

Rebels in Chad accept ceasefire

France vows to 'do its duty'

AFP, Ndjamen

Rebels in Chad announced Tuesday an immediate ceasefire as France -- emboldened by UN condemnation of the insurgents -- declared it was poised to intervene militarily.

With refugees pouring into neighbouring Cameroon by the thousands, fearing renewed fighting in the capital Ndjamen, rebel spokesman Abderraman Koulamallah said the insurgents were bowing to diplomatic pressure to halt their offensive against President Idriss Deby's regime.

"Aware of the suffering of the Chadian people ... the forces of national resistance have given their agreement to an immediate ceasefire," Koulamallah told AFP by satellite telephone.

The rebels -- who stormed Ndjamen over the weekend,

pinning Deby inside his presidential palace -- were doing so, he said, "in line with the peace initiatives of fraternal countries Libya and Burkina Faso".

Reacting to the announcement, Deby's government said a ceasefire was pointless because the rebels -- who last week surged across the width of Chad from bases inside Sudan -- had been "decimated".

"Why a ceasefire? They don't exist any more. With whom would we sign a ceasefire? ... We've got them under control," Prime Minister Nourredine Delwa Kassire Koumakoye told the French global TV channel France 24.

In the wake of Monday's unanimous Security Council statement, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said France -- with 1,450 troops and Mirage fighter jets stationed in Chad -- was ready to "do its duty" and intervene if need be.

Roadside bombs kill 7 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

Two roadside bombs killed seven people in Afghanistan, five of them civilians from the same family, police said Tuesday, in new attacks linked to a bloody Taliban insurgency.

A remote-controlled bomb struck an estate car (station wagon) in the southern province of Helmand on Monday, provincial police chief Mohammad Hussain Andiwali told AFP.

"Five people -- a woman, two children and two men, all members of the same family -- were killed in the roadside blast. One person was wounded," Andiwali said.

He blamed the "enemies of Afghanistan" for the attack, a term often used to refer to fighters for the extremist Taliban movement that was forced from power in late 2001 in a US-led invasion.

Another bomb, also remotely controlled, hit a police patrol in the neighbouring province of Kandahar late Tuesday and killed two police, provincial police chief Sayed Aqa Saqib said.



US Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama (C) receives the support of Caroline Kennedy (R) and US Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) during a rally in East Rutherford, New Jersey on Monday. Heading into Tuesday's slew of voting in two dozen states, Obama has wiped out Hillary Clinton's large nationwide poll lead and is chasing her in key states such as California.

Observers eye Obama, Hillary 'dream ticket'

AFP, Washington

As Democratic rivals Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama chase the nomination to run for US president, observers have raised the prospect of a "dream ticket" uniting them in November's election.

Former first lady Hillary Clinton, aiming to be the first woman commander-in-chief, and Illinois Senator Obama, who would be the nation's first black president if he won, were neck-and-neck in national opinion polls Monday.

Whoever wins the frantic series of nomination contests, some predict they will both run for the White House with a "ticket" listing

one of them the candidate for president and the other for vice president.

The two contenders' latest televised debate on Thursday fueled speculation, as Hillary Clinton and Obama spoke civilly after some sharp exchanges in earlier debates.

"I'm sure Hillary would be on anybody's short list" of potential vice presidential candidates, Obama said. "I respect Senator Clinton. I think her service to this country has been extraordinary."

"It's premature for either of us to start speculating about vice presidents, etcetera," he insisted.

"I can say this about who I want

... people of the greatest excellence and competence. It means people with integrity. It means people with independence, who are willing to say no to me."

"I have to agree with everything Barack just said," Hillary Clinton responded. "There is no doubt we will have a unified Democratic Party. We will go into the November election prepared to win."

"I got a true sense of actual camaraderie there," talk show host David Letterman said of Thursday's debate.

"I think I was looking at the Democratic ticket," he told Clinton, who appeared on his television show late Monday.

Obama takes first blood as 'Super Tuesday' goes abroad

AFP, Jakarta

From the Indonesian city where Barack Obama spent part of his childhood to Hong Kong's bars and a Dublin pub, US Democrats abroad grabbed their first chance to vote in "Super Tuesday" primaries.

Voting for expat Democrats is taking place across the world until February 12, as well as online, with a total of 11 votes at stake for the Democratic Party convention that

will eventually choose its candidate.

The venues are about as far removed from formal political institutions as possible, from pubs and cafes to bookshops and doughnut stores.

In Jakarta, where Obama spent part of his youth living and going to school in Menteng, a suburb of decaying colonial grandeur, Democrats handed him a win over Hillary Clinton in the first result announced, party officials said.

7 Lankan sailors missing after sea battle

AFP, Colombo

Seven Sri Lankan sailors and their speedboat were missing yesterday following a sea battle with Tamil Tiger rebels near the maritime border with India, diplomats and officials said.

The clashes erupted on Monday when two navy speedboats moved to push back a fleet of what they believed to be poaching fishermen from India, a military official said.

"We suspect Tigers had taken the cover of Indian fishermen to attack the naval craft," the official said, adding that Sri Lankan authorities had lodged a complaint with India about hundreds of fishing trawlers in its waters.

