

Putin: West in 'mediaeval Crusade'

REUTERS, AFP, Tripoli

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said yesterday a UN resolution authorising military action in Libya resembled "mediaeval calls for crusades" after Western forces launched a second wave of air strikes.

As diplomatic tempers over the campaign flared, officials in Tripoli said a missile intended to kill Muammar Gaddafi had destroyed a building in his fortified compound, which was heavily bombed in 1986 by the Reagan administration.

"It was a barbaric bombing," said government spokesman Mussa Ibrahim, showing pieces of shrapnel that he said came from the missile. "This contradicts American and Western (statements)... that it is not their target to attack this place."

There was no comment on the strike from attacking forces.

I am concerned about the ease with which the decision to use force was taken," Russian news agencies quoted Putin as saying in reference to the current international campaign in Libya.

Noting that the United States had already involved itself in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, Putin added: "Now it's Libya's turn."

"And all of this under the guise of protecting peaceful civilians. Where is the logic, where is the conscience? There is neither one nor the other," Putin said.

In an appearance on Libyan television on Sunday, Gaddafi promised his enemies a "long war" after the UN-authorised intervention in the uprising against his 41-year rule of this oil producing North African desert state.

"The resolution is defective and flawed," said Russia's Putin, whose country did not use its power to veto the resolution at the United Nations. "It allows everything. It resembles mediaeval calls for crusades," Putin added.

China's official newspapers yesterday stepping up Beijing's opposition to air attacks on Libya, accused nations backing the strikes of breaking international rules and courting new turmoil in the Middle East. China also did not veto the UN resolution.

Libyan rebels welcomed the second wave of attacks.



Vladimir Putin

Middle East boils with Libya strikes, Yemen on brink

AFP, Sanaa

Middle East boiled yesterday after fresh air strikes in Libya, a mass protest in Syria and Yemen on the brink after top generals backed protesters battling to overthrow President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Tanks took up positions in key locations across Yemen's capital Sanaa including at the presidential palace, the central bank and the ministry of defence, but it was unclear what their orders were or who was in command.

In the first of a series of body blows to Saleh's authority, General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, commander of the Northwest Military District which includes Sanaa, announced he had joined the "revolution."

"The crisis is getting more complicated and it's pushing the country towards violence and civil war," the general said in a statement.

"According to what I'm feeling, and according to the feelings of my partner commanders and soldiers... I announce our support and our peaceful backing to the youth revolution."

"We are going to fulfil our duties in preserving security and stability."

Ahmar was followed by fellow generals Mohammed Ali Mohsen, the Eastern Military district chief, Nasser Ali Shuaybi in Hadramawt province and Faisal Rajab in the southern province of Lahij.

Dozens of officers of various ranks went to the tent city near Sanaa University, where demonstrators have kept vigil since February 21 in spite of a wave of attacks, and publicly pledged to support the revolution.

The deputy speaker of parliament,



Libyan rebels gather around a burning T-72 tank belonging to forces of Gaddafi in Shat al-Bedin 50 km West of Benghazi yesterday as news reports said government forces pulled back 100 km from rebel-held area.

PHOTO: AFP

ment, Himyar al-Ahmar, and the governor of the key southern province of Aden, Ahmed Qaatabi, also resigned in protest at the treatment of demonstrators.

Sadiq al-Ahmar, who leads the Hashid tribal federation, the largest in deeply tribal Yemen and a crucial source of Saleh's power, told Al-Jazeera it was time for the embattled president to make a "quiet exit."

The defections came a day after Saleh sacked his cabinet in a bid to placate opposition calls for sweeping reforms in the key US ally.

The regime has already lost the support of religious leaders and been weakened by the resignations of ministers, ambassadors and a host of ruling party MPs, but Saleh has refused to stand down until his term ends in 2013.

He said Monday the majority of the people were behind him.

His regime was internationally condemned after more than 50 people were killed when loyalist gunmen opened fire Friday on protesters in Sanaa's University Square, the centre of the pro-democracy

movement.

The defection of top military officers to the opposition is likely to complicate Washington's support for Saleh, whom it sees as a pillar of stability in a volatile country and a partner in the war against al-Qaeda.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, speaking in Cairo on Monday, strongly condemned the use of live ammunition against demonstrators in Yemen, and repeated international calls for dialogue and restraint.

Yemeni generals back democracy protesters

REUTERS, Sanaa

Top generals, ambassadors and some tribes threw their support behind Yemen's anti-government protesters yesterday in a major blow to President Ali Abdullah Saleh as he tries to survive growing demands for his immediate departure.

The president, a perennial survivor who has stayed in power for 32 years throughout a civil war, numerous uprisings and militant campaigns, has seen a string of allies break ranks with him in recent days.

