



MARTIN MURPHY/THE EPOCH TIMES

Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II with Irish President Mary McAleese at Áras an Uachtaráin, the official residence of the President of Ireland, on May 17. The Queen's four-day state visit to Ireland is the first by a British monarch in 100 years.

Queen's visit heralds start of new era in British-Irish relations

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Both national anthems were also played in the garden, an act that would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

The Garden of Remembrance is a memorial site for Irish men and women who died in the struggle against British rule, and also in campaigns with Britain in World War I and World War II.

Speaking on national television prior to the queen's arrival, Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Enda Kenny, said the state visit represents "the start of a new era between both countries based on respect, friendship, and mutual recognition of two countries having normalized relations."

"It also symbolizes the healing of the past, a recognition of two countries having grown up together and two countries who face the future together," Kenny said on Sky News.

Few Union Jacks

A distinct lack of Union Jacks was also noticeable. One establishment that had two on display was Foley's Bar and Restaurant on Merrion Row. Manager Damian Redmond said, "We decided to put them up out of a mark of respect, and in a showing of a changing of the times."

He said a few people had complained but that "most of them were intoxicated."

"We have also had a few people come in and say, fair play, it's about time someone did it," Redmond added.

Commenting on whether he thought the queen might drop in for a pint later he said "She's more than welcome, during these days and times everybody is welcome. They have been saying on the radio that they (the British) were one of the first countries to give us 7 billion in the bailout."

Rain eases up

An official cameraman from Buckingham Palace, who did not wish to give his name for security reasons, told The Epoch Times that he had covered events on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972.

After that experience he was "elated to be back in Ireland under different circumstances," he said.

On a lighter note, he said that in all his years covering royal visits it has only rained on the queen a handful of times. Usually the rain stops just before Her Majesty arrives and commences just after she leaves, he explained, and as if by magic the rain stopped outside Áras an Uachtaráin, the official residence of the President of Ireland, just as Queen Elizabeth arrived.

Visit could boost tourism

Ireland is currently going through a financial crisis that has left many people out of work. With the number of tourists visiting Ireland falling over the past decade, it is hoped that the royal visit will help boost tourist figures from Britain.

According to the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, the queen's visit is the first test of Ireland's jobs initiative that was launched just last week—a program to create full-time employment of those over 35 who have been out of work for five years.

"The Dublin business community is pleased that Dublin will be welcoming Queen Elizabeth II," said Gina Quin, Dublin Chamber chief executive.

"Official state visits such as these give us the opportunity to showcase our world renowned warm Irish welcome to a nation's first citizen, demonstrating to audiences in their country what they can expect as tourists," said Quin.

There has been a high level of U.K. media interest in advance of the queen's visit to Ireland. Tourism Ireland has estimated the value of the publicity at 150 million euros (€208 million).

"The tourism sector has been significantly impacted because of the global recession, and Dublin and Ireland are fighting to demonstrate that we offer good value for money to tourists," Quin said.

US sanctions Syrian president and government officials

BY ANDREY VOLKOV
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

The United States imposed sanctions on Syrian President Bashar Assad and his government Wednesday in the wake of escalating human rights abuses by Syrian forces to quell pro-democracy and anti-regime protests in the country.

The White House issued an executive order to freeze assets and property possessed by Assad and six other top officials. Besides the president, the sanctions, which will be enforced

