INTERNATIONAL



Libyan ship 'will continue to Gaza'

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Organisers of a Libya-sponsored aid ship have said they will continue their attempt to break the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip, despite Israeli claims that the vessel would instead sail to Egypt.

Yousseuf Sawani, a director of the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation, told Al Jazeera that there were no plans for the Al-Amal to dock at the port El-Arish.

"This is definitely a part of the campaign against the ship, a campaign of distortion, but we are definitely heading towards Gaza, because that is where aid should be heading to," he told Al Jazeera.

"This is a purely humane mission, it is neither provocative nor hostile," he

The ship set sail from Greece on Saturday, carrying 2,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip, but the Israeli foreign ministry said that it had

reached an agreement with Greece and Moldova to have the ship diverted to

Israeli authorities also reportedly contacted Omar Suleiman, the Egyptian intelligence chief, to request that the ship be allowed to dock in El-Arish, close to the border with the Gaza Strip.

But Hossam Zaki, a spokesman for the Egyptian foreign ministry, said that he was not expecting the ship to travel to the Egyptian port. This ship is not headed Egypt. We did

not get any official request from the Libyan side for the ship to dock in Egypt," "Its not about the Israelis' request. Its

up to the will of the organisers of the ship. They said they are heading to Gaza, they did not approach us. The situation as far we are concerned is a ship heading to

The boat was chartered by a charity headed by the son of Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader, and was carrying "a number of supporters who are keen on expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people in the plight amidst the siege imposed on Gaza".

The 92-metre ship, renamed Al-Amal which means "Hope" in Arabic, had a 12-man crew and was carrying at least nine passengers, a representative of Piraeus-based agents Alpha Shipping said.

The passengers were made up of six Libyans, a Moroccan, a Nigerian and an Algerian.

"Israel will not let the boat reach Gaza," Yossi Peled, an Israeli cabinet minister, said vesterday.

Allowing boats to reach the Hamasrun Gaza Strip without being checked would have "very serious consequences" for Israel's security, he said.

The latest attempt to defy the Israeli blockade comes after the killings in May of eight Turks and a dual US-Turkish citizen when Israeli armed forces attacked a flotilla heading for Gaza.

Israel says won't let aid ship reach Gaza

REUTERS, jerusalem

Israel will not allow an aid ship sent by a Libyan group to reach Gaza, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said yesterday, just over a month after Israeli commandos killed nine activists in a raid at sea.

"I say very clearly, no ship will arrive in Gaza. We will not permit our sovereignty to be harmed," Lieberman said on Army Radio, referring to Israel's naval blockade of the Palestinian territory controlled by Hamas Islamists.

The Moldovan-flagged Amalthea -- renamed Hope -left Greece on Saturday bound for Gaza on a trip organised by a charity chaired by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. The group said the ship was carrying some 2,000 tons of food and medicine and complied with international rules.

Organisers said the vessel, with 12 crew and up to 10 activists on board, would head for Gaza but go to Egypt's port of El-Arish instead if banned from reaching its destination in a voyage expected to take between 70 and 80 hours.

"I hope very much that common sense will prevail and the ship will go to El-Arish, or that it will obey the Israel Defence Forces and eventually go to (Israel's port of) Ashdod," Lieberman said.

Israel's blockade of the coastal strip has been under closer international scrutiny since it sent commandos to raid an aid flotilla on May 31, killing nine Turkish pro-Palestinian activists. Israel said those troops acted in selfdefence after passengers attacked them with metal rods and knives.

Palestinian president finds no point in direct talks with Israel now AP, Ramallah, West Bank

Mahmoud Abbas

The Palestinian president, who is under US pressure to resume direct talks with Israel, said that doing so under current circumstances would be pointless.