Despite that, TV channel Al Arabiya quoted Saleh as saying the majority of Yemenis were with him and that he was "holding on," while Al Jazeera said he had asked Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal to mediate in the worsening crisis.

Defense Minister Mohammad Nasser Ali was due to read a statement on state television announcing that the defections were against the constitution, an official source said.

The latest defections and resignations were apparently sparked by Saleh's decision to resort to violence to deal with the continuing protests against his rule.

52 feared dead in Pak coal mine blast

AP, Sorange

Rescuers used shovels and bare hands Monday to dig out miners buried after a gas explosion deep in a coal mine in southwestern Pakistan, lining up wooden caskets to await the bodies from an accident that left 52 feared dead.

More than 200 people stood outside the mine waiting to help or hear news from the search, but since the accident Sunday only bodies -- 27 of them -- have been recovered.

Mine Inspector Iftikhar Ahmed said the mine, owned by the state-run Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, was declared dangerous two weeks ago due to the presence of methane gas, but the warning was ignored by the contractor working it.

Methane gas is a major cause of coal mine explosions around the world. It can cause also asphyxiation.

Seven of the victims recovered so far were

from a single family from the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan.

The search for the bodies was slowed by the presence of the gas and the fragile state of the mine, which prevented the use of heavy machinery, he said.

Ten of the dead were charred from the explosion and ensuing fire, while the others appeared to have been killed by falling debris or suffocation, said Ahmed. The bodies were at a depth of about 2,000 feet, but the mine continues down to 4,000 feet.

The mine is located in Sorange in Baluchistan province, 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of the provincial capital, Quetta.

Mining for gems, marble, granite, chromite and coal is one of the only industries in much of Baluchistan and northwest Pakistan. But it has attracted very little foreign investment in recent years due to the precarious security situation. Accidents are commonplace.

Delivering drugs to brain

A vital breakthrough for treating Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Muscular Dystrophy

BBC ONLINE

A new way of delivering drugs to the brain has been developed by scientists at the University of Oxford.

They used the body's own transporters - exosomes - to deliver drugs in an experiment on mice.

The authors say the study, in Nature Biotechnology, could be vital for treating diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Muscular Dystrophy.

The Alzheimer's Society said the study was "exciting" and could lead to more effective treatments.

RESEARCH BARRIER

One of the medical challenges with diseases of the brain is getting any treatment to cross the blood-brain barrier.

The barrier exists to protect the brain, preventing bacteria from crossing over from the blood, while letting oxygen through.

However, this has also produced problems for medicine, as drugs can also be blocked.

In this study the researchers used exosomes to cross that barrier.

Exosomes are like the body's own fleet of incredibly small vans, transporting materials between cells.

The team at Oxford harvested exosomes from mouse dendritic

cells, part of the immune system, which naturally produce large numbers of exosomes.

They then fused the exosomes with targeting proteins from the rabies virus, which binds to acetylcholine receptors in brain cells, so the exosome would target the brain.

They filled the exosomes with a piece of genetic code, siRNA, and injected them back into the mice.

The siRNA was delivered to the brain cells and turned off a gene, BACE1, which is involved in Alzheimer's disease.

The authors reported a 60% reduction in the gene's activity.

"These are dramatic and exciting results" said the lead researcher Dr Matthew Wood.

"This is the first time this natural system has been exploited for drug delivery."

CUSTOMISED

The research group believes that the method could be modified to treat other conditions and other parts of the body.

Dr Wood said: "We are working on sending exosomes to muscle, but you can envisage targeting any tissue."

"It can also be made specific by changing the drug used."

The researchers are now going to test the treatment on mice with

Alzheimer's disease to see if their condition changes.

The team expect to begin trials in human patients within five years.

Dr Susanne Sorensen, head of research at the Alzheimer's Society, said: "In this exciting study, researchers may have overcome a major barrier to the delivery of potential new drugs for many neurological diseases including Alzheimer's."

She said the blood-brain barrier had been an "enormous issue as many potential drugs have not been properly tested because you couldn't get enough of them into the brain."

She added: "If this delivery method proves safe in humans, then we may see more effective drugs being made available for people with Alzheimer's in the future."

Dr Simon Ridley, head of research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said: "This is innovative research, but at such an early stage it's still a long way from becoming a treatment for patients."

"Designing drugs that cross the blood brain barrier is a key goal of research that holds the promise of improving the effectiveness of Alzheimer's treatments in the future."

Smoke slows race to cool nuke plant

AFP, Kitakami

Smoke belched from a stricken nuclear plant in Japan yesterday, disrupting urgent efforts to repair the cooling systems as Tokyo halted some food shipments owing to radiation worries.

Rain complicated rescue efforts and compounded the misery of tsunami survivors fearful of dangerous radioactive leaks from the wrecked Fukushima power station, which has suffered a series of explosions and fires.

