

NEWS IN brief

Hillary Clinton wants to exit after Obama term ends

AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in an interview Wednesday she would not seek another term as the top US diplomat if President Barack Obama is re-elected in 2012.

Clinton told CNN she has "no intention" of running again for the presidency and said she would be "moving on" after her current term ends.

In the interview in Cairo, Clinton was asked if she would want a second term as secretary of state if

Two Yemen police, three Qaeda men killed

AFP, Sanaa

Two Yemeni policemen and three members of Al-Qaeda were killed in clashes yesterday in the eastern province of Marib, one of the network's strongholds in the country, a security official told AFP.

"A group of Al-Qaeda members in two vehicles... attacked a security post in Marib... where they clashed with security forces, causing the death of two policemen and three Al-Qaeda elements and

Sri Lanka holds first local polls since war

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka held its first local elections yesterday since the end of its long ethnic war two years ago, in a test for the all-powerful government of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

Since government troops defeated the Tamil Tiger separatist rebels in 2009 after decades of warfare, Rajapakse has tightened his grip on power by securing a second presidential term and winning parliamentary polls.

Voting was under way in rural areas where 9.4 million people were eligible to elect more than

I Coast death toll rises to 410

AFP, Abidjan

Eighteen people were killed in post-election violence in the Ivory Coast in the past week, bringing to 410 the death toll since the end of 2010, the UN mission (UNOCI) in Abidjan said yesterday.

Spokesman Hamadou Toure gave the new figures during a weekly press briefing in the financial capital.

On Wednesday the ONUCI said that it was "imperative to put an end, immediately, to this escalation of violence that jeopardizes peace, social cohesion and national reconciliation."

Up to 50 Somali pirates seize Indonesian ship

AFP, Brussels

An unusually large group of 30 to 50 Somali pirates seized an Indonesian vessel and used it in a failed bid to hijack a second ship yesterday, the EU naval mission said.

The pirates hijacked the bulk carrier Sinar Kudus about 320 nautical miles northeast of the island of Socotra on Wednesday morning, the EU anti-piracy

**JAPAN DISASTER
Death, missing toll nears 15,000**

AFP, Tokyo

The official number of dead and missing after a devastating earthquake and tsunami that flattened Japan's northeast coast is approaching 15,000, police said yesterday.

The number of confirmed dead from Friday's twin disasters rose to 5,457 while the official number of missing increased to 9,508, the National Police Agency said.

A total of 2,409 people were injured in the disaster. But reports have indicated that the final toll could be much higher.

The mayor of the coastal town of Ishinomaki in Miyagi prefecture said that the number of missing there was likely to hit 10,000.



A Japanese Self Defence Force soldier prays before removing the body of a tsunami victim found in the debris in the town of Otsuchi in Iwate prefecture yesterday.

Taiwan finds radiation on 26 travellers from Japan

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan authorities have detected radioactive particles on 26 passengers arriving on planes from Japan as the quake-hit country battles an escalating nuclear crisis, officials said yesterday.

A day after three major airports set up scanning equipment, over 4,400 people arriving from Japan had been tested, with 26 found to carry radioactive particles so far, said the Atomic Energy Council of Taiwan.

"Most of the radioactive particles were discovered on their shoes or clothes," an official said. "The radiation levels detected were not harmful."

Bitter cold deepens Japan quake misery

AFP, Ofunato

Thick snow covered the wreckage littering quake-hit Japan yesterday, all but extinguishing hopes of finding anyone alive in the debris and deepening danger and misery for survivors.

A cold snap brought heavy blizzards over the country's northeast overnight, covering the tsunami-razed region in deep snow and vital highways in treacherous black ice.

Half a million evacuees struggled to stay warm as rescuers said their efforts to help the devastated population were at risk, almost a week after the 9.0 magnitude quake and massive tsunami hit.

"We are concerned about ice on the roads," US rescuer Dave Stone told AFP

and were complicating relief efforts that were already hampered by aftershocks.

There were fears for children and the elderly, especially those sleeping on the floors of schools and gymnasiums acting as evacuation centres, where colds and influenza would rapidly spread.

"Babies are especially vulnerable, as their bodies are smaller and take less time to drop below normal body temperature when exposed to cold weather."

Most of the region's pharmacies were swept away, adding to the pressure on hospitals, where thousands of people were already turning up seeking to have routine prescriptions filled. More than 80,000 buildings were damaged and almost 5,000 destroyed.

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**Bahrain crackdown on protesters
6 opposition leaders arrested**

REUTERS, Manama

Bahrain arrested at least six opposition leaders yesterday, a day after its crackdown on protests among the Shi'ite Muslim majority drew rare US criticism and raised fears of a regional conflict.

State television said "leaders of the civil strife" had been arrested for communicating with foreign countries and inciting murder and destruction of property. It did not say how many had been arrested or name them.

Meanwhile, Bahraini police fired shotguns and tear gas yesterday to disperse a protest in the Shiite village of Deih, west of Manama, a local rights activist said.

Several hundred protesters rallied in the village before security forces opened fire, Bahrain Centre for Human Rights chief Nabeel Rajab said.

An AFP journalist saw riot police stationed at the entrance to Deih firing tear gas. Several military vehicles full of police blocked the road leading from the village of Jidhafs to Deih, he said.

US mulls air strikes as battle for Benghazi looms

REUTERS, Tripoli

Libyan government soldiers battled rebels on the road to the insurgent stronghold of Benghazi yesterday as the United States raised the possibility of air strikes to stop Muammar Gaddafi's forces.

But the international debate on what action to take may have dragged on too long to help the anti-Gaddafi uprising, now struggling to hold its ground one month after it started.

Libyan state television said gunfire and explosions could be heard at the airport near Benghazi. If confirmed, it would be the first fighting near the city where the revolution started.

Clashes around Ajdabiyah, a strategic town on the coastal highway, hampered the government advance on Benghazi, but the army warned citizens that it had the city in its sights and told them to leave rebel-held locations.

Libyan state television said government

forces had taken Libya's third city, Misrata, about 200 km east of Tripoli, but rebels and residents there denied the claim.

The United States, previously cool on the idea of a foreign military intervention, said the UN Security Council should consider tougher action than a no-fly zone over Libya.

"We are discussing very seriously and leading efforts in the Council around a range of actions that we believe could be effective in protecting civilians," US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice said in New York late on Wednesday.

"The US view is that we need to be prepared to contemplate steps that include, but perhaps go beyond, a no-fly zone."

Washington had initially reacted cautiously to Arab League and European calls for a no-fly zone over Libya, with some officials concerned it could be militarily ineffective or politically damaging.

**LATEST leaks
IAEA warned Japan over nuke risk**

AFP, London

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned Japan two years ago that a strong earthquake could pose a "serious problem" for its nuclear power stations, Britain's Daily Telegraph reported.

An IAEA expert expressed concern that the Japanese reactors were only designed to withstand magnitude 7.0 tremors, according to a December 2008 US diplomatic cable obtained by the WikiLeaks website, Telegraph reported.

The IAEA official told a meeting of the G8's Nuclear Safety and Security Group in Tokyo in 2008 that Japan's safety guide-

lines were outdated, the cable said.

"He (the IAEA official) explained that safety guides for seismic safety have only been revised three times in the last 35 years and that the IAEA is now re-examining them," it added.

"Also, the presenter noted recent earthquakes in some cases have exceeded the design basis for some nuclear plants, and that this is a serious problem that is now driving seismic safety work," it added.

The government responded by building an emergency response centre at the Fukushima site, but the plant was still only designed to withstand a 7.0 quake.

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