

France, Italy to aid Libyan rebels

UN rights chief condemns 'cluster bomb use' by regime

AFP, Paris

France and Italy joined Britain yesterday in sending military advisers to assist Libya's rebel shadow government in its Benghazi stronghold.

"We are going to help you," France's President Nicolas Sarkozy told Mustafa Abdel Jalil, the head of Libya's Transitional National Council (TNC), which leads the revolt against Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year-old rule, aides said.

French officials said Sarkozy and Abdel Jalil had discussed stepping up coalition air strikes against Gaddafi's forces, and insisted that the rebel leader had not requested support from coalition ground troops.

"France has placed a small number of liaison officers alongside our special envoy to Benghazi who are carrying out a liaison mission with the TNC," foreign ministry spokeswoman Christine Fage told reporters.

"The precise objective is to give the TNC essentially technical, logistical and organisational advice to reinforce the protection of civilians and to improve the distribution of humanitarian and medical aid," Fages said.

"We have invited the French president to come visit Benghazi. I think that would be very important for the revolution's morale," Abdel Jalil said after the meeting. Sarkozy's office said it had "taken note" of the invitation.

Separately Italy -- along with France and Qatar one of only three states to recognise the TNC -- announced the dispatch of 10 officers.

"There is a clear understanding that the rebels have to be trained," Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa told reporters after meeting British Defence Minister Liam Fox in Rome.

The announcement came the day after France's main ally in the drive to aid the rebels defeat Gaddafi's forces, Britain, said it would send advisers to help organise the stalled rebellion, amid heavy civilian casualties.

Western powers have nevertheless strongly denied they are preparing to break their taboo against putting foreign combat troops on the battlefield to bolster the two-month-old revolt.

"We are not envisaging troops on the ground, in any shape or form," government spokesman Francois Baroin told

journalists following a cabinet meeting, adding that the advisers would number "fewer than 10".

Baroin also said France was not seeking new UN Security Council action that would give the allies a broader mandate to intervene in Libya.

"We are not taking the initiative to seek a new Security Council resolution. The French position is stable and unchanged on this problem of applying Resolution 1973," he said.

That resolution permitted the use of force to protect Libyan civilians, but explicitly forbade a "foreign occupation force" -- a phrase which some states interpret as banning any ground intervention at all.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague insisted Tuesday that adding around 12 military advisers to the diplomatic team in Benghazi did not breach the UN resolution authorising air strikes against Gaddafi forces.

The UN human rights chief yesterday slammed the Libyan regime for the alleged use of cluster bombs in Misrata, saying such attacks on densely populated urban areas could be international crimes.

"Using imprecise weaponry such as cluster munitions, multiple rocket launchers and mortars, and other forms of heavy weaponry, in crowded urban areas will inevitably lead to civilian casualties," Pillay said.

She warned pro-regime forces that "their orders and actions will be subject to intense scrutiny."

"Under international law, the deliberate targeting of medical facilities is a war crime, and the deliberate targeting or reckless endangerment of civilians may also amount to serious violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law," she added.

Gaddafi's regime has strongly denied using cluster bombs in clashes with rebels.

Rebels in Libya's besieged city of Misrata have called for Britain and France to send troops to help the fight against regime.

The rebels in Misrata, which has been under siege for more than a month and seen hundreds killed, have no direct contact with coalition forces, which have nevertheless carried out air strikes on Gaddafi allies besieging the town.



PHOTO: AFP

French president Nicolas Sarkozy (L) shakes hands with the head of Libya's Transitional National Council (TNC) Mustafa Abdel Jalil yesterday prior to a meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris.

Heavy gunfire erupts in Ivory Coast

AFP, Abidjan

Heavy gunfire erupted in a district of Abidjan yesterday as Ivory Coast's new government forces tried to dislodge militia loyal to deposed president Laurent Gbagbo, residents said.

Die-hard pro-Gbagbo militia are still operating in sectors of Abidjan's north-western Yopougon district, where residents said insecurity is high and were forced to flee to safer neighbourhoods.

The sound of heavy fire reverberated over the vast metropolis, where the new administration is trying to re-establish security following heavy fighting earlier this month to oust Gbagbo.

The former strongman was arrested on April 11 with the help of United Nations and French forces.

Award winning British journo killed in Libya

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Award-winning British photographer Tim Hetherington was killed yesterday covering the escalating violence in the Libyan city of Misrata while three other western journalists were injured.

Hetherington, 40, was the co-creator of Oscar-winning documentary Restrepo. He is believed to be the first western journalist killed covering the Libyan conflict.

Chris Hondros, 41, a US Pulitzer prize-winner who works for Getty Images, and British photographer Guy Martin, who works for the Panos agency, were critically injured in the same incident, according to a New York Times report.

The fourth photographer injured was reported by the New York Times to be Michael Christopher Brown, although his



Tim Hetherington

condition was not said to be life threatening.

Hetherington posted on Twitter on Tuesday: "In besieged Libyan city of Misrata. Indiscriminate shelling by Qaddafi forces. No sign of NATO."

