

# Nato set to take command of Libya campaign

## Turmoil could destabilise Egypt, Tunisia: US Defence Secretary

AFP, Brussels

Nato looks set to agree yesterday to take command of military operations against Muammar Gaddafi as France fights to keep political control in the hands of the US-led "coalition of the willing".

Ambassadors from the 28-nation alliance gather at headquarters in the late afternoon to mull military plans for a transfer nailed down only after long days of fraught talks, over objections raised by France and Turkey.

Pressed by Western powers, notably the United States and Italy, to take the helm as swiftly as possible, the alliance was expected to give a thumbs up, possibly approving and activating immediate engagement, Nato sources said.

At present, the transatlantic organisation is manning naval operations to enforce an arms embargo against the Tripoli regime, and has agreed to take to the air to enforce a no-fly zone to protect civilians against bombings.

But as coalition air strikes pound

Gaddafi forces for a ninth day, tipping the scale to favour insurgents, Nato ambassadors will scrutinise in detail the rules of engagement needed "to protect civilians", under UN resolution 1973.

In its landmark ruling, the United Nations approved "all necessary measures" to safeguard civilians under threat of attack.

But Turkey, Nato's sole predominantly Muslim member, opposes Western-led air strikes.

"If Nato takes on the broader mission, the rules of engagement will take into account the sensitivities of all Nato members, including Turkey," said an alliance diplomat who asked not to be identified.

With decisions at Nato taken by unanimous vote, talks to pin down the rules have been acrimonious to say the least, diplomats said.

From the outset, Western nations levered for support for the campaign from Arab and African states as Turkey, a key regional player, vowed to "never point a gun at the Libyan people".

In war-weary United States, President Barack Obama moved to reassure Americans on Saturday, saying "because we acted quickly, a humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided."

Another key question to resolve is who will have political control.

France has warned that flying the mission under the Nato flag would alienate Arab allies and President Nicolas Sarkozy fired a new broadside at an EU summit Friday, saying:

"It would be playing into the hands of Colonel Gaddafi to say Nato is taking over."

That squabble, as well as efforts to clarify the end-game, will return to haunt key talks in London on Tuesday between a "contact group" of coalition nations.

Many Libyan diplomats and military leaders are defecting, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday.

"We have a lot of diplomats and military leaders in Libya who are flipping, changing sides, defecting," Hillary told CBS television.

# Italy outlines plan with Gaddafi exile

AFP, Rome

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini set out the broad outlines of a diplomatic plan to resolve the crisis in Libya that could include exile for Muammar Gaddafi, in an interview published yesterday.

"After the whole of Europe and the United Nations have said that the colonel is no longer an acceptable interlocutor, we cannot envisage a solution in which he would stay in power," Frattini told La Repubblica daily.

"Clearly exile for Gaddafi would be different... Even in his regime there are people working from the inside for this solution," he said.

Frattini said Italy would present its plan at a meeting in London on Tuesday of foreign ministers from the international coalition taking military action against the Libyan regime and from other countries in the region.

"We have a plan and we will see if it can become an Italian-German proposal. Perhaps we will have a joint document to present on Tuesday," he said.

Frattini said the plan would include a UN-monitored ceasefire, wide consultations with Libya's many tribal groups and "a permanent humanitarian corridor which we are already working on with the Turkish government."

"We will have to include the tribal groups, at least the most significant ones. Everyone will then work together on a constitution for Libya," he said.

Libya was an Italian colony between 1911 and 1942 and is Italy's top trade partner. Italian companies have billions of euros (dollars) in contracts there.

# Pope urges ceasefire in Libya

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI called yesterday for the international community to immediately begin a dialogue in Libya to bring about a ceasefire, saying he was concerned about the safety of civilians.

"I launch a heartfelt appeal to international organisations and those with political and military responsibilities to immediately launch a dialogue that will suspend the use of arms," he told pilgrims in the Vatican.

"At moments of the highest tension, it becomes more urgent to use every diplomatic method available and to support even the weakest signal of openness and of willingness for reconciliation from all sides involved," he added.

# Syria to lift emergency law

## 12 people shot dead in protest city

AFP, Damascus

The decision to lift emergency rule in Syria, which has been in place since 1963, has "already been made", a presidential adviser said yesterday.

"The decision to lift the emergency law has already been made. But I do not know about the time frame," Buthaina Shaaban told AFP in an interview at her office.

Meanwhile, President Bashar al-Assad, who is facing unprecedented domestic pressure as protests and clashes erupt across Syria, will address the nation "very soon," his adviser told AFP yesterday.

"President Assad will address his people very soon to explain the situation and clarify and elaborate on the reforms that have already been decided," Buthaina Shaaban told AFP.

Syria's emergency law, put in place when the ruling Baath party rose to power in March 1963, imposes restrictions on public gatherings and movement and authorises the arrest of "suspects or persons who threaten security."

