

French forces seize Ivory Coast's main airport

Quattara rejects Ivory Coast massacre allegation

AFP, Abidjan

The French army took over Ivory Coast's main airport yesterday as the battle for Abidjan dragged into a fourth day and recognised leader Alassane Ouattara came under fire for a massacre in the west.

In a telephone conversation with Ouattara, UN chief Ban Ki-moon demanded he take action against followers who took part in a massacre of about 800 people, a UN spokesman said yesterday.

Ouattara told Ban that his followers were not involved in events in the western town of Duekoue, spokesman Martin Nesirky said.

The international Red Cross and United Nations say about 800 people were killed in an operation by pro-Ouattara forces in the town last Tuesday as they took territory from Ivory Coast strongman Laurent Gbagbo.

Ouattara also told Ban he had ordered an investigation.

Gbagbo, meanwhile, resisting international calls to step down, mobilised his supporters around his strongholds in the seaside city.

The French force Licorne took control of the airport in Abidjan and Paris reinforced the troops with 300 men as over 1,500 foreigners sought refuge at the French military camp amid violence and looting in the city.

Early yesterday residents and AFP journalists said Ouattara's fighters held firm to their positions as sporadic heavy arms fire broke out near the presidential palace. The whereabouts of Gbagbo were unknown.

As tension in the city, awaiting a final showdown, reached fever pitch, Gbagbo's state television broadcast virulently anti-French messages.

The RTI television station, a vital means of communication for Gbagbo

to his loyalists, was briefly captured by pro-Ouattara fighters on Thursday night before Gbagbo troops regained control and restored the signal.

Weary with failed diplomatic efforts to resolve a post-election crisis, Ouattara's army on Monday launched a lightning offensive across the country before arriving in Abidjan on Thursday.

Fierce attacks on Gbagbo's strongholds have shaken the city with artillery explosions and machine gun fire, but the strongman, internationally isolated, economically asphyxiated and virtually cornered in Abidjan, is fighting to the last.

The Catholic mission Caritas reported 1,000 were "killed or disappeared" while the UN mission gave an initial death toll of 330, saying while both camps were involved in the mass killings, the majority of deaths were caused by Ouattara fighters.



Debris and cars sit in a former rice field flooded by the tsunami as seen in Higashimatsushima, Miyagi prefecture yesterday. 18,000 Japanese military personnel and 7,000 US forces, as well as police, firefighters and coastguard are still searching for over 15,000 missing people.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

German foreign minister to quit as party leader

AFP, Berlin

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle is expected to quit as leader of his ailing Free Democrats in a bid to shore up support for the party and the centre-right government, reports said yesterday.

Front-page headlines said the 49-year-old acknowledged the time had come for a fresh start after a series of state election debacles which have weakened Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition in Berlin.

Media reports said Westerwelle opined for clearing the way for fresh leadership at a party meeting

Kazakh strongman set for crushing poll win

AFP, Stana

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev was set yesterday to stretch his rule into a third decade by scoring a crushing poll win whose scripted nature has raised alarm over democracy in the energy-rich state.

The authenticity of the vote was thrown into further doubt after an admission by one of the three little-known challengers that he eventually decided to cast his ballot for Nazarbayev as a sign of "respect".

The usually soft-spoken Nazarbayev unexpectedly answered his critics when voting yesterday by telling a nationally-televised live broadcast that the government remained committed to transparency and democratic standards.

UAE forces free ship hijacked by pirates

AFP, Abu Dhabi

United Arab Emirates special forces on Saturday freed an Abu Dhabi-owned ship seized by pirates east of Oman in the Arabian Sea, a military official told state news agency WAM.

"A special counter-terrorism unit, backed by air force units and in coordination with the (Bahrain-based) US Fifth Fleet, stormed the ship. The hijackers subsequently surrendered," the official said.

Japan nuclear crisis to affect climate battle: EU

AFP, Bangkok

Japan's nuclear crisis will have a clear impact on global efforts to fight climate change, the chief EU negotiator said yesterday as the latest round of UN talks got under way.

"Nuclear is one of those energy options that has very, very low greenhouse gas emissions," Artur Runge-Metzger said at a news conference on the sidelines of the meeting in Bangkok.

"If you look at the energy mix countries were planning to have in the future, nuclear plays an important role."

But since an earthquake and tsunami on March 11 sparked an emergency at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant, in many of those countries doubts have now emerged about the nuclear option, he added.

"I think there will be a lot of political considerations," Runge-Metzger said. "Certainly, this is something that has an impact

on climate negotiations."

Several developing countries, whose greenhouse gas emissions have risen sharply in recent years owing to their rapid economic growth, have shown interest in nuclear power to meet their soaring energy demand.

