



Hong Kong elects new leader amid protests

AFP, Hong Kong

Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong yesterday, adamant there was nothing to cheer as the former British colony marked 15 years of Chinese rule and swore in a new leader.

The rally came after Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, a millionaire property consultant seen as close to China's communist rulers, took his oath before Chinese President Hu Jintao -- whose speech was interrupted by a demonstrator.

Hu's visit and Leung's inauguration have become focal points for growing discontent towards Beijing, which has surged to a new post-handover high amid soaring housing costs, limited democracy and perceived meddling by China.

The financial centre enjoys significant autonomy and civil liberties unheard of in the mainland under the "one country, two systems" model set up when it returned to China in 1997 after more than a century of British rule.

Leung was elected as chief executive in March by a special committee stacked with pro-Beijing business elites.

A poll released by Hong Kong University last week showed mistrust towards Beijing at 37 percent, a post-handover high, and the number of Hong Kongers identifying themselves primarily as citizens of

Powers agree Syria deal

Assad's fate unclear; death toll mounts

AGENCIES

World powers struck an agreement that a transitional government should be set up in Syria to end the conflict there but they remained at odds over what part President Bashar al-Assad might play in the process.

The talks had been billed as a last-ditch effort to halt the worsening violence in Syria but hit obstacles as Russia, Assad's most powerful ally, opposed Western and Arab insistence that he must quit the scene.

However, both the regime and the opposition branded the international plan for a transition in strife-torn Syria a failure.

The final communique said the transitional government should be formed "on the basis of mutual consent".

After the meeting, the United States and Russia contradicted each other over what that meant for Assad, who has ruled Syria for 11 years since succeeding his father Hafez and has been condemned internationally for the ferocity of his crackdown on the uprising against him.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he was "delighted" with the result. The key point was that the deal did not attempt to impose a process on Syria, he said.

But US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said it sent a clear message to Assad that he must quit.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius took the same stance, saying, "It's clear that Assad must stand down".

At least 21 people were killed nationwide yesterday. The deaths came after a day in which 120 people were killed.

MAIN POINTS OF GENEVA DEAL

TRANSITION GOVERNMENT: Could include members of the present government and the opposition and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent.

RECOMMITMENT TO CEASEFIRE: Both parties must observe a ceasefire according to Annan's six-point peace plan.

A SYRIAN-DRIVEN PROCESS: Syrians will determine future of their country.



CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW: A review of the constitutional order and legal system to be carried out, and changes subject to popular approval.

GENUINE ENGAGEMENT: Parties must engage genuinely with Annan to work towards the transition.

Egypt military cede power to new leader

Israel PM writes to Morsi

AFP, Cairo

After being sworn in as the country's first freely elected civilian president on Saturday, Morsi formally received a transfer of power and pledge of support from the military.

In Saturday's handover at Cairo's Hike Step base, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), vowed to support the Islamist Morsi.

"We will stand with the new president, elected by the people," Tantawi said in a speech.

However, the ritual masked a political impasse ripe for future confrontation as the military still holds key powers. They are also holding to key ministries like the defense ministry.

Meanwhile, an Israeli source yesterday said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had written to Morsi urging him to uphold the 1979 peace accord between their two countries and wishing him good luck.

Israeli President Shimon Peres, a Nobel peace laureate, sent Morsi a message of his own yesterday, his office said, in which he wrote that "contrary to war, peace is the victory of both sides."

Morsi has repeatedly asserted that Egypt -- the first Arab state to make formal peace with Israel -- would respect its international treaties, in an allusion to the 1979 accord.

Assam floods toll rises to 77

AGENCIES

With the current spell of floods and landslides claiming 77 lives in Assam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi are scheduled to visit the affected areas today.

An official yesterday said that 61 people died in floods and 16 in landslides, while six persons were reported missing.

Reports from Assam said all the 27 districts have been affected by floods while landslides have occurred in three districts. The Brahmaputra and the Kapili rivers were flowing above danger level at various places.

The government report said 2,166 villages across 113 revenue circles in the State were hit and 19.37 lakh people affected.

Gun attack

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Zakir aspires to be the general secretary of upcoming Banani thana Jubo League committee and has been in dispute with Yusuf Sardar Soheli, another aspirant for the post, said a Jubo League activist preferring not to be named.

