

# Gaddafi regime demands UN suspend sanctions

*Pro-Gaddafi tanks 'fire on houses in Zawiyah'*

AFP, United Nations

Muammar Gaddafi's regime has demanded that the UN Security Council suspend sanctions taken against the Libyan leader over his crackdown on opposition protests.

Libyan Foreign Minister Musa Kussa said in a letter to the UN Security Council that only "a modicum" of force has been used against opposition demonstrators and that the government was "taken aback" by the sanctions.

The regime called for the travel ban and assets freeze ordered against Gaddafi and his entourage "to be suspended until such time as the truth is established."

Kussa demanded that the Security Council "stand up to the states that are threatening force against it."

The letter, sent to the UN Security Council Friday, was the first official reaction communicated to the United Nations since the sanctions were unanimously passed by the council last Saturday.

Meanwhile, tanks manned by forces loyal to Gaddafi fired on houses when they launched a fresh assault on the town of Zawiyah, near the capital, yesterday, wit-

nesses said.

"The tanks are everywhere in the city and are opening fire on houses. I saw at least seven speed outside my house and the shelling does not stop," one resident told AFP by telephone.

The opposition website Al-Manara said 40 tanks rolled into Zawiyah and were attacking homes in the city, a key protest centre west of Tripoli where rebels and Gaddafi loyalists have been battling for hours.

Rights groups say 6,000 people have been killed since protests against Gaddafi erupted on February 15. The United Nations says that more than 1,000 have died.

Libyan rebels said Friday they had seized a key oil refinery town in some of the heaviest fighting of the rebellion that left "many dead", a claim denied by a senior government official.

A Security Council diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "It's just another example of the regime's refusal to accept the consequences of their actions."

"However, it also shows that they are rattled by the firm and united action taken by the international community."



PHOTO: AFP

Libyan rebel fighters shout "God is great" as they prepare to leave the oil town of Ras Lanuf to the west front yesterday after ten people were killed and more than 20 wounded in clashes between Libyan rebels and loyalists of Muammar Gaddafi.

## Pakistan court gives police more time on Musharraf

AFP, Rawalpindi

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court yesterday gave police two more weeks to arrest exiled former president Pervez Musharraf over the assassination of ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

Musharraf, who was president when Bhutto was killed in December 2007 in a gun and suicide bomb attack, is living in London and does not intend to go back to Pakistan for any court hearing, his spokesman says.

Judge Rana Nisar Ahmad issued the arrest warrant on February 12 and reissued it a week later.

"Police requested the court for a month more time to implement the court order but the judge gave only two weeks," Malik Mohammad Rafique, one of the defence lawyers, told AFP.

## NEWS IN brief

### China will pursue 'powerful' military

AFP, Beijing

Premier Wen Jiabao vowed yesterday that China would continue building a "powerful" military, one day after Beijing announced a return to double-digit percentage hikes in defence spending.

"Strengthening national defence and building a powerful people's army are important guarantees for safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests," Wen said in a speech opening the nation's legislature.

A spokesman for the National People's Congress said on Friday that China's defence budget would rise 12.7 percent in 2011 to 601.1 billion yuan (\$91.7

### Monk shot dead in Thai south

AFP, Bangkok

Gunmen killed a Buddhist monk and injured two others as they collected alms in Thailand's insurgency-plagued south yesterday, police said.

The three monks were shot by two assailants on a motorcycle as they walked through a busy area in Pattani province.

Shadowy Islamic insurgents have waged a violent campaign in Thailand's southernmost region bordering Malaysia since early 2004, leaving more than 4,400 people dead, including both Muslims and Buddhists.

### 22 killed in south Sudan land dispute

AFP, Khartoum

Fighting over a disputed stretch of land in South Sudan's troubled Jonglei state has left 22 people dead, including a soldier, and 43 wounded, the state's governor said yesterday.

"Fighting broke out on Thursday over a piece of land in the Nyak Payam area (in the Twic East region of western Jonglei state). The SPLA and the police intervened and it has now stopped," Kuol Manyang Kuol told AFP by telephone.

Kuol described the clashes, between armed members of the Ayal and Dachuek peoples, two branches of south Sudan's predominant Dinka tribe, as "a misunderstanding between the two communities."