Workers at the Japanese plant at the centre of the worst atomic accident since Chernobyl have been battling to prevent a major disaster after the quake and tsunami damaged the plant and knocked out the cooling system.

Contamination has been found in the air, tap water, farm produce and sea near the stricken plant, adding to worries about public safety.

But the crisis must not lead to reduced ambitions about tackling climate change, with renewable energy an alternative option, Runge-Metzger said, while indicating that the EU might re-examine its own energy roadmap.

Syria moves to form new government

AFP, Damascus

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad asked former Agriculture minister Adel Safar to form a new government, the state-run news agency SANA reported yesterday, as communications networks failed and residents in Douma prepared to bury the first of their dead.

Safar's appointment comes after Assad, who is facing an unprecedented domestic crisis, fired his cabinet in a bid to quell pro-democracy protests but dashed hopes he would lift almost 50 years of emergency rule in a rare address.

Cell phone and internet networks failed yesterday in Syria "due to an overload", according to a customer representative, a day after authorities carried out a wave of arrests in protest cities.

On Friday, the Muslim day of rest, thousands of Syrians marched across the country after midday prayers, calling for reforms, disappointed by a presidential speech which failed to lift a state of emergency in place since 1963.

Italy faces more Tunisian migrants

AFP, Rome

A new wave of Tunisian boat people landed yesterday at Italy's Lampedusa island, authorities said, as Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said he would visit to Tunis to try to halt the arrivals.

A first boatload of 133 arrived at Italy's southernmost island shortly before dawn yesterday, while another 113 landed at around 8:00am they said.

A third boat with around 100 people aboard was rescued a few kilometres off the tiny island after an Italian journalist who was with them raised the alarm that the boat was taking on water.

Another three boats were headed towards the island, the sources said.

Another diplomat quits Gaddafi regime

AFP, Cairo



Ali Treiki

Veteran Libyan diplomat Ali Treiki has resigned from official duties, Arab League sources in Cairo said yesterday, the latest in a string of officials to abandon Moamer Kadhafi's regime.

Treiki, a former foreign minister and UN General Assembly president up until December 2010, held talks yesterday in Cairo with Arab League chief Amr Mussa but refused to make any press statements.

He has resigned his official duties as an adviser to Kadhafi but did not pledge allegiance to the rebels fighting to overthrow the Libyan regime, a league source said.

Treiki was ambassador to the United Nations until 2009 when he became president of the UN General Assembly. He also served as Libya's ambassador to France, minister of African affairs, and foreign minister in the 1970s and again in the 1980s.

He is the second high profile official to resign this week, after the defection of foreign minister and Kadhafi regime stalwart Mussa Kussa.

Kussa arrived in Britain from Tunisia on Wednesday, dealing a major blow to the Libyan regime as it faced a Western-led aerial assault backed by a UN Security Council resolution authorising the protection of civilians by all means.

KORAN BURNING PROTEST 2 killed, scores hurt in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Two people were killed and dozens injured yesterday as demonstrations erupted for a third day in Afghanistan over the burning of a Koran in the United States, officials said.

President Hamid Karzai repeated his call to the White House, Senate and United Nations to bring to justice Terry Jones, the pastor who masterminded the burning of Islam's holy book, his office said.

One person was killed and 20 injured in what officials described as an accidental explosion that ripped through crowds of protesters in the southern city of Kandahar.

Hundreds of people had taken to the streets to protest against the burning of a Koran overseen by Jones at an evangelical church in Florida last month.

Elizabeth Taylor's love letters up for sale

BBC ONLINE

A collection of letters written by a young Dame Elizabeth Taylor to her first love are to be sold at auction.

The 66 letters were penned by the late actress when she was 17 years old to her first fiancé, William Pawley, the son of a former US ambassador.

Written between March and November 1949, they give an insight into Dame Elizabeth's rise to Hollywood fame.

The actress died in Los Angeles last month after a long history of ill health aged 79.

In one letter dated 28 March, Dame Elizabeth wrote: "I want our hearts to belong to each other throughout eternity."

"I want us to be 'lovers' always, even after we've been married seventy-five years and have at least a dozen great-great-grandchildren."

In another letter she told Mr Pawley she was "completely convinced that you are the only man in the world that I shall ever love".

By September, the actress was writing about giving back her diamond engagement ring at her fiancé's request, but appeared reluctant to end the relationship saying: "I know with all my heart and soul that this is not the end for us".

The Oscar-winner went on to have seven husbands.

The collection was bought two years ago from Mr Pawley, who is now retired, a spokesman for RR Auctions said.



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