

NEWSIN brief

Sarkozy secret cash case 'dropped'

BBC ONLINE

A criminal investigation into former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, for allegedly soliciting secret campaign financing from France's richest woman, has been dropped, judicial sources say.

Sarkozy has been left off a list of those to appear for trial over the so-called Bettencourt affair, they say.

The decision could leave Sarkozy, 58, clear to contest the 2017 election.

India test-fires nuke-capable missile

PTI, Balasore

India yesterday test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear-capable Prithvi-II missile with a strike range of 350km from a test range at Chandipur, about 15km from here.

Prithvi, a surface to surface missile, is capable of carrying 500kg to 1000kg of warheads and is powered by liquid propulsion twin engines. It uses advanced inertial guidance system with manoeuvring trajectory.

32 dead in India lightning strikes

AFP, Patna

At least 32 people including nine children were killed over the weekend by lightning strikes in the eastern Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, officials said yesterday.

"About 24 people including seven children were killed Saturday and Sunday by bolts of lightning across Bihar," State Disaster Management Minister Renu Kumari Kushwaha said. In neighbouring Jharkhand, eight people including two children died, Puran Mahto, an official in the state's Dhanbad district said.

Lanka's first Tamil CM takes oath

PTI, Colombo

C V Wigneswaran was sworn in yesterday as the first elected Tamil chief minister of Northern Province - the stronghold of the vanquished rebel LTTE - weeks after his party secured a landslide victory in the historic polls held after nearly three decades.

Wigneswaran, 73, took oath before President Mahinda Rajapaksa at a function held at Temple Trees, the presidential house.

Wigneswaran, a former Supreme Court judge, was nominated as the chief minister following the landslide victory of the country's main Tamil party, Tamil National Alliance (TNA), at the elections held on September 21.

Nott reveals his love for Thatcher

One of Margaret Thatcher's ministers gushed over her "good looks, charm and bearing" in a resignation note released yesterday that reads almost like a love letter to the former British prime minister.

John Nott wrote the private note when he resigned as defence minister from Thatcher's Conservative government in 1983, and it has now been made public.

"Your greatest triumph as a PM, if I may say so, is that your colleagues actually like you. Some of them even love you, just a little!" he wrote to Thatcher, who died in April this year, aged 87.

Nott continued: "It is inexcusable to say so nowadays but I actually admire you as a woman -- your good looks, charm and bearing have always attracted me, as a man.

"I'm sorry, but what is wrong with that!

"I think your emotional, instinctive and unpragmatic approach to most issues -- so very unmasculine -- is the secret of your success in the male-dominated world of politics."

Nott referred to the letter, which he signed "Love - John", in his memoir and revealed that Thatcher did not reply.

Thatcher was prime minister between 1979 and 1990. Her private papers from 1983 have been released by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation.



Egyptian Muslim brotherhood and supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi block the road during clashes with riot police along Ramsis street in downtown Cairo, on Sunday. At least 51 people were killed in clashes between Islamists and police in Egypt, most of them in Cairo, a senior health ministry official said, as thousands of supporters of the military marked the anniversary of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. (Story on page 16)

PHOTO: AFP

US gives credit to Assad for honouring arms deal

Experts say Syria cooperating; Russia-US talks set for mid-Nov

AFP, Damascus

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad can take "credit" for moving quickly to eliminate his regime's chemical arms, the United States said yesterday, as disarmament experts said Damascus was being "cooperative".

Speaking in Indonesia, US Secretary of State John Kerry welcomed the start of work to destroy Syria's chemical weapons under the terms of a UN Security Council resolution.

"The process has begun in record time and we are appreciative for the Russian cooperation and obviously for the Syrian compliance," he told reporters after talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"I think it's a credit to the Assad



regime, frankly. It's a good beginning and we welcome a good beginning."

Syria agreed to give up its chemical arsenal under last month's UN resolution, which enshrined an agreement struck between Washington and Moscow aimed at averting US military action.

