



### Social sanction urged for Thai royal critics

AFP, Bangkok

Thais should "socially sanction" those who defame the monarchy following King Bhumibol Adulyadej's death, the junta's justice minister said yesterday, as fresh videos emerged of mob justice against people accused of insulting the institution. The death on Thursday of the world's longest reigning monarch has left the nation bereft of its key pillar of unity and seen mass outpourings of grief from black-clad Thais. But it has also unleashed small but vocal ultra-monarchist forces, including mobs and online crusaders scouring the web and bent on punishing anyone perceived to have insulted the monarchy. "There is no better way to punish these people than to socially sanction them," Justice Minister Paiboon Koomchaya told reporters yesterday, as he vowed to "pursue those people who violate the law". His message comes amid a growing number of cases of vigilantism by royalist Thais against people accused of insulting the monarchy. At 10:30am a video was broadcast live on Facebook showing a mob kicking and beating a man and forcing him to prostrate himself in apology for allegedly insulting the monarchy. During the beating, which appeared to take place in Chonburi east of Bangkok, the man cried out: "I didn't mean to do it, I love the king! It's my fault."

## MILITARY OFFENSIVE TO LIBERATE MOSUL FROM ISLAMIC STATE

# 'Jihadists using human shields'

### Fear for civilian mount as coalition forces close in; report says chemical gas attack possible

REUTERS, Baghdad/erbil

Residents of Mosul said Islamic State was using civilians as human shields as Iraqi and Kurdish forces captured outlying villages in their advance on the jihadists' stronghold.

The leader of Islamic State and one of its main explosives experts were reported to be among thousands of the hardline militants still in Mosul, suggesting the group would go to great lengths to fend off any ground attack within the city limits.

With the attacking forces still between 20 and 50 km (12-30 miles) away, residents reached by telephone said more than 100 families had started moving from southern and eastern suburbs most exposed to the offensive to more central parts of the city.

Islamic State militants were preventing people fleeing Mosul, they said, and one said they directed some towards buildings they had recently used themselves.

"It's quite clear Daesh (Islamic State) has started to use civilians as human shields by allowing families to stay in buildings likely to be targeted by air strikes," said Abu Mahir, who lives near the city's university and offered food to the displaced.

Around 1.5 million people are still living in Mosul and the International Organisation for Migration said it was preparing gas masks in case of chemical attack by the jihadists, who had used such weapons previously against Iraqi Kurdish forces.

The fall of Mosul would signal the defeat of the ultra-hardline Sunni jihadists in Iraq but could also lead to land grabs and sectarian bloodletting between groups which fought one another after the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

For US President Barack Obama, the campaign is a calculated risk, with US officials acknowledging that there is no clear plan for how the region



Smoke billows from a distant village as Iraqi forces hold a position on Monday in the area of al-Shurah, some 45 kms south of Mosul, while advancing towards the city to retake it from the Islamic State (IS) group jihadists.

DEVELOPMENTS	
IS LEADER STILL IN MOSUL: OFFICIAL	
OBAMA: 'MOSUL WILL BE A DIFFICULT FIGHT'	
UN PREPARES FOR FIRST BATCH OF ONE MILLION REFUGEES IN 5-6 DAYS	
US PLANNING SAFE PASSAGE FOR MILITANTS INTO SYRIA: DAMASCUS	

around Mosul will be governed once Islamic State is expelled.

Obama yesterday warned of a tough battle.

"There will be ups and downs in this process, but my expectation is that ultimately it will be successful," he told a joint news conference with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

But the US leader warned of a challenging road ahead.

"Mosul will be a difficult fight. There will be advances and there will be setbacks," he said.

Obama said he expected "significant displacement" of civilians from Mosul, and that the US-led coalition, in conjunction with the United Nations and major aid organizations was prepared to respond to it.

France said it would co-host a multilateral meeting with Iraq on Oct 20 to discuss how to stabilise Mosul and its surroundings once Islamic State has been defeated.

However, the Syrian army yesterday accused the US-led coalition of planning to allow safe passage into Syria for Islamic State militants fleeing the city, saying it would combat this with all forces at its disposal.

The Iraqi army and Peshmerga forces from autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan began moving towards the city at dawn on Monday under air cover from a US-led coalition set up after Islamic State swept into Iraq from Syria in 2014.

Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and explosives expert Fawzi Ali Nouimeh were

both in the city, Hoshiyar Zebari, a senior Kurdish official, said. He described the information as "solid" intelligence.

A total of 20 villages were taken from the militants east, south and southeast of Mosul by early yesterday, according to statements from the two forces, fighting alongside one another for the first time.

