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EARLY EDITION

EGYPT

Mubarak's surgery in Germany successful

Cairo/Berlin (Reuters) Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in power for almost three decades, underwent successful surgery in Germany yesterday after handing power temporarily to his prime minister, Egyptian media said.

The official Middle East News Agency said Mubarak, 81, underwent "a successful operation on Saturday morning" to remove the gall bladder and was in intensive care where he was speaking with family members and his medical team.

"I can confirm that the operation went well," said Annette Tuffs, spokeswoman for Heidelberg University Hospital.

Delegates power

Mubarak, who gave a news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Thursday, had also delegated power to the prime minister in 2004 when he had back surgery in Germany.

Mubarak has not said whether he will seek a sixth six-year term in the 2011 presidential election, nor has he designated a successor but many believe he will try to hand power to his politician son, Jamal, 46, if he chooses not to stand again.

State media said Prime Minister Ahmad Nadeef would assume the powers of the president "until his return to undertake his duties", adding that medical checks had shown chronic inflammation of Mubarak's gall bladder.

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TREASURE FROM THE PAST



Abu Dhabi book fair draws the crowds

Boys look at a facsimile of one of seven sections of the Quran commissioned by Mamluk ruler Rukn Al Deen Baybars Al Jashnqari in the pavilion of Britain's Facsimile Editions Ltd at the 20th Abu Dhabi International Book Fair yesterday. Produced in Cairo between AD1304-1306, and produced in gold, the original is housed in the British Library. The book fair, which began on March 2 and ends today, received 25,000 visitors until yesterday. The participation of more than 840 publishers from 63 countries makes it the largest book fair in the region.

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Iraqis decide their future

LANDMARK POLLS INCLUDING ALL SECTIONS OF SOCIETY COULD PAVE WAY TO STABILITY



By DURRAID AL BAKI
Associate Editor

Dubai Widely considered the most decisive Iraqi election since the US invaded the country exactly seven years ago, today's national polls are expected to reshape the political landscape and may pave the way to permanent stability.

Nearly 20 million voters are eligible to vote in the elections, in which more than 6,000 candidates are competing for the 325 seats in the National Assembly.

Iraqis unanimously agreed that this election is "a landmark" process as it includes all segments of Iraq's sectarian and ethnic mosaic.

Unlike the previous elections in 2005, the first since the 2003 invasion, when the Sunni community boycotted the process, this time there is a strong Sunni participation in all major competing political alliances, including the State of the Law, led by incumbent Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki, and its strongest rival Iraqiya, led by former Prime Minister Eyad Al-Lawi.

The 2005 boycott left most Sunnis in the political wilderness, deepened the sectarian divide and heightened the deadly violence between Sunnis and Shiites.

A Shiite is almost certain to become prime minister. Al Maliki and Al-Lawi are the two frontrunners to lead the new government.

Many Sunnis have begun engaging with the state, and Sunni voters are expected to turn out in force.

VIOLENCE CAR BOMB HITS NAJAF

A car bomb exploded near a bus in the Shiite city of Najaf yesterday, killing at least four people, including Iraqis, officials said.

A group of Iraqis and Iraqis were waiting to board the bus after visiting a famous shrine when the blast occurred.

Also yesterday, a Sunni candidate belonging to the Iraqi Accord Front (Al Tawajuj) was arrested under anti-terrorism laws, the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) said.

- DPA

The positive thing about this election is that Iraqis for the first time are not divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. Each of the 260 political blocs registered for the election has listed people based on their political programmes and not on ethnic or sectarian affiliation," Maysoun Al Damlouji, a spokeswoman for Al-Lawi, told Gulf News.

However, Sunni leaders seem to remain wary of the tendency of Shiite domination in the army and security forces of the post-Saddam Hussein era.

Eyad Al Samarrai, the parliamentary speaker, said that while the sectarian violence had decreased, unless violence had decreased, today's election did not deliver a just government.

Two other issues are prominent in today's elections: the US military's planned withdrawal next year and its impact on security, and the interference by neighbouring states in Iraq's internal affairs.

— With additional inputs from AFP

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DUBAI

Boy stabbed to death in teen grudge

By SUHAIL AL NAJAMI
Staff Reporter

Dubai A 13-year-old Emirati boy was stabbed to death, allegedly by four Emirati teenagers over "a silly and a childish argument", a senior police official said yesterday.

There were 13 stab wounds on the body, which was found in a pool of blood in Al Rashidiya on Thursday evening, the source told Gulf News.

What started as an exchange of "ridiculous" comments between the boys over a period of time turned into an assault, the official said.

A teenager, who is believed to be the brother of the victim, made sarcastic remarks directed at another boy that evening.

Angered by the verbal volley, the boy allegedly brought a group of teenagers and attacked the victim (the brother of the boy who mocked him), the official said.

The suspects have been arrested.

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Iran signs security deals with 3 Gulf states

Tehran tells Russian pilots to leave amid calls for new sanctions over nuclear policy

By HARRY TOUNI
Bureau Chief

Manama Iran has signed security agreements with three Gulf countries, the country's defence minister, Ahmad Vahidi said.

The Iranian minister said that the bilateral pacts with Qatar, Oman and Kuwait stipulated that these states will not allow their territories to be used for attacks against either Iran or any of the other signatories.

The agreements include several clauses as part of joint defence, the minister was quoted as telling Al Jazeera television station.

Kuwaiti military sources told Al Rai daily that Kuwait did not sign a direct military agreement with Tehran as stated by Vahidi. "Kuwait is invariably committed politically and militarily not to allow its soil to be used to attack other countries," the unnamed sources told Al Rai.

The agreement comes at a time when Western countries are pushing for fresh sanctions over the Islamic Republic's controversial nuclear programme.

A Western proposal for sanctions includes a call for restricting new Iranian banks abroad and urges "vigilance" against the Islamic Republic's central bank, diplomats said.

In another development, Iran has given Russian commercial pilots work-

ing in the Islamic Republic two months to leave the country as it has no need for them. Transport Minister Hamid Behbahani was quoted as saying.

The move is a further sign of strains between Iran and Russia, which has indicated it could back sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear work. Iran has also voiced frustration over Moscow's failure to deliver a defence missile system.

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MEDICAL MIRACLE

Germany's Tom Thumb clings to life

Boy weighing just 275 grams becomes smallest premature baby to survive

By ALLAN HALL

Berlin German doctors have revealed photographs of what is believed to be the smallest premature baby boy to have survived, born at 25 weeks weighing just 275 grams.

The baby, who doctors nicknamed "Tom Thumb", was born by caesarean section 15 weeks prematurely at the University of Göttingen, in western Germany, in June.



Special child
The boy four months after his birth. Now, nine months later, his parents are taking him home.

For 24 hours a day, the child was in an incubator and hooked up to feeding and breathing tubes, a heart monitor, a catheter and devices to monitor every vital sign as he was at risk of cerebral haemorrhage or organ failure.

In December, the baby was finally pronounced "stable" after achieving a weight of 3.7kg.

— The Telegraph Group Limited, London 2010

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ALL THE OSCAR ACTION

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