

Pakistan frees Musharraf from house arrest

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan formally freed former ruler Pervez Musharraf from house arrest yesterday after a court granted him bail in the last criminal case against him.

But the retired general remains under heavy guard in his villa on the edge of Islamabad because of serious threats to his life.

The Taliban have threatened to kill Musharraf, who as president allied Islamabad with Washington in the US "war on terror" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

An Islamabad district court on Monday granted the 70-year-old bail over a deadly raid on a radical mosque in the capital in 2007, the last of the cases against him dating back to his 1999-2008 rule.

Prison staff left the house, which had been declared a "sub-jail", on Thursday after Musharraf's legal team submitted bail bonds totalling 200,000 rupees (\$2,000).

"We received written orders from Islamabad city administration this morning and we have called back the prison officials deployed at his house," Malik Mushtaq, the superintendent of Adiala prison in Rawalpindi, told AFP.

Jawad Paul, the head of Islamabad's local administration, confirmed the news.

"Musharraf is a free man now, his house is no more a sub-prison," he told AFP.

His lawyer Ilyas Siddiqui said Musharraf was free to go wherever he wants in Pakistan, though his name remains on a government exit control list, meaning he is unable to leave the country.

Former commando Musharraf returned to Pakistan in March after years of self-imposed exile to run in the May general election, vowing to "save" the country from economic collapse and militancy.

But he was barred from contesting the poll, which was won convincingly by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif -- the man he ousted from power in 1999 -- and was hit with a series of criminal cases dating back to his rule.



Residents of Legazpi city in Albay province, south of Manila, are evacuated yesterday ahead of a super typhoon that was to strike the country early today. Authorities warned Typhoon Haiyan, the world's most powerful typhoon of the year with wind gusts exceeding 330 kilometres an hour, could cause major damage across a vast area of the central and southern Philippines. The typhoon has forced mass evacuations, flight cancellations and school suspensions across the disaster-weary nation.

PHOTO : AFP

Iran nuke talks kicks off with guarded hope

AFP, Geneva

A fresh round of talks between Iran and world powers kicked off yesterday with a push for Tehran to freeze its disputed nuclear programme in exchange for some relief from sanctions.

Officials have said that a long-awaited deal on curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions may be finally within reach, after years of fruitless talks were given fresh momentum by the election of Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani, seen as a relative moderate.

In their second meeting in Geneva in less than a month, negotiators from the United States and five other global powers sat down with Iranian officials for two days of talks aimed at hammering out an agreement.

Chaired by Catherine Ashton -- the EU diplomatic chief who heads the so-called P5+1 group of Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany -- the initial talks ended after 45 minutes but were set to resume later.

"The talks are extremely complex and are now getting into a serious phase," Ashton's spokesman Michael Mann told journalists.

"It was a good opening session... We have agreed with the Iranian side that we will not go into the details, into the substance of what's being discussed in the room," he said.

"But we very much hope of course that there will be concrete progress here over the next couple of days."

In a possible indication the talks were making progress, Iranian officials said Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who opened the negotiations with Ashton, had cancelled a trip to Rome.

Iran's lead negotiator in Geneva, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, said in comments shown on Iranian state television that Zarif would be staying in Geneva because talks "have entered a complicated, difficult and intensive" phase.

He said Iranian officials would be meeting separately with European, Russian, Chinese and US officials yesterday before full talks resume in the early evening.

Both sides have said recent talks have been the most productive in years but admit that reaching a deal will not be easy.

Iran is anxious for relief from crippling economic sanctions that have cut oil revenues in half, caused the value of the rial to plunge and pushed inflation above 40 percent.

Too fat to fly

French family stranded in US

AFP, Chicago

A French family who came to the United States for medical treatment said they were stranded in Chicago after British Airways determined their son was too fat to fly.

Kevin Chenais, 22, spent a year and a half at the Mayo Clinic for treatment of a hormone disorder which led him to weigh 500 pounds.

His mother was near tears as she described the family's problems to the local CBS affiliate.

"We blame British Airways because now they just leave us, and they brought us here," Christina Chenais told the station.

"If they could bring him here with that problem in economy, there was a way to take him back by economy but just get him back home for his medical treatments to continue."

The family spent a week in an airport hotel trying to resolve the matter and, running out of money, has decided their only option is to take a train to New York and get back to France on the Queen Mary cruise ship.

Kevin Chenais requires round-the-clock oxygen and medical attention.

A British Airways spokesperson told CBS that its customer service team "worked diligently to find a solution."

"Unfortunately, it is not possible to safely accommodate the customer on any of our aircraft," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Calls grow for probe

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian officials demanded a global probe into the "killing" of Yasser Arafat yesterday, a day after it emerged that Swiss forensic tests showed he probably died from polonium poisoning.

With the scientific analysis purportedly showing how the Palestinian leader had died mysteriously, a senior figure in the Palestine Liberation Organisation called for an international inquiry to determine who was behind it.

"The (test) results proved Arafat was poisoned by polonium, and this substance is owned by states, not people, meaning that the crime was committed by a state," said Wasel Abu Yusef of the PLO's executive committee.

