

Rocket salvo hits Misrata

Gaddafi must go: Allies; Nato exceeds Libya mandate: Russia

AGENCIES, Tripoli

A fresh hail of government rockets crashed into Misrata yesterday after Western allies denounced a "medieval siege" of the city and vowed to keep bombing Muammar Gaddafi's forces until he stepped down.

A local doctor told Al Jazeera at least eight people died and seven others were wounded in the second day of intense bombardment of Misrata, a lone rebel bastion in western Libya.

Meanwhile, Russia's foreign minister charged that Nato was exceeding its UN mandate in Libya and called for an urgent move towards a political settlement to the conflict.

"Today, we can see actions that in a number of cases go beyond the mandate of the UN Security Council," Sergei Lavrov said after talks with Nato foreign ministers in Berlin.

"We believe it is important to urgently transfer things into the political course and proceed with a political and diplomatic settlement," he told a news conference.

Residents told the television network at least 120 rockets hit the city, where hundreds of civilians are reported to have died in a six-week

siege.

The suffering of Misrata is heaping pressure on Western allies to step up air attacks to stop the bombardment, but Nato is split over providing more planes for the task.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said at a Nato ministerial meeting in Berlin that London was making progress in persuading other members to provide more strike aircraft, but Italy immediately ruled out joining attacks.

Britain, France and the United States said in a joint newspaper article yesterday: "It is unthinkable that someone who has tried to massacre his own people can play a part in their future government."

But their clear intention to achieve regime change in Libya goes well beyond the terms of a United Nations resolution authorising air strikes to protect civilians and other allies have misgivings.

Gaddafi's daughter Aisha told a rally in Tripoli that demanding his departure was an insult.

In a strongly worded article published on both sides of the Atlantic, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and US President Barack Obama said leav-

ing Gaddafi in power would be an "unconscionable betrayal."

"So long as Gaddafi is in power, Nato and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds," they said.

The United States has taken a back seat in the air campaign after handing command to Nato on March 31 and France has suggested it needs to return to the campaign.

The allied leaders said in their article that Gaddafi could play no role in a transition to democracy. "For that transition to succeed, Colonel Gaddafi must go, and go for good."

Aisha Gaddafi told a rally in Tripoli marking the 25th anniversary of American bombing of Gaddafi's compound there:

"Talk about Gaddafi stepping down is an insult to all Libyans because Gaddafi is not in Libya, but in the hearts of all Libyans."

The article by the Western allies appeared at a time when diplomatic efforts have failed to paper over divisions between Nato allies about how intensively they should prosecute the three-week-old air war, amid increasing stalemate on the ground.



Libyan rebel fighters stand next to rocket launcher as they drive towards the front line, near the eastern town of Ajdabiya yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Ex-Croatian generals convicted of war crimes

BBC ONLINE

Two Croatian military leaders have been convicted of atrocities against Serbs during a 1995 campaign of ethnic cleansing, after a trial at The Hague.

Judges sentenced Ante Gotovina to 24 years and Mladen Markac to 18 years in jail for crimes including murder, persecution and plunder.

The men helped to plan an operation to retake Croatia's Krajina region and force out its Serbian population.

The war crimes tribunal cleared another defendant, Ivan Cermak, of all charges.

World's oldest man dies in US aged 114

BBC ONLINE

The world's certified oldest man, whose advice to others included the observation "you're born to die", has passed away aged 114 in the US.

Walter Breuning was old enough to remember his grandfather recounting his part in the slaughter of the American Civil War, during the 1860s.

In his final years in Montana, he was passionate about ending two modern wars, those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

34 killed at Iranian exiles camp in Iraq: UN

AFP, United Nations

At least 34 people, including several women, were killed and dozens wounded at an Iranian exiles' camp raided by the Iraqi military last week, the United Nations said Thursday.

A top US official called the Iraqi assault on Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad, a "massacre" and demanded a thorough government investigation.

United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay yesterday called for an independent inquiry on the alleged death of the 34 people.

At least 15 dead in Colombia landslide

AFP, Bogota

At least 15 people were killed and five others were missing after a mudslide pushed a bus over an embankment and into a ravine, rescuers said Thursday.

Officials said the bus was hit by a wall of mud as it traveled along a stretch of highway some 280 kilometers (170 miles) west of Bogota, en route to the Colombian town of Manizales.

Ouattara takes charge after Ivory Coast victory

Gbagbo's 'Street General' arrested

AFP, Abidjan

Ivory Coast's slow recovery after four months of bloodshed gained pace yesterday as Alassane Ouattara's victorious regime captured ousted strongman Laurent Gbagbo's most notorious henchman.

Alongside the arrest of Charles Ble Goude, known as the "street general" of the feared Young Patriots movement, a pro-Ouattara newspaper reopened and the government declared the resumption of schooling and cocoa exports.

The mouthpiece of the West African state's new masters, Ouattara's TCI television, said classes would resume on April 26 and traders have begun to shift a 400,000 tonne backlog of cocoa that built up during the conflict.