According to colleagues at the scene, Hetherington and Hondros were among a group of about eight or 10 journalists reporting from the bridge on Tripoli Street in Misrata yesterday afternoon, regarded as the frontline between rebels and Gaddafi's forces.

When shooting broke out, the group split in two. Hetherington's group of five journalists took shelter against a wall, which was then hit by mortar or RPG fire.

Rushed to hospital, Hetherington died soon after arrival.

Heavy explosions in Misrata continued into the evening.

Arab League delays summit in Baghdad

AFP, Cairo

The Arab League has delayed a summit that was to be held in Iraq next month as a wave of political unrest rocks the region, its deputy secretary general said yesterday.

Ahmed Ben Hilli said consultations with the pan-Arab organisation's 22 members showed a "preference to delay the summit" that was scheduled for May 10-11 and added that an upcoming ministerial meeting would set a new date.

The league's outgoing secretary general Amr Mussa had earlier said that it might be best to delay the meeting because of regional unrest.

"The public mood in the region is transitional, nervous and rebellious, which leads us to ask whether it is wise to hold a summit in this period," he said.

Nigerian poll unrest triggers exodus

More than 200 killed: Red Cross

AGENCIES, Kano, Nigeria

Riots broke out in the north after Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, emerged as the winner of the presidential poll.

A civil rights group says the unrest has left more than 200 dead, while hundreds of arrests have been made.

The main opposition presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, has alleged widespread irregularities in Saturday's election but urged calm and said he would pursue his complaints through legal means.

In some areas "our supporters weren't allowed to vote," the northerner told Voice of America radio's Hausa-language service.

Nigeria is divided by rivalry between the predominantly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south - so much so that the presidency has often rotated between people who come from the two halves of the country, in an attempt to keep the peace.

Umar Marigar of the Red Cross told the BBC yesterday that the number of displaced

had trebled in the last day - from 16,000 to 48,000, mainly in the north.

But he said that, in the southern state of Anambra, 8,400 people had sought refuge at the Onitsha military barracks because they feared reprisal attacks against northerners.

He added: "The violent protests turn from political into ethno-religious crisis. As such, people might like to engage in retaliatory attacks. This is what we are always afraid of."

Shehu Sani, head of the Civil Rights Congress, told the AFP news agency: "In the whole region, from reports reaching Civil Rights Congress, the death toll is over 200."

He added that more than 1,000 people had been arrested in the city of Kaduna alone.

The BBC's Abdullahi Kaura Abubakar says it is calm now in Kaduna city, where streets have been left littered with burnt corpses and rioters burned churches, police stations and homes during two days of disturbances.

There are clashes in other parts of the state and more security forces have been deployed to those areas, he says.

NEWS IN brief

US to move WikiLeaks suspect in better prison

AFP, Washington

Bradley Manning, a US soldier held for allegedly passing classified documents to WikiLeaks, is being transferred to a new prison facility after intense criticism of the conditions of his detention.

The Pentagon on Tuesday announced his imminent transfer to a Kansas military facility it said was better-suited for a long-term stay, while denying that the move was in response to criticism of his treatment in Quantico, Virginia.

The 23-year-old Welsh-born US army intelligence officer, who allegedly provided the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks with a trove of secret military and diplomatic documents, has been imprisoned at Quantico since July 2010.

20 soldiers killed in clashes with south Sudan militia

AFP, Juba

Clashes between the army of south Sudan and a rebel militia group in oil-producing Unity state left 20 soldiers dead, the army's spokesman said yesterday, the latest in a wave of deadly fighting in the region.

The rebels "attacked the area of Boang, where a company of 100 were based. There was fighting and the post was temporarily overrun, with 20 SPLA killed according to initial assessments," Philip Aguer, the spokesman for the Sudan People's Liberation Army,

Three Afghan civilians killed in Nato air strike

AFP, Asadabad

A child was among three civilians who died in a Nato air strike in eastern Afghanistan which also killed 14 insurgents, local officials said yesterday.

The attack by the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) happened late Tuesday in the Dangam district of Kunar province, provincial governor Fazlullah Wahidi told AFP.

District governor Hamish Gulab said the civilians were two women and a child who died when a missile



Bradley Manning

Attractive men have long ring fingers: Study

AFP, Paris

The longer a man's fourth or ring finger is compared to his index finger, the more likely he is to be judged attractive by women, according to a study released yesterday.

The results, published in the British Royal Society's journal Biological Sciences, unveil intricate links between foetal exposure of males to hormones, the development of certain physical traits, and what turns on the opposite sex.

It also adds to a growing body of research -- conducted under the banner of evolutionary psychology -- suggesting that the drivers of human behaviour are found, more than previously suspected, in "nature" rather than "nurture."

Earlier studies had already shown that the size ratio between the fourth and second fingers, especially of the right hand, is a reliable indicator of the extent a man was exposed to testosterone while still in the womb.

The bigger the gap between a longer ring finger and a shorter index, the greater the likely impact of the hormone.

For the new study, scientists led by Camille Ferdenzi of the University of Geneva designed an experiment to find out if women are drawn to the telltale signs of high testosterone levels in men -- a symmetrical face, a deeper voice, a particular body odour -- who have this more "masculine" finger configuration.

