

World

AFGHANISTAN: The international community on Tuesday endorsed sweeping Afghan government plans to take responsibility for security by 2014, forge peace to end nine years of war and take greater control of aid projects.

USA: President Barack Obama's second US Supreme Court pick, Elena Kagan, drew one step closer on Tuesday to being just the fourth woman to reach the high bench as a key senate committee backed her nomination.

CUBA: Cuba is ready to release more political prisoners after announcing this month it would free 52, and they could remain on the island if they wished, the Cuban parliament chief said.

JAPAN: A former North Korean spy who once blew up a Korean Air passenger jet visited Japan under tight security on Tuesday to meet the families of people who were abducted by Pyongyang's agents.

RWANDA: Rwandan President Paul Kagame said on Tuesday he was confident of re-election on August 9 as he kicked off a campaign already tarnished by a string of political assassinations and arrests.

FRANCE: French football international Franck Ribery was placed under formal judicial investigation on Tuesday on allegations he had sex with an under-age prostitute, a judicial official said. The 27-year-old midfielder appeared before an investigating magistrate in Paris after having been detained by vice squad officers and questioned for six hours on a charge of having "solicited an under-age prostitute."

Obama, Cameron navigate Lockerbie, BP rows

Prime Minister David Cameron on Tuesday rejected an inquiry into Scotland's release of the Lockerbie bomber, and said BP did not sway the decision, as he met US President Barack Obama. Cameron however told his top civil servants to assess whether new information needed to be made public on the release last year of terminally ill Libyan Abdelbaset Ali Mohmet al-Megrahi. "I don't need an inquiry to tell me what was a bad decision," Cameron said, but also rejected suggestions that a

lobbying effort by energy giant BP helped win the release of Megrahi, who remains alive nearly a year after he was freed. "That wasn't a decision taken by BP - it was a decision taken by the Scottish government." Obama and his visitor carefully picked through raw political sensitivities surrounding the release of Megrahi, and over BP's pariah status in the US following the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster. And both leaders insisted that war strategy in Afghanistan was correct, and said plans to hand over the country largely to

Afghan forces by 2014, endorsed by an international Kabul conference, were realistic. In their first White House meeting, they also both pledged fealty to the US-British "special relationship" as Obama attempted to stamp out suggestions he did not value the long alliance in the same way as his predecessors. The two men held three hours of talks in the Oval Office, shared a lunch of Wild Striped Bass, and the president gave his guest a tour of the White House living quarters - Cameron remarked on the Obama daughters' tidy bed-

rooms. Cameron forcibly condemned the decision by Scotland's devolved government to free Megrahi, who was the only person convicted in the bombing of a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie in 1988 that killed 270 people. "I said this a year ago... it was a bad decision, it shouldn't have been made," said Cameron. "He showed his victims no compassion. They were not allowed to die in their beds at home, surrounded by their families; so, in my view, neither should that callous killer have been given that luxury."

Extremist threat rose after Iraq war: ex-MI5 chief

Iraq posed little threat to Britain just before the 2003 invasion - but the danger of extremist attacks surged afterwards, a former head of the MI5 security service told an inquiry on Tuesday. Eliza Manningham-Buller, chief of the domestic intelligence agency from 2002 to 2007, also dismissed any connection between Iraq and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. She was giving evidence at Britain's public inquiry into the war in Iraq,

which has heard from figures including former prime minister Tony Blair, who was in power when the country joined the US-led invasion. Manningham-Buller said that in 2002, MI5 had advised Blair's government that the "direct threat" from Iraq was "low". "We did think that Saddam Hussein might resort to terrorism in the theatre if he thought his regime was toppled but we didn't believe he had the capability to do anything in the UK," she said.

Parliament protest camp removed in pre-dawn raid

Bailiffs cleared away a sprawling protest camp in front of parliament in a pre-dawn raid on Tuesday, though evicted demonstrators vowed to reappear elsewhere in London. Officials descended at 1:00 am on Parliament Square, in the heart of the city, to drag away a few dozen protesters and remove the ramshackle collection of tents, banners and straw bales used as toilets. The protesters had been camped on the grassy

square since May 1 to protest against the war in Afghanistan and a range of other issues, but a court ruled last week that their "Democracy Village" could not remain. It took about 60 bailiffs four hours to remove the protesters after a few tied themselves to scaffolding. Some of the protesters complained they had been roughly treated. Activist Howard Rees, 30, said the eviction was "pretty unpleasant" and claimed the bailiffs were "pretty brutal".