The law also authorises interrogation of any individual and the surveillance of personal communication as well as official control of the content of newspapers and

other media before publication.

Twelve people were killed in clashes Saturday in the northern city of Latakia, presidential adviser Buthaina Shaaban told AFP yesterday.

"The official death toll in Latakia Saturday is 10 people -- citizens and members of the security forces -- and two gunmen," Shaaban told AFP.

Syrian troops have entered the port city of Latakia, 350 kilometres northwest of the capital Damascus, a day after an official said two passers-by were killed by snipers.

Saturday's bloodshed was the latest in a spiral of violence that has gripped Syria since protests broke out on March 15, with demonstrators demanding major reforms.

Earlier, the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said more than 200 inmates, mostly Islamists, were freed from Damascus' Saidnaya prison.

However, reports about the total number involved differ, with another human rights activist being quoted by Reuters as saying that 70 political prisoners were freed.

The government has announced a string of reforms in a bid to appease the protesters, including the possibility of lifting emergency rule which has been in place since 1963.

# Coldest star found no hotter than fresh coffee

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ONLINE

According to a new study, a star discovered 75 light-years away is no warmer than a freshly brewed cup of coffee.

Dubbed CFBDSIR 1458 10b, the star is what's called a brown dwarf. These oddball objects are often called failed stars, because they have starlike heat and chemical properties but don't have enough mass for the crush of gravity to ignite nuclear fusion at their cores.

With surface temperatures hovering around 97 degrees C, the newfound star is the coldest brown dwarf seen to date.

"Over the years there has been steady but slow progress in pushing the boundaries of finding the coldest stars," said study leader Michael Liu, an astronomer at the University of Hawaii.

"But with this latest discovery we have made a big leap forward besting the previous record holder by at least 150 Kelvin (150 degrees C)," he said.

With an estimated mass of only 6 to 15 times that of Jupiter, CFBDSIR 1458 10b is the smaller and dimmer member of a binary system in which two brown dwarfs are locked in close orbit.

The discovery is stretching our understanding of where to draw the line between what is a planet and what is a star, Lui added.

For instance, although surface temperatures on our solar system's Jupiter sit around -149 degrees C, astronomers have found so-called hot Jupiters orbiting other stars with surface temperatures around 538 degrees C.

"This new object may actually have an atmosphere with water clouds," Liu said.

# IVORY COAST CRISIS Ouattara rejects AU envoy

REUTERS, Abidjan

Alassane Ouattara, Ivory Coast's internationally recognised president, has rejected the African Union's nomination of an envoy, questioning his impartiality.

The AU on Saturday appointed Jose Brito, Cape Verde's former foreign minister, as its diplomat charged with overseeing talks meant to result in incumbent Laurent Gbagbo stepping down in favor of Ouattara, to end a crisis that has pushed the top cocoa producer to the brink of war.

But Ouattara's camp overnight complained that Brito was unsuitable as he had personal and professional relations with Gbagbo and was not a former president, as was expected. Gbagbo camp's opinion was not immediately available.

# Indian PM commits to reforms

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister has reaffirmed his Congress-led government's commitment to economic reforms as the administration battles a host of corruption scandals.

The new thrust on reforms is seen by analysts as an attempt by the government to re-energise its legislative programme and take away the focus from the corruption storm.

"I confirm our commitment to new wave of reforms," Singh, widely credited with opening up India's economy in 1991 while finance minister, said in a speech late Friday.

He added that he welcomed the "national focus on corruption because it will, as it already has to an extent, generate public pressure in favour of more reform."

The government has been hit by a slew of corruption scandals, ranging from a cash-for-votes controversy and the cut-price sale of telecoms licences to graft surrounding last year's Commonwealth Games.

Singh's own "Mr Clean" reputation has been tainted by the scandals, with the 78-year-old prime minister being portrayed by critics as a weak leader who turned a blind eye to corruption in his administration.

Singh said the battle against corruption is a "relentless one" requiring "eternal vigilance".

Economic liberalisation had "ended old opportunities for corruption and favouritism... but human ingenuity and the desire to make a quick buck are such that the greedy are able to tap into new sources of corruption", Singh said.

India's economic reform programme has been stalled by the scandals that have paralysed parliament and been a factor in discouraging foreign capital flows, analysts say.

"What India needs is a political consensus (on reform)", Singh said.

Singh said the government was committed to carrying forward reforms in the financial sector to sustain India's high growth -- expected to be nine percent in the fiscal year starting April 1 -- and ease high inflation.

Putting into effect of India's proposed national Goods and Service Tax (GST) is long overdue, he said, adding that "we are committed to implementing it" from 2012.

India's government earlier in the week introduced legislation to pave the way for the passage of the far-reaching reform aimed at simplifying tax on goods and services.



