

Greece inches to coalition govt

AFP, Athens

Greece inched towards a three-party coalition yesterday under fierce pressure from financial markets and world powers after a pro-euro party won elections on a surge of anger over austerity.

The New Democracy conservatives were negotiating a possible coalition with Pasok socialists and the Democratic Left party after clinching a narrow victory against the radical leftist Syriza which wants Greece's EU-IMF bailout deal torn up.

The three parties "are drawing closer" to a deal, New Democracy spokesman Yiannis Michelakis told Real radio.

Pasok leader Evangelos Venizelos has voiced hope that a coalition will be announced later yesterday and Democratic Left leader Fotis Kouvelis said that it was possible "within the next few hours, if we reach agreement".

New Democracy chief Antonis Samaras, a 61-year-old former foreign minister educated at Amherst and Harvard in the United States, won 129 of the 300 parliamentary seats on Sunday, Syriza won 71, Pasok 33 and Democratic Left 17.

The results of Greece's most important elections since the end of military rule in 1974 eased fears of an immediate euro exit but any new government faces a potential stand-off with its EU-IMF creditors over the terms of the bailout.

Europe and the United States have urged Greece to move quickly to form a new government and enact the reforms it has agreed to in return for the loans.

In a country in its fifth year of recession where unemployment is at a record 22.6 percent Samaras, if elected, faces a thankless balancing act between growing pressure from the streets and a hard line from the global financial community.



PHOTO: AFP

Heads of the G20 leading economies pose for a family photo yesterday at the convention center in Los Cabos, Mexico. The world leaders vowed to kickstart growth and pull the eurozone back from the brink of disaster yesterday on the final day of the summit.

Pakistan 13th among failed states

PTI, Washington

Pakistan, a country which is run by a military obsessed with India and by a civilian elite that steals all it can and pay almost no taxes, has been ranked 13th in the latest ranking of failed states.

The unique ranking compiled by the prestigious Foreign Policy magazine is topped by African countries Somalia, Congo, Sudan, Chad and Zimbabwe.

Afghanistan is ranked at number 6, followed by Haiti, Yemen, Iraq and Central African Republic.

Explaining the reasons for Pakistan being in the list of a failed state, Kaplan said the root cause of these manifold failures, in many minds, is the very artificiality of Pakistan itself: a cartographic puzzle piece sandwiched between India and Central Asia that splits apart what the British Empire ruled as one indivisible subcontinent.

Vietnam law bans smoking in public

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam has passed a law banning smoking in public places and all tobacco advertising, an official said yesterday.

The law, passed by 440 out of 468 national assembly deputies on Monday, also makes it illegal to sell tobacco products to anyone under 18 years old, said the parliamentary official, who did not want to be named.

It will take effect from next May, state media said.

Smoking in public places was banned once already in 2010 by a government decree. But that order was widely ignored.

According to SEATCA, there are currently 15.3 million smokers in Vietnam.

Tobacco kills 40,000 people per year in Vietnam and that figure is expected to rise to 70,000 per year by 2030.

EGYPT UNREST Islamists warn generals

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Cairo yesterday braced for protests against the ruling military's bid to grab new powers, with the Muslim Brotherhood set to take part after claiming a win for its candidate in presidential elections.

The demonstration comes against a backdrop of uncertainty over the winner of the presidential vote, with the Brotherhood insisting their candidate Mohammed Morsi was the victor, over objections from his rival Ahmed Shafiq.

The Muslim Brotherhood has vowed to face down Egypt's ruling generals in a "life or death" struggle over the country's political future.

As final ballot results trickled in and unofficial tallies suggested that Mohamed Morsi had secured approximately 52% of the popular vote, the Brotherhood deployed its harshest language yet against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf), promising to bring millions of Egyptians back on to the streets if attempts to rebuild the old regime continued.