Diplomatic sources said Indian authorities had been alerted to the case of the missing sailors, who were operating near Sri Lanka's northern Talamannar naval facility, and the fact that rebels may have been disguised as fishermen.

Kenya rivals discuss power-sharing

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya's feuding political factions yesterday started discussing power-sharing issues, a day after reaching a number of recommendations aimed at easing the security crisis.

"The talks have opened and they are discussing about power-sharing," a foreign ministry official told AFP, describing the talks as "tough".

The negotiations between teams set up by President Mwai Kibaki and his opposition rival Raila Odinga are being brokered by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan.

"We begin our work on the political issues. The crisis arising out of the December 2007 elections, that is going to take hard negotiations, understandably give and take," Annan told reporters Monday.

Life threat on Advani, govt to review security

PTI, New Delhi

The government is planning to increase the security of senior BJP leader LK Advani in the wake of intelligence inputs suggesting threat to his life from terrorists.

National Security Adviser MK Narayanan met Advani on Monday and discussed perception of threat to his life and government's plan to review his security, party sources said on Tuesday.

The meeting comes ahead of Advani's sankalp yatra to be launched from Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday.



Pakistani supporters of slain former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto pray for her during a ceremony at the party office in Islamabad yesterday. The party of Benazir Bhutto publicly released her will Tuesday to prove that it names the slain Pakistani opposition leader's husband as her political heir.

PPP reveals will naming husband as successor

AFP, Larkana

The party of slain Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto released her will to the public yesterday to prove that it names her husband as her political heir.

The move follows a whispering campaign that Benazir Bhutto had not handed the leadership of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to her spouse Asif Ali Zardari, and that she instead picked their 19-year-old son Bilawal.

The handwritten will -- dated October 16, two days before the former premier returned to Pakistan from exile -- also says that she feared for Pakistan's future in the face of extremism and dictatorship.

"I would like my husband Asif Ali Zardari to lead you in this interim period until you and he decide what is best. I say this because he is a man of courage and honour," said the will, unveiled at the Benazir Bhutto home in southern Pakistan.

Benazir Bhutto was assassinated at a political rally on December 27. The party named Zardari and Bilawal as co-chairmen three days later, after the will was read out to senior party members, but not to the public.

The will says that Zardari "spent 11.5 years in prison without bending despite torture. He has the political stature to keep our party united."

India struggles for strategy in war on Maoists

AFP, Dantewada

Combining violence with rhetoric that appeals to the hundreds of millions living in poverty, India's Maoist rebels have left the government looking for an effective counter-insurgency strategy.

The dilemma boils down to two options: strike the militants hard in their strongholds or address the abject poverty that has created fertile ground for the Naxals, as the Maoists are known.

India says it is fighting on both fronts against what Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called the greatest threat to domestic secu-

rity. But observers say it is making little headway on either.

"The effective force, actually engaging Naxals is not more than 1,800 to 2,000," said Ajai Sahni, executive director of the New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management.

The numbers are quickly diluted in the epicentre of the Maoist conflict -- a 40,000-square-kilometre (15,500 square mile) heavily forested region in central Chhattisgarh state.

Police officials in the largely tribal region that includes Dantewada and four other districts, put the figures slightly higher -- but not by much.

Suicide bomber kills 8 anti-Qaeda members

US troops kill 3 in Iraq raid

AFP, Tarmiyah/Baghdad

A suicide bomber killed eight members of an anti-Qaeda front as he triggered his explosive vest at a checkpoint outside a Sunni tribal sheikh's house in central Iraq on Tuesday, police said.

The attack took place outside the home of Sheikh Shathir al-Obeidi, head of a tribal "Awakening" group ranged against al-Qaeda in Awad village near Taji, 40km north of Baghdad in Salaheddin province, a police officer said.

"Eight members of the Awakening were killed at the checkpoint. Several were wounded," the officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The target of the attack was Sheikh Shathir al-Obeidi."

Awakening groups, made up mainly of Sunni former insurgents, have been battling al-Qaeda in Iraq with the support of the US military for more than a year and have been the target of attack by various insurgent groups.

Tuesday's attack follows a spate

of suicide bombings in Iraq this year that have killed more than 200 people and injured scores, mostly in Diyala province which is now considered Iraq's most dangerous region, as well as in Salaheddin.

US commanders say that al-Qaeda and other insurgents are on the run and are increasingly forced to resort to suicide attacks because their ability to stage major bombings has been reduced.

Meanwhile, a US raid on a central Iraqi village killed two men and a woman as well as injuring a child, officials said on Tuesday, a day after the US military said nine civilians were killed in anti-Qaeda operations.

An Iraqi military officer said a farmer, his wife and 20-year-old son were killed in a raid which targeted their house in Al-Dawr, east of the city of Tikrit, early on Tuesday. The couple's daughter was injured, he said.

The US military said troops were fired on when they entered a house and they returned fire in self defence.



People walk in front of the snow sculpture of Egyptian statues at the Odori park in central Sapporo in Japan yesterday. The annual Sapporo Snow Festival kicked off Tuesday with the hundreds of beautiful snow statues and ice sculptures.

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