Under the plan, Syria's chemical

weapons production facilities must be destroyed by November 1.

The process is being overseen by a joint team from the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which arrived in Damascus last Tuesday.

On Sunday, it began overseeing the first work to destroy and disable parts of the weapons arsenal.

Syria's chemical arsenal, believed to include 1,000 tonnes of the nerve agent sarin, mustard gas and other banned arms at dozens of sites, must be destroyed by mid-2014.

Meanwhile, Russia's foreign minister meanwhile said Washington and Moscow had agreed to push for Syria peace talks in mid-November.

US defends capture of Libi despite Libya's protest

Vows 'relentless' fight against global terror

AFP, Nusa Dua

Secretary of State John Kerry yesterday insisted the capture of an alleged al-Qaeda operative in Libya in a US raid was legal, after Tripoli demanded answers about the "kidnap".

Abu Anas al-Libi, who was indicted in connection with the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and has a \$5 million FBI bounty on his head, was captured on Saturday.

It was one of two US raids at the weekend, with US Navy Seals also storming a Shebab stronghold in the southern Somali port of Barawe, although the success of that assault was unclear. The operation to capture Libi drew fury from the Libyan government, which said it was unauthorised.

But Kerry yesterday defended the operation as within the law.

"With respect to Abu Anas al-Libi, he is a key al-Qaeda figure, and he is a legal and an

appropriate target for the US military," Kerry told reporters on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Indonesia.

Libi was taken to a US Navy warship in the region after the raid and was being questioned there, a US official said.

Libi, 49, had been indicted in the US federal court in New York for allegedly playing a key role in the east Africa bombings -- which left more than 200 dead -- and plots to attack US forces.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Sunday the operations sent "a strong message to the world that the United States will spare no effort to hold terrorists accountable".

"We will continue to maintain relentless pressure on terrorist groups that threaten our people or our interests, and we will conduct direct action against them, if necessary, that is consistent with our laws and our values," he added.

Pakistan's army chief confirms retirement



AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's powerful army chief General Ashfaq Kayani on Sunday confirmed he will retire next month at the end of his second tenure, ending rumours he would seek to keep a key military role.

Kayani, who oversaw Pakistan's first democratic transfer of power, will retire on November 29 in a move likely to be seen as pushing forward the country's development as a democracy.

"It is time for others to carry forward the mission of making Pakistan a truly democratic, prosperous and peaceful country that embodies the finest dreams our founding fathers had envisaged for us," he said in a statement.

Kayani was appointed Chief of the Army Staff in 2007 and was given an additional three-year term in 2010.

Pakistan's army chief is considered the most powerful man in the country, commanding a force of around 600,000 and guiding policy in defence as well as in foreign and home affairs.

The country has suffered three coups and been ruled for more than half of its 66-year history by the military.



The spouses of visiting Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit leaders pose for a group photo during their visit to the Bali Safari and Marine Park in Gianyar, on the Indonesian resort island of Bali, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Deliberate power cuts hit Andhra

PTI, Vizianagaram/new Delhi

Large parts of coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions remained in darkness for the second day yesterday and several trains cancelled with electricity employees on strike amid continuing protests against bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh (AP) of India.

Former chief minister and TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu brought his fight against bifurcation of the state to the national capital when he started an indefinite fast.

Concerned over simmering tension on granting Telangana statehood, the Centre appealed to people to create the environment for healthy dialogue process and assured all regions of AP that an amicable solution that safeguards interests of all will be found.

The appeal by Union home minister Sushilkumar Shinde came even as curfew remained in place in violence-hit Vizianagaram town -- the epicentre of the protests in support of "United Andhra". Curfew was clamped on Saturday night.

"We are confident of achieving an amicable solution that gives safeguards to people of all regions in the state," Shinde told PTI in New Delhi after a meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh whom he briefed about the prevailing situation in Seemandhra.