Mahmoud Abbas sounded determined not to return to the table unless Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu committed to an internationally mandated settlement freeze and agreed to pick up talks where they left off under the Israeli leader's predecessor in December 2008. However, it could become increasingly

Obama administration pushed harder to revive the negotiations. Netanyahu hasn't agreed to either demand,

and has so far curbed but not frozen settlement activity. He insisted negotiations should be held without any preconditions. Later this week, White House envoy George

Mitchell is to meet with Abbas and is expected to lay out some gestures Israel is prepared to make to bring Abbas back to the table, said an Abbas aide.

The Palestinians were not informed about the nature of the gestures, said the aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to brief reporters on the issue. Israeli defense officials said Israel was considering expanding the role of Palestinian security forces in West Bank towns and removing additional checkpoints that hinder the movement of people and goods. They spoke on condition of anonymity because no final decision had been made.

Any decision on resuming talks would not be made without Arab backing, the Abbas aide said. Arab foreign ministers are to discuss the fate of negotiations later this month, he added.

In the absence of direct talks, U.S. envoy George Mitchell had been shuttling between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Abbas said in a speech late Saturday that he has no incentive to resume direct talks.

"We have presented our vision and thoughts

and said that if progress is made, we will move to direct talks, but that if no progress is made, it (direct negotiations) will be futile," Abbas said.

"If they (the Israelis) say 'come and let's start negotiations from zero,' that is futile and pointless," Abbas added.

Netanyahu reiterated yesterday that he is ready to move to direct talks immediately. "The goal is to promote the political process and to try to reach a peace settlement," he said. "The condition is guarding Israel's security scrupulously."

Netanyahu said in difficult for him to stick to his position as the New York last week that if Abbas agreed to sit down with him in direct talks, then a peace agreement could be hammered out within a

President Barack Obama called Abbas last

week, following the U.S. president's meeting with Netanyahu. The White House said Obama and Abbas talked about ways to revive direct talks soon. The Palestinians have said that after 17 years

of intermittent talks, they don't want to start all over again, especially with an Israeli leader who has retreated from positions presented by his predecessors. Abbas' aide Yasser Abed Rabbo told

Palestinian radio yesterday that the Palestinians don't want to enter open-ended negotiations with Israel. "There must be a timetable, a framework for

these negotiations," he said. "We will not enter new negotiations that could take more than 10

The Palestinians want to establish a state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast War. They have said the 1967 borders must be the baseline for negotiations, but that they are ready to swap some land to enable Israel to keep some of the largest settlements it has built on occupied land since 1967.

Netanyahu says he will not relinquish any part of Jerusalem and has not presented his own border plan.

Australia to hold boatpeople talks with East Timor

REUTERS, Australia

Australia will send officials to Dili this week for talks on creating a processing centre for boatpeople in East Timor, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said yesterday. The officials would "start

a detailed discussion" with East Timor's government about the proposal, floated last week by new Prime Minister Julia Gillard, said Smith in a TV interview.

The arrival of asylumseekers on the country's remote northwestern shores is a hot political issue in Australia, where an election is due within months.

Gillard, who ousted former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in an internal party revolt late last month, was keen to be seen to be taking a strong stance on the issue.

The conservative opposition had blamed an upsurge in boat arrivals, mainly Afghans and Sri Lankans sailing from Indonesia, on a soft policy by the Labour government.

Smith told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that any plan for a regional processing centre for asylum-seekers would need regional and U.N. support.

He rejected comparisons with the former conservative government's "Pacific solution" under which asylumseekers were processed on the island nation of Nauru.

"It needs to be more than just a detention centre, which Nauru was," Smith

However, Gillard's announcement last week that she had discussed the issue with East Timor President Jose Ramos-Horta met with a mixed response, with some Timorese figures saying they did not want their country to become a "prison island".

Media reports have said that Papua New Guinea was also under consideration, but Smith said Australia was currently only talking to East Timor.

Japan PM losing upper house control, exit polls suggest

BBC ONLINE

The ruling DPJ party of PM Naoto Kan will lose control of the upper house of parliament after yesterday's election, exit polls suggested.