The operation had been planned since July with US and other coalition forces and Western and Iraqi officials, mindful of the civil war that followed Saddam's fall, say plans for administering the mainly Sunni city and accommodating those who flee the fighting are in place.

The United Nations has said up to a million people could flee

the city and that it expected the first big wave in five or six days, indicating fighting would reach the city then.

But some residents said Islamic State was making sure people did not leave. Anwar said he fled his Sumer district, which lies near Mosul airport, fearing ground forces and ariel bombing.

Fighting is expected to take weeks, if not months, as some 30,000 government forces, Sunni tribal fighters and Kurdish Peshmerga first encircle the city then attempt to oust between 4,000 and 8,000 Islamic State militants. More than 5,000 US soldiers are also deployed in support missions, as are troops from France, Britain, Canada and other Western nations.

### UN declares a 72-hour Yemen truce

REUTERS, United Nations

A 72-hour ceasefire in Yemen is due to start tonight, the UN envoy for Yemen said on Monday after he received commitments from all of the country's warring factions.

UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said the cessation of hostilities would begin at 2359 local time (2059 GMT) today and could be renewed after the initial three-day period, the United Nations said in a statement.

"The Special Envoy welcomes the restoration of the Cessation of Hostilities, which will spare the Yemeni people further bloodshed and will allow for the expanded delivery of humanitarian assistance," the statement said.

Earlier on Monday, Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdel-Malek al-Mekhlafi said on his official Twitter feed that President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi had agreed to a 72-hour ceasefire with the possibility of it being extended.

"The President agreed to a 72 hrs ceasefire to be extended if the other party adheres to it, activates the DCC (De-escalation and Coordination Committee) and lifts the siege of Taiz," he said.

Hadi's exiled government has been requesting humanitarian access for Taiz, a divided city largely encircled by the Houthis rebels who overran Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014. Government forces maintain control of only one of four access routes.

The Iranian-aligned Houthis and their allies, forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, hold most of Yemen's northern half, while forces loyal to the Saudi-backed Hadi share control of the rest of the country with local tribes.



### Thatcher UK's worst PM in 100 yrs: study

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Margaret Thatcher has been named the worst prime minister of the last 100 years, closely beating fellow Conservative David Cameron in a new survey of leading historical writers.

The Historical Writers' Association (HWA) asked its members to give their views on the last 19 prime ministers, in a survey released to mark Theresa May's 100th day in office on 22 October.

Baroness Thatcher, who died in 2013, came first with 24% of the vote, closely followed by Cameron (22%) and Neville Chamberlain (17%).

Tony Blair took 11% to leave him in fourth spot, while Gordon Brown and Sir Edward Heath were tied for fifth place with 8%.

However, former Liberal Democrat leader Lord Ashdown disagreed with the poll, claiming Baroness Thatcher was a "great and necessary destroyer".

"I disagreed with Mrs Thatcher, I fought her all the way. But I thought she was a great and necessary destroyer, some of those old structures she pulled down had to be pulled down," he said.

However, voters said Thatcher's attitude towards community and society made her eligible for the top spot.

Cameron was also heavily criticised by those who took part in the poll, with his decision to call June's historic EU referendum guaranteeing him second place.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi shakes hands with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi upon her arrival during a ceremonial reception in New Delhi, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Israel angered as UNESCO adopts 'Al-Aqsa' resolution

AFP, Paris

The UN cultural agency yesterday adopted an Arab-sponsored resolution condemning Israel's actions at a flashpoint holy site in east Jerusalem, deepening anger in the Jewish state.

The UNESCO resolution on "occupied Palestine" was endorsed by the agency's executive board at its headquarters in Paris, after being approved at the committee stage last week.

Referring throughout to "the occupying power," it condemns Israel for restricting Muslims' access to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound -- Islam's third holiest site -- and criticises damage by security forces to the site and nearby excavations.

It is the latest episode in a series of rows at UNESCO, which is responsible for protecting important heritage sites and is one of few international organisations that recognises Palestine as a member state.

Israel suspended its cooperation with UNESCO last week in response to the draft resolution and its ambassador, Carmel

Shama Hacoheh, accused the Palestinians of playing "games" yesterday.

Israel is furious that the resolution refers to the Old City site in Jerusalem by its Muslim name, Al-Aqsa or Al-Haram al-Sharif. It is considered holy by Muslims, Christians and Jews. Jews refer to it as the Temple Mount and it is considered the holiest site in Judaism.

While acknowledging the importance of the Old City to "the three monotheistic religions" -- Islam, Judaism and Christianity -- the resolution focuses on Israeli restrictions on Muslims accessing the mosque.

It also includes condemnation of Israel's blockade of Gaza and "constant aggressions by the Israeli settlers" in the West Bank.

The east Jerusalem site is a 14-hectare (35-acre) rectangular esplanade at the southeast corner of the Old City which was seized by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed in a move never internationally recognised.

Israel considers all of Jerusalem as its undivided capital, but the Palestinians want the eastern sector as capital of their future state.

## Russia, Syria halts Aleppo air strikes

AFP, Moscow

Moscow yesterday announced that Russian and Syrian air forces have stopped bombing Aleppo ahead of a brief truce, a move the Kremlin said showed "goodwill" as it faces mounting criticism for backing a brutal regime offensive.

It comes a day after Russia said there would be an eight-hour "humanitarian pause" in the battered city today, a move welcomed by the United Nations and the European Union which nevertheless said the ceasefire needed to be longer to allow the delivery of aid.

However, the US State Department voiced scepticism regarding Moscow's latest initiative while welcoming a halt in the bombing.

The West has expressed increasing alarm at the situation in Aleppo, saying the ferocious Russian-backed onslaught on the rebel-held east could amount to a war crime.

"Strikes in the Aleppo region by the Russian and Syrian air forces are stopping today starting at 10:00 am," Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said in a televised briefing.

"This guarantees the security of civilians' exit through six corridors and prepares the evacuation of the sick and injured from eastern Aleppo," he said, adding that it would also guarantee safe passage for armed rebels to leave eastern Aleppo.

The UN said it was waiting for safety assurances from all sides before going in with "critical humanitarian assistance" for Aleppo's desperate population.

The brutal government offensive against eastern Aleppo -- which has destroyed hospitals and other civilian infrastructure -- has plunged Syria into some of the worst violence of the five-year war that has claimed over 300,000 lives.

## Fire kills 23 in Indian hospital

AGENCIES

A fire broke out late Monday at a private hospital in a city in eastern India, killing at least 23 people, India's federal health minister said.

Minister JP Nadra disclosed the death toll from the fire at the Sum Hospital in the city of Bhubaneswar in an interview with the Times Now TV news station.

An electrical short circuit is believed to be the cause.

They said more than 20 people were being treated for injuries. The slight discrepancy in casualty figures could not be resolved.

Police and fire fighters broke windows and worked with hospital staff and volunteers in a massive rescue operation to evacuate more than 500 patients from the hospital, an eyewitness and hospital officials told PTI.

## 'Stop whining' Obama slams Trump over 'rigged' vote claims

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama issued a scathing rebuke Tuesday to Donald Trump on the eve of the final election debate, blasting him for "whining" about "rigged" elections.

Trump and Democratic rival Hillary Clinton are set for their final presidential debate today, with three weeks to go before Americans head to the polls on November 8.

It is seen as a last chance for the Republican nominee, dogged by accusations of sexual misconduct and sinking poll numbers, to make his mark on millions of voters.

But with Trump pressing the dangerous conspiracy theory that the US election is "rigged," Obama abandoned diplomatic decorum and skewered the mogul from the Rose Garden in front of visiting Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

"I have never seen in my lifetime, or in modern political history, any presidential candidate trying to discredit the elections and the election process before votes have even taken place. It's unprecedented," Obama told a joint press conference. "That is both irresponsible -- and, by the

way, it doesn't really show the kind of leadership and toughness that you'd want out of a president. You start whining before the game's even over?"

"I'd advise Mr Trump to stop whining, and go try to make his case to get votes."

**MELANIA DEFENDS TRUMP**

Trump's campaign has reeled in the face of his lewd comments about women and accusations of sexual assault from several women.

His team has deployed his wife Melania in a media blitz to try to tamp down the furor over the allegations, with interviews airing late Monday on CNN and early Tuesday on Fox News.

"Those words, they were offensive to me and they were inappropriate. And he apologized to me. And I accept his apology. And we are moving on," Trump told Fox.

A firestorm erupted earlier this month when a 2005 video was made public and caught Trump saying lewd things about women, in a mostly off-camera conversation with host Billy Bush of the show "Access Hollywood."

Melania Trump told CNN that she felt her husband had been "egged on by the host to say dirty and bad stuff."

## UNREST IN RAKHINE Crackdown cuts off UN's aid

REUTERS, Yangon

Violence in a Muslim-majority region of Myanmar is stopping aid agencies from delivering food and medicines, a United Nations official said yesterday, as security forces respond to deadly raids that the government says were inspired by Islamists.

Troops have been sweeping northern Rakhine state for more than a week, hunting an estimated 400 fighters who officials believe are members of the mostly stateless Rohingya Muslim community acting with the support of Islamists abroad.

The military has declared the area an "operation zone" and has tightly controlled the flow of information since insurgents seized dozens of weapons in raids on border posts on Oct 9 in which nine police officers were killed.

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