

NEWS IN
brief

Nasheed leaves Indian embassy

AFP, New Delhi

Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed left the Indian embassy in the capital Male yesterday, an Indian official said, 10 days after he sought refuge in the mission in a bid to avoid arrest.

Nasheed's exit came after a Maldivian court earlier this week postponed his trial for abuse of power when he was in office and India sent an envoy to the nation of 330,000 Sunni Muslims to try and end the political standoff.

Microsoft added to hacker's hit list

AFP, San Francisco

Microsoft joined Facebook and Apple on Friday on the list of US technology titans targeted in recent cyberattacks.

"As reported by Facebook and Apple, Microsoft can confirm that we also recently experienced a similar security intrusion," Trustworthy Computing team general manager Matt Thomlinson said in a blogpost. There was no evidence customer data was stolen but an investigation into the attack was con-

Chavez working from hospital

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is able to work on government issues and is "very energetic" despite being hospitalised and breathing through a tube, a top aide said yesterday.

The 58-year-old president has not been seen or heard from since Monday, when he returned to Caracas from cancer surgery in Cuba.

"The president continues to breathe through a tracheal tube, but he is able to communicate with us through written notes and give us instructions,"

Royal faces graft scandal in Spain

AFP, Madrid

Spanish King Juan Carlos's son-in-law Inaki Urdangarin was up before a judge yesterday for the second time in a corruption case that is casting a growing shadow over the royal family.

Urdangarin appeared in court on the Mediterranean island of Majorca for questioning over allegations that he embezzled millions of euros of public money paid to a company he managed.



Inaki Urdangarin

Family members of a victim, who was badly injured in a recent blast, cry outside a hospital in Hyderabad, India yesterday. BJP leader L K Advani yesterday blamed Pakistan squarely for Thursday's blasts in Hyderabad that killed 16 people.

PHOTO: AFP



Kerry begins Europe, Mideast tour

AFP, Washington

America's top diplomat John Kerry will begin on his first official trip as secretary of state yesterday, a marathon get-acquainted tour of America's closest allies in Europe and the Middle East.

Kerry will visit the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar from February 24 to March 6.

The first stop will be London, where Kerry will meet with senior British officials, State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters Friday.

Kerry travels on to Berlin where, in addition to meeting Germans, he will encounter his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, for a tricky exchange at a time when Moscow and Washington are at loggerheads on many issues.

Opposition scraps int'l meets over 'inaction'

Says will form govt in 'liberated areas'

AFP, Damascus

The umbrella opposition National Coalition yesterday condemned world powers for failing to act to stop the slaughter in Syria, as missiles killed at least 29 in second city Aleppo.

The remarks by spokesman Walid al-Bunni came after the Coalition had said it would form a government to run "liberated areas" of Syria and was pulling out of several international meetings in protest against world "silence".

"We cannot continue listening to statements that are not accompanied by action," Bunni said in remarks to France 24's Arabic-language channel.

"The world has a responsibility to protect (the Syrian people) from a butcher who has been slaughtering them for two years," a reference to President Bashar al-Assad.

Referring to a meeting of the Friends of Syria group in Rome next Thursday, Bunni said: "We want to say... if you are our real friends, help us to stop the massacres that are being committed against our people".

Late on Friday, the group had said it would not attend meetings in Italy, Russia and the United States to protest against the "shameful" lack of global condemna-

tion of "crimes committed against the Syrian people".

It had been due to attend the Friends of Syria, and Coalition chief Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib had also been invited to Moscow.

Bunni also challenged the United States to honour what he said were promises of support for democracy in Syria.

On Friday, Bunni announced plans for a government for "liberated areas" that he said he hoped would be based inside northern Syria.

Its composition and "prime minister" would be chosen at a meeting on March 2, he added, with Coalition members saying the gathering would be held in Istanbul.

Meanwhile, peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said Thursday's attack in Damascus had left about 100 people dead -- substantially more than a previous toll of 61 -- and wounded another 250.

