

POISON PLOT Arafat's body to be exhumed Tuesday

AFP, Ramallah

The body of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat will be exhumed on Tuesday to undergo poison tests, the head of the Palestinian inquiry team said yesterday.

"The tomb will be opened on November 27 and experts will take samples the same day within a matter of a few hours," Tawfiq Tirawi told reporters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

He said a reburial ceremony would be held later the same day.

Tirawi added that members of his commission remained convinced the Israel had used the radioactive element polonium to kill Arafat -- the same poison used to assassinate Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006.



Palestinian school girls stand in a classroom damaged during last week's Israeli offensive yesterday. Inset, schoolchildren walk in debris by a damaged school. Tens of thousands of children are returning to school in the Gaza Strip after eight days of cross-border fighting between Israel and Hamas, which killed 156 Palestinians including 33 children.

PHOTO: AFP



EU BUDGET BATTLE 'Outcast' UK PM wins new allies

AFP, Brussels

British Prime Minister David Cameron has ended his European isolation, for the time being at least, after Germany and other nations backed his call for cuts to the troubled EU budget.

Nearly a year ago Cameron was the outcast of Europe, finding himself shunned by angry counterparts when he vetoed a crucial fiscal pact that was aimed at tackling the crisis in the eurozone.

But this time there were few of the same recriminations and Cameron named Germany, Sweden, The Netherlands, Finland and Denmark as having backed his position.

By marshalling an austerity-supporting "northern European" bloc he will also please eurosceptics in his party back home who are threatening to rebel if he does not loosen Britain's ties with the EU.

He leads a fragile coalition government with the pro-Europe Liberal Democrats and faces elections in 2015 during which he will try to win a majority, for which he will need the "eurosceptic" wing of his Conservative party on-side.

Thailand tense

Protesters urge PM to quit

AFP, Bangkok

Thai police yesterday fired tear gas and detained dozens of demonstrators as clashes erupted at the first major street protests against Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's government.

The violence, while relatively small scale, appeared to mark a new phase in Thailand's long-running political crisis pitting Thai royalists against ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra -- Yingluck's brother -- and his supporters.

About 17,000 police were deployed for the rally in Bangkok's historic district, which was organised by the royalist group Pitak Siam (Protecting Siam), a relatively new force in the kingdom's fractured political scene.

"In the name of Pitak Siam and its allies I promise that we will topple this government," the movement's head, retired general Boonlert Kaewprasit, declared from the rally stage.

But the estimated attendance of about 20,000 fell far short of the half a million

organisers had hoped for, and by early evening as rain began to fall Boonlert called off the protest, which had been due to last until Sunday.

"I can't afford to lose even one life so I declare the rally over," he announced.

The demo comes two and a half years after 90 people died and about 1,900 were wounded in a military crackdown on "Red Shirt" protests in the heart of the capital against the previous government, which was replaced by Yingluck's administration last year.

Earlier yesterday tensions flared as police fired several rounds of tear gas at protesters trying to ram through barriers near the main rally site in the Royal Plaza using a truck.

"Tear gas was used in one area because protesters did not comply with the rules," said national police spokesman Major General Piya Uthayo.

About 100 protesters were detained while knives and bullets were confiscated, he said.

Forty-two people, including seven police officers, were treated for cuts and other injuries, officials said.

Congo rebels urged to stop war

AFP, Kampala

Regional leaders yesterday called on DR Congo rebel group M23 to end hostilities and leave a key eastern town they seized in a rampant advance that has sparked fears of a wider conflict.

The meeting of east African heads of state went forward without a key player -- Rwandan President Paul Kagame, whose country the United Nations accuses of backing the rebels -- and wrapped up after less than an hour.

In their closing statement, the leaders called on the rebels to "stop all war activities" and "stop talk of overthrowing an elected government".

The M23 has refused to withdraw unless Kabila agrees to direct peace talks with the group.

Kagame, whose country denies backing the M23, had been expected to attend the meeting in the Ugandan capital.

But a Ugandan foreign ministry official told AFP shortly before the summit that the president was not coming and would instead be represented by his foreign minister, Louise Mushikiwabo. No reason was provided for the absence.

