



### Case against me political, says Sarkozy

BBC ONLINE

Ex-President Nicolas Sarkozy yesterday said the French justice system is being used for "political ends" after he was placed under formal investigation for influence peddling.

In extracts released ahead of the broadcast of a TV interview, Sarkozy denied committing any unlawful act. He said the case against him was intended to harm his reputation.

It is alleged Sarkozy sought insider information from a judge about an inquiry into illegal campaign funding. Sarkozy was detained on Tuesday for questioning - the first time a former French head of state has been held in police custody.

Sarkozy was released from custody around midnight after appearing in court in Paris. When a suspect is placed under formal investigation, he or she is then examined by a judge, who determines whether there is sufficient evidence for the suspect to be charged. The step often, but not always, leads to trial. Influence-peddling can be punished by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of \$205,000.

Investigators are trying to find out whether Sarkozy, 59, who was president from 2007 to 2012, had promised a prestigious role in Monaco to senior prosecutor Gilbert Azibert in exchange for information about the investigation into illegal campaign funding. Azibert was never given the job.

The inquiry into funding is looking into whether Sarkozy received illegal donations for the 2007 election campaign from late Muammar Gaddafi.



Iraqi families fleeing violence in the northern city of Tal Afar, arrive at the Kurdish checkpoint in Askal, 40 km West of Arbil, in the autonomous Kurdistan region, on Tuesday. Saudi Arabia pledged \$500 million in humanitarian aid for Iraq to be disbursed through the United Nations to those in need regardless of sect or ethnicity, state media reported.

PHOTO: AFP

# Time running out for Iraq

## Warn US, UN; PM offers amnesty to turn tide of offensive

AFP, Baghdad

The US and UN have sharply criticised Iraqi leaders, warning time is running out after chaos in parliament despite calls for unity in the face of a Sunni militant offensive.



Nuri al-Maliki

Iraq Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki offered an amnesty to some backers of a sweeping militant offensive, in an apparent attempt to undercut support for the insurgents.

The offer comes after a farcical opening to the new parliament, despite world leaders calling on Iraq's fractious politicians to unite urgently to help combat insurgents, as the military struggles to seize the initiative. Maliki's surprise move, made in his weekly televised address, appeared to be a bid to split the broad alliance of jihadists, loyalists of executed dictator Saddam Hussein and anti-government tribes that has captured large chunks of five provinces, displacing hundreds of thousands of people.

### IS CALLS FOR ALLEGIANCE

Loyalists are battling militants led by the IS, which Sunday declared a "caliphate", an Islamic form of government last seen under the Ottoman Empire, and ordered Muslims worldwide to pledge allegiance to their chief. The announcement is an indicator of IS confidence, with its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi even calling Tuesday for skilled professionals to join the cause, and marks a move against al-Qaeda, from which the group broke away.

The vast majority of Iraq's Sunni Arab minority do not actively support the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group spearheading the offensive, but analysts say anger over perceived mistreatment by the authorities means they are less likely to cooperate with the security forces. A major Sunni Arab militant offensive, spearheaded by jihadists from the Islamic State group, has overrun large areas of five provinces since June 9.

Iraqi security forces folded under the weight of the initial onslaught, in some cases shedding uniforms and

abandoning vehicles to flee. They are now performing better, but are still struggling to regain lost territory.

Tuesday's first session of parliament since April elections ended in chaos, with so many Sunni and Kurdish deputies staying away after a break meant to soothe soaring tempers that the quorum was lost and a speaker could not be elected.

Washington quickly warned that "time is not on Iraq's side", with State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf calling for "extreme urgency".

UN special envoy Nickolay Mladenov said Iraqi politicians "need to realise that it is no longer business as usual".

Under a de facto agreement, the premier is a Shia Arab, the speaker Sunni Arab and the president a Kurd.

Meanwhile, Maliki yesterday rejected an assertion by the country's autonomous Kurdish region that its control of disputed territory is here to stay.

He was responding to remarks by regional president Massud Barzani last week that there was no going back on Kurdish rule in the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk and other towns now defended by Kurdish fighters against Sunni militants.

# Syrian chem weapons transferred to US ship

AFP, Gioia Tauro

The international operation to destroy Syrian chemical weapons entered its final phase yesterday, with the stockpile being loaded onto a US military ship equipped to dispose of them.

Hundreds of tonnes of mustard gas and ingredients to make Sarin nerve gas were transferred from a Danish freighter in the southern Italian port of Gioia Tauro amid tight security.