In peacetime, Ivory Coast was the world's largest exporter of cocoa and income from the crop will be key as Ouattara rebuilds the economy and state institutions after a near civil war that left more than 900 people dead.

The former IMF official and long-time



Charles Ble Goude

opposition figure took charge of the country on Monday, when his forces stormed the presidential palace in Abidjan and seized former strongman Laurent Gbagbo and his close family.

Now, the former president is under house arrest in the north of the country and former rebel fighters loyal to Ouattara are patrolling Abidjan along with UN peacekeepers and a force from former colonial master France.

Ouattara's spokesman said his forces had seized another prize with the arrest of Ble Goude, officially Gbagbo's minister for youth but better known as the hardline leader of Abidjan youths loyal to the former regime.

"He was apprehended yesterday and is currently under house arrest," Patrick Achi told AFP, without giving details.

Ouattara has given himself two months to restore order and has promised to probe any allegations of brutality against his own men, while calling on Gbagbo's remaining partisans to lay down their arms.

Republicans will make US a 'Third World' country Says Obama

AFP, Chicago

US President Barack Obama accused his Republican foes of wanting to turn the United States into a "Third World" country Thursday as he rallied support for his reelection campaign.

The attack came a day after Obama savaged Republican budget plans and unveiled his \$4 trillion deficit reduction drive that aims to raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans in order to preserve key social services.

The debate over fiscal policy will prove critical to the 2012 campaign, and Obama sought to frame it as a "stark choice" between investing in the future or watching the country fall apart.

"Under their vision, we can't invest in roads and bridges and broadband and high-speed rail," Obama told a select group of the Democratic faithful at the second of three fundraising events in his hometown of Chicago.

"I mean, we would be a nation of potholes, and our airports would be worse than places that we thought -- that we used to call the Third World, but who are now investing in infrastructure."

Republican plans to shrink the reach of government is "not a vision that's impelled by the numbers" but a "choice" to give a trillion dollars in tax breaks to the rich rather than ask those who have been "blessed" to "give a little more," he said.

Obama said his vision was one of an ambitious, compassionate and caring America "where we're living within our means but we're still investing in our future."

Burkina Faso leader battles mutiny

AFP, Ouagadougou

Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore, facing a mutiny by his personal guard, strove to reassert his authority yesterday after mass street protests and a night when soldiers ran riot.

The mutiny broke out late Thursday in two barracks, including one in the compound of Compaore's residence in Ouagadougou, and spread yesterday morning to three other army bases.

Both sides told AFP they were holding talks on the grievances of the soldiers, which included housing and food allowances.

"We're claiming a lot of things," one soldier told AFP, asking not to be named. "We're angry with our commanders. We don't want to work for them to get rich."

Bahrain 'defers' Shia party ban

BBC ONLINE

Bahrain has postponed plans to ban the two main political parties that represent the country's Shia majority, following criticism from Washington.

The government had announced legal action to disband the parties, but now says it will delay the moves until an investigation into the recent unrest.

Some 30 people have died since February in protests by mainly Shia citizens against Bahrain's Sunni monarchy.

The daughter of human rights activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja has told the BBC that she will continue a hunger strike she began on Tuesday until her father and other relatives are set free.

Earlier, the US has voiced concern over the treatment of detainees in Bahrain after a fourth man died in custody.

WIKILEAKS Hariri wanted Syrian Islamists in power

AFP, Beirut

WikiLeaks cables unveiled by a Lebanese daily yesterday revealed that outgoing premier Saad Hariri wanted Syria isolated and its leader replaced with the Muslim Brotherhood and exiled former officials.

The release of the cables by WikiLeaks' Arabic-language partner Al-Akhar comes days after Damascus accused a member of Hariri's Saudi-backed Sunni Future Movement of arming and funding anti-regime protests in Syria that broke out mid-March.

In the cable filed by the US embassy in Lebanon on August 24, 2006 -- 10 days after the end of Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hezbollah's devastating war with Israel -- Hariri urged the international community to isolate Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Hariri also warned US officials of trouble in Lebanon should the international community fail to isolate Assad through sanctions.

When asked who could fill the void in the event of the toppling of the Assad regime, Hariri replied by "talking about sectarian demographics in Syria," Al-Akhar said.

He then proposed a partnership between the Muslim Brotherhood -- currently banned in Syria -- and former Syrian officials such as Abdel Halim Khaddam and Hikmat Shehawi, according to the cable.

Shehawi is a former Syrian army chief of staff. Khaddam, formerly Syria's vice president, resigned in 2005 after Syria pulled its troops from Lebanon before going into exile and voicing criticism of Assad's rule over Beirut.

Damascus was forced to pull its troops out of Lebanon in 2005 following a 29-year presence.

Whales spread 'greatest hits' across the ocean

Humpback whale song spreads to other whales

BBC ONLINE

Recordings of male humpback whales have shown that their songs spread through the ocean to other whales.

Researchers in Australia listened to hundreds of hours of recordings gathered over more than a decade.

