

Nato air strike flattens Gaddafi compound

REUTERS, Tripoli

Nato forces flattened a building inside Muammar Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya compound early yesterday, in what a press official from Gaddafi's government said was an attempt on the Libyan leader's life.

Firefighters were still working to extinguish flames in part of the ruined building a few hours after the attack, when foreign journalists were brought to the scene in Tripoli.

The press official, who asked not to be identified, said 45 people were hurt in the strike, 15 of them seriously, and some were still missing. That could not be independently confirmed.

Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam said the Libyan government would not be cowed by such attacks.

"The bombing which targeted Muammar Gaddafi's office today... will only scare children. It's impossible that it will make us afraid or give up or raise

the white flag," he was quoted as saying by the Jana state news agency.

"You, Nato, are waging a losing battle because you are backed by traitors and spies. History has proved that no state can rely on them to win."

Gaddafi's compound has been hit before, but Nato forces appear to have stepped up the pace of strikes in Tripoli in recent days. A target nearby, which the government called a car park but which appeared to cover a bunker, was hit two days ago.

The United States, Britain and France say they will not stop their air campaign over Libya until Gaddafi leaves power.

Washington has taken a backseat role in the air war since turning over command to Nato at the end of March but is under pressure to do more. Last week it sent Predator drone aircraft, which fired for the first time on Saturday.

Government troops bombarded the

western rebel bastion of Misrata again on Sunday, two days after announcing their withdrawal following a two month siege.

An engineer who works for a dissident radio station in Misrata told Al Arabiya television that at least 30 people had been killed and 60 wounded by the shelling in the coastal city.

The number of dead could not be independently verified.

"There is very intense and random shelling on residential areas. Burned bodies are being brought into the hospital," Ahmed al-Qadi told Al Arabiya.

A doctor in a hospital in Misrata said that among the dead from what he called heavy artillery and mortar shelling was a 10-year-old boy killed while he was sleeping at home.

A government spokesman said the army was still carrying out its plan to withdraw from the city, but had fired back when retreating troops were attacked.



PHOTO: AFP

This photo taken on a guided government tour shows Libyans loyal to Col. Moamer Gaddafi rallying to show their support following a Nato airstrike on Gaddafi's office building in Bab al-Aziziya in Tripoli early yesterday.

NEWS IN brief

UN rights chief demands immediate halt to Syria killings

AFP, Geneva

The head of the UN human rights agency yesterday demanded an immediate halt to the killings in Syria, slamming the security forces' disregard for human life.

"The Government has an international legal obligation to protect peaceful demonstrators and the right to peaceful protest," High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said in a statement.

"The first step now is to immediately halt the use of

Strong quake hits Indonesia's Sulawesi

AFP, Jakarta

A strong earthquake hit the Indonesian island of Sulawesi yesterday, seismologists said, but there were no immediate reports of any casualties or damage.

The shallow quake hit at a depth of nine kilometres (five miles) at 2307 GMT around 75 kilometres southeast of the nearest main city of Kendari, the US Geological Survey said, putting the size of the tremor at magnitude 6.2.

Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency measured the quake at magnitude 6.0 and said it hit about 55 kilometres southeast of Kendari at a depth of 18 kilometres.

"The tremor was felt in Kendari city but there was no report of damage," agency official Lukito, who goes by one name, told AFP adding that there was no danger of a tsunami as the quake's epicenter was on land.

The quake was followed by an aftershock measuring 5.2.

'Nuclear hellstorm' if Laden caught: 9/11 mastermind

AFP, London

The mastermind of the 9/11 attacks warned that Al-Qaeda has hidden a nuclear bomb in Europe that will unleash a "nuclear hellstorm" if Osama bin Laden is captured, leaked files revealed yesterday.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed told Guantanamo Bay interrogators the terror group would detonate the device if the Al-Qaeda chief was captured or killed, according to the classified files released by the WikiLeaks website.

Sheikh Mohammed, the self-professed mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, has been held at Guantanamo since 2006 and is to be tried in a military court at the US naval base on

500 Taliban flee in Afghan jailbreak

AFP, Kandahar

Almost 500 Taliban prisoners escaped through a tunnel in an audacious overnight jailbreak in south Afghanistan which the president's office yesterday called a security "disaster".

The Taliban said it was behind the operation to free the prisoners using a massive underground tunnel in its heartland of southern Kandahar, and claimed that all of those who escaped were its members, many of them senior commanders.

The daring breakout, the second from the prison in three years, threatens to undermine recent security gains claimed by foreign forces after a US troop surge, with the newly-freed insurgents once again available to wreak havoc.

It is also an embarrassment for Afghan forces who are due to take increasing responsibility for security ahead of the withdrawal of foreign combat troops in 2014.

"A tunnel hundreds of metres long was dug from the south of the prison into the prison, and 476 political prisoners escaped last night," prison director General Ghulam

Dastageer Mayar said.

The escapees, who represent over a third of the prison's total population, came from its political section, he said, adding that the prison is the largest in southern Afghanistan.

Confirming the breakout, President Hamid Karzai's spokesman Waheed Omer described it as a "disaster" at a press conference in Kabul.

"This is a blow, it's something that should not have happened," he said.

"We're looking into finding out what exactly happened and what's being done to compensate for the disaster that happened in Kandahar."

Taliban spokesman Yousaf Ahmadi said the militia was responsible for the mass breakout, claiming that more than 500 prisoners had escaped -- 106 of whom were commanders -- during an operation lasting several hours.

A separate statement from the militants said they had started digging the 360-metre-long tunnel five months ago and that it passed under several government checkpoints.

Mubarak to be moved to military hospital

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's state prosecutor on Sunday ordered ex-president Hosni Mubarak's transfer to a military hospital after a medical exam showed his health was stable enough for the move.

The move would be temporary until preparations are completed at a Cairo prison hospital for the former strongman, who is under detention in a Red Sea resort hospital on suspicion of involvement in the deaths of protesters.

The military hospital was not specified but security sources have said it was likely to be the International Medical Centre on the outskirts of Cairo.

25 killed in Syria crackdown

AFP, Nicosia

At least 25 people were killed when thousands of