An exclusion zone was set up around the port in the Reggio Calabria region as the vessels moored stern-to-stern, and the containers were moved from one ship to the other by crane and a vast climbing platform.

The operation is being overseen by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPAC). Safety officers in the area are constantly monitoring for the possible release of dangerous toxins into the sea amid protests by Italian environmentalists about the "poison ship".

The chemical agents will be destroyed in international waters. The process to destroy the materials is expected to take between 45 and 90 days.

The disposal process marks the culmination of a programme to rid Syria of its chemical weapons stockpile after the outcry that followed chemical attacks by the Assad regime in the suburbs of Damascus on August 23 last year, that may have killed as many as 1,400 people.

Syria shipped out its stockpile of chemical weapons under the terms of a UN-backed and US-Russia brokered agreement to head off Western air strikes against the regime last year.

# 'REVENGE KILLING' OF PALESTINIAN TEEN Clashes erupt in Jerusalem

AGENCIES

A Palestinian teenager was kidnapped and killed yesterday in an apparent act of revenge for the murder by militants of three Israeli youths, triggering violent clashes in east Jerusalem.

Palestinian leaders denounced the killing, holding Israel responsible and demanding the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu act to prevent revenge attacks.

Hamas yesterday warned that Israel would pay for the kidnap and murder of the Palestinian teenager.

Israeli leaders have appealed for calm. Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the "despicable murder" and the mayor of Jerusalem urged restraint.

The United States condemned the killing warning acts of vengeance would worsen an explosive situation.

"There are no words to convey adequately our condolences to the Palestinian

people," Secretary of State John Kerry said in a statement.

Eyewitnesses told AFP 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khder was seen being forced into a car by three Israelis in east Jerusalem.

And police confirmed a body had been found in a forest in Givat Shaul in west Jerusalem, although they refused to link the two incidents. However, DNA tests proved the body was that of the missing teenager, his father said.

The attack is widely believed to have been carried out in revenge for the kidnap and killing of three Israeli teenagers by Palestinian militants, with Israeli police raising the alert to the second highest level across the country.

Shortly after dawn, crowds of angry Palestinians began gathering outside the teenager's home in Shuafat, with violent clashes erupting at 8:00am and showing no sign of easing some eight hours later. The Red Crescent said at least 65 people had been hurt in the clashes.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian protestor directs fireworks toward Israeli police during clashes in Shuafat neighborhood in Israeli-annexed Arab East Jerusalem, yesterday.

# Obama worst US President: Survey

REUTERS, Washington

Two years into President Barack Obama's second term, more voters say they are dissatisfied with his administration's handling of everything from the economy to foreign policy, giving him the worst marks of any modern US president, a poll said yesterday.

In a survey of 1,446 registered voters, 33 percent said Obama was the worst president since World War Two, while 28 percent pointed to his predecessor, George W. Bush, as the worst, the poll by Quinnipiac University found.

Voters were split over which of the two most recent presidents has done a better job with 39 percent saying Obama has been a better president than Bush and, 40 percent saying Obama is worse.

Most voters said Ronald Reagan, who served two terms in the 1980s, was the best president since 1945, the survey showed.

"Over the span of 69 years of American history and 12 presidencies, President Barack Obama finds himself with President George W. Bush at the bottom of the popularity barrel," said Tim Malloy, assistant director of Quinnipiac University's polling unit.

While Obama's job approval rating has inched higher to 40 percent, up from 38 percent in December, more voters gave him largely negative marks in key areas: the economy, foreign policy, healthcare and terrorism, according to the poll.

On the environment, 50 percent gave Obama positive marks.



# Berlin talks renew hope

## Top diplomats urge new truce talks by July 5

AFP, Berlin

The foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France yesterday agreed that fresh ceasefire talks involving the OSCE should start no later than Saturday on crisis-torn Ukraine.

"Ministers urge that the Contact Group should resume no later than July 5 with the goal of reaching an unconditional and mutually agreed sustainable ceasefire," the four top diplomats said in a joint statement after talks in Berlin.

The so-called Contact Group represents Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier had hastily convened the talks as fighting escalated in Ukraine after the government had ended a 10-day ceasefire with pro-Russian rebels that Kiev charged had been violated over 100 times by the separatists, claiming some 30 lives. Hundreds of civilians and rebels have also died.

The German minister warned that in the past 48 hours the situation had "dramatically escalated... and might get totally out of control".

