



A demonstrator throws an inflatable doll known as "Pixuleco" of Brazil's former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in a bonfire during a protest at the appointment of Lula da Silva as a minister, in front of the national congress in Brasilia, Brazil, on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Lula named chief of staff

Fresh protests mount pressure on Brazil's Rousseff to leave office

AFP, Brasilia

Protests have erupted in Brazil after a recorded phone call between President Dilma Rousseff and her once-popular predecessor was released, suggesting that she appointed him to her cabinet to spare him from arrest for corruption.

Rousseff appointed Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as her chief of staff on Wednesday hoping that his political prowess can save her administration. The president is battling an impeachment attempt, a deep recession, and the fallout of an explosive corruption scandal at state oil giant Petrobras.



nomination to the post was aimed at sparing him possible arrest for corruption.

Cabinet ministers can only be tried before the Supreme Court in Brazil, and ministerial immunity will now protect Lula from prosecution in criminal court.

Lula vigorously denies involvement in the scandal, in which investigators say construction companies conspired with Petrobras executives to overbill the oil giant to the tune of \$2 billion, paying huge bribes to politicians and parties along the way.

Rousseff's office said the phone call was merely to discuss a procedural matter. The recording's release caused an uproar in Congress, where furious opposition lawmakers shouted "Resign! Resign!"

Some 2,000 people spontaneously gathered in the capital Brasilia to demand that Lula step down and Rousseff leave office.

"Instead of explaining himself and assuming his responsibilities, former president Lula preferred to flee out the back door," said lawmaker Antonio Imbassahy,

Lanka warns of 'serious threat' to power network

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka warned yesterday of a "serious security threat" to its electricity grid as engineers battled for the fifth straight day to restore supplies crippled by an explosion and a fire.

Deputy power minister Ajith Perera said investigators had not ruled out sabotage in Sunday's blast and a fire at the main distribution centre just outside the capital.

"There is a serious security threat. That is why the military has been called in to protect these (electricity) locations," the minister told reporters in Colombo.

He said investigators had so far been unable to determine the cause of the blast that plunged the country into darkness for about eight hours, the worst black-out in 20 years. Sri Lanka's army, navy and airforce have been deployed to provide round-the-clock protection to all installations.

The military was deployed at vital sites during the island's decades-long Tamil separatist war that ended in May 2009, but there have been no guerrilla-related attacks in the past seven years.

Authorities imposed electricity rationing of seven-and-a-half hours daily as engineers tried to restore normal supplies after Sunday's fire.

But by yesterday afternoon, the authorities had still not managed to get the system fully back online.

Perera said only one of three generators at the Chinese-built coal-fired power plant that automatically shut down on Sunday had been reconnected.

The \$1.35 billion plant commissioned in 2011 has been plagued with frequent breakdowns, he said.

Sunday's was the second major power failure in less than a month and the worst since May 1996, when the entire country was without electricity for four days.

Pathankot issue figures in Sushma-Aziz talks

India to allow Pak probe team to visit wherever necessary

PTI, Pokhara

India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj held a meeting with Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Pakistan Prime Minister, on the sidelines of the Saarc Ministerial meeting here yesterday.

During the meeting, Aziz handed over to Swaraj an invitation from Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to attend the South Association Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit scheduled to be held in Pakistan later this year.

This was the first formal meeting between the two leaders after the January 2 cross-border terror attack on the Indian Air Force base at Pathankot, Punjab, that claimed the lives of seven Indian security personnel.

The attack derailed the Foreign Secretary-level talks between the two south Asian neighbours scheduled for the middle of January after Aziz and Swaraj had in December last year agreed to start a comprehensive bilateral dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi.

The two leaders arrived in Pokhara on Wednesday to attend the 37th meeting of the Saarc council of ministers

which was held yesterday.

Earlier yesterday, Sushma Swaraj and Aziz met for five minutes over breakfast here. Their first meeting was over dinner on Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, India has conveyed that it will allow a Pakistani probe team to visit wherever necessary in connection with the probe into the terror attack on Pathankot airbase, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said yesterday.