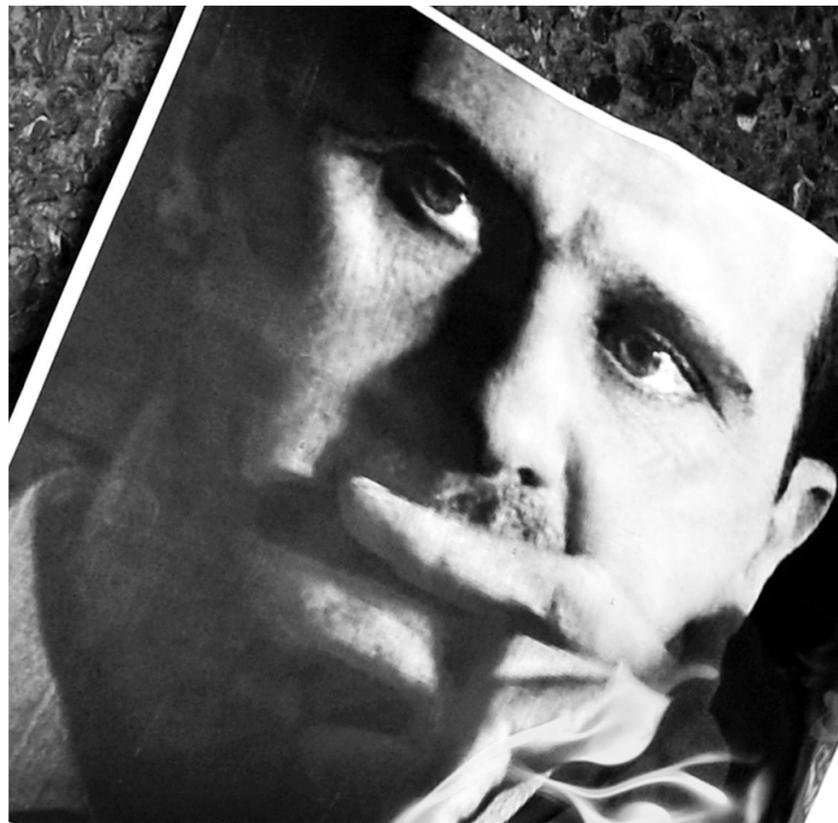


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by the Treasury Department, are also aimed at the Syrian vice president, prime minister, interior and defence ministers, and the head of military intelligence.

Americans are also banned from doing business with top Syrian officials.

Last week, the U.S. and European Union had imposed sanctions on 13 high-ranking Syrian officials, including Assad's younger brother, but avoided placing sanctions on the president.



MUSTAFA OZER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A portrait of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is burned by protesters. The U.S. on Wednesday imposed sanctions on al-Assad following weeks of heavy crackdowns on protesters.

After a meeting with top EU diplomat Catherine Ashton on Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Assad's actions are belying his words. "President Assad talks about reform, but his heavy-handed brutal crackdown shows his true intentions," Clinton said.

According to U.S. estimates, 1,000 people have been killed by Syrian forces since protests against the Syrian regime began

two months ago. Syrian tactics to quell demonstrations include arbitrary arrests and torture.

The Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, Sarah Leah Whitson, said in a statement that ordinary citizens are feeling the brunt of Syria's so-called war on terror.

"Syria's leaders talk about a war against terrorists, but what we see on the ground is a war against ordinary Syrians—law-

yers, human rights activists, and university students—who are calling for democratic changes in their country."

The latest sanctions come as President Barack Obama visits the Middle East and other European countries this week. Earlier, White House officials said Obama would not address any new Middle East peace initiative in a speech planned for Thursday.

Wife of jailed Belarus opposition leader gets suspended sentence

BY ANDREY VOLKOV
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

A Minsk court gave Irina Khalip a two-year suspended sentence on Monday after jailing her husband, former presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov, for five years just days earlier.

Khalip, a journalist and human rights activist, received a "softer" verdict for merely taking part in mass protests on Election Day last December. Her husband's conviction was based on being deemed an organizer of the demonstrations.

Mass protests broke out last December over presidential elections that were widely seen as rigged by incumbent autocratic ruler Alexander Lukashenko. Lukashenko, who has been in office since 1994, won the elec-

tion with 80 percent of the vote. About 700 people were arrested in the crackdown on the protests, including seven presidential candidates. More than 20 opposition activists have received prison sentences.

