those two nations.

The Iranian president alluded to "rulers" who sold "their petrol" for \$60 billion worth in arms, though he did not mention by name either the purchasing or selling country.

Saudi Arabia is in the midst of a 20-year, \$60 billion arms deal with the United States, including nearly \$30 billion for F-15 fighter jets announced late last year.



NEWS IN brief

Romney rejects same-sex marriage

AFP, Lynchburg

Republican White House challenger Mitt Romney, wooing social conservatives, has adamantly rejected same-sex marriage and trumpeted his belief in Christian values and the family.

Three days after Barack Obama became the first US president to back gay and lesbian marriage, Romney told university graduates that the "pre-eminence of the family" remains at the heart of the principles that underpin the nation.

Romney, who did not directly refer to gays or lesbians, had previously voiced opposition to gay marriage, although he has also stated same-sex couples should have some rights such as child adop-



Mladic trial begins on Wednesday

AFP, The Hague

Ratko Mladic, wartime chief of the Bosnian Serb army, goes on trial Wednesday accused of carrying out a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing and the massacre of Muslims at Srebrenica, Europe's worst atrocity since Nazi rule.

Mladic, now 70, has been indicted on 11 counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the Balkan country's 1992-95 war which left 100,000 dead and 2.2 million homeless.

Dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia", Mladic is accused over the tragedy at Srebrenica where almost 8,000 Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered in July 1995.

Prosecutors also hold him responsible for the 44-month siege of Sarajevo where his forces waged a "terror campaign" of sniping and shelling that left 10,000 civilians dead.

Police find 49 bodies in Mexico

AFP, Monterrey

Mexican police yesterday said they had found 49 mutilated bodies dumped in black plastic bags near the northern city of Monterrey, in an apparent flare up of brutal drug violence.

A spokesperson for the state of Nuevo Leon told AFP that 49 bodies had been counted after their discovery on an isolated stretch of a highway 180 kilometers from the US border.

The find comes just days after police discovered the dismembered, decapitated bodies of 18 people in two abandoned vehicles in western Mexico, in what appeared to be a revenge killing involving powerful drug gangs.

BORDER SECURITY US, Pakistan, Afghan military hold talks

AFP, Islamabad

The commander of Nato-led forces in Afghanistan met Pakistan and Afghanistan army chiefs yesterday for talks on border security, almost six months after US airstrikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

The November 26 airstrikes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border provoked a major crisis in Pakistani-US relations, which were still reeling from the raid that killed Osama bin Laden the previous May.

Pakistan retaliated by shutting its Afghan border crossings to Nato supplies -- and the frontier remains closed.

But in a sign of easing tensions, US General John Allen, Pakistani army chief General Ashfaq Kayani and Afghan army chief General Sher Muhammad Karimi led their respective delegations at talks in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad.

"Talks focused on border control measures, and mechanisms put in place to avoid untoward incidents on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border," a Pakistan military statement said.

The talks are the most significant Pakistan has hosted with the international military alliance and the Afghan military for a year.

Nato steps closer to getting out of Afghan war

Top Taliban negotiator shot dead in Kabul

AFP, Kabul

Nato took a step closer to getting out of the Afghan war yesterday as the Kabul government announced local forces would take over control of security in a large new slice of the country.

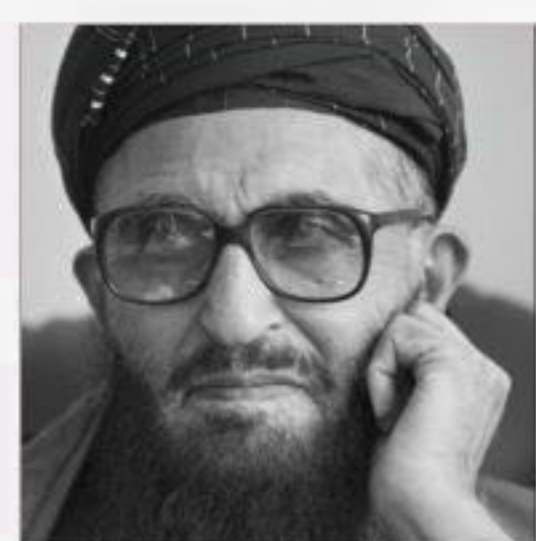
In the third phase of a five-tranche military transition process, 122 more districts throughout Afghanistan will come under local command, putting Afghan forces in control of security for 75 percent of the population.

