

Saudi Arabian King Abdullah passes away at age ninety

by Kelsey Fleming

News Editor

On Fri., Jan. 23, Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud passed away at age 90 from a lung infection. For ten years, Abdullah ruled Saudi Arabia after his brother King Fahd's death in 2005. In the wake of Abdullah's death, King Salman, who is Abdullah's brother, has succeeded Abdullah's position as ruler. As Saudi Arabia enters this new age of leadership, many contemplate Saudi Arabia's future and the ways it will combat terrorist violence and maintain its prominent position in the oil industry.

At an annual address, Salman proclaimed, "Today, as you know, our country is facing unprecedented regional challenges. That should make us cautious, and I would like to assure that your leadership is aware of these challenges and their consequences." Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of petroleum, holds sixteen percent of the world's known oil reserves. The US imports over a million barrels of oil a day from Saudi Arabia. According to Prince Alwaleed, ninety percent of Saudi Arabia's budget depends on oil exports. Former political analyst



FUELED BY FUEL: Abdullah was the ruler of the oil-rich kingdom of Saudi Arabia for a decade.

Fahad Nazer from the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC, claims, "I don't anticipate the kingdom to make any dramatic changes in its oil policy in the short term."

On Tues., Jan. 27, President Obama arrived at the King Khalid

International Airport in Riyadh to attend Abdullah's memorial service. President Obama stated, "It is with deep respect that I express my personal condolences and the sympathies of the American people to the family of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and to the people of Saudi Arabia." Vice President Joe Biden, who led a presidential delegation in Saudi Arabia during the memorial, remarked, "I always appreciated [Abdullah's] frankness, his sense of history, his pride in his efforts to move his country forward, and his steadfast belief in the US-Saudi relationship."

Currently, Jordan is in a 40-day period of mourning for Abdullah. In President Obama's statement, he credits Abdullah with taking "bold steps in advancing the Arab Peace Initiative, an endeavor that will outlive him as an enduring contribution to the search for peace in the region." He continued, "At home, King Abdullah's vision was dedicated to the education of his people and to greater engagement with the world. The closeness and strength of the partnership between our countries is part of King Abdullah's legacy. May God grant him peace." (Sources: CNN, Fox News, The Guardian, NPR, The Washington Post)

COM: Exotic Cuba

by Olivia Pla

People Editor

Cuba: Land of cigars and Fidel Castro. This little Caribbean nation has been in and out of the news for decades since the late fifties, when its turbulent relationship with the United States began. Two months ago, however, President Barack Obama and Raul Castro, the president of Cuba, announced that their previously severed diplomatic ties would be restored.

During the Cold War, Raul's brother, Fidel Castro, and a group of rebels overthrew the ruler of Havana and seized power. At the time, the United States recognized this new government. However, tension between the two countries mounted as Castro increased trade with the Soviet Union and levied taxes on American imports. President John F. Kennedy responded with a full economic embargo and eventually severed diplomatic ties with Cuba in 1961.

"Normalizing" relations would benefit both countries, but there are still many obstacles in the way of accomplishing this. Delegates from both countries met three weeks ago in Havana to discuss their new diplomatic relations. However, Raul Castro made several demands that the United States is reluctant to grant, such as bringing an end to the blockade, giving back "the territory illegally occupied by the Guantanamo naval base," and compensating Cuba's people for the human and economic damage that they've suffered. The demand for compensation is nearly impossible for the United States to provide, making it unlikely that any agreement will be reached soon. Normalizing relations faces opposition in Congress as well. Only time will tell how this debate will end.



A WALLED GARDEN: Valle de Viñales was formed when underground rivers eroded bedrock and made walls.

Although Cuba struggles with its diplomatic relations with The United States, the country's tourism industry is flourishing. Due to its warm climate, tropical beaches, colonial architecture, and cultural history, the country receives over three million visitors per year. Must-sees include Valle de Viñales, Callejon de Hemel, Plaza de Armas, and Playa Sirena.

Valle de Viñales is one of Cuba's most spectacular natural settings. The park was formed 100 million years ago when underground rivers eroded bedrock, forming expansive caverns. Eventually, the roofs of these caverns collapsed and left just the walls. The park is perfect for hiking, rock climbing, and horseback riding.

Though dancing in the street is not often seen in the United States, it is a common pastime during the evening in Cuba. The Callejon de Hemel is one of the most popular sites to visit for live music and dancing. Afro-Cuban rumba performed by live musicians is hard to resist for anyone passing by, for tourists and Cubans alike.