Describing it as a "war crime", the UN-Arab League envoy said "nothing could justify such horrible actions that amount to war crimes under international law."

European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said "nothing can justify an act of such brutality that killed so many people, mostly civilians, including children."

SYRIA CIVIL WAR

N Korea warns US of 'destruction'

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea yesterday warned the top US military commander stationed in South Korea that his forces would "meet a miserable destruction" if they go ahead with scheduled military drills with South Korean troops, North Korean state media said.

Pak Rim-su, chief delegate of the North Korean military mission to the inter-Korean truce village of Panmunjom, gave the message by phone to Gen. James Thurman, the commander of the US Forces Korea, KCNA news agency said.

"If your side ignites a war of aggression by staging the reckless joint military exercises... at this dangerous time, from that moment your fate will be hung by a thread with every hour," Pak was quoted as saying.

"You had better bear in mind that those igniting a war are destined to meet a miserable destruction."

It came amid escalating tension on the divided Korean peninsula after the North's third nuclear test earlier this month, in defiance of UN resolutions, drew harsh international condemnation.

A direct message from the North's Panmunjom mission to the US commander is rare.

North and South Korea are technically still at war after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

The US-South Korean Combined Forces Command is holding an annual computer-based simulation war drill, Key Resolve, from March 11 to 25, involving 10,000 South Korean and 3,500 U.S. troops.

North Korea threatened South Korea with "final destruction" during a debate at the UN Conference on Disarmament on Tuesday.

ElBaradei urges poll boycott in Egypt

Govt to change election date

AFP, Cairo

Opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei yesterday called for a boycott of Egypt's upcoming legislative elections as the president was set to reschedule the first round which clashes with a Christian holiday.

"Called for parliamentary election boycott in 2010 to expose sham democracy. Today I repeat my call, will not be part of an act of deception," the Nobel Peace laureate and former head of the UN atomic watchdog wrote on Twitter.

Former foreign minister Amr Mussa, another leader in the National Salvation Front (NSF), said many members of the opposition bloc were inclined to boycott the four-round election, but a final position had not yet been taken.

The election is scheduled to begin on April 27, with a new parliament to convene on July 6.

But the presidency said it was "seriously" considering changing the starting date because it falls on the Christian holidays of Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, after objections from the Coptic Church.



Iran announces new uranium finds

Refuses to go beyond nuke obligations

AGENCIES

Days before resuming talks over its disputed atomic programme, Iran yesterday said it had found significant new deposits of raw uranium and identified sites for 16 more nuclear power stations.

State news agency IRNA quoted a report by the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI) which said the reserves were discovered in northern and southern coastal areas and had tripled the amount outlined in previous estimates.

There was no independent confirmation. With few uranium mines of its own, Western experts had previously thought that Iran might be close to exhausting its supply of raw uranium.

The timing of the announcement suggested Iran, by talking up its reserves and nuclear ambitions, may hope to strengthen its negotiating hand at talks in Kazakhstan