A Ugandan official had earlier said that both Kagame and DR Congo President Joseph Kabila would attend, and that without them the summit would be "meaningless".

MYANMAR REFORMS

West's wake makes China wane

AFP, Bangkok

After years of almost unchallenged dominance, China's influence in Myanmar is under threat as the United States and other nations seek closer ties with the former pariah state, experts say.

The Asian economic powerhouse has long helped keep Myanmar afloat through trade ties, arms sales, and by shielding it from UN sanctions over rights abuses as a veto-wielding, permanent member of the Security Council.

In return, China was assured of a stable neighbour and access to Myanmar's oil, gas and other natural resources.

But since Myanmar's military ceded power last year, China has lost some of its leverage over the country formerly known as Burma.

European and US firms are no longer banned from doing business there, leaving them scrambling to catch up with rivals from China, India and elsewhere in Asia in the competition for its resources and consumer markets.



US President Barack Obama's historic visit to Yangon this week was the clearest indication yet of the sea change in relations under way between Washington and Myanmar.

Myanmar is now in the process of reversing its long-standing dependence on Beijing, said Renaud Egretau, a Myanmar expert at the University of Hong Kong.

"It's clear that the monopoly era is finished," he said, while adding that "strong influence

will remain."

The US diplomatic offensive, part of a strategic "tilt" towards the Pacific in the face of a rising China, became clear with a visit by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton a year ago and has frayed nerves in Beijing.

"America will use more non-military means to slow or obstruct China's rise," according to Yuan Peng, director of the China Institute of Contemporary International Affairs.

Washington will pursue its goal "by strengthening alliances and upgrading partnerships and driving wedges in China's relationships with North Korea, Pakistan and Myanmar," he wrote in a commentary earlier this year.

China and Myanmar's "deep-seated" relationship will not disappear overnight, however, said Professor Chen Qi, a foreign relations expert at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"If Myanmar is gaining international support, then China will need greater diplomatic skill to maintain its relationship."

Saudi women

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travelling with his wife got an alert as they left Riyadh airport.

Saudi women are denied the right to travel without their guardian's consent and are also banned from driving.

Saudi men earlier had the option of requesting alert messages about their dependants' cross-border movement, but it appears that since last week such notifications are being sent automatically.

Some Twitter users have mocked the move, suggesting the use of microchips and ankle bracelets to track women.

Another tweet read: "If I need an SMS to let me know my wife is leaving Saudi

Arabia, then I'm either married to the wrong woman or need a psychiatrist."

The text alerts are part of an electronic passport system launched by the Saudi authorities last year.

The government argues that e-passports make it easier for citizens to deal with their travel arrangements "without having to visit the passport office".

Saudi Arabia remains a deeply conservative country, however, King Abdullah has recently introduced some cautious political and social reforms.

In September 2011, he announced that women would be given the right to vote and run in future municipal elections.

Call for special care for special people

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Multiple Disabilities with Candidates of Dhaka City Corporation Election, Policy Makers and Civil Society.

ActionAid Bangladesh, Special Education for Intellectually Disabled (SEID) and The Daily Star jointly organised the discussion at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Addressing the roundtable, Ranjan Karmaker, chairperson of SEID, said, "People with different disabilities should be transformed into skilled human resources."

They had the right to be independent and live with dignity like others, he said, adding that a combined effort of the NGOs, local

government representatives, the media, the administration and the civil society was needed to ensure it.

"Our society has a diverse section of people and setting a single standard to serve all their needs is inadequate," said Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh.

DCC South mayor aspirants Shirin Akhter, Tuhin Malik and M Enamul Huq also agreed that the local government bodies should focus on areas like city infrastructure, transportation, education and health to make the city convenient for the people with disabilities.

Highlighting the difficulties these people face every day, Tuhin Malik

said, "It is a major challenge for them to move from one place to another as the city infrastructure is not quite friendly to them."

He alleged that most of the government funds for people with disabilities ends up in the hands of people with political influence.

Mazharul Mannan, coordinator of the newly established Autism Resource Centre at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), thanked the government for opening the centre.