Nato has a total of 130,000 soldiers helping the government of President Hamid Karzai fight an insurgency by hardline Taliban Islamists, and they are due to withdraw by the end of 2014 when the transition process is complete. But the conflict is increasingly

unpopular in the US and other contributing nations, with opinion polls showing a desire to get out as soon as possible.

Nato welcomed the move and also voiced support for the latest stage of the five-phase transition process.

Meanwhile, dealing a major blow to Kabul's efforts to broker peace with Taliban insurgents, a senior Afghan peace negotiator and close ally of President Hamid Karzai was shot dead yesterday.



Arsalah Rahmani

Arsalah Rahmani was shot dead shortly after leaving home as he was driving to work in Kabul, Rahmani's grandson Mohammad Waris told AFP.

Taliban denied involvement in the killing. The rebels are known to deny high-profile assassinations and attacks with many civilian casualties.

Arsalah Rahmani, who was the Taliban's higher education minister during their rule from 1996 to 2001, joined Karzai's government after the regime was toppled by a US-led invasion in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

His death is the second major blow to Karzai's US-backed peace efforts in less than a year. The former head of the council, ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani, was killed last September by a

China, Japan, South Korea warn N Korea over nuke test

Agree to start negotiations on free trade zone

AFP, Beijing

China, Japan and South Korea yesterday warned North Korea they will not tolerate further nuclear tests, the South Korean president said, amid fears that Pyongyang is preparing a third atomic blast.

Lee Myung-Bak made the remark after talks in Beijing with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda that also saw the trio decide to start free-trade area negotiations before the end of this year.

"Our three countries agreed that we will not accept further nuclear tests or further provocations from North Korea," Lee told reporters after meeting with his two counterparts for 90 minutes.

Fears of a third North Korean nuclear test have grown after a failed rocket launch by Pyongyang last month that the United States and its allies said was a disguised ballistic missile test banned under UN resolutions.

Satellite photos have recently shown work in progress at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site.

Wen warned earlier yesterday that the region faced many "unstable" factors that made the situation hard to predict.

China, long the North's key ally, has been an advocate of seeking to put a stop to the isolated regime's nuclear ambitions via multilateral talks.

The three leaders also agreed to start talks this year on a free-trade area, saying it would boost the economies of the entire region.

The issue has been on the trilateral agenda for the past decade, beginning with an agreement among the three in late 2002 to launch a feasibility study on a free-trade area.

China, Japan and South Korea combined would have the world's largest economy -- ahead of the European Union -- when measured by purchasing power parity, which takes into account differences in living costs across nations.

MOTHER'S DAY

Hillary most powerful mom

PTI, New York

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been named No 1 in the World's 20 Most Powerful Moms list which also ranked UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi at No 6.

The list released by Forbes ahead of World Mother's Day today placed 64-year-old Hillary, who has one of the world's biggest jobs in hand, at No 1.

The list chosen from diverse spheres of government, business, entertainment and philanthropy ranked 64-year-old Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff at second position, who has a daughter.

56-year-old Nooyi, PepsiCo chairman and a mother of two has been placed at 3rd position. She says if her kids call in the middle of a meeting, she takes the call.

65-year-old Sonia, mother of Priyanka



Hillary Clinton with her daughter Chelsea

and Rahul, was ranked ahead of US First Lady Michelle Obama (ranked 7) and Myanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi (ranked 20).

According to the magazine, "Power moms must develop unique strategies to succeed in both boardrooms and playgrounds."

ForbesWoman analysed the annual list of the world's 100 most powerful women - based on money controlled, decision-making power and multiple measures of influence - and teased out the moms who are at the top of their game.

The list also figured Melinda Gates, co-founder of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of International Monetary Fund and Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook.