

# US to deploy drones in Libya

Rebels welcome support, say no to ground troops

AFP, Benghazi

The US was to deploy unmanned armed drones over Libya after France, Britain and Italy sent military advisers but rebels were adamant yesterday they don't want foreign troops in their ranks.

US President Barack Obama authorised deployment of missile-carrying drone warplanes over Libya "because of the humanitarian situation," US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said on Thursday.

Libyan rebels, who on Thursday overran a post on the Tunisian border to mark their first advance in weeks against Gaddafi's forces, have complained that civilians are being killed in places like Misrata.

"Our houses are being hit by bombs and rockets," said 45-year-old Ibrahim Issa Abu Hajjar, who fled Misrata with hundreds of civilians aboard a Turkish ferry that docked Thursday in the eastern rebel stronghold of Benghazi.

"We want the allies to stop Gaddafi's forces from taking the city."

Unmanned drones will give Nato commanders precision capabilities to strike targets that are "nestling up against crowded areas," said US General James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Now you have the intermixing of the lines, so it's very difficult to pick friend from foe," Cartwright said. "A vehicle like the Predator (drone) that can get down lower and get IDs helps us."

Their first deployment was slated for Thursday but it was called off because of bad weather.

Libya's deputy foreign minister Khaled Kaim slammed the deployment of drones.

"They will kill more civilians," Kaim told BBC radio.

"This is very sad... they are claiming they are supporting democracy, (but) supporting democracy, I think, is helping people to sit together and talk together and have a serious dialogue for the future."

"It's for the Libyans" to decide their future "not by air strikes and sending

money to the rebels," he said.

Rebels have been pinned back by government troops for more than three weeks in eastern Libya and suffered heavy losses in the western city of Misrata, which has been pounded for more than six weeks in fighting which has cost hundreds of lives.

Rebel leaders in Misrata have pleaded for foreign help, saying the air strikes are not enough to dislodge Gaddafi troops hiding in civilian areas and fighting street by street.

France, Italy and Britain have said they would send military personnel to insurgent-held eastern Libya, but only to advise the rebels on technical, logistical and organisational matters and not to engage in combat.

The rebels' Transitional National Council in their eastern bastion Benghazi however stressed they don't want foreign troops fighting alongside them.

"We only accept military help to create safe passages to deliver humanitarian aid and save civilian lives," a spokesman of the TNC in Benghazi told reporters.



PHOTO: AFP

A Libyan boy holds a banner calling for the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi during the weekly Muslim Friday prayers in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi yesterday.

## McCain urges recognition of Libyan rebels

AFP, Benghazi

Visiting US Senator John McCain yesterday urged the international community to recognise the rebel Transitional National Council as the "legitimate voice" of Libya's people.

McCain at a press conference in the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, called on the world "to recognise the Transitional National Council as the legitimate voice of the Libyan people. They have earned this right."

The Mediterranean city of Benghazi, run by the TNC, was "a powerful and hopeful example of what a free Libya could be," the senator said after talks with rebel leaders.

"I met with all the key leaders of the Council and applaud their remarkable progress in their struggle for liberation," he said.

## NEWS IN brief

### Egypt extends Mubarak's detention

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's state prosecutor has renewed the detention of ousted leader Hosni Mubarak for another 15 days amid a probe into a deadly crackdown on protesters and corruption, MENA news agency said yesterday.

Mubarak, who was forced to resign in February after mass protests, was first remanded into preventive custody for 15 days on April 13 on suspicion of involvement in a deadly crackdown on protesters and corruption.

### Russia kills top Al-Qaeda leader in Chechnya

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday announced the killing of Al-Qaeda's top militant in the Caucasus in an operation analysts said marked one of the biggest successes by security forces in the region in years.

Security officials identified the Saudi-born militant - known by the nom-de-guerre of Moganed -- as a "religious authority" and top field commander responsible for the most recent bombings on Russian soil.

### Mexico mass grave body count rises to 177

AFP, Nuevo Laredo

Mexican authorities said Thursday the number of bodies uncovered in unmarked graves in northern Tamaulipas state rose to 177, from an earlier estimate of 145.

The announcement from state officials marked the latest gruesome news involving mass graves in areas hit by rampant drug-related violence.

Officials said the total probably includes 122 passengers from a bus that was commandeered near the town of San Fernando, some 160 kilometres from the US border.

### China truckers strike for third day in Shanghai

AFP, Shanghai

Truck drivers picketed at Shanghai port facilities over rising fuel costs for a third day yesterday, prompting a heavy police response to restore calm at a strike location.

The walkouts this week by hundreds of drivers at shipping sites in Shanghai, China's largest port and the world's busiest container port, underline official concerns over the potential for spiralling inflation to spark unrest.

The state-controlled Chinese-language media has made no mention of the demonstrations, apparently fearing they could spread to other sectors.

## Yemen's Saleh cool on Gulf exit plan

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's embattled President Ali Abdullah Saleh yesterday gave a cool response to a Gulf plan for him to quit, even as massive crowds returned to the streets to demand his immediate ouster.

While tens of thousands of anti- and pro-Saleh demonstrators packed two different locations in Sanaa, suspected Al-Qaeda militants and tribesmen gunned down 20 soldiers and 2 civilians in separate attacks in Marib province, eastern Yemen.

"We stress that we will hold on to the constitutional legitimacy, in loyalty to our people, as we categorically reject the attempted coups on freedom, democracy, and political pluralism," Saleh told regime supporters in Sanaa.

## 18 killed in Karachi gambling den blast

BBC ONLINE

At least 18 people have been killed late on Thursday in a bombing in one of the largest gambling dens in the volatile Pakistani city of Karachi, officials say.

The attack took place in the Lyari neighbourhood, where a number of warring drug and arms gangs operate.

It came amid a surge in targeted political and ethnic killings in Karachi in which hundreds have died in recent months.

Police suspect the latest attack was carried out by Islamist militants.

The Taliban have attacked a number of targets in Karachi, but this would be the first on an illegal gambling club.

Security officials told the BBC's Syed Shoaib Hasan in Karachi that the device was sophisticated and bore the hallmarks of the militants.

The attack happened late on Thursday in the Rummy Club in the Ghas Mandi area of old Karachi.

Some 30 others were reported to have been wounded in the explosion.

The Rummy Club is one of many popular gambling dens in what is a poorer part of the south of the city. It is frequented by members of Karachi's various ethnic groups.

Police officials told the BBC the bomb was planted inside a room within the den and detonated by remote control.

Officials say the high number of casualties was due to such a large number of people being packed inside the club.

Eyewitnesses described how shrapnel from the bomb ripped through victims, killing many instantly.

## Japan approves \$49b quake budget

AFP, Tokyo

Japan said yesterday it would extend an evacuation zone around a crippled nuclear plant and announced a \$49 billion reconstruction budget for areas devastated by the quake and tsunami.

It was the first special budget approved by Prime Minister Naoto Kan's cabinet since the disaster hit northeast Japan on March 11, wiping entire towns off the map and leaving more than 27,000 people dead or missing.

The four trillion yen (\$49 billion) budget would cover restoration work such as clearing massive amounts of rubble and building temporary housing for the thousands of people who lost their homes in the disaster.

Embattled plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) has said it aims to cool reactors and start reducing radiation from the facility within three months and expects to achieve cold shutdown within six to nine months.

Kan's cabinet plans to submit the supplementary budget for devastated areas to parliament on April 28, aiming to pass it by May 2 with the expected support of the conservative opposition, which controls the upper house.

Some 1.20 trillion yen, the biggest portion, would be spent on public works projects such as the restoration of roads, ports and farmland.

Kan, under pressure to reduce the nation's huge debt, plans another extra budget as early as June for disaster reconstruction, raising total costs to 10 trillion yen, local media said.

## ANTI-REGIME LEAFLETS North Korea strongly warns South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea's military yesterday stepped up threats against the launching of leaflets from South Korea that criticise its regime, vowing to open fire at any place at any time.

The military said in a statement that launch sites have been changed since its earlier threats to open fire across the border against the "smear campaign".

Bundles of tens of thousands of the flyers are slung under large helium-filled balloons, with a timing device attached to scatter them north of the heavily-fortified border.

Activists also send DVDs and \$1 notes to induce North Koreans to pick up the leaflets.

## Insects: Answer to global malnutrition?

AFP, Vientiane

Serge Verniau is a man with a mission; to persuade the world to swap the chicken wings and steaks on their plates for crickets, palm weevils and other insects rich in protein and vitamins.

Verniau, the Laos representative of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), is only half-joking when he says his dream is "to feed the big metropolises from Tokyo to Los Angeles, via Paris" with the small arthropods.

He plans to present the lessons drawn from a pilot project to the world at a conference on edible insects, probably in 2012.

"Most of the world's population will live in urban areas. Trying to feed the whole planet enough protein from cows won't work," Verniau told AFP.

It is not by chance that the dream was

collects scientific data on this new area of breeding.

Along with house crickets -- which are already widely farmed in neighbouring Thailand -- there are experiments in breeding mealworms, palm weevils and weaver ants, which are appreciated for their larvae.

The students are trying out different foods for the insects in an attempt to reduce costs while maintaining quality, explains Yupa Hanboonsong, a Thai entomologist supervising the project for the FAO.

Up to now, the roughly 20 cricket farms operating in Laos have used chicken feed, like thousands of Thai farms, but it is expensive and must be imported.

Vegetables or waste left over from the production of the national beer, BeerLao, could be one solution, said Yupa, who hopes to "train the whole country."

Beyond the fight against malnutrition, this new economic activity can also generate revenue for farmers, added Yupa.

One kilo of live insects fetches 60,000 kips (7.5 dollars). The same quantity crushed sells for 50,000 kips.

"Insect farming creates less damage to the environment. It is a green protein," said Yupa.

It requires little space or natural resources and only their singing might annoy the neighbours.

