

Fighting flares as Libyan rebels move into west

Gaddafi accuses protesters of bin Laden links

AGENCIES, Benghazi, Tripoli

Forces loyal to Muammar Gaddafi launched a counter-attack yesterday as rebels threatened the Libyan leader's grip on power by seizing important towns close to the capital.

Meanwhile, Gaddafi addressed yesterday the people of Az-Zawiyah, a town west of the capital, where there was fierce fighting between his forces and rebels, accusing them of being linked to Osama bin Laden.

In what was said to be a live audio feed on state television, Gaddafi also accused the protesters of being on drugs.

"You in Zawiya turn to Bin Laden," he said. "They give you drugs."

The opposition already control major centres in the east, including the regional capital Benghazi, and reports that the towns of Misrata and Zuara in the west had also fallen brought the tide of rebellion ever closer to Gaddafi's powerbase.

Forces loyal to Gaddafi yesterday attacked anti-government militias controlling Misrata and killed several people in fighting near the city's airport.

"The (pro-Gaddafi) brigade has managed to control the site but we are still trying to push it back. The clashes are still taking place at the moment," a witness told Reuters.

Violence also reached the town of Az-Zawiyah, just 50 km west of the capital Tripoli.

Al Arabiya television said Gaddafi would address residents of the town shortly.

Anti-government militias are in control of Zuara, about 120 km west of Tripoli, fleeing Egyptian construction workers who crossed into Tunisia told Reuters yesterday.

There was no sign of police or military and the town was controlled by 'popular committees' armed with automatic weapons.

Separately, lawyers and judges said

they had the coastal city of Misrata, 125 miles east of Tripoli, in their grip, according to an Internet statement.

With help from 'honest' military officers, they had removed agents of the 'oppressive regime' in Misrata, said the statement, which could not immediately be verified.

Meanwhile, World governments scrambled to evacuate stranded nationals from an oil-rich country falling into mounting lawlessness as world crude prices soared.

World leaders condemned Gaddafi's bloody crackdown on the week-long revolt that has split Libya, but did little to halt the bloodshed from the latest upheaval reshaping the Arab world.

Washington and Brussels spoke of possible sanctions against a man whose 41 years in power have been marked by idiosyncratic defiance of the West, yet there seemed little cohesion and urgency in the global response to the Libyan crisis.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of Libya's Internal Security Forces (ISF) parade in the eastern city of Tobruk yesterday. Residents of Libya's dissident-held east, frenzied by a deadly crackdown by Muammar Gaddafi's crumbling regime, vowed to march on the capital Tripoli as a string of towns famous as World War II battlegrounds fell under their control.

Gaddafi will die like Hitler

Says ex-Libyan minister

AFP, Stockholm

One of Muammar Gaddafi's former ministers has predicted that the Libyan leader will follow in Adolph Hitler's footsteps by committing suicide, rather than give up power.

Mustapha Abdeljalil, justice minister until he quit over the bloody crackdown on protestors, told Sweden's Expressen that he expected Gaddafi to make good on his pledge to die on Libyan soil rather than slink into exile.

"Gaddafi's time is up. He is going to go like Hitler, he is going to commit suicide," Abdeljalil said.

Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin in April 1945 as he witnessed the disintegration of the Nazi German empire.

In his interview, he also endorsed claims that Gaddafi had hired mercenaries from other parts of Africa.

NEWS IN brief

Egypt detains ex-information minister, state TV boss

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian police detained former information minister Anas al-Fikki and former state broadcasting chief Osama al-Sheikh yesterday as part of a probe into alleged graft under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, a security official said.

Both men were arrested from their homes during the morning on warrants from the financial affairs section of the prosecutor's office, the official said.

Fikki is the fourth member of Mubarak's former government to be detained, after the former ministers of interior Habib al-Adly, tourism Zoheir

Uganda opposition calls post-poll protest

AFP, Kampala

Opposition candidates who lost in Uganda's election called yesterday on their supporters to stage peaceful protests against veteran President Yoweri Museveni's overwhelming triumph.

"We therefore make a call to action. The time is now for the people of Uganda to rise up and peacefully protest against the outcome of the 2011 election," Kizza Besigye, the most prominent figure among the candidates who lost in the February 18 election, told journalists.

Besigye said his declaration was a joint statement with three other opposition candidates.

Russia to Buy 600 Warplanes, 100 Ships

AP, Moscow

Russia will spend \$650 billion to equip its dilapidated military with 600 new warplanes, 100 ships and 1,000 helicopters by 2020, Defence Ministry officials were quoted as saying yesterday.

The ambitious weapons procurement program also envisages eight new nuclear submarines and two Mistral aircraft carriers in addition to the two that Russia is buying from France.

His announcement comes during a large-scale streamlining of personnel in Russia's bloated and poorly equipped armed forces. The unpopular reforms of Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov have seen as many as 200,000 officers lose their jobs and nine of every 10 army units disbanded.

Pakistani court to begin US shooter case today

AFP, Lahore

A Pakistani court is to begin proceedings today at a hearing into double murder charges against a CIA contractor who shot dead two men in Lahore last month, lawyers said.

Washington is pushing hard for Pakistan to free Raymond Davis, arguing that he has diplomatic immunity and is backing his claim that he acted in self-defence when he shot the men in a busy city street nearly four weeks ago.