"Over the past 18 months we were very keen to avoid any clashes or confrontations with other components of Egypt's political system," said Fatema AbouZeid, a senior policy

researcher for the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice party and a media co-ordinator for the Morsi campaign.

"But now it's very clear that Scaf and other institutions of the state are determined to stand in the way of what we're trying to achieve, and we won't accept this any more. Egypt will not go back to the old regime through any means, legal or illegal.

"The revolution is facing a life or death moment and the Egyptian people have put their faith in Morsi to represent them at this time."

On Monday the parliamentary speaker, Saad el-Katatni, a Brotherhood veteran, said he did not recognise last week's decision by Mubarak-era judges in Egypt's supreme constitutional court to dissolve the legislature, a move widely viewed as highly politicised and designed to bolster the generals.

An 11th-hour constitutional declaration issued unilaterally by Scaf awarded the generals sweeping powers including the right to put forward legislation and an effective veto over clauses in the new constitution, and formalised the army's ability to detain civilians and sweep out of barracks at moments of "internal unrest".

Blow for BJP as ally backs Pranab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Giving a setback to opposition BJP's plans to contest the Presidential election, its key NDA ally Shiv Sena yesterday pitched support for ruling UPA nominee Pranab Mukherjee for the top post.

Hailing Mukherjee as the "right candidate", Sena chief Bal Thackeray said a message that "we are all united" should go by the unanimous election of the Finance Minister to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"Let bygones be bygones. Let us unanimously support Pranab Mukherjee and show the world that "hum sab ek hai" (we are all united)," Thackeray said in a statement published in the party mouthpiece 'Saamana'.

Shiv Sena's support to Mukherjee came after the Indian Finance Minister spoke to Thackeray and his son Uddhav on phone on Monday.

The decision by Sena, BJP's longest ideological ally, will help boost the prospects of the UPA nominee significantly given the fact that the party has 15 MPs, including 11 in the Lok Sabha, and has 46 MLAs in Maharashtra state legislature.

The presidential poll is scheduled for July 19.

Obama, Putin call for halt to Syria onslaught

UN to weigh future of mission

AFP, Damascus

US President Barack Obama and Russia's President Vladimir Putin called Monday for an "immediate" end to the Syrian conflict as 94 deaths were reported in a worsening artillery pounding of cities.

The call by the rival powers was made as Russia reportedly prepared to send two warships with marines to its naval base in Syria where UN monitors have suspended their patrols because of escalating violence.

"In order to stop the bloodshed in Syria, we call for an immediate cessation of all violence," the two leaders said in a statement after meeting on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico.

Obama said he and Putin agreed on the need for a "political process" to halt the conflict and had pledged to work with UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan on the crisis.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council was to examine the future of its observer mission in violence-racked Syria yesterday as civilians remained pinned down by regime shelling of rebel strongholds.

Syrian government forces, meanwhile, pounded rebel strongholds in the central city of Homs and Damascus. At least 14 people were killed yesterday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin met yesterday on the sidelines of G20 summit. PHOTO: AFP

Ruling party split deepens Nepal crisis

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's ruling Maoist party split into rival factions yesterday, pushing the country deeper into political turmoil after the parliament was dissolved in chaos last month.

The Maoists' break-up poses further challenges for impoverished Nepal, which has struggled to implement a peace process since the end of its bloody ten-year civil war in 2006.

National elections are due in November after an interim parliament known as the Constituent Assembly, which was set up following the war, collapsed having repeatedly failed to agree on a new constitution.

"The split will have adverse effects on the constitution-making process and the peace plan," Sudheer Sharma, editor-in-chief of the best-selling Kantipur newspaper, told AFP.

Sharma said a breakaway faction of hardline Maoists could spark fears of renewed violence in the troubled Himalayan nation.

An estimated 16,000 people died in the 1996-2006 "people's war" fought by the Maoists against the state before the rebels turned to politics and swept to power in elections two years later.