Proponents believe such nutritional and environmental advantages could be beneficial beyond Laos, particularly in other developing countries where people are used to eating cicadas and grasshoppers.

"You can make powder from crickets that is very rich in protein. It's low in fat and it can be added to biscuits in problem areas where food rations are distributed," said Verniau.

Nor has he given up hope of persuading sceptics in the West.

"When you look closely, a grey shrimp or a cricket, it has the same appeal," he joked.



born in landlocked Laos, one of the world's poorest countries.

Almost one quarter of its population of six million people, and nearly 40 percent of children below the age of five years old, suffer from malnutrition, according to figures from the Laos government.

The typical rice-based diet provides insufficient nutrients for development -- a shortfall that could be filled by insects, highly rich in protein and vitamins.

Eaten as snacks, grilled or fried, they are already part of Laos cuisine, but most people do not know how to breed them, said Oudom Phonkhampheng, dean of the faculty of agriculture at the National University of Laos.

In a modest building in the suburbs of the capital, his department's laboratory

## Obama faces singing protest over WikiLeaks

AFP, San Francisco

US President Barack Obama yesterday faced an unusual singing protest over the detention of Bradley Manning, a US soldier held for allegedly passing classified documents to WikiLeaks.

In San Francisco on a campaign-style swing, Obama was headlining a fundraising breakfast where tickets cost \$35,800 when a woman

in a white suit rose to interrupt him, saying she and her friends had written him a song.

The woman, who stripped off her jacket to reveal a black t-shirt that said "Free Bradley Manning," and others at a table for 10 then sang a song that noted they had just

contributed to Obama's 2012 reelection bid and went on to criticize his detention.

"Dear Mr. President we honour you today sir / Each of us brought you \$5,000 /



It takes a lot of Benjamins to run a campaign / I paid my dues, where's our change?" the song began.

"We'll vote for you in 2012, yes that's true / Look at the Republicans - what else can we do / Even though we don't know if we'll retain our liberties? /"

In what you seem content to call a free society," it continued.

"That was a nice song," Obama, evidently displeased, told the roomful of about 200 donors at the upscale Saint Regis Hotel.

The woman was escorted out, two others at her table left, but others stayed and applauded Obama's speech when he finished it.

Manning was transferred Wednesday from a military prison at Quantico, Virginia, to another in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, according to the Pentagon.

## Samsung returns Apple legal fire

REUTERS, Seoul

Samsung Electronics Co has filed patent lawsuits against Apple over the US firm's iPhone and iPad in a tit-for-tat case after Apple claimed Samsung's smartphones and tablets "slavishly" copied its products.

Samsung said in a statement yesterday that Apple's iPhone and iPad infringe Samsung's 10 mobile technology patents and it called for Apple to stop infringing its technology and compensate the company.

Apple filed a lawsuit last Friday alleging Samsung violated patents and trademarks of its iPhone and iPad, as the popular gadgets are being threatened by the fast rise of rival devices based on Google's free Android operating system.

The legal battle between Apple and Samsung could jeopardize business ties between the two technology companies, as the Cupertino, California-based company depends heavily on Samsung for components such as chips and LCD displays.

Operating systems have emerged as the key battlefield for dominance of the world's smartphone market.

Android became the most popular smartphone software in the United States in the three months ending in February, ahead of Apple and Research in Motion, according to a recent survey by research firm comScore.

## Ozone hole dried up Australia

BBC ONLINE

The Antarctic ozone hole is about one-third to blame for Australia's recent series of droughts, scientists say.

Writing in the journal Science, they conclude that the hole has shifted wind and rainfall patterns right across the Southern Hemisphere, even the tropics.

Their climate models suggest the effect has been notably strong over Australia.

Many parts of the country have seen drought in recent years, with cities forced to invest in technologies such as desalination, and farms closing.

The scientists behind the new study - led from Columbia University in New York - added the ozone hole into standard climate models to investigate how it might have affected winds and rains.

"The ozone hole results in a southward shift of the high-latitude circulation - and the whole tropical circulation shifts southwards too," explained Columbia's Sarah Kang.

Of particular interest was the southward migration of the Southern Hemisphere jet stream.

These high-altitude winds are key to

determining weather patterns, in both hemispheres. Much of the cold weather felt in the UK over the last couple of winters, for example, was caused by blocking of the Northern Hemisphere stream.

The Columbia team found that overall, the ozone hole has resulted in rainfall moving south along with the winds.

But there are regional differences, particularly concerning Australia.

"In terms of the average for that zone, [the ozone hole drives] about a 10% change - but for Australia, it's about 35%," Dr Kang told BBC News.

Their modelling indicated that global warming due to greenhouse gas emissions was also a factor - although natural climate cycles are also thought to be important, as Australia suffered severe droughts in the era before ozone depletion and before the warming seen in the late 20th Century.

"This study does illustrate the important point that different mechanisms of global change are contributing to the climate impacts we're seeing around the world," observed Professor Myles Allen of Oxford University, a leading UK climate modeller.