"We have taken an in-principle decision to facilitate the visit of a Pakistani team to India for furtherance of our case," he told reporters here.

A Pakistani Joint Investigation Team will arrive in India on March 27 to carry forward its probe into the Pathankot terror attack.

Asked whether the Pakistani team will be given access to strategic Pathankot airbase, Rijiju said, "we will allow them to visit wherever necessary" for the investigation.

On reports that New Delhi has given clearance for visas for a six-member Pakistani SIT team, Rijiju, Union Minister of State for Home, said no decision has been taken on visa as Islamabad has not yet conveyed about the composition

Lok Sabha passes Aadhaar Bill

Opposition claims privacy of Indians at risk

PTI, New Delhi

Rejecting Rajya Sabha's five amendments and opposition's appeal not to make "haste", the Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the legislation that aims at better targeting of subsidies through the Aadhaar unique identity number within hours of the Upper Housing returning it.

Just moments before it was adjourned for more than a month-long recess for scrutiny of budget, the Lok Sabha adopted the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other subsidies, benefits and services) Bill, 2016, by a voice vote after rejecting the recommendations for five amendments made by the Upper House earlier in the evening.

The Aadhaar Bill, 2016, brought in by the government as a money Bill, was opposed by the Opposition over concerns that access to the biometric database in the interest of national security would compromise privacy.

Armed with the Speaker's that it was a money bill, the government rushed it through the Rajya Sabha, which cannot amend it but only make recommendations for amendment to the Lok Sabha.

Once the Lok Sabha passes a money bill with or without amendments recommended by the Rajya Sabha, it is deemed to have been passed by both the Houses.



Elderly women carry sacks past an armed government soldier as they leave their houses during clashes in central Diyarbakir yesterday. Turkish security forces clashed with rebels in the main city of the Kurdish-dominated south-east on March 15, days after a deadly bombing in Ankara claimed by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK). PHOTO: AFP

Libya intervention risky

Says Egypt's Sisi, supports eastern commander

REUTERS, Rome

Military intervention in Libya is risky and foreign powers would be better off supporting a military commander based in the east, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of neighbouring Egypt was quoted as saying yesterday.

A power struggle between two rival administrations in Libya has allowed Islamic State militants to gain ground there, and hardliners have held up efforts to set up a unity government.

Interviewed in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, Sisi recommended supporting Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army - which is linked to the internationally recognised government based in the eastern city of Tobruk - in the fight against jihadists.

"If we give arms and support to the Libyan National Army, it can do the job much better than anyone else, better than any external intervention that would risk putting us in a situation that could get out of hand and provoke uncontrollable developments," he said.

Egypt was putting pressure on Tobruk to accept a United Nations-backed unity government, he said, and wanted all parties to take their share of responsibility.

Tobruk's administration has said it cannot vote on the unity government and the rival General National Congress in Tripoli has said it cannot hand over power.

Foreign powers can only intervene in Libya if asked to do so by a Libyan government and with a U.N. and Arab League mandate, Sisi said. The United States and European Union have said further intervention would need to be requested by Libya.

The Guardian 'plans to cut 250 UK jobs'

AFP, London

The parent company of The Guardian is planning to cut 250 jobs, including 100 in the newsroom, as it attempts to balance the books within three years, the newspaper reported yesterday.

Editor-in-chief Katharine Viner and chief executive David Pemsel sent a joint email to staff saying that the "volatile media environment" had led to an "urgent need for radical action", but that they hoped the redundancies would all be voluntary.

Operating losses amounted to £58.6 million in the year to the end of March 2015, according to the online report.

A spokeswoman for Guardian News and Media confirmed that the company was consulting on proposals "to reduce our UK headcount" but declined to give numbers.

She said there were "no plans" to close The Guardian's sister Sunday newspaper, The Observer.

"In January we unveiled our strategy to address the balance of costs and revenues across Guardian Media Group, targeting new revenue streams and a 20 per cent overall reduction in our current cost base, with an aim to break even at an operating level by 2018/19," the spokeswoman said.

"Today we have shared with colleagues a series of proposals, which include plans to reduce our UK headcount. These proposals form the basis of a consultation process, which begins today."