PHOTO: AFP

Cambodian diners enjoy a candlelight meal at a restaurant in Phnom Penh on last Saturday, after the lights were turned off during Earth Hour, the world's largest environmental awareness campaign. Lights were switched off around the world to stress the need to save energy, showing concern over global warming and preserve the environment for a better future.

# 4 charged with killing SI Goutam

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Detective Branch (DB) police sources said they dropped the name of Hayder Ali and Zakir Hossain, who were earlier arrested by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), as their involvement in the killing was not found.

DB officials said they submitted the charge sheet against Mohammad Ali alias Hadi, Jakir Hossain alias Kailya Jakir, Jamal Mallik and Abdur Rauf Bhuiyan Sohel.

Ali, Jakir and Jamal were present on the spot during the seizure of firearms, which were used for shooting Gautam, from Sohel's possession, police said.

Criminals shot Gautam dead at city's Dholaikhal on April 19 last year. Sutrapur police started investigation into the incident, and the case was later sent to DB police.

Controversy mounted when law enforcers of Sutrapur Police Station claimed that they had arrested Ahammed Ali, alias Hadi alias Hayder on April 23 last year, and later on April 26 at a press briefing Rab claimed that they had arrested the alleged killer Hayder along with Zakir.

Within two days of the arrest of Zakir, DB police arrested another youth named Jakir alias Kailya Jakir.

They arrested Jamal Mallik and Abdur Rauf Bhuiyan Sohel following information provided by Jakir. Police recovered two firearms, which were used in the killing, from Sohel's possession.

Investigation officers of DB claimed that Hayder and Zakir, who were arrested by Rab, were not involved in the murder; rather Rab had

arrested them because their names matched with the real criminals' names.

Sub Inspector of DB Ruhul Amin, also investigation officer of the case, said they had submitted the charge sheet to a Dhaka Court yesterday along with the pieces of evidence, including two firearms.

An explosives test has proved that of the two firearms, one was used in the firing incident, officials said.

The law enforcers also recovered paper cuttings of different newspapers on Gautam killing from Jamal Mallik's house and submitted those to court as evidence.

Meanwhile, small trader Hayder, who was arrested by Rab, was released after serving eleven months in jail while motor mechanic Zakir is still behind bars.



PHOTO: AFP

A protestor wears a gas mask to protest against nuclear plants in front of the Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. Hundreds protested against nuclear power as very high levels of radiation detected in water leaking from a reactor at a nuclear plant in Japan.

# NEWS IN brief

## Regime change in Libya 'very complicated': Robert Gates

AFP, Washington

Regime change is not part of the military mission in Libya because past experience has shown it is "very complicated," US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates said yesterday.

"As we've seen in the past, regime change is a very complicated business, sometimes it takes a long time, sometimes it can happen very fast. But it was never part of the military mission (in Libya)," he told ABC television.

## Suu Kyi's party seeks talks with Myanmar's generals

REUTERS, Yangon

The party of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, called yesterday for talks with the country's military rulers to clear up "misunderstandings" before a new government takes office.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) reiterated its demand for talks with the military, known locally as the "Tatmadaw," to seek the release of more than 2,100 political prisoners and a bigger role for democratic forces in the country's future.

"It is urged that dialogue be held urgently to eliminate the misunderstandings between the democratic forces and the Tatmadaw," the NLD said in a statement.

## Six Yemen troops killed in suspected Qaeda attack

AFP, Sanaa

A suspected Al-Qaeda attack on an army convoy killed six Yemeni soldiers and wounded four others yesterday in Marib, east of the capital, a military official said.

He said two vehicles were seized by the assailants in the attack about three kilometres north of Marib.

"The attack was led by Aaed al-Shabwani, the most prominent wanted Al-Qaeda leader in Marib," a tribal source said.

## Israel strike kills 2 in Gaza after call for calm

AFP, Gaza City

An Israeli air strike killed two Gaza militants yesterday, threatening to prompt more tit-for-tat attacks, a day after militants committed to calm if Israel reciprocated.

"Two Palestinians were killed and another wounded yesterday morning in an Israeli air raid on targets east of Jabaliya," said Gaza emergency services spokesman Adham Abu Selmiya.

Islamic Jihad's armed wing, the Al-Quds Brigade, claimed the men as its own and said it would respond to the "crime" against them and vowed to respond "in the right time and place."

## Taliban abduct 50 policemen in Afghanistan

REUTERS, ASADABAD

Taliban insurgents abducted around 50 off-duty Afghan policemen in an ambush in a volatile province in northeastern Afghanistan, the militant group and provincial officials said yesterday.

The policemen were abducted by militants in the Chapa Dara district of remote northeastern Kunar province after returning from neighboring Nuristan province where they had traveled to collect their salaries, Nuristan governor Jamaluddin Badr said.

"The policemen were in civilian clothes and had no weapons with them," Badr told Reuters from Nuristan.