BRIEF

United Kingdom in

BA: British Airways cabin crew have rejected the airline's latest offer to end their long-running dispute, their union said on Tuesday, raising the prospect of fresh strikes. Members of the Unite union, Britain's biggest trade union, voted by 3,419 to 1,686 against the offer, dashing hopes of an end to the bitter row over cost-cutting and travel perks.

WATCHDOG: Just one in ten police officers are on the frontline combating crime with the majority dealing with bureaucratic tasks, the police watchdog said on Tuesday. Denis O'Connor, HM chief inspector of constabulary, said that in some forces, only six per cent of officers were visible to the public during peak weekend evening shifts, fewer than on quiet weekday mornings.

2012: The general public will be given priority for tickets for the 2012 London Olympics and everything possible will be done to fill stadiums, the chief organiser said in a newspaper interview Tuesday. Paul Deighton, the chief executive of LOCOCG, the organising committee of the London Olympics, said the aim was to avoid the empty seats seen at some venues during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

RYANAIR: Budget airline Ryanair said on Tuesday that net profits slumped in the first quarter of the group's financial year, as the group was hammered by the volcanic ash cloud chaos. Net earn-

ings tumbled 24 per cent to £79.7 million in the three months to the end of June, compared with £104.6 million in the equivalent period of the previous financial year, Ryanair said.

FTSE: London shares closed lower on Tuesday, reversing earlier gains as investors digested downbeat US data, and bond auction news. The FTSE 100 index of leading shares fell 0.17 per cent to end at 5,139.46 points.

FARNBOROUGH: Airlines and leasing groups agreed to buy single-aisle passenger jets worth billions of dollars on Tuesday, highlighting robust demand for short- and medium-haul air travel.

MERCURY PRIZE: Rapper Dizzee Rascal, soul diva Corinne Bailey Rae and "modfather" Paul Weller were on Tuesday shortlisted for this year's Mercury Prize. Other acts in contention for the prestigious prize, which honours the best British or Irish album released in the last year, include art-rockers Foals, Manchester singer-songwriter I Am Kloot and rockers Biffy Clyro.

SIMPLY RED: Former Simply Red guitarist Sylvan Richardson has swapped his six strings for hamstrings, joining Liverpool as their new masseur, the Premier League side said on Tuesday. Richardson was part of the soul band's original line-up in the mid-1980s but quit after two years and trained as a physiotherapist.

Sports

FOOTBALL: Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson is adamant money wasn't Joe Cole's motivation for moving to Anfield. Cole is reported to have signed a four-year contract worth £90,000 a week after agreeing to become the first major signing of Hodgson's reign.

GERRARD: Steven Gerrard has hinted he will stay at Liverpool after the Reds captain revealed he was delighted by the club's capture of England midfielder Joe Cole. Gerrard had been linked with a move to Real Madrid after Liverpool endured a dismal campaign last season, finishing seventh in the Premier League and failing to advance past the Champions League group stage.

ARSENAL: Premier League clubs Arsenal and Tottenham have banned controversial vuvuzela horns from their stadiums this season. Vuvuzelas provided the soundtrack to the World Cup in South Africa as fans blew the plastic horns throughout matches, creating a monotonous drone that drowned out crowd chants. They were criticised by players and television audiences

during the World Cup and several English Football League teams had already banned them.

LOEW: Germany's national coach Joachim Loew and his three right-hand men have agreed two-year extensions to their contracts following the team's World Cup success, press reports said on Tuesday.

TOUR DE FRANCE: Pierrick Fedrigo of the Bbox-Bouygues team won the 16th stage of the Tour de France on Tuesday to hand the hosts their sixth stage win of the race. Race leader Alberto

Contador, who took the yellow jersey from Luxembourg rival Andy Schleck on Monday, came over the finish line just under seven minutes later.

GOLF: Colin Montgomerie believes Europe will go into the Ryder Cup with the strongest squad the continent has ever assembled, both on and off the course. Darren Clarke, Thomas Bjorn and Paul McGinley were on Tuesday unveiled as Montgomerie's vice-captains for the clash at the Celtic Manor Resort in October as Europe try to regain the trophy after their defeat to the United States in Valhalla in 2008.

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