One of Cuba's most historic locations, Plaza de Armas, is Havana's oldest square and dates back to the 1520's. The square is home to a daily secondhand book market and a statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the man who helped Cuba begin its fight for independence from Spanish rule.

For a more relaxing environment, Playa Sirena, or "siren beach" in Spanish, features a wide expanse of powdery white sand (or 2 km in length from the waterline to be exact). Many recreational activities like kayaking and snorkeling are available at this beach.

Because the fate of American travel to Cuba lies in the diplomatic relations debate, we should all be crossing our fingers these next few weeks. (Sources: National Post, Lonely Planet)

South Korean spy chief convicted

by Mhairi Finlayson

Web Editor

The former chief of South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) has been sentenced to three years in prison for directing NIS agents to engage in a smear campaign against the rivals of South Korea's current president, Park Guen-hye. Under Intelligence Chief Won Sei-hoon, the NIS posted online its support of Park, and called Park's rivals "servants" of North Korea. They mainly targeted Park's biggest rival Moon Jae-in, whom she defeated by 3.5 percentage points in the election. The NIS was created to spy on North Korea, as South Korea technically remains at war with its northern neighbor. The NIS has previously been accused of being controlled by the current president and interfering with politics within the country. In South Korea, those that work for the NIS must maintain political neutrality. Won violated this law through his direction during the 2012 election.

Won was indicted in June, as prosecutors made the claim that a secret team of NIS agents attempted to influence public opinion in favor of Park. In September, a court sentenced Won to a suspended sentence of two and a half years. Though the court admitted that he had violated the law, they said it was not clear that he did so with the intention of influencing the election. The Seoul High Court overthrew that decision on Monday, as Judge Kim Sang-hwan said "It is fair to say Won had the intention to intervene in the election." Two subordinates of Won were sentenced to lesser sentences of up to a year and a half, but both of the sentences were suspended.

Opposition politicians have spoken out, challenging the legitimacy of Park's victory considering the influence of the NIS. Ms. Park insists that she did not benefit from the

actions of the intelligence service. The NIS itself continues to contend that the messages posted were part of a legitimate psychological warfare campaign in opposition to pro-North Korean content. Won stands by his actions, maintaining his actions were on behalf of "the nation and for the people."

The case is not yet over, as the Supreme Court has yet to review the case. This has led those in support of Park to warn against prematurely challenging the legitimacy of Park's presidency.

(Sources: BBC, NY Times)



DUBIOUS VICTORY: President Park Guen-hye denies benefitting from the NIS posts.

Unrest in Hong Kong continues

by Hyuntae Byun

World Editor

On Feb. 1, several thousand Hong Kong civilians took to the streets in a pro-democracy rally. The protest was the latest in a series of similar movements, which have been sparked by Chinese attempts to curb Hong Kong's relatively free democracy.

The Feb. 1 protest was set apart from its predecessors as Hong Kong police told protest organizers that they had to arrange their own security beforehand to prevent the occupation of streets afterward, meaning that organizers needed

to hire private security in order to enforce order during the protest. If organizers failed to comply, they faced possible legal prosecution. The police stipulation has drawn criticism and has been accused of being an attempt to curtail the right to protest.

Civil rights groups and humanitarian organizations worry that the latest protest is indicative of a rising trend of civil rights violations. For example, in January the human rights and literary organization PEN America published a study which found that media censorship and physical assaults on journalists in Hong Kong have become more severe.

The International Federation of Journalists subsequently published another report that claimed that Hong Kong's media is increasingly becoming controlled by government influences. In other significant cases, the editor of the Oriental Daily newspaper was pepper-sprayed by police during a news report last October. No police officers were charged following the assault.

Additionally, staff at the TVB television network faced backlash after about 80 journalists in the news department signed a petition stating that corporate executives had censored a video showing police beating up a protestor. The network fired several of the signatories, and others were banned from covering local news.

The Feb. 1 protest itself was relatively small, with police counting about 9,000 protestors and organizers counting 13,000. In any case, the protest was smaller than expected, which may be a result of "protest fatigue," as Hong Kong has seen a string of protests for the past few months.

The protests were originally sparked by Chinese government attempts to increase control over Hong Kong, which has historically been relatively liberal and pro-democratic compared to most other parts of China. Despite promises by Chinese officials that Hong Kong would have the right to vote for the next chief executive in 2017, in August, the Chinese government stipulated that all candidates would have to be first vetted by a government-approved committee. (sources: Washington Post, NY Times, Forbes)



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IT'S ALL POLITICAL: HK protests were sparked by federal curtailing of democracy.