



INDIA TOUR
Suu Kyi urges caution against over-optimism

AFP, New Delhi

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi urged India not to be over-optimistic about political changes in her homeland, as she began her first visit to New Delhi for a quarter of a century yesterday.

Suu Kyi, who was a student in the city where her mother served as an ambassador, spoke in an interview to The Hindu of her sadness at the Indian government's ties with Myanmar's former junta.

Her invitation to India is an attempt by its government to rebuild the relationship with Suu Kyi. New Delhi was once one of her staunchest supporters, but changed tack and sought engagement with the junta in the mid-1990s.

Suu Kyi said India should not get carried away by recent developments in Myanmar.

"I think too much optimism doesn't help because then you ignore what is going wrong."

Her official programme begins today when she will meet Manmohan Singh and deliver the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru memorial lecture. On Friday she will visit the Lady Shri Ram college in New Delhi, from which she graduated with a degree in politics.

Syria crisis gathers pace

Opposition block gets quick backing from Arabs, EU

AFP, Cairo

Deadly fighting raged near Damascus and in Syria's northeast yesterday, as the Arab League urged more groups to join a newly formed opposition bloc that won swift recognition from the Gulf states.

The Gulf Cooperation Council said its six members recognised the National Coalition as "the Syrian people's legitimate representative", and the Arab League also gave its backing, although it stopped short of granting it full recognition.

The GCC members -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- on Monday became the first to recognise the umbrella group.

And foreign ministers of the 22-member Arab League said at talks in Cairo that they recognised the coalition as "the legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition".

The hard-won coalition deal reached Sunday in Doha, Qatar calls for the opposition to create a supreme military council to take overall command of rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The bloc's newly appointed leader, moderate Muslim cleric Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, said the coalition already

SYRIA CIVIL WAR

had promises of weapons, without specifying from whom.

The United States swiftly declared its backing for the National Coalition following Sunday's deal that brought together a broad spectrum of regime opponents.

Traditional Damascus ally Moscow gave a cooler response, urging the opposition to drop its refusal to negotiate with the Assad regime.

EU Foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who addressed the opening session at the League, welcomed the Doha agreement but warned of a spillover of the conflict.

Regime warplanes carried out a new wave of bombing raids yesterday on the strategic town of Ras al-Ain, on the northeastern border, a day after deadly air strikes and shelling, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Elsewhere, fierce clashes rocked in the east Damascus suburb of Ghuta and at Daraya to the south, said the Observatory. More than 151 people were killed in Syria on Monday.

Violence on Syria's borders with Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as across the UN-monitored ceasefire line that splits the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, has stoked fears of a spillover of the 20-month conflict.

Petraeus scandal widens

Top US general under probe

REUTERS, Aboard A Us Military Aircraft

The top US commander in Afghanistan, General John Allen, is under investigation for alleged inappropriate communication with a woman at the centre of the scandal involving former CIA Director David Petraeus, a senior US defence official said yesterday.

The shocking revelation threatens to fell another of the US military's biggest names and suggests that the scandal involving Petraeus - a former four-star general who had Allen's job in Afghanistan before moving to the CIA last year - could expand much further than previously imagined.

The US official said the FBI uncovered between 20,000 and 30,000 pages of communications - mostly emails and spanning from 2010 to 2012 - between Allen and Jill Kelley, who has been identified as a long-time friend of the Petraeus family and a Tampa, Florida, volunteer social liaison with military families at MacDill Air Force Base.



It was Kelley's complaints about harassing emails from the woman with whom Petraeus had had an affair, Paula Broadwell, that prompted an FBI investigation, ultimately alerting authorities to Petraeus' involvement with Broadwell. Petraeus resigned from his job on Friday.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said in a statement given to reporters flying with him to Australia that he had asked that Allen's nomination to be Commander of US European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe be delayed "and the president has agreed".

Allen, who is now in Washington, was due to face a Senate confirmation hearing tomorrow, as was his slated successor in Afghanistan, General Joseph Dunford.

The FBI referred the case to the Pentagon on Sunday and Panetta directed the Defense Department's Inspector General to handle the investigation. Panetta informed the top Republican and Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee during the flight to Australia. The House Armed Services Committee was also notified.

The US defense official said that Allen denied any wrongdoing and that Panetta had opted to keep him in his job while the matter was under review.

US officials had said in recent days that their investigation was largely complete.

'Who the hell knows?'

Says Panetta on his job as speculations mount

AGENCIES

Pentagon chief Leon Panetta, a longtime veteran of Washington politics, sidestepped questions Monday about whether he would quit his post as expected amid a new report that John Kerry might replace him.

"Who the hell knows?" Panetta joked when asked if he would stay on for another four years through President Barack Obama's second term.

Panetta, who took charge of Pentagon in 2011, acknowledged he was anxious after a decades-long career in Washington to retire to his native California.