These revealed how a specific song pattern, which originated in Eastern Australia, had passed "like Chinese whispers" to whale populations up to 6,000km away in French Polynesia.

The research team, led by Ellen Garland from the University of Queensland, say the findings show the animals transmit such "cultural trends" over huge distances.

"Within a population, all males sing the same song," Garland explained. "But that song is constantly changing. So we wanted to look at the dynamics of songs throughout an ocean basin."

To do this, she and her colleagues



studied recordings of 775 humpback whale songs, taken by scientists from the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium.

Using sound analysis software, Garland and her colleagues discovered that four new songs that had emerged in a population in Eastern Australia

gradually spread westwards. Within two years of this new song being invented, whales in French Polynesia were singing this same "version".

Peter Tyack, a biologist from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, US, said the results showed "a new way to look at culture in these animals".

"These are very mobile animals; they can swim hundreds of km in a day... and their song carried very well underwater," he said.

"So all it takes is a few roving males acting as cultural ambassadors to spread their songs (from population to population)."

Pahela Baishakh celebrated

FROM PAGE 20

"Esho he Baishakh..."

Different cultural organisations and popular bands performed at the venue throughout the day as more people poured in.

The traditional colourful procession, known as Mongol Shobhajatra, organised by the students of the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University, also began from its premises.

The Shobhajatra featuring giant replicas of tiger, cat, owl, tortoise, elephant and huge colourful masks symbolises triumph of good over evil. Tens of thousands of people joined the Shobhajatra dancing along the beats of traditional musical instruments.

Makeshift fairs, cultural performances and celebration programmes were organ-

ised by different organisations across the country.

Many ate traditional panta bhat (watered rice) with fried hilsa, lentil, green chilli and onion at home, restaurants and fairs.

The Central Shaheed Minar, Dhanmondi, and Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban areas were also seen swarmed with people since early morning till night.

No major outward incidents were reported thanks to the tight security measures around the celebration venues.

Mughal Emperor Akbar introduced the tradition of celebrating the Bangla New Year in relation to closing of the annual tax collection.

Traditionally, traders and shopkeepers open halkhata (new account register) on this day and serve sweetmeats to clients.

In the course of time, it evolved into a day of celebration and an integral part of the Bangalee culture. It is a non-communal festival as people irrespective of their religion, sect and creed celebrate the day as one nation.

The most visible aspect of the Pahela Baishakh is sprinkles of rural life that generally goes amiss in the everyday hustle and bustle of modern life.

The state-owned BT, Bangladesh Betar (radio), and all private television channels broadcast special programmes and the newspapers brought out special supplements marking the day.

Various professional, political, social and cultural organisations also held programmes to celebrate the day.

Clashes erupt at mass protest in Syria

AFP, Damascus

Tens of thousands of protesters trying to march on the centre of the Syrian capital, Damascus, have been met by security forces firing tear gas yesterday.

Witnesses said security forces also beat protesters with batons.

Syria has been shaken by a month of anti-government protests in which about 200 people have been reported killed. Demonstrations have continued despite President Bashar al-Assad forming a new government and granting amnesties to some of the detained protesters.

Thousands of people were also reported to have demonstrated in a number of other Syrian cities, including Deraa, Latakia and Baniyas.

The unrest is seen as the biggest challenge to Assad, who inherited power from his father in 2000.

The protesters say they want greater freedoms, including a repeal of the decades-old security law, which bans public gatherings of more than five people.

The demonstrators in Damascus held up yellow cards, in a football-style warning to President Assad, AP news agency said.

"This is our first warning, next time we will come with the red cards," one protester said.

Yemen's Saleh calls for talks as protests escalate

REUTERS, Sanaa

Opponents of Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped up a campaign to force him out yesterday, but Saleh was defiant as he addressed thousands of supporters and called on the opposition to join talks.

"We call on the opposition to consult their consciences and come to dialogue and reach an agreement for security and stability of the country," Saleh said.

"These crowds are a clear message to those inside and outside the country ... on constitutional legitimacy."

Saleh was capitalising on the opposition's rejection of a Gulf Arab offer to mediate talks in Riyadh on a transfer of power in the Arabian peninsula state, fearing a trick to keep Saleh in office for any time up to the end of his term in 2013.

Saleh spoke as hundreds of thousands protested against him in Sanaa, Aden and

Taiz, tribesmen attacked a power plant and clerics and tribal leaders who were once his allies issued a statement saying he must go now.

"It's only a matter of days before this regime is over. This revolution cannot be defeated. Our aim to bring down corrupt family rule," preacher Abubakr Obaid told thousands of worshippers near Sanaa University, where protesters have been camped out since early February.

Activists distributed leaflets calling on people to stop paying taxes, electricity and other bills to the government in a campaign of civil disobedience to force Saleh out. Strikes in schools and government offices began in the southern city of Aden last week.

Electricity supply was hit in cities including Sanaa, Taiz, Hudaida and Ibb after tribesmen attacked a main power plant, an official said, accusing them of acting on behalf of opposition parties.