He urged the government to pass the proposed disability act immediately.

Ranjit Kumar Biswas, secretary to the Social Welfare Ministry, said he

was upbeat about the new movement of creating awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.

Former election commissioner M Sakawat Hossain said the poll booths cannot cater for the needs of the people with disabilities. He proposed keeping special mark on voter identity cards so that others could quickly recognise them.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc (ret'd), editor of Defence & Strategic Affairs of The Daily Star, Dilara Sattar Mitu, director of SEID Trust and Azeeya Aziz Khan, director of SIMCL of Summit Group took part in the roundtable, among others.

NEWS IN brief

Kejriwal names his anti-graft party

AFP, New Delhi

Arvind Kejriwal's party was named 'Aam Admi Party' yesterday at a meeting of its founder members in New Delhi during which the Constitution for the organisation was also adopted.

The meeting of around 300 founder members was held at Constitution Club in New Delhi during which Kejriwal proposed the name of the party which was accepted by other members, sources said.

The Constitution of the party was also adopted at the meeting. It was proposed by Mayank Gandhi and seconded by Chandramohan, they said.

Hijab first in British parliament

AFP, London

A 16-year-old girl is thought to have become the first person to speak from the House of Commons despatch box in the British parliament while wearing a hijab, The Times newspaper reported yesterday.

Karim, from Wokingham, west of London, said: "Wearing the hijab was my own choice."

The democratically elected Youth Parliament members, aged 11 to 18, are elected to represent the views of young people in their area to government.

Darfur rebels 'seize' army base

AFP, Khartoum

Sudanese rebels have seized an army compound in the Darfur region, the insurgents said yesterday, after peacekeepers expressed concern over escalating violence.

The pre-dawn attack happened on Friday about five kilometres (three miles) northeast of Kebkabiya in North Darfur state, said Ibrahim Al-Hillu, spokesman for the Sudan Liberation Army's Abdelwahid Nur faction.

Earlier this month, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) said "escalating violence has become a matter of grave concern".

Koroma wins in Sierra Leone poll

BBC ONLINE

Sierra Leone's incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma has won the presidential election, which has been declared by international observers as peaceful, the election commission has said.

He received almost 59% of votes cast, meaning there is no need for a run-off as he won more than 55%. His main challenger, ex-military ruler Julius Maada Bio, took 38% of the ballots in Saturday's peaceful poll.

Blast kills eight Shias in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

A bomb blast claimed by the Taliban killed eight people near a Shia Muslim procession in north-west Pakistan yesterday, in the latest attack against the minority during their holy month.

Four boys were among the dead and 30 other people were injured when the remote-controlled bomb packed with ball bearings exploded on the outskirts of Dera Ismail Khan city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said.

The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility.

Talks to resume amid stern warnings

AFP, Paris

Nearly 200 nations gather in Doha from tomorrow for a new round of climate talks as a rush of reports warn extreme weather events like superstorm Sandy may become commonplace if mitigation efforts fail.

Negotiators will converge in the Qatari capital for two weeks under the UN banner to review commitments to cutting climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions.

Ramping up the pressure, expert reports warned in recent days that existing mitigation pledges are not nearly enough to limit warming to a manageable 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 deg Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial levels.

"A faster response to climate change is necessary and possible," UN climate chief Christiana Figueres said ahead of the talks.

"Doha must make sure the response is accelerated."

The UN Environmental Programme said this week the goal of keeping planet warming in check has moved further out of reach and the world was headed for an average 3-5 deg C temperature rise this century barring urgent action.

And the World Bank said a planet that is four degrees warmer would see coastal areas inundated and small islands washed away, food production slashed, species eradicated, more frequent heat waves and high-intensity cyclones, and diseases spread to new areas.

"Time is clearly not on our side," Marlene Moses, chairwoman of the Alliance of Small Island States told AFP.

Topping the agenda in Doha is the launch of a followup commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, the world's only binding pact for curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

Delegates must also set out a work plan for arriving in the next 36 months at a new, global climate deal that must enter into force by 2020.

That commitment runs out on December 31.