Revelations that Davis was a CIA contractor have heaped pressure on Pakistan's fragile government and further ramped up burning public mistrust of

Five killed in blast at military facility in Spain

AFP, Madrid

Five soldiers were killed yesterday in an accidental explosion at a military facility in central Spain that includes a demining training centre, police and defence sources said.

There are "five soldiers killed," the police source said.

The blast occurred in the grounds of a military engineering academy at Hoyo de Manzanares, 35 kilometres (21 miles) from Madrid and which also includes the International Demining Centre.

A source at the defence ministry said explosions

Indian PM defends record in parliament

AFP, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday defended his record in office as his embattled government looked to revive its fortunes during a new parliamentary session.

Singh pointed to the country's rapid development in recent years as he tried to shrug off a series of corruption scandals that have undermined his personal reputation and led to damaging deadlock in parliament last year.

"The whole world has admired India's economic growth," he told lawmakers. "The government is committed to achieving a growth rate of nine to 10 percent this year."

He again vowed to tackle graft, which many Indians believe has increased as the economy has boomed.

"Nobody will escape the law," he said. "Action has been taken against the wrongdoers as and when there has been credible evidence. The government will do everything to clean public life of corruption."

A corruption scam in which the treasury lost up to \$40 billion through the cut-price sale of mobile phones licences in 2008 has become a major challenge for Singh, but he said there was "nothing wrong in the telecom policy".

Inflation and the rising cost of food has been another key issue -- tens of thousands of people protested in New Delhi on Wednesday against surging prices.

US in Burma aid talks with Suu Kyi

BBC ONLINE

The US has begun talks with Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday about US aid programmes in the country, says the top US diplomat in Burma.

The US chargé d'affaires, Larry Dinger, said he was also consulting Burma's military-backed authorities.

The US currently imposes sanctions on Burma, and offers direct aid only for emergency and humanitarian causes.

Ms Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) recently called for talks on modifying sanctions.

"We hope that it will be a continuing conversation," he told the BBC.

Wasa plans

FROM PAGE 1
If the situation continues like this, the city in near future may face severe water crisis.

Of the Wasa's current 210 crore litre production, 87 percent is coming from underground and the rest surface water.

About Tk 10,500 crore is needed to set up five more water treatment plants and that will increase the production cost, said Tagsem A Khan, managing director of Wasa.

"So, to cope with the additional cost, we need to increase the tariff," he said while presenting a keynote paper at a roundtable on "Surface water: future of Dhaka Wasa" at Hotel Sonargaon in the capital.

Wasa is planning to increase the consumption of surface water from 13 to 70 percent by next 10 years, he added.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, who was the chief guest at the programme, said Wasa will have to reduce dependency on underground water.

Hope dims for survivors of N Zealand quake

AFP, Christchurch

New Zealand rescuers refused to give up the hunt for quake survivors yesterday, despite hope fading for hundreds feared trapped two days after a disaster that has killed nearly 100.

Emergency officials gave the grim news that they could find no signs of life in the wreckage of office towers, churches and homes after the 6.3-magnitude tremor laid waste to central Christchurch and some of its suburbs.

Police said 98 bodies had been retrieved from the rubble and 226 people were listed as missing. "We're gravely concerned about those individuals," district commander Dave Cliff told reporters.

Yemen confirms 'right to protest'

Bahrain protesters show no sign of retreat

AFP, Sanaa, Manama

Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh has ordered his security forces to offer 'full protection' to anti- and pro-government demonstrators alike.

He has also instructed forces to prevent direct confrontation between the two sides, according to an official statement.

Since the unrest began two weeks ago, 15 people have reportedly been killed.

Nine members of the ruling party have quit over the government's handling of the protests.

"Late this evening... Saleh instructed all security services to thwart all clashes and prevent direct confrontation between pro- and anti-government demonstrators," read the statement, relayed by the Yemeni embassy in Washington.

US drone kills three in NW Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

A US drone strike in a Pakistani tribal area yesterday killed at least three militants, security officials said, the first such incident since a US official shot dead two men in Lahore last month.

The strike took place in the restive Datta Khel region, 25 kilometres west of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, considered a stronghold of Al-Qaeda-linked militants.

"A US drone fired missiles on a house used by militants, killing three of them," a senior security official told AFP.

Another official also confirmed the missile strike and casualties.

UK court agrees on Assange extradition

REUTERS, London

A British court has agreed to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to Sweden where he is accused of sex crimes, dismissing claims such a move would breach his human rights.

However, the WikiLeaks founder will appeal against the decision, his lawyer said. He has seven days to appeal against the ruling.

"We will be appealing," his main lawyer Geoffrey Robertson told Belmarsh Magistrates Court in southeast London after judge Howard Riddle handed down his ruling.

Swedish prosecutors want to question Assange about allegations of sexual misconduct, which he denies, made by two WikiLeaks volunteers during his time in Sweden last August.

During three days of legal argument earlier this month, lawyers for Assange argued he would not get a fair trial in Sweden and said Swedish prosecutors had mishandled the case against the 39-year-old Australian computer expert.

They argued that he might wind up being sent to the United States where he could face execution.

However, Judge Howard Riddle dismissed the arguments.



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