But he suggested he would remain on the job at least in the short-term with major budget issues and strategic decisions on the war in Afghanistan pending.



John Kerry

Meanwhile, The Washington Post yesterday reported that President Obama was considering asking Sen John F Kerry to serve as his next defense secretary, part of an extensive rearrangement of his national security team that will include a permanent replacement for former CIA director David H Petraeus.

Although Kerry is thought to covet the job of secretary of state, senior administration officials familiar with the transition planning said that nomination will almost certainly go to Susan E Rice, the US ambassador to the United Nations.

John O Brennan, Obama's chief counterterrorism adviser, is a leading contender for the CIA job if he wants it, officials said. Otherwise, Michael J Morell, the agency's acting director, is the prohibitive favorite to take over permanently.

Palestinian UN bid on Nov 29

AFP, Cairo

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas has announced that the Palestinian Authority will present its bid for non-state UN membership on November 29, despite US and Israeli opposition.

Abbas announced the date following talks with Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi in Cairo and urged support from Arab states.

US President Barack Obama told Abbas in a telephone conversation on Sunday that his administration opposes the move, and Israeli officials have threatened punitive measures if the they go ahead with the bid.

NEWS IN brief

No regrets over loss: Ryan

AFP, Chicago

Former Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan said Monday he has "no regrets" over the 2012 campaign despite losing the election last week.

In his first public comments since Mitt Romney was defeated by President Barack Obama after a multi-billion-dollar campaign, Ryan admitted the Democratic incumbent "did a better job of getting voters to the polls."

"It hurts to lose a big election like this, but I don't have any regrets whatsoever," Ryan told the Racine Journal Times on Monday.

Myanmar quake toll rises to 38

AFP, Yangon

A powerful earthquake that struck Myanmar at the weekend has left 38 people dead or missing, the Red Cross said yesterday as a new tremor rattled the government's showpiece capital Naypyidaw.

Hundreds of buildings were destroyed or damaged in Sunday's tremor, which sent terrified people running from their homes in the country's second-biggest city of Mandalay and surrounding villages.

Qatada released from British jail

AFP, London

Britain yesterday released terror suspect Abu Qatada from prison on bail after judges ruled that the man dubbed Osama bin Laden's right-hand man in Europe should not be extradited to Jordan.

The radical Islamist preacher, who is in his early 50s, was driven out of the high-security Long Lartin in central England in a black van at high speed, television pictures showed.

Abu Qatada was expected to be taken to his home in northwest London where he will be under a curfew 16 hours a day.

Japan set for 'next month' poll

AFP, Tokyo

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has decided to dissolve Japan's parliament as early as Friday, with an election possibly next month, media said yesterday, in a move likely to unseat him from power.

Noda will call an election for as early as December 16 or as late as January 20, according to major news media, including the Nikkei business daily and the liberal-leaning Asahi Shimbun.

After months of speculation over the date of the next national ballot, the issue came to the fore on Monday afternoon.

Israel says Gaza strife not over

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel struck three targets in the Gaza Strip in the early hours of yesterday and warned an on-going crisis with Palestinian militants had not been resolved, despite a marked decrease in rocket-fire from the territory.

The Israeli military said its warplanes successfully hit a weapons storage facility in central Gaza and two rocket launching sites in the north of the coastal enclave. No casualties were reported following the loud, pre-dawn blasts.

Palestinian militants indicated they were ready for a truce with Israel late on Monday, and only one rocket strike was reported in Israel by 10.00am (0800 GMT) yesterday.

However, Defence Minister Ehud Barak told reporters the government was not prepared to forgive and forget following four days of violence, which saw Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers join smaller factions in firing more than 115 missiles into Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has convened a meeting of his inner circle of nine senior ministers later on Tuesday to decide what action to take, aware that public opinion is pushing for an end to the regular Gaza flare-ups.

He discussed possible attack scenarios with Barak and military chief Lieutenant General Benny Gantz on Monday night and some ministers have said the airforce may return to a policy of targeted killings of senior Islamist leaders in Gaza.

Mossad tried to kill Saddam Hussein

ANI, Washington

Israeli's intelligence agency Mossad tried and failed to kill Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with a book bomb in the 1970s, a new documentary has revealed.



The film, titled 'Sealed Lips', said that the notoriously paranoid Hussein refused to open the package containing the book himself, and instead had another Iraqi official open it.

According to ABC News, Brigadier-General Tzuri Sagi, the mastermind of the alleged operation, told filmmakers the device was prepared by an Israeli bombmaker identified only as "Natan."

According to the report, the Mossad has a rich history of targeted assassinations, mainly against Palestinian faction leaders.

Most recently, a hit squad made up of dozens of men and women traveling on fake passports and wearing disguises that included wigs and tennis outfits were believed to have assassinated Hamas leader Mahmoud al Mabhouth in his Dubai hotel room in 2010, it added.

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