AFTER 24 YEARS Suu Kyi returns to UK

AFP, London

Aung San Suu Kyi began a bitter-sweet return to Britain yesterday, during which she will address both houses of parliament and have an emotional family reunion after nearly 25 years in Myanmar.

The democracy icon will also meet members of Britain's royal family and Prime Minister David Cameron during her week-long visit, the longest part of her first trip to Europe since 1988.

She visited the London School of Economics and met staff at the BBC Burmese Service yesterday, on her 67th birthday.

In a debate at LSE, she spoke of the difficulties of reform in her homeland, where she spent much of the last 24 years under house arrest, and stressed the importance of the rule of law.

Suu Kyi said she had been "surprised" and "touched" by the reception she had received on a trip which has also taken in Switzerland, Norway and Ireland.

As a special birthday gift, she was given a photograph of her father, independence leader General Aung San, taken on his visit to London



in 1947, a few months before he was assassinated.

Later, she was to attend a family reunion in Oxford, where she studied at the prestigious university and lived for almost 20 years with the late Michael Aris, her English husband and father of her two sons.

The Chancellor of Oxford University, former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten, will formally welcome her.

The university -- where she studied politics, philosophy and economics -- will award her an honorary doctorate in civil law today and she will also deliver a speech in the 17th century Sheldonian Theatre.

Suu Kyi is to address both houses of parliament in London tomorrow, an honour only granted to high-profile foreign dignitaries such as US President Barack Obama.

Her younger son Kim is expected to attend the reunion, but it was not clear if her older son Alexander who reportedly lives in the United States, would be there.

Suu Kyi's tour, which will wrap up in France.

Israel air raid kills 6 Gazans

AFP, Gaza City

An Israeli air strike killed six Palestinian teenagers near the central Gaza Strip town of Deir el-Balah early yesterday, a Palestinian medical official said.

The Israeli military confirmed hitting what it called a "terrorist squad identified handling an explosive device" near the security fence in the central Gaza Strip.

Ten rockets were later fired into southern Israel's Hof Ashkelon district, with the military wing of Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip and generally maintains a tacit truce with Israel, making a rare claim of responsibility.

On Monday, Israeli aircraft killed four Palestinians in two sorties over the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanun and wounded at least three, Palestinian medics said.

Iraq PM warns 'wars' with Kurds

AFP, Baghdad

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki believes a contract between US oil giant ExxonMobil and Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region is dangerous and could lead to "wars," his spokesman told AFP yesterday.

ExxonMobil signed an oil exploration deal with the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq covering six areas, including two that are said to be outside the region and claimed by both Baghdad and Kurdistan.

The central government says all oil contracts must go through Baghdad and regards any that do not as illegal.

Brazil president tells her story of horror

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

President Dilma Rousseff still has trouble chewing, after her jaw was dislocated during three years of torture and imprisonment under Brazil's former military leadership, it was revealed Monday.

According to an unedited autobiographical account by the South American nation's first female president published in the media Monday, she was subjected to regular torture.

"The interrogation started, generally with electric shocks, growing in intensity, and then there were sessions of "pau de arara" (suspension from a rod by the hands and feet), something people can't take for too long," Rousseff said.

Rousseff, 64, recounted her experiences under Brazil's military regime (1964-1985) over a decade ago at a provincial human rights council that sought to compensate



Dilma Rousseff

victims of torture, but the full details have just been released.

In 1970, then 22-year-old Rousseff was arrested and imprisoned for three years in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte, where she began to fight with guerrillas at the age of 16.

In Belo Horizonte, Rousseff faced the worst years of repression by the military leadership, which accused her of helping a guerrilla leader escape, something she denies to this day.

Rousseff's torturers often beat and threatened to disfigure her.

"My jaw was dislocated. That still causes me problems until today," she said, but she added her torture wounds "are a part of me."

According to official estimates, some 400 Brazilians were killed or disappeared during the military regime, compared with 3,200 in Chile and 30,000 in Argentina.

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