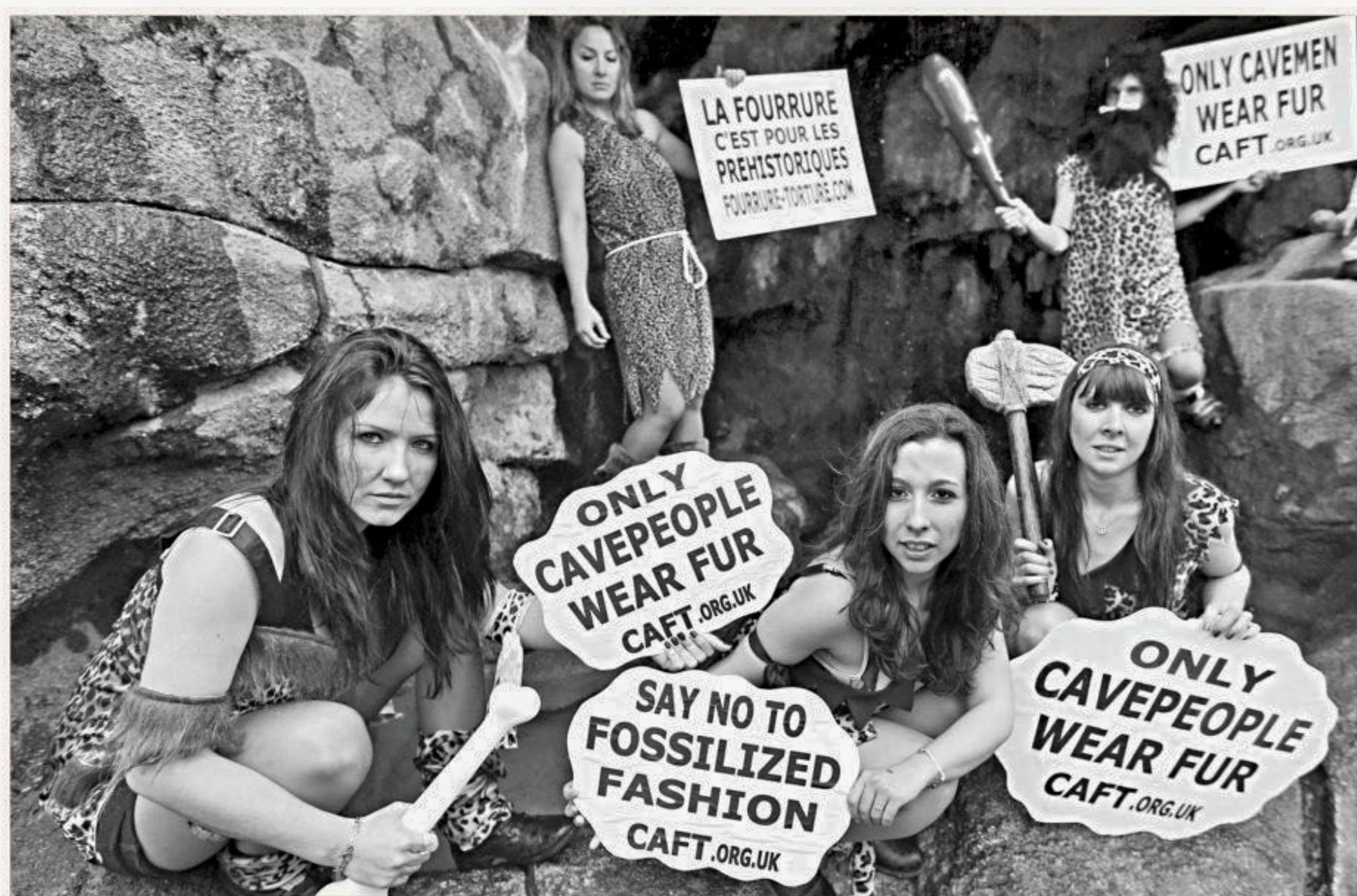
on Tuesday with the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany.

Meanwhile, Iran refused to go beyond its obligations or accept anything outside its rights under the non-proliferation treaty (NPT), ahead of talks with major powers on its disputed nuclear drive.

"We will not accept anything beyond our obligations and will not accept anything less than our rights," said the Islamic republic's top nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, quoted by ISNA news agency.

"Iran has fulfilled its NPT obligations as an active and committed member, therefore (it) should gain all of its rights," Jalili said in an address to Iranian nuclear industry officials.

The so-called P5+1 has called on Iran to scale back on uranium enrichment, the process that is used for power plant fuel and in higher purities needed for a nuclear weapon.



Members of the French branch of the international anti-fur group "CAFT" (The Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade) dressed as cavemen demonstrate against the production and use of animal fur in Nice, southeastern France yesterday.

Italy goes to poll today

AFP, Rome

Italians hit by austerity and recession on Saturday prepared to take to the polls for an election that is being watched around Europe.

Candidates could not campaign on Saturday, and voter surveys have been off-limits for the two weeks leading up to the polls.