More than 80 women university students between 18 and 34 looked at pictures of 49 similarly aged men, and were asked to evaluate them for masculinity and attractiveness.

"The aim was to understand what makes a man attractive," and whether at least some of those qualities "were in part conditioned by the foetal environment," Ferdenzi said in an interview.

The results were unambiguous. "The longer the ring finger compared to the index -- that is, the greater the exposure to testosterone -- the more attractive the face was rated," she said by phone.

The ring-index finger ratio has also proven to be a useful indicator for gauging the risk of prostate cancer, likewise tied to high levels of testosterone.

Pakistan's ISI has links with militants: US

REUTERS, Islamabad

The top US military officer accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of maintaining ties to militants in Afghanistan during a trip to Islamabad yesterday that was focused on easing diplomatic tensions.

Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Pakistan's perceived foot-dragging in tackling strongholds in North Waziristan belonging to the Haqqani network and its continuing relationship with it was "the most difficult part" of the US-Pakistani relationship.

"It's fairly well known that the ISI has a longstanding relationship with the Haqqani network," he said in an interview with Pakistan's daily Dawn newspaper.

"So that's at the core -- it's not the only thing -- but that's at the core that I think is the most difficult part of the relationship," Mullen said.

Pakistan's powerful Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has long been suspected of maintaining ties to the Haqqani network, cultivated during the 1980s when Jalaluddin Haqqani was a feared battlefield commander against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

"I don't know what kind of relationship he's talking about," a senior Pakistani intelligence official told Reuters. "If he means we're providing them with protection, with help, that's not correct. Even if you are enemies, you have a relationship."

India launches three satellites

AFP, Bangalore

India launched a rocket carrying three satellites into orbit yesterday in its latest effort to gain a share of the global commercial space market.

The main satellite in the launch from the Sriharikota space centre in Andhra Pradesh was the remote-sensing Resourcesat-2, which will study the effect of human life on the Earth's natural resources.

The rocket also carried an Indo-Russian satellite for stellar and atmospheric studies and an imaging orbiter built by the Singapore-based Nanyang Technological University.

The successful mission was a relief for India's space project, which suffered a major setback in December when a satellite launch vehicle blew up during launching.

2G SCAM Five Indian executives detained

AFP, New Delhi

Five senior Indian corporate executives accused in an alleged mobile phone licence sales fraud which may have cost the country up to \$40 billion in lost revenue were arrested yesterday.

The men were taken into custody after a special court hearing the case rejected their bail pleas, citing the "magnitude" of the corruption scandal -- potentially the biggest in independent India's history.

The five executives had been charged earlier this month with cheating, forgery and abetment to crime but not detained.

They joined six other men already in New Delhi's crowded Tihar Jail who include ex-telecom minister A. Raju, government officials and businessmen.

Putin pokes fun at US budget deficit

AFP, Moscow

Vladimir Putin yesterday needled the United States for running an outsized budget deficit and running deep into debt in comments touting his own economic achievement as Russian prime minister.

"Look at their trade balance, look at the budget deficit, at the debt of the United States," Russia's de facto leader said in closing comments to his annual address to parliament.

"We have none of that -- and, I hope, we never will," Putin said to a strong round of applause.

"But then they have things easier. They just turn on the printing presses," Putin said, accusing Washington of "behaving like a hooligan" by flooding world markets with devalued dollars.

"I hope that we will continue strengthening our national currency, making it into a reserve (currency) for our region," he added.

Putin's comments came at the end of a three-hour appearance in which he touted his achievements amid growing speculation that he plans to return to the Kremlin next year after ceding the presidency to Dmitry Medvedev in 2008.



Vladimir Putin

WIKILEAKS

US helped Israel contain UN Gaza war probes

AFP, Washington

The United States worked behind the scenes to help Israel contain UN probes into possible war crimes committed during the 2008-2009 Gaza war, Foreign Policy reported.

The online foreign affairs magazine cited exclusive WikiLeaks cables detailing moves by the US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice to prevent a more thorough UN investigation of alleged abuses during the conflict.

Some 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed during the three-week-long Israeli offensive in December 2008 and January 2009, which was aimed at halting Palestinian rocket attacks.

According to one cable, Rice spoke with UN chief Ban Ki-moon three times on May 4, 2009 to urge him to remove recommendations for a wider investigation from a board of inquiry report into attacks on UN sites in Gaza.

Rice "underscored the importance of having a strong cover letter that made clear that no further action was needed and would close out this issue," the US diplomatic cable said.

Ban said his staff was working with the Israeli delegation and "called her after the letter had been finalised to report that he believed they had arrived at a satisfactory cover letter."

Later that year Israel and the United States pushed back against a similar effort to investigate the war by the UN Human Rights Council, which appointed a team led by the South African jurist Richard Goldstone.

The release of the Goldstone probe coincided with US efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and in another cable Rice links the two during a meeting with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon.

Rice told Ayalon that Washington "is still studying the report, remains concerned about the fact-finding mission's mandate and many of the recommendations in the report," according to the cable.

The Goldstone report said there was evidence that both Israel and Palestinian militant groups had committed war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, urging independent probes on both sides.