They suggested the DPJ would win just 47 of the contested seats, in an election seen as a referendum on its 10-month rule.

Kan, who only became PM last month, has reportedly said he will not resign.

The DPJ went into the polls with a majority in both houses and will now need new allies.

VULNERABLE

A total of 121 seats, half of the upper house, were being contested in yesterday's election.

The DPJ held 62 seats not being contested and the projected 47 wins would leave it short of the 122 majority needed, public broadcaster NHK said.

The DPJ still has a majority in the more powerful lower house but its ability to govern effectively has been challenged.

The BBC's Roland Buerk in Tokyo said that what was at stake was whether the prime minister would be able to build a stable political base to tackle the massive national debt. BBC correspondent said Kan must now

look for allies among smaller parties and the result could leave the prime minister vulnerable to leadership challenges from within his own party.

The DPJ came to power last August, ending half a century of dominance by its main rivals, the conservative Liberal Democratic

Kan succeeded Yukio Hatoyama who resigned abruptly after only nine months in office amid funding scandals and a row over an American military base.

The election campaign was dominated by the prime minister's suggestion that Japan needed to discuss the possibility of an increase in sales tax - an issue that has divided voters, said BBC Tokyo correspon-

Kan said the country had to make sure it avoided financial collapse.

"Japan's economy is 20 to 30 times bigger than that of Greece and its public debt is huge, so no country in the world could rescue Japan," Kan said on Friday.

Japan has been borrowing money for two decades, trying to bring its economy out of stagnation.

Iraq seeks arrest of Iranian exiles

REUTERS, Baghdad

An Iraqi court ordered the arrest of 39 members of an exiled Iranian opposition group, accusing them of crimes against humanity in helping Saddam Hussein to crush a revolt almost two decades ago, a judge said yesterday.

The 39 are members of the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI), a guerrilla movement opposed to the Iranian government. It sided with the toppled Iraqi dictator, a Sunni Muslim, during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s but has denied helping Saddam to crack down on long-oppressed majority Shia and ethnic Kurds.

Iran, Iraq and the United States consider the PMOI a terroris organisation and the now Shia-led Iraqi government has been trying to get it to vacate a base north of Baghdad where around 3,500 of its members have lived for 20 years.

"An arrest warrant has been issued against 39 leaders and members of the organisation including the PMOI's head Massoud Rajavi, due to evidence that confirms they committed crimes against humanity," said Judge Mohammed Abdul-Sahib, a spokesman of the Iraqi High Tribunal.

Rajavi's wife Maryam, leader of the French-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the PMOI's political wing, was also included in the warrant, Abdul Sahib added.

"The 39 Iranian suspects were involved with the former Iraqi security forces in suppressing the 1991 (Shia) uprising against the former Iraqi regime and the killing of Iraqi citizens," he said.

The PMOI began as an Islamist leftist group opposed to Iran's late Shah, but fell out with Shia who took power after the 1979 revolution.

Top Lashker militant killed in Kashmir

PTI, Jammu

A top Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant was killed in a gun battle between security forces and ultras in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, police said yesterday.

The slain ultra, identified as Abdul Hafeez alias Nomaan, was a self-styled commander of the Pakistan-based terrorist group, LeT, they said adding some arms and ammunition were recovered from the

Acting on a tip-off that some LeT ultras were hiding in Sarwan forest belt in Kishtwar district, security forces launched an operation to flush them out. In the ensuing gunfight, a LeT ultra was killed while others managed to escape, police

BP begins to fit new cap on Gulf of Mexico oil leak

BBC ONLINE

Underwater robots have successfully removed a leaking cap or BP's blown-out Gulf of Mexico oil well, the first stage in fitting a tighter cap.

However, many thousands of barrels of oil will now flow freely until the new cap is fitted, an operation that could take four to seven days. BP also said there was no guarantee of success at such a depth.