In a bid to de-escalate the crisis, the four ministers agreed that the violence should cease on all sides, hostages be released, and Ukraine border points with Russia be brought back under government control.

Earlier, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had warned Moscow shortly before the talks that economic sanctions remained an option unless it backed peace efforts.

"Regarding sanctions against Russia, we have so far reached level two and we cannot rule out having to go further," Merkel added. The European Union has threatened to ratchet up sanctions against the Russian economy unless it reins in the separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow denies supporting them. Poroshenko, under pressure at home to take a tough line on rebels who have been fighting Kiev's forces since April, refused to renew the 10-day ceasefire on Monday night and ordered an offensive against "the terrorists, militants and marauders".

That won backing from the United States and Germany, but drew criticism from Russia's Vladimir Putin who said Ukraine's newly-elected leader had veered off the road to peace.

# Modi has every right to rule: Amartya Sen

HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen was not in favour of Narendra Modi forming the government but having won in the recent elections and as a democratic Indian, he believes Modi has every right to govern and govern well.

Addressing a packed audience at Asia House in London on Monday, Sen dwelt on many lessons that India needed to learn from its Asian neighbours such as Japan and China. He particularly focussed on India's challenges in education, healthcare and power.

Speaking to HT later, Sen said the landslide election results in favour of the BJP did not mean any fundamental changes had taken place in Indian society. The party had got only 31 per cent votes, and such results were not unusual in the present electoral system, he said.

Stating that the Left in India had 'imploded as of now', Sen told the audience comprising diplomats, bankers and leading individuals from various fields that every new government had to function in a secular milieu watched by a largely secular media, courts and the opposition.

Sen said that many were concerned about the "majoritarian tendency" in the Modi government, and whether minority rights would be respected. "We are a democratic country, we are a secular democratic country, people have a right to express their views and I hope we will express it", he said.



# UKRAINE CRISIS

# NEWS IN brief

## Ebola fear grips West Africa

AFP, Accra

Health ministers from across western Africa met yesterday to plan "drastic action" against the world's deadliest-ever Ebola epidemic as dozens of new cases continued to emerge. There have been 759 confirmed or suspected cases of the haemorrhagic fever in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday with 467 people dead.

## US's Afghan envoy steps down

AFP, Washington

The US special envoy for Afghanistan is stepping down, Secretary of State John Kerry announced yesterday in a move which comes at a key juncture in troubled US-Afghan ties. James Dobbins, a veteran diplomat with deep ties to Afghanistan, is retiring after just over a year in office and will be replaced by his deputy Dan Feldman. Kerry said in a statement.

## Cops arrest 500 after Hong Kong protest

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong police arrested more than 500 protesters at a sit-in early yesterday following a huge march that organisers said mobilised half a million people demanding democratic reforms. The arrests followed a largely peaceful march on Tuesday that protest leaders said brought the biggest crowds onto the streets since the city was handed over from Britain to China in 1997.

## Pakistan amends anti-terror law

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's parliament amended an anti-terrorism law yesterday, doubling the maximum prison sentence for those convicted of terror offences to 20 years and allowing security forces to detain suspects for up to 60 days. The Protection of Pakistan Bill 2014 allows security forces to detain suspects for up to 60 days without disclosing their whereabouts or the allegations against them.

## China restricts Ramadan fasting in Xinjiang

AFP, Beijing

China has banned civil servants, students and teachers in its mainly Muslim Xinjiang region from taking part in Ramadan fasting, government websites said, prompting condemnation from an exile group yesterday. China's ruling Communist party is officially atheist, and for years has restricted fasting in Xinjiang, home to the mostly Muslim Uighur minority. China has in the past said that restrictions on fasting are meant to ensure the health of government employees.

## Sectarian unrest shakes Myanmar city

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar police fired warning shots after an angry mob attacked Muslim property in the central city of Mandalay, authorities said yesterday, in the latest eruption of religious unrest to shake the Buddhist-majority nation which has killed at least 250 people since 2012. Around five people were injured as rioters hurled stones at a Muslim teashop and surrounding buildings on Tuesday night, police said.

## Taliban attack military bus in Kabul; 8 killed

AFP, Kabul

A Taliban suicide bomber in Kabul killed eight military officers yesterday in an attack on an air force bus, Afghan officials said, in the latest strike against the national security forces as US troops withdraw. Sediq Sediqqi, spokesman for the interior ministry, told AFP that five civilians were also wounded in the attack that targeted the bus as it took military staff to work.