Chief government spokesman Yukio Edano said Tokyo had ordered the suspension of shipments of milk and certain vegetables including spinach from regions around the plant after abnormal radiation levels were found in the products.

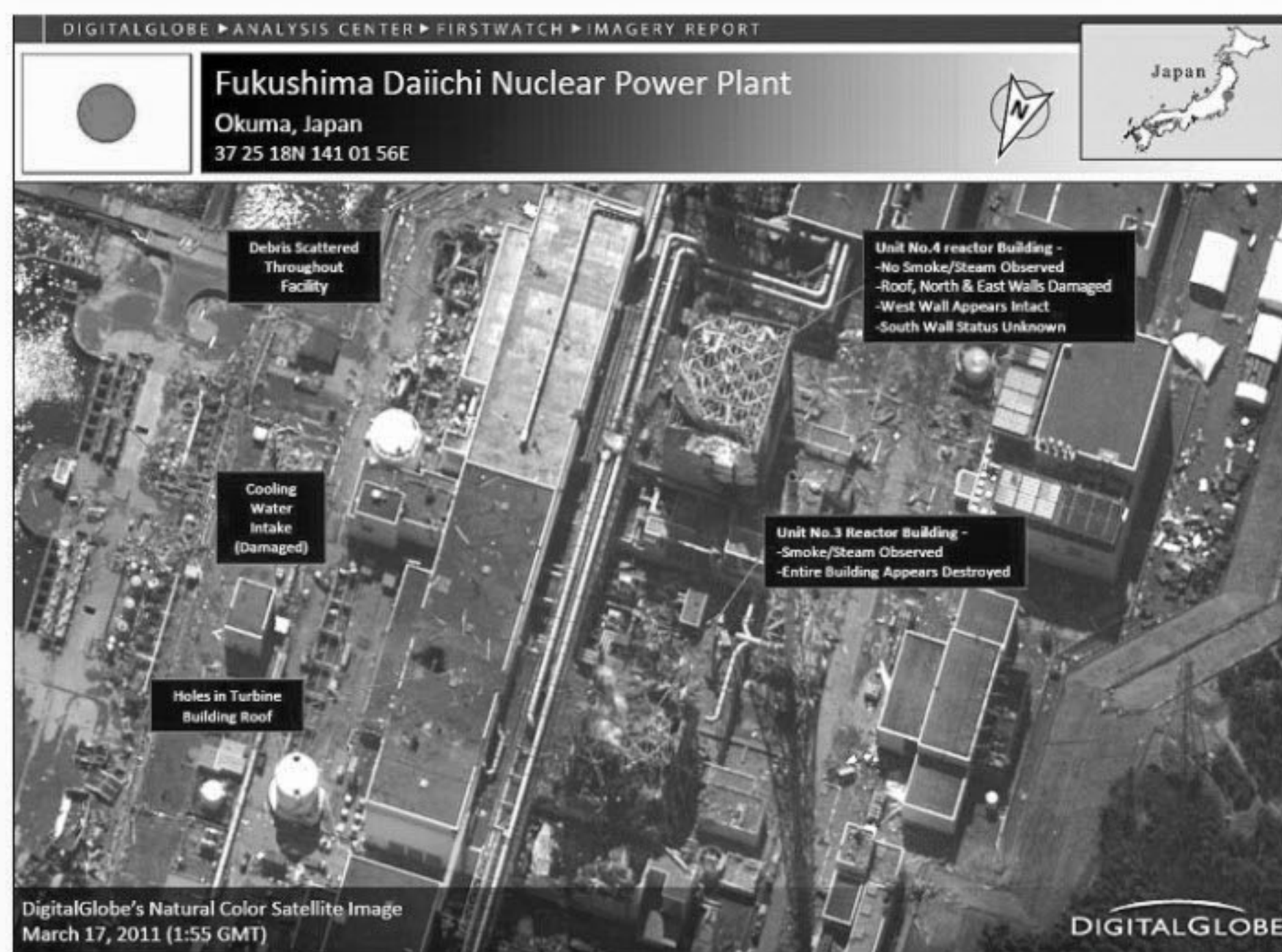
But "even if you eat and drink them several times it will not be a health hazard. So I would like you to act calmly," Edano said.

Workers were forced to evacuate from part of the troubled Fukushima plant after grey smoke rose from reactor number three, operator Tokyo Electric Power Co said.

The cause was unclear but it was not believed to be linked to the all-important efforts to restore power to the reactor unit systems, officials said.

The smoke abated more than two hours later but white smoke was later seen rising from the number two reactor, although there were no immediate reports of an increase in radiation from the plant.

Shortly before the crews' evacuation, Prime Minister Naoto Kan said there was "slow but steady progress" in dealing with the atomic crisis.



This DigitalGlobe annotated satellite photo shows the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant in Japan after the March 11 quake and tsunami.

PHOTO: AFP

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