U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner called the conviction of Sannikov and other candidates "politically motivated." He added that the U.S. would be watching the trials of other opposition members as the Washington considers further measures.

The U.S. and the EU imposed financial sanctions and travel bans on top Belarusian officials in response to the crackdown on the opposition.

Sannikov, 57, a former deputy foreign minister and co-founder of the Charter '97 pro-democracy group, said at his trial that he had been tortured and that the



VIKTOR DRACHEV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Belarus opposition leader Andrei Sannikov's wife, Irina Khalip (R), embraces her mother-in-law Alla Sannikov (L), after Khalip's release at the court in Minsk on May 16. Belarus handed a two-year suspended prison sentence to Khalip, who risked losing her son to child protection authorities, two days after the jailing of her husband sparked a global outcry.

head of the KGB, the Soviet-style security service, told him his wife and 4-year-old son would receive harsh reprisals if he didn't confess, according to Charter '97 website.

Meanwhile, Sannikov's sister, Irina Bogdanova who lives in

London, plans to sue Lukashenko. She and other family members of political prisoners arrested in the crackdown on the election demonstrations hold Lukashenko accountable for jailing their loved ones and destroying their families.

Obama's re-election campaign gets cheeky

OBAMA CONTINUED FROM A1
Also included is Smoot's comment, "This week, Jerome Corsi released a new book that his publisher says will be a bestseller of historic proportions. The title is 'Where's the Birth Certificate?'—yes, really," she wrote.

"There's no way to make this stuff completely go away. The only thing we can do is laugh at it—and make sure as many other people as possible are in on the joke."

The president's birth certificate was first released by his campaign in 2008, but was disputed by conspiracy theorists and others—most notably real estate mogul Donald Trump, who during a short presidential run exploratory tour insisted he did not accept the document's veracity.

In response to the ensuing media "distraction" from the budget crisis created by Trump's high profile remarks, White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer said in a statement, "The president directed his counsel

to review the legal authority for seeking access to the long form certificate and to request on that basis that the Hawaii State Department of Health make an exception to release a copy of his long form birth certificate."

The request was granted, and the long form document, complete with doctor's signatures, was released to the public on April 27. It again received a flurry of media attention.

"I know that there's going to be a segment of people for which, no matter what we put out, this issue will not be put to rest. But I'm speaking to the vast majority of the American people, as well as to the press. We do not have time for this kind of silliness," said the president in an address to the American people.

Headquarters for Obama's re-election campaign opened last week in downtown Chicago. The 50,000-square-foot space in a high-rise is just down the street from headquarters of the president's successful 2008 bid.

Rwandan general given 30 years for role in 1994 genocide

BY CARLEN ZHANG
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

The former Rwandan army chief of staff was sentenced to 30 years in prison for his actions during the country's 1994 genocide in which 800,000 people were killed.

The United Nations tribunal, which was established to prosecute those responsible for the Rwandan genocide, found Augustin Bizimungu guilty of numerous crimes against humanity including six counts of genocide.

The court found that Bizimungu had full control over his subordinates, despite claims

by his defence that he was not in control of the underlings who carried out the killings.

The tribunal also convicted three other senior Rwandan officials and gave 20-year sentences to Rwandan army battalion Cmdr. Francois-Xavier Nzuwonemeye and his subordinate Innocent Sagahutu.

The third official convicted was the head of the Rwandan gendarmerie (paramilitary police) but he will be released after the court deemed that he had already served enough time since his arrest in 2000, according to intelligence news agency, ISRIA.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

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deals with the trials of those with the most responsibility for the genocide; thousands of minor members of the leadership are being tried in Rwandan courts or through the traditional justice system, BBC reported.

The genocide began when

the plane of former Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, an ethnic Hutu, was shot down April 6, 1994. The Hutus accused an ethnic Tutsi group of shooting at the plane and began a violent campaign to eradicate the Tutsi civilian minority.