A fleet of 400 skimmers is in place to try to minimise the

effects of increased oil loss. The company has two other operations ongoing. One will deploy a larger surface vessel to collect oil, the other is drilling two wells to intercept the leak, which it is hoped will provide a permanent solution.

The larger ship, Helix Producer, could be in place to collect leaking oil as early as Sunday.

BP says the first of the relief wells will be finished in the first half of August.

The explosion of the Deepwater Horizon rig in April killed 11 people. President Barack Obama has called the leak the biggest environmental disaster in US history. INCREASED POTENTIAL

BP's submersible robots removed the current containment cap from the ocean floor at 1737GMT on Saturday but it will be several days at best before the new cap is in place.

A fleet of 400 skimmers is in place to try to minimise the effects of increased oil loss during the operation, BP said. "It's not just going to be, you put the cap on, it's done. It's not like putting a cap on a tube of toothpaste," Coast Guard spokesman Capt James McPherson warned.

Netanyahu plans to meet Egypt's Mubarak

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, back in Israel from talks in Washington on restarting direct peace negotiations with the Palestinians, said yesterday he would meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak this week.

"On Tuesday, I will meet President Mubarak in Cairo. It will be our fifth meeting in the space of a year. I hope to work together with him to promote direct talks with the Palestinians, Netanyahu said in public remarks atacabinetmeeting.

Netanyahu met US President Barack Obama at the White House last Tuesday and both leaders said they hoped face-to-face Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would begin soon. Israel and the Palestinians

are currently negotiating indirectly through Obama's Middle East envoy, George Mitchell. Palestinians have said they

ing to direct talks.

would wait and see what those measure entail before agree-

Bosnia marks Srebrenica massacre

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Bosnians yesterday marked 15 years since the massacre at Srebrenica, when Bosnian Serbs slaughtered almost 8,000 Muslims in Europe's worst mass killings since the SecondWorldWar.

A special ceremony was held at the Potocari ceremony outside the town yesterday as the recently identified remains of 775 victims were laid to rest with the 3,749 already buried there.

The massacre occurred when Bosnian Serb troops advanced on Srebrenica, a Muslim enclave supposedly under the protection of United Nations forces. The towns' men and boys fled into

the surrounding hills, but were hunted down by the troops, who shot and buried them in mass graves. They were then dug up and reburied

up the extent of the killings.

The massacre has been designated an act of genocide by the UN's war crimes court and the international court of justice. It is remembered as the darkest day in the bloody break-up of the Yugoslav federation in the 1990s.

Yesterday's memorial was an emotional occasion for Srebrenica, which has struggled to recover from losing two generations of men and boys in the incident.

Hasan and Suhra Mahic, both in their



PHOTO: AFP A Bosnian woman mourns during preparation for yesterday's mass burial.

eighties, saw their two sons Fuad and Suad buried during the service.

"I would have preferred that all of us have been killed together then we would not have had to live through this," Hasan said ahead of the ceremony.

Nearly 6,500 victims have been

identified, but relatives of those still missing are hopeful that more bodies will be found in the dense woodland

surrounding the town.

tion, Boris Tadic, the Serbian president, attended the ceremony, along with thousands of relatives of those who Tadic said he hoped "to build bridges

In a symbolic gesture of reconcilia-

of friendship and understanding among nations in the region" by attending the ceremony.

Serbia has for years denied the scale of the crime and many Serbs, led by nationalist politicians, believe that allegations of genocide have been exaggerated as part of an international political conspiracy against the country.

But in March the country's parliament passed a declaration condemning the massacre and apologised to the victims and their families. General Ratko Mladic, the alleged

mastermind of the killings, is still on the run and believed to be hiding in Serbia, where many see him as a heroic figure. The other alleged architect of the

massacre, Radovan Karadzic, was arrested in Belgrade in 2008, and is currently fighting charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).