Polls open at 0700 GMT today and close at 1900 GMT. A second day of voting begins at 0600 GMT tomorrow and ends at 1400 GMT, after which early results will begin to trickle through later that day.

An average of the most recent polls gave Bersani 34 percent of the vote, Berlusconi 30 percent, Grillo 17 percent and Monti around 11 percent.

Vatican condemns scandal reports

AGENCIES

The Vatican has attacked reports in the Italian media linking Pope Benedict XVI's resignation to the alleged discovery of a network of gay prelates as attempts to influence the cardinals in their choice of a new pontiff.

The Vatican secretariat of state said in a statement: "It is deplorable that as we draw closer to the time of the beginning of the conclave... that there be a widespread distribution of often unverified, unverifiable or completely false news stories that cause serious damage to persons and institutions."

The statement was made as Pope Benedict XVI had his final meeting with senior clerics, lamenting the "evil, suffering and corruption" that have defaced God's creation in a final address to Vatican officials.

The Vatican also condemned Italian media reports of intrigue, corruption and blackmail among senior prelates. "People who think in terms of money, sex and power and see different realities through this prism cannot see the Church any differently," he said. "The result is a profoundly unjust description of the Church and many of its people," Vatican spokesman Lombardi added.

US strips citizenship of Rwandan over hiding role in genocide

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A Rwandan woman who won political asylum in the US after hiding her family's role in the 1994 genocide has been convicted in a New Hampshire court of lying about her own part in the mass killings.

Beatrice Munyenyezi, 43, was immediately stripped of the US citizenship she had gained a decade earlier in the same courthouse where she was found guilty on Thursday of making false statements to officials in order to cover up how she selected Tutsis to be raped and murdered. She faces up to 10 years in prison and then likely deportation to face a trial in Rwanda for genocide.

Munyenyezi settled in Manchester, New Hampshire, with three young daughters in 1998 after claiming to have been persecuted in Rwanda.

She caught the attention of the US



authorities several years later after giving false testimony on behalf of her husband and mother-in-law who were later sentenced to life in prison for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

Prosecutors alleged that Munyenyezi had a "front row seat" during the mass killings of about 800,000 Tutsis because her mother-in-law, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, served as the minister of family and women's affairs in the Hutu government which organised the slaughter.

When the killings began in April 1994, the government sent

Nyiramasuhuko to her home city, Butare, to order the governor to begin murdering Tutsis there. When the governor refused he was killed and Nyiramasuhuko took charge along with her son and Munyenyezi's husband, Arsene Shalom Ntahobali, a leader of the interahamwe militia at the forefront of the murders.

The killings in Butare were among the most intense of the genocide.

Nyiramasuhuko had the presidential guard brought into the city to kick start the slaughter.

Prosecutors said they began investigating Munyenyezi after she gave evidence at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 2006 in which she testified that there was no roadblock with her husband and other militiamen butchering people outside the Butare hotel, owned by her in-laws, in which she was staying.

Troops, Islamists clash in Mali

13 soldiers, 65 Islamists killed

AFP, Gao

Chad suffered the heaviest losses so far in the French-led campaign to drive Islamists from northern Mali after a battle in which it said 13 Chadian soldiers and 65 Islamist rebels were killed.

News of the battle came after two suicide car bombers targeted ethnic Tuareg forces in the northern town of Tessalit, killing three people.

A US official meanwhile confirmed that Washington had deployed several Predator drones to Niger to fly surveillance missions in support of French forces in Mali.

The clash between Chadian forces and the Islamists took place Friday in the mountainous Ifoghas region of northern Mali, Chad's military command announced.

Earlier this month Chad deployed 1,800 soldiers in the northern city of Kidal to secure what had been the rebels' last urban stronghold, putting itself in the frontline in the fight against the Islamists.

A US defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity, meanwhile confirmed that drones were now flying out of Niamey, Niger, from a base with a 100-strong contingent of air force personnel.