Soheli could not be reached for his comment. A gang of five-six criminals stormed into the office under Mohakhali flyover around 12:00 noon and opened fire indiscriminately, the victims said at the hospital.

DMCH sources said Zakir had been shot in the left leg, Ali in the chest while Noyon in the left hand and back.

A vendor near the party's ward-20 unit office said he had heard seven shots. Hearing gunshots, pedestrians, street vendors, even some policemen on duty around the spot ran away in

EU oil embargo on Iran comes into effect

AFP, Tehran

A European Union embargo on Iranian oil went into effect yesterday, provoking anger in Tehran which says the measure will hurt talks with world powers over its sensitive nuclear activities.

Oil Minister Rostam Qasemi sought to downplay the embargo as just the latest punishment in decades of ineffective sanctions.

Iranian leaders have insisted they will forge ahead with their atomic programme, regardless of the Western restrictions and others imposed by the UN Security Council.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, warned the EU in a letter on Thursday that the new EU and US sanctions will have "repercussions" on the talks. He did not elaborate.

NEWS IN brief

Drone kills 8 in Pakistan

REUTERS, Miranshah

A US drone aircraft killed eight suspected Islamist militants in northwest Pakistan yesterday, security officials said.

A drone missile struck a house in the Shawal Valley where militants were reported to be hiding in the North Waziristan tribal region near the Afghan border.

"Two missiles were fired on a house. Eight militants were killed," said a local intelligence official.

Suu Kyi delays parliament debut

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has decided not to attend a new session of parliament this week to give herself time to recover from a gruelling European tour, her party said yesterday.

The 67-year-old had been due to take her place in the legislature for the first time as an elected MP on Wednesday.

She will now make her debut as an MP on the

Israel's ex-PM

Shamir dies

AFP, Jerusalem

Ex-prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, a former soldier, spy and statesman, has died at the age of 96, Israeli officials announced on Saturday.

As leader of the right-wing Likud party, Mr Shamir was prime minister between 1983-1984, and in 1986-1992.

Israeli ministers gathered for Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting stood in silence for one minute in



Yitzhak Shamir

Australia introduces carbon tax

AFP, Sydney

Australia yesterday introduced a controversial carbon tax in a bid to tackle climate change, with Prime Minister Julia Gillard hailing the move amid opposition warnings it will stifle industry.

The tax on corporate pollution, which drew thousands of protesters on to the streets of Sydney yesterday, will mean some 350 entities will be liable to pay Aus\$23 (US\$23.5) for every tonne of carbon emissions they produce.

Charge sheet

FROM PAGE 1

murder of the popular municipal mayor, does not contain the name of the prime accused Salauddin Ahmed Bachchu, the younger brother of Posts and Telecommunications Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju.

Lokman, who was also the general secretary of the city Awami League, was shot dead on November 1 last year in the party office in the town.

Relatives of the victim rejected the charge sheet, saying they were not contacted during the investigation.

"I reject this charge sheet and will challenge it," said Lokman's brother Kamruzzaman, who filed the case.

The names of the killers have been dropped under the influence of a minister,

headed.

According to the case statement, telecoms minister's brother Salauddin is the master planner of the killing.

Protesting against the charge sheet, people in Narsingdi held a rally and besieged the Deputy Commissioner's office there around 5:00 pm.

Police later foiled the rally and dispersed the agitators who then brought out a procession and chanted slogans demanding fresh investigation into the case.

Mamunur Rashid Mondol, detective police inspector who is also the investigation officer of the case, on June 24 pressed charges against 12 people.

Of them, three were made accused in the case Kamruzzaman filed. They are Abdul Matin Sarkar, vice-president of city AL, his

younger brother Ashrafal Sarkar, president of city Jubo League, and Mobarok Hossain Moba, treasurer of city AL.

The nine other charge-sheeted accused are Nazmul Hassan Sharif, Selim Mia, Awlad Hossain, Sarwar Hossain, Mahfuz Hossain, Faruk Hossain, Md Shahin, Shibli Sarkar and Kamrul Hasan.

Contacted, the investigation officer said charges were pressed after a "long and proper" investigation.

Khandaker Mohiuddin Ahmed, superintendent of Narsingdi police, said the charge sheet was prepared with assistance from senior police officers.