"Just as a committee was formed to investigate the killing of (slain Lebanese prime minister) Rafiq Hariri, there must be a international committee to investigate the killing of president Arafat."

His remarks came a day after Al-Jazeera published a report by Swiss scientists that said the results of tests on Arafat's remains "moderately support the proposition that the death was the consequence of poisoning with polonium-210".

Arafat died in France on November 11, 2004 at the age of 75, but doctors were unable to specify the cause of death. No autopsy was carried out at the time, in line with his widow Suha's request.

Officials from Fatah, which dominates both the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, were scheduled to meet at 1100 GMT to discuss the findings, a senior party member told AFP.

In an interview with Al-Jazeera on Wednesday, Suha Arafat, widow of Yasser Arafat, charged that the poisoning amounted to "the assassination of a great leader" and a "political crime".

Following Arafat's sudden demise and death, rumours exploded across the Palestinian spectrum that Israel was responsible, a charge Israeli officials have repeatedly rejected.

Israel's foreign ministry on Wednesday scoffed at the notion that Arafat had been poisoned, describing the matters as a long-running "soap opera" and suggesting the various investigations were not impartial.

The Palestinians received the Swiss report on November 2 and a separate Russian team appointed by the Palestinian Authority also handed in its report on the same day.

Some 60 samples were taken from Arafat's remains in November last year and were divided between the Swiss and Russian investigators and a French team carrying out a probe at his widow's request.

Last month, The Lancet medical journal said Swiss scientists had found traces of polonium in separate tests on Arafat's clothing which "support

ARAFAT 'KILLING'



A woman argues with riot police yesterday as she tries to pass outside the headquarters of former public broadcaster ERT in Athens. Greek riot police burst into the headquarters of former public broadcaster ERT early yesterday and forcibly removed employees who had been occupying the site since its shock shutdown five months ago.

Qaeda's reign of fear in Syria

CNN ONLINE

Raqqa was, a matter of months ago, one of Syria's most liberal cities. Now locals call it Tora Bora. They say it's as if the Taliban of Afghanistan have taken over.

After months of bombardment by the regime and a chaotic lack of control by weak and divided moderate rebels, al Qaeda have found a broken society, made it their home, and imposed on it hardline Islamist law.

Each morning, activists told us, they seem to awake to a more conservative city. The "Bayanaat" or rulings sometimes appear on town walls. Many limit women's rights -- to walk alone, to style or show their hair. Other edicts come by word of mouth -- no smoking, no cameras. Behind them are often foreign jihadists from the al-Qaeda linked militant group the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

Dozens of interviews with activists and Syrians have also detailed the story of a city where women -- along with the previously liberal lifestyle of an entire town -- are being rapidly suppressed by militants bent on establishing an Islamic caliphate across northern Syria.

One female activist said: "They are closing hair salons, women can't go out at certain times. They spat on one girl for disobedience. It's like Afghanistan. Now people call Raqqa Tora Bora." The speed of change has overwhelmed many who notice that the city is becoming quieter and more conservative each week.

ISIS first came into town on May 15, and swiftly executed men they accused of working for the regime. At first, they seemed an Islamist but better-organized alternative to the rebels who had failed to bring governance or peace to the city for months.

Rebels who opposed ISIS were at first jailed, sparking protests. Yet ISIS became increasingly uncompromising in their grip on the town. Rules for social conduct in Raqqa, some written and some not, have emerged in the past few weeks. They have yet to reach the extent of those seen in the nearby town of Jarablus -- where one poster recently warned thieves would have their hand chopped off -- but locals fear that could come soon.

Anti-ISIS dissent has been silenced in Raqqa, and many activists and locals we spoke to have fled the town. Some stay and spray-paint graffiti declaring that ISIS and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad are the same, or telling ISIS to get out.

Locals note the irony in the fact that ISIS beats them for this graffiti, just in the same way that the Assad regime was accused of torturing young people for anti-government graffiti in the southern town of Daraa -- an incident that began the revolution in March 2011. For many, ISIS is now something worse than the regime.

Egypt evaluating ties with Turkey

PTI, Cairo

Egypt has taken strong objection to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments that "Rabaa sign" adopted by the supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsi is a symbol of denouncing injustice.

Islamist supporters of Morsi have adopted the "Rabaa sign" - four-finger salute - during recent protests as a symbol of defiance to the interim government.

At a meeting of his Turkish Justice and Development Party on Sunday, Erdogan said the "Rabaa sign" is not only a symbol for the just cause of the Egyptian people, but also a sign of denouncing injustice and persecution in all parts of the world.

"Egypt is re-evaluating its relationship with Turkey in light of such statements," presidential spokesperson Ehab Badawy said.

from 09 December 2013

Yangon

Biman Bangladesh Airlines resumes twice-a-week flight to Yangon from 09 December 2013. Yangon (Rangoon) came under the wings of Biman in 1976 and the operation was suspended in 2006, the year the capital of Myanmar was moved to Nay Pyi Taw.

Myanmar is very rich in natural resources like petroleum, timber, tin, antimony, zinc, copper, tungsten, lead, coal, limestone, natural gas, hydro-power and jade and finest quality ruby.

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