Shinde's deputy RPN Singh said there is no scope for "reconsidering" the proposed creation of Telangana.

Shinde's statement came close on the heels of four Union ministers of Seemandhra region meeting the prime minister requesting him to accept their resignations over Telangana statehood but got no assurance.

What is required to win a Nobel Prize?

AFP, Stockholm

For a scientist to win a Nobel Prize, many things have to come together -- ample funding, a supportive environment, even luck. But one rarely recognised factor may be more important than any other: democracy.

"Of course, you need to have at least the fundamental resources," said Swedish virologist Erling Norrby, a former member of the Nobel Committee for Medicine. "But science also requires an open society. A democratic system is very important."

There is solid science behind the claim that democratic systems and Nobel prizes go together, according to Warren Smith, an American mathematician with the website Rangevoting.org.

He has carried out statistical analysis on the correlation between a society's level of democracy and its ability to rack up Nobel Prizes. The conclusion: Democracies create Nobel-worthy research, non-democratic regimes don't.

"It could be a fluke, but it's unlikely. There's a statistical probability of 0.01 that something this impressive could happen by chance," said Smith, whose study excluded the peace prize.

Even the Soviet Union, often highlighted as an authoritarian state that could produce good research, may be less of an exception than it seems.

On a per-capita basis, the United States has done 17 times better than the former Soviet Union, Denmark 39 times better.

The democracy link could also go a long way towards explaining the pro-Western bias of the Nobel prize.

Historically, 247 out of altogether 834 Nobel Laureates -- including winners of the literature and peace prizes -- were born in the United States. Many more did their Nobel-winning research at US universities.

Middle Eastern countries have performed badly in the prize stakes -- a phenomenon some have sought to explain with religion.

Prominent atheist Richard Dawkins stated this year in a controversial tweet that "all the world's Muslims have fewer Nobel prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge."

Wave of blasts kill 29 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

A wave of car and roadside bombs hit Baghdad province on Monday evening, killing at least 21 people, while eight security forces members died in other attacks, officials said.

The Baghdad attacks are just the latest coordinated bombings to strike Iraq's capital in recent weeks, as the country witnesses its worst violence since 2008.

This year's surge in violence has raised fears of a relapse into the kind of intense Sunni-Shia bloodshed that peaked in 2006-2007 and killed tens of thousands of people.

Eight car bombs and two roadside bombs exploded in eight areas in and around Baghdad yesterday, killing at least 21 people and wounding at least 98, officials said.

With the latest violence, more than 200 people have been killed so far this month, and over 4,900 since the beginning of the year, according to AFP figures based on security and medical sources.

Malala eyes politics to change Pakistan

AFP, London

Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl shot by the Taliban last year for campaigning for girls' education, yesterday said she hoped to become a politician to "change the future of my country".

The 16-year-old, whose continued fight for all children to go to school has made her a favourite for the Nobel Peace Prize this week, also backed dialogue with the Taliban, although she said this was an issue for the government.

However, the Pakistani Taliban yesterday said they would target the 16-year-old again for promoting western propaganda.

In her first in-depth interview since the attack, Malala told the BBC that discussions with the Taliban were needed to achieve peace.

Malala said it was important that the Taliban discussed their demands.

"They must do what they want through dialogue," she said. "Killing people, torturing people and flogging people... it's totally against Islam. They are misusing the name of Islam."

"I will be a politician in my future. I want to change the future of my country and I want to make education compulsory," Malala said in a BBC interview.

"But for me the best way to fight against terrorism and extremism is a simple thing -- educate the next generation."

Malala dismissed the continued threats against her life and repeated her desire to return to Pakistan from Britain, where she was flown for treatment after the attack in October and where she now goes to school.

Malala admitted Britain had been a culture shock, "especially for my mother because we had never seen that women would be that much free -- they would go to any market, they would be going alone with no men, no brothers and fathers".

She said: "I'm not becoming western, I'm still following my own culture, the Pashtun culture."

