

Gaddafi clings on while pressure builds in Arab world

AGENCIES, Tripoli

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi clings to power amid mounting pressure in Tripoli, the last big city where an uprising against his rule has yet to take hold and powerful tribes abandoned Yemen's increasingly embattled ruler.

The escalating revolt against Gaddafi, which one of his diplomats to the United Nations said killed thousands, has emboldened tens of thousands of protesters across the Arab world to step up demands for historic reforms.

After protests in Tunisia and Egypt forced out longtime leaders Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, Libya's Gaddafi and Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh are facing the most serious threats to their decades' grip on power.

Almost the entire east of the oil-rich North African nation has slipped from Gaddafi's control since the popular uprising began in the port city of Benghazi on February 15, inspired by revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia.

Tripoli's streets were eerily quiet overnight, with portraits of Gaddafi adorning street corners and a few police cars patrolling after a day in which residents said pro-Gaddafi forces fired at and over the heads of protesters in many areas. Up to 25 people were said to have been killed in one area alone.

"Peace is coming back to our country," one of Gaddafi's sons, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, told reporters flown into Libya under close supervision.

"If you hear fireworks don't mistake it for shooting," he said, smiling.

In Benghazi, a spokesman for the revolution told AFP yesterday they were drawing up plans for a transitional government to take power but in the nearby town of Ajdabiya, local residents said food was becoming scarce.

In Yemen, pressure on Saleh to resign intensified as the leaders of two of the country's most powerful tribes joined the anti-regime movement, one day after the biggest protests yet

against the government.

Nineteen people have died in near daily clashes since February 16.

In Bahrain, opposition leader Hassan Mashaima arrived yesterday in Manama, a day after he was arrested in Lebanon on his way to join anti-government protests, an AFP correspondent said.

Thousands of demonstrators rallied for a 13th day in Manama to demand the Sunni ruling family stand down in the Shiite majority Gulf state, upping pressure on the government one day after tens of thousands flooded the streets.

In Tunisia, security forces fired tear gas to disperse about 300 protesters chanting anti-government slogans at a fresh demonstration outside the interior ministry yesterday, an AFP reporter said.

In Algeria, several hundred riot police were out in force to block a new attempt to stage an anti-government march in the capital, two days after President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's regime lifted a state of emergency.



PHOTO: AFP

Yemeni anti-government protesters demonstrate to demand President Ali Abdullah Saleh's step down after three decades in power yesterday in Sanaa. Important Yemeni tribal leaders, including those of the Hashid and Baqil, pledged to join protests today at a gathering north of the capital.

Turkey blasts move for Libya sanctions

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey's prime minister yesterday raised strong objections to imposing sanctions on Libya, arguing that innocent people would suffer and accusing world powers of making 'calculations' based on oil.

"Any intervention will make the process even more difficult. It will harm not the administration but the Libyan people. You cannot secure world peace by resorting to sanctions in each and every incident," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised public speech in Istanbul.

"We call on the international community to approach Libya not with concerns about oil but with conscience, justice and universal human values," he said.

"We call on the international community to stop making various calculations over Libya and work for a remedy to stop the suffering of the Libyan people," he said without elaborating.

Erdogan spoke after a telephone conversation with US President Barack Obama on Friday evening. Washington has already imposed personal sanctions on Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi and four of his sons.

Egypt protesters in Tahrir after army apology

AFP, Cairo

Some 2,000 protesters marched onto Cairo's Tahrir Square yesterday to call for a new government, denouncing violence by authorities after military police beat and arrested demonstrators.

Protesters demanded the replacement of the government of Prime Minister Ahmad Shafiq, which includes several ministers from toppled president Hosni Mubarak's regime.

"The revolution will continue until all our demands are met," read one banner.

Many protesters walked around with a sticker on their clothes that read "Shafiq = old regime."

Late on Friday, military police had surrounded protesters, hitting them with batons and using tasers to disperse a crowd of several hundred that had gathered to push for reforms, according to witnesses and a security official.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces said that "what happened late Friday was the result of unintentional confronta-

tions between the military police and the youth of the revolution."

It stressed that it "did not and will not issue orders to attack the youth, and all measures will be taken to ensure this will not happen again."

In a second statement, the armed forces said they would "immediately release all the youth of the January 25 revolution that were detained in Tahrir Square (on Friday)", but did not say how many there were.

A security official said about 20 people were detained.

Activists launched a Facebook call for fresh protests yesterday to denounce the army's use of force.

"Peaceful protesters in Tahrir are being chased away by the military police with tasers, sticks and whips. Masked men with machine guns trying to shut down the strike by force. Many beaten, assaulted and arrested," the statement said.

"We cannot stand for this; we must stand strong against violence towards peaceful protesters."

Russia vows to sell missiles to Syria

AFP, Moscow

Russia announced yesterday that it intended to fulfil its contract to supply Syria with cruise missiles despite the turmoil shaking the Arab world and Israel's furious condemnation of the deal.

"The contract is in the implementation stage," news agencies quoted Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov as saying.

Russia initially agreed to send a large shipment of anti-ship Yakhont cruise missiles to Syria in 2007 under the terms of a controversial deal that was only disclosed by Serdyukov in September 2010.

The revelation infuriated both Israel and the United States as they expected Russia to tear up the contract.

NEWS IN brief

US shuts Libyan embassy

AFP, Washington

Washington closed down Libyan embassy yesterday and warned its spies were seeking evidence of 'atrocities' in Libya and said that Gaddafi had lost the confidence of his people, in an apparent broad hint that Washington wanted him gone.

Gaddafi, once branded a 'mad dog' by the White House for backing global militants, had in recent years sought cooperation with the West.

The move came as US removed its citizens from the troubled Libya.