The proposal is to cut the UK workforce by 18 per cent, or 310 jobs, according to theguardian.com report.

About 60 positions remain unfilled, so the company is hoping to cut 100 jobs from the 725-strong editorial workforce and 150 from commercial and support departments.

The Guardian also employs 210 people in its US and Australian operations, who will be unaffected.

Nefertiti hunt 'finds organic material'

BBC ONLINE

Egypt says a search for the resting place of the pharaonic Queen Nefertiti has revealed possible "organic material" inside empty spaces behind two walls in the tomb of Tutankhamun.

The antiquities minister said radar scans carried out in November pointed to "different things behind the walls".

A more advanced scan will be conducted later this month to ascertain whether the empty spaces are in fact chambers. A British Egyptologist believes Nefertiti was buried there.

She ruled in the 14th Century BC, and may have been Tutankhamun's mother. His tomb was discovered in 1922 by British archaeologist Howard Carter.

Announcing the results of November's scans yesterday, Antiquities Minister Mamdouh el-Damaty said they had revealed the presence of two empty spaces

behind two walls of the burial chamber. "We can say more than 90% that the chambers are there. But I never start the next step until I'm 100%."

"[The scans point to] different things behind the walls, different material that could be metal, could be organic."

He added: "For Egypt it is a very big discovery, could be discovery of the century."

"It is very important for the Egyptian history and for all over the world."

The British Egyptologist Dr Nicholas Reeves believes the remains of Tutankhamun, who died 3,000 years ago

aged 19, may have been rushed into an outer chamber of what was originally Nefertiti's tomb.

He posited in early 2015 that Nefertiti may have been buried there too after examining scans of the tomb, near the site of the original Valley of the Kings in Luxor.



Indian police arrest Muslim students

AFP, New Delhi

Police in India arrested four Muslim students on charges of breaching the peace after rumours the men were cooking beef sparked protests, an officer said yesterday.

Hundreds of fellow students and right-wing Hindu activists had gathered outside a university residence in the northern state of Rajasthan on Monday and were accusing the four of cooking beef -- a taboo in parts of the Hindu-majority nation.

Many Indian states including Rajasthan have banned the consumption of cow meat, which has become even more contentious since the murder last year of a Muslim man wrongly suspected of eating beef.

Local police officer Labhu Ram said a "tense" crowd had gathered and were demanding the men be arrested, although he denied media reports they had been physically attacked.

"We came to know about the incident and rushed to the campus," he told AFP by phone from Chittorgarh district, where the university is located.

"There was high tension as the angry crowd was demanding their arrest, we seized the suspected material and appealed people to leave the spot."

Stay out of EU debate

Pro-Brexit MPs warn Obama

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

US president Barack Obama has been warned against intervening in the EU debate by pro-Brexit MPs ahead of his visit to Britain next month.

In an open letter the cross-party group said it would be an "unfortunate milestone" at the end of Obama's time in office should he enter the debate with even a "passive diplomatic recommendation".

It comes after Boris Johnson labelled Obama's suggestion that Britain would be weaker on the world stage outside the 28-member bloc as "outrageous" and "wholly fallacious".

The letter's signatories said that, while they understood the president was obliged to speak in the interests of the United States, any intervention risked being undemocratic.

Labour backbencher Kate Hoey said the letter aims to caution Obama that "feelings will run high" if he expresses a side in the debate.

She said: "We have chosen to respectfully request he recognises matters of sovereignty are best left to the citizens directly affected."

"We would certainly never think of visiting the United States and telling the US public how to vote in an election or the amendment of their constitution."

The letter, which is the initiative of Leave.EU and the Grassroots Out Brexit campaigns, carries the signatures of Ukip's Nigel Farage, Labour MP Kelvin Hopkins, Tories Tom Pursglove and Peter Bone, and the DUP's Sammy Wilson.

Copies are due to appear in several political journals delivered to the White House and members of the Congress and Senate, as well as political offices on Capitol Hill.

Tory backbencher Bone said that however Obama thought a Leave vote on June 23 may affect the US, it would be better