Accepting the charge sheet, Chief Judicial Magistrate Nitai Chandra Saha yesterday fixed July 27 for further hearing.

Govt now focuses

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finance the largest infrastructure project of the country.

"We have alternative sources ready for financing the project," Communications Minister Obaidul Quader told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The bridge construction will start within the stipulated time," said Quader, who recently reiterated that the work would begin by February next year.

Malaysia has already given a final draft proposal while two other sources are also ready. One is Qatar and another is "one of the power-houses in Asia", the minister said without mentioning any other country or organisation by name.

A high official source said the government would seek help from China, which has already shown interest in the second Padma bridge across Paturia-Daulatdia.

The source claimed that Beijing had been keeping in touch with Dhaka, aiming at getting involved in the project ever since the WB suspended the loan agreement in September last year.

Quader, who is also railway minister, said, "If Malaysia gives a final proposal, we will review it thoroughly and see whether the interests of Bangladesh have been protected. We will go for a final deal with it only if we find things positive."

"But if the negotiations with Malaysia fail to prioritise our national, economic and public interests, we will go for other options which are also ready," he said.

The minister claimed that a group of intellectuals appearing on television talk shows were giving a false impression of interest rates for the Malaysian funds.

"It's not correct that Bangladesh will have to pay 2 to 3 percent interest for the Malaysian loan," said Quader, adding that there was no such provision in the Malaysian proposal so far.

"Malaysia will bring funds, construct the bridge, operate it for a certain period of time and hand it over to the government. So there is no option for paying a high interest."

The minister hoped the

toll rates for the bridge would be tolerable for the common people and the operating time would also be much less than what had been set.

Quader said a surprise was waiting for those who kept saying before its birth that the "Padma baby" would be lame and blind.

The minister said he was hopeful about Malaysian funding.

About the World Bank decision to cancel the loan, the minister said the WB had extended time until July 27 to review the loan agreement.

"But on what ground did they cancel it suddenly [on June 30] before the end of the deadline they themselves had fixed?"

The Daily Star learnt yesterday that the WB had recommended sending the persons, allegedly involved in graft, on leave by June 30.

Asked about it, the minister said the WB could not impose such conditions on

any of its member countries.

The government's door was open for discussions and negotiations with the bank, he said.

But the global lender on its own closed the door by taking a unilateral decision at a time when a probe was going on against those allegedly involved in the corruption.

The government had removed the persons against whom graft allegations had been brought, from departments and the helm of a ministry related to the project to ensure a fair investigation.

The WB cannot hand out punishment before the probe ends.

"As they [WB] have closed the door, we are now open to the alternative sources," he said.

The minister added that 97 percent of the preparatory work for the Padma bridge was complete and construction could commence after the signing of a deal with any of the alternative sources.

Culprits to be tried

FROM PAGE 1

bridges over the Padma river if her party won the next general polls.

Later, she and her party members distributed relief from the Ziaur Rahman Foundation.

On her way back to Dhaka in the afternoon, she addressed a gathering at Fulgazi Bazar in Feni after distributing relief materials among flood-affected people.

The ruling party before the 2008 elections had pledged to build the Padma bridge. But the World Bank has cancelled its loan for the bridge, alleging that the government is corrupt.

"This is a killer, failed and corrupt government.... They [govt] should quit immediately if they have a minimum sense of dignity," Khaleda said.

The former premier continued that other donor agencies would also not provide any support for the bridge as they had lost confidence in the government because of corruption. "So, there'll be no develop-

ment in the country during the present government's rule."

Khaleda also blamed corruption for the journalist couple Sagar-Runi murder. "They [Sagar-Runi] were killed as they had detected corruption by the government and wanted to expose it."

This government killed more than 6,000 people since it assumed office, she said.

Khaleda Zia went to Chittagong on Saturday and left for Feni at noon yesterday.

Prior to leaving the port city, she visited Akbar Shah Mazar area where scores of people were killed in landslides. She distributed relief among 300 family members of the victims.

Over a hundred people were killed and many other were injured in the recent natural calamities, including landslides, in Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Bandarban. In addition, several lakhs of people in Chittagong and Feni have remained marooned due to incessant rain for over a week and onrush of water from hills.

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