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UNITED KINGDOM

Monday 15 June 2009

International

ISRAEL, Ramat Gan - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded on Sunday to uncommon pressure from Washington by finally giving his endorsement -- with conditions -- to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

AFGHANISTAN, Kabul - Afghanistan's interior minister said on Sunday the Taliban have stepped up their attacks in many parts of the country and warned the Islamist militants would attempt to sabotage an August 20 presidential election.

PAKISTAN, Islamabad - Pakistan has ordered the military to carry out an offensive against Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud and his fighters, a provincial governor said on Sunday.

IRAN, Tehran - Defeated candidate Mirhossein Mousavi demanded on Sunday that Iran's presidential election be annulled and urged more protests, while tens of thousands of people hailed the victory of the hardline Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

RUSSIA, Moscow - The rift between Russia and Belarus deepened on Sunday when Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko snubbed a security summit in Moscow in protest at Russia's "trade war" against his nation.

YEMEN, Sanaa - Yemen has arrested a man described as al Qaeda's top financier in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Separately, a government source said nine foreigners, including seven Germans, were kidnapped in the Saada area of north Yemen.

Sport

FOOTBALL - Premier League - Cristiano Ronaldo has said he does not care if his proposed £80 million move to Real Madrid makes him an object of hate. Ronaldo is set to seal a world record transfer to the Spanish giants this summer after United accepted a bid.

FOOTBALL - Confederations Cup - Fernando Torres hit a first-half hat-trick as Spain thumped New Zealand 5-0 in their Group A clash at the Confederations Cup in Rustenburg.

CRICKET - World Twenty20 - England knocked defending champions India out of the Twenty20 World Cup with a three-run victory in their second-round match at Lord's on Sunday.

TENNIS - ATP Queen's - Andy Murray won the first grass court title of his career after beating James Blake 7-5 6-4 in the Queen's Club final and became the first Briton to win the title in 71 years.

MOTOGP - Italian Valentino Rossi won a monumental battle with Fiat Yamaha team-mate Jorge Lorenzo to triumph in the Catalan's home MotoGP race.

MORE THAN HALF OF BRITONS THINK BROWN "DAMAGING"

A little over half of Britons think Prime Minister Gordon Brown is damaging the country by staying in power, according to a survey published on Sunday. The poll, conducted on Thursday and Friday, came after European and local elections at which Brown's Labour party, in power for 12 years, suffered substantial setbacks. It also follows a parliamentary expenses scandal that has affected all parties but damaged the incumbents more, provoking popular anger. In terms of party support, 40 percent of those polled favoured the Conservatives, against 24 percent for Labour. The gap of 16 points remains the same from the last poll, but both parties have lost support since last month, when the Conservatives stood at 43 percent and Labour 27 percent.

UK SUFFERS FIRST H1N1 FLU DEATH

Britain recorded its first death from H1N1 flu on Sunday after a patient suffering from the disease died in Scotland, health officials said. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared an influenza pandemic on Thursday and advised governments to prepare for a long-term battle against the virus. The Scottish government said no further details about the patient would be released until later to allow the family time to grieve.



VIRGIN MAY BE NORTHERN ROCK BUYER

The British government is considering options for nationalised lender Northern Rock, including a sale of the bank to Richard Branson's Virgin Group, the Sunday Express reported, citing unnamed sources. The Express said the Treasury was considering Virgin as a potential buyer of Northern Rock, although it had yet to decide whether a sale of the bank would deliver the best return for taxpayers. The Treasury said there was no plan to sell Northern Rock at this stage. Any sale of Northern Rock would have to wait until the European Union competition authorities deliver their verdict on the company's state-assisted restructuring, expected during the summer. Virgin declined to comment on the newspaper report, but a spokesman added: "We've always been interested in becoming a bank and we will continue to study the market for any opportunities."

MICHELLE OBAMA FINDS A NEW FRIEND IN QUEEN

If Michelle Obama ever needs a place to stay in London, she could do worse than call on Queen Elizabeth. The two women met at the G20 summit in London in April and have kept in touch since then, royal sources said on Sunday. When Michelle Obama made a private visit to the London last week with daughters, Malia, 10, and Sasha, 8, they were given a private three-hour tour of Buckingham Palace, including a meeting with the queen. According to the sources, the queen and Michelle Obama have exchanged letters and spoken by telephone since that first meeting. The visit last Wednesday was organised as a treat for Sasha, who turned 8 that day. Despite their age difference, the two women are said to share a number of interests, including the countryside, gardening and clothes.

In Brief

DEFENSE - A planned U.S. missile shield may not strengthen Europe's security and could hurt NATO's interests if deployed in the face of Russian opposition, MPs said on Sunday. The United States says the anti-missile system is designed to prevent potential attacks from countries such as Iran, but the plan has outraged Moscow which sees it as a threat.

IRAQ INQUIRY - The British government will announce an inquiry into the war in Iraq this week, media reported. The inquiry will likely examine the circumstances leading up to Britain's decision under Brown's predecessor Tony Blair to join the US-led invasion in March 2003, and its aftermath.

POLITICS - Prime Minister Gordon Brown could face another attempt to depose him by disgruntled Labour MPs, Business Secretary Peter Mandelson said. Mandelson told the Daily Telegraph he expected the threat to Brown could emerge in the autumn when Labour meets for its annual conference.

G8 - The world's rich nations, heartened by signs the credit crisis is easing, have started to consider how to unwind rescue steps for their economies once recovery is certain, their finance ministers said.

LOANS - Part-nationalised British lender Lloyds Banking Group is to take a 450 million pound hit on loans it made to pubs group Admiral Taverns, the Sunday Times reported without citing sources. The paper said the loss reflects a decline in the value of Admiral Taverns' estate as a result of the economic downturn.

PEOPLE - Former prime minister Margaret Thatcher is recovering after breaking her arm in a fall and will remain in hospital until at least Monday. The Conservative politician, known as the "Iron Lady" during her 11 years in power, has had intermittent health scares since she was forced from power by her own Conservative Party in 1990.

BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT - Susan Boyle has pulled out of the third date of the Britain's Got Talent live tour after she was advised to rest. The 48-year-old Scottish singer was due on stage for a matinee and evening show at the Manchester Evening News Arena but concert-goers were greeted at the venue with notices announcing she would not be performing.



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