Facebook page calls for Qatar emir's ouster

AFP, Dubai

A Facebook page demanding the ouster of Qatar's moderate, pro-Western emir, accusing him of being an agent of Israel, had attracted 18,262 fans by yesterday in the latest web-driven push for change in the Arab world.

In what is apparently the first call for change in the gas-rich state since popular revolts began sweeping the Arab world, the page has a profile picture with an image of Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, crossed out in red.

Against a backdrop of Qatar's flag is the tagline: "For Qatar: try the traitor, an agent of Israel."

Entitled "Freedom Revolution, March 16, Qatar," the page calls on Qataris to hit the streets to demand change.

New Zealand earthquake toll at 145 dead

AP, Christchurch

New Zealand's premier said the Christchurch quake may be the country's worst disaster ever, as officials raised the toll yesterday to 145 dead and more than 200 missing while giving a grim prognosis for the city's downtown.

Engineers and planners said the city's decimated central area may be completely unusable for months to come and that at least a third of the buildings must be razed and rebuilt after last Tuesday's 6.3-magnitude quake.

"This may be New Zealand's single-most tragic event," Key said.

Italy's Berlusconi faces showdowns with justice

AFP, Rome

A tax fraud trial involving Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi resumes in Milan today, in the first of a series of showdowns between the embattled leader and Italy's justice system.

The 74-year-old media tycoon turned politician has been asked to appear before the court to face accusations that his Mediaset business empire engaged in a fraud to make its revenues appear smaller than they really were.

The trial was suspended in April 2010 after parliament adopted a hugely controversial law that granted Berlusconi temporary immunity but Italy's Constitutional Court partially struck down the legislation last month.

Eiffel tower evacuated after bomb hoax

AFP, Paris

The Eiffel Tower was evacuated on Friday evening after hoax bomb calls, police said yesterday.

Two calls from a public booth around 8:00pm Friday led to both Paris landmarks being immediately cleared, police said, confirming a report on the Internet site of Le Parisien newspaper.

Around 1,700 people were evacuated from the Eiffel Tower and the monument remained closed for the rest of the evening.

It was the third time in recent months that the Eiffel Tower had been the target of a bomb hoax.

Homeless finds daughter by Twitter

BBC ONLINE



They had been apart for a decade, but in the end all it took to reunite a homeless father and his daughter was a few 140-character messages on the social networking site, Twitter.

Daniel Morales, 58, was taking part in a New York project in which homeless people are given a prepaid mobile phone to keep a record of their lives.

He had been updating his 3,000-odd followers with regular Twitter updates.

Three weeks into the scheme, he decided to use it to track down his daughter.

"Hi thi is to let yo people know that in lookin eqo my daughter her name is sarah m rivera," he tweeted on Thursday.

He followed the message up with others posting his mobile number and a photo of his daughter, Sarah, 27.

She called him the next day, and the overjoyed pair was reunited in New York on Friday.

"This is an awesome moment," Mr Morales told CNN. "I am rejoicing."

The two had lost touch after Sarah left their Puerto Rico home to live with her

Blast kills 9 civilians in Afghanistan

AFP, Khost

A roadside bomb killed nine civilians including women and children when it struck the vehicle they were travelling in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, provincial police said.

The civilians were driving into Khost city, capital of Khost province, when the blast hit their van, deputy provincial police chief M o h a m m a d Y a q o u b Mandozai told AFP.

"Three women, four children and two men were killed by the roadside bomb explosion. They were all civilians," Mandozai said.

He blamed the attack on 'enemies of Afghanistan' a term often used to refer to Taliban militants who have waged a bloody insurgency against Afghan and foreign forces in Afghanistan.

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AL's feuding leaders

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never bring any good result. You should learn from the recent City Corporation election results," she said during an opinion exchange meeting with the local leaders at the Circuit House.

Drawing attention of the senior most AL leaders of the port city, Hasina said that in Awami League nobody is leader. "We all, including me, are just workers of Awami League."

She asked the AL activists to stay united and work for greater interests of the mass people. "Mass people and the party activists are our main strength," she said.

The PM said the great responsibility, reposed on the present government by the mass people, would have to be performed with sincerity.

"People have voted us to power to work for their betterment. We've to fulfil their aspirations at any cost," she said.

Regarding development of Chittagong, Hasina said she herself has taken the charge of development of the port city.

The AL Chittagong city committee is currently ravaged by serious discord between ex-mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and Primary and Mass Education Minister Afsarul Ameen.

Mohiuddin Chowdhury and Afsarul Ameen are president and joint secretary respectively of the Chittagong city unit of the ruling party.

The PM talked with Mohiuddin and Afsarul Amin privately for a few minutes but the details about the conversation could not be known.

Engr Mosharraf Hossain MP and Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury MP also addressed the meeting, which was attended, among others, by Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

Rally as Pak court hears assassin case

AFP, Rawalpindi

Supporters of a Pakistani police commando charged with murdering a high-profile liberal governor held a rally yesterday as the court resumed taking statements in the case.

At a previous hearing Malik Mumtaz Qadri was charged with terrorism and the January 4 murder of Punjab governor Salman Taseer.

The killing of the reformist

Taseer was the most high-profile political assassination in Pakistan since former prime minister Benazir Bhutto died in a gun and suicide attack in December 2007.

More than 250 demon-

strators rallied outside the Adiyala prison, where the hearing took place.

She also said the leaders and parliament members of AL-led 14-party alliance are risking their lives trying to bring the situation under control. "During the time, BDR soldiers of at least 42 camps across the country revolted although our government handled the situation prudently," she added.

Expressing her shock at the loss of lives of innocent army officials during the massacre, Hasina said her government has provided all out support for the family members of the officers within its limited resources.

The people of the country want to know where you were staying during the three days after the BDR carnage," she asked the former prime minister at the meet-

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