### Six dead as plane crashes in Russia during tests

AFP, Moscow

Six crew members, including at least two citizens of Myanmar, died when a plane they were testing crashed in central Russia yesterday, Russian news agencies reported.

The bodies of six crew members were found after the AN-148 plane crashed around 130 kilometres from the city of Voronezh, the regional emergency ministry said, cited by the RIA Novosti news agency.

At least two citizens of Myanmar were on board and the plane was undergoing tests prior to being sent to Myanmar, a source in Voronezh aircraft factory told RIA Novosti.

### Queen Elizabeth to make historic Ireland visit

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II will visit Ireland this year, her office announced Friday, in a first state visit by a British monarch since the republic gained independence in 1922.

In a hugely symbolic move for the normalisation of British-Irish relations following the peace established in Northern Ireland, it will be the first visit by a British sovereign in 100 years.

"The Queen has been pleased to accept an invitation from the president of Ireland to pay a state visit to Ireland this year," said a brief statement

## Trial opens of Egypt ex-interior minister

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's once feared former interior minister Habib al-Adly pleaded not guilty to corruption charges yesterday, in the first trial of a member of ousted president Hosni Mubarak's regime.

Standing in the dock and dressed in white prison clothes, Adly denied accusations of money laundering and unlawful acquisition of public money.

"It didn't happen," he said twice, in a calm tone.

Judge Al-Mohammadi Qunsua swiftly adjourned the hearing to April 2, after a heated exchange between the defence team and civil society lawyers attending the trial.

## S Arabia slams protests Two Oman ministers sacked

AFP, Riyadh, Muscat

Saudi Arabia's interior ministry said yesterday that protests were illegal, amid various calls for demonstrations demanding change in the ultra-conservative kingdom, state media said.

"Regulations in the kingdom forbid categorically all sorts of demonstrations, marches and sit-ins... as they contradict Islamic Sharia law and the values and traditions of Saudi society," said a ministry statement carried by SPA state news agency.

The statement said police were "authorised by law to take all measures needed against those who try to break the law." Several hundred Shiites protested on Friday in the Eastern Province, calling for the release of an arrested Shiite cleric, Sheikh Tawfiq al-Aamer, and other detainees, witnesses said.

The demonstration was staged after an appeal made on Facebook for a "Day of Rage" in the kingdom's east to demand the release Aamer, who was arrested on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Oman's Sultan Qaboos has replaced two ministers, days after protests erupted demanding an end to corruption and reforms in the normally placid Gulf state, official media reported on Saturday.

The sultan has appointed Khaled bin Hilal bin Saud al-Busaidi as a minister of the royal court, replacing Sayed Ali bin Hmud al-Busaidi, the state ONA news agency said.

## Key party leaves India's ruling coalition

AFP, New Delhi

A key regional party from southern India has withdrawn from the ruling national coalition, dealing a fresh blow to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's embattled administration.

The exit of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) is the latest challenge to confront the Congress-led government, which has been buffeted by slew of corruption scandals -- the biggest of them centred on a DMK former minister.

But the DMK said it snapped its seven-year alliance with Congress late yesterday because it had been unable to reach a seat-sharing deal with the party for elections in the state of Tamil Nadu.

## US favours long-term allies in Mideast

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama's administration is settling on a Middle East strategy that favours keeping longtime Arab allies who are willing to reform in power, The Wall Street Journal reported late Friday.

Citing unnamed officials and diplomats, the newspaper said the administration is leaning toward this approach even if that means the full democratic demands of Arab citizens might have to wait.

Instead of pushing for immediate change -- as it did in Egypt and now Libya -- the United States is urging protesters from Bahrain to Morocco to work with existing rulers toward what some officials and diplomats are now calling "regime alteration," the report said.

The moderate US approach has emerged after lobbying by Arab governments who were alarmed that Obama had abandoned Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, The Journal said.

The Arab rulers were worried that, if Washington did the same to the king of Bahrain, a chain of revolts could sweep them from power too, the paper noted.

"What we have said throughout this is that there is a need for political, economic and social reform, but the particular approach will be country by country," The Journal quotes the unnamed official as saying.

## Abed points at trust

FROM PAGE 1  
Fazle Hasan Abed yesterday.

The chairperson of Brac, the world's largest non-government organisation, in a statement expressed concern over the recent development at Grameen Bank. The bank is the centre of debate after the central bank removed its managing director Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus in connection with holding on to the post without prior approval from the regulator.

Abed said Grameen Bank is an extremely important institution serving about 83 lakh of Bangladesh's most under-served population. "The welfare of these borrowers and the continuous progress of the institution must be given the highest priority for any decision

affecting the organisation."

He said the role of microfinance in ensuring financial inclusion and improving people's lives are well documented. "MFIs [microfinance institutions] such as Grameen Bank and Brac supported by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation have played a very important role in Bangladesh in ensuring this access to finance and enterprise development."

Brac has also played its role by providing additional support services in various areas such as health, education and agriculture through a multi-pronged approach for tackling poverty.

Abed, who has been knighted for services in tackling poverty and empowering the poor in

Bangladesh and across the world, said, "We must understand that microfinance institutions like Grameen Bank are different from traditional organisations. A big capital of such organisations is the intrinsic community level trust that they have earned."

"This trust element must not be underestimated. If this trust is lost, then there may be delinquencies, intentional refusal to repay loans or large-scale withdrawal of savings by the members; in effect potentially bringing the organisation's future in jeopardy."

"For the sake of the millions of its members, we must take utmost care in not letting this happen. A carefully planned succession for Dr Yunus can help a smooth

transition and give the organisation the stability that it needs to ensure the welfare of its members," the Brac chairperson maintained.

He hoped due process would be followed before taking any step about Prof Yunus or Grameen Bank, keeping in mind the integrity of the institution concerned and also how lack of

due process may affect the reputation of our country globally.

"We must remember that development organisations play a complimentary and supportive role to the government in national development. Recent dramatic decline in maternal mortality rate is a great example where such complimentary work can prove tremen-

dously beneficial for the entire country and in effect globally improving the image of the country," he said.

The government and the NGOs must continue to work together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for which our prime minister recently got acclaimed internationally, said Abed.

## Two die after crossing border

FROM PAGE 1  
flights and increase their frequencies for speedy repatriation of expatriate Bangladeshis as the number of workers escaping from Libya to neighbouring Tunisia, Egypt and Greece has risen to 26,341, said the foreign secretary.

The number of Bangladeshis who crossed the border to Tunisia rose to 15,000 yesterday since the Tunisian government opened its border for the refugees on Thursday.

Besides, the government has sought overflight clearance from India so that the IOM charter flights can travel through Indian sky. There are positive responses both from IOM and India.

Giving a breakup of 26,341 Bangladeshis who have left Libya, Quayes said so far 15,000 Bangladeshis have entered Tunisia, while Korean Daewoo company shifted 2,014 to the Crete and 2,098 to the Hania islands of Greece.

Roughly, over 30,000 Bangladeshis are still in different cities of Libya. Nine

Bangladeshi female nurses are still staying at a military hospital in Tripoli.

The foreign secretary said Bangladeshis expats are returning in three ways -- under the arrangement of IOM and the Bangladesh government, through the recruitment authorities concerned, and by privately managed ways.

He said 616 people, including 168 from Egypt and 448 from the Crete Island, returned home yesterday. With yesterday's returnees, as many as 3,491 Bangladeshis have returned home from Libya.

Of them, 2,222 have returned with the help of their respective employers or on their own, while 1,269 returned through the IOM.

Quayes also further informed that six Bangladeshis were missing from temporary shelter in Greece, which became a serious concern for both Bangladesh and Greece.

"We have given undertakings to the governments of Greece and Tunisia that the stranded Bangladeshi work-

ers will be repatriated as early as possible.

"It would be difficult for other Bangladeshis to get shelter in those countries if any worker goes missing," he said. In this context, he said the government has increased personnel in its missions in Cairo and Greece to coordinate the repatriation process.

Meanwhile, a truck laden with water, juice and dry food was looted by unruly people on its way to the Egyptian border, Quayes said. As a result, 10 percent Bangladeshis who are on the Egyptian border did not get food on Friday.

He said Bangladesh has requested the Indian government to accommodate 250 Bangladeshis in an Indian ship, which will evacuate its citizens to Malta. Besides, a group of 70 Bangladeshis reached Kathmandu yesterday with a Nepalese group from Libya.

The Bangladesh mission in Kathmandu has arranged a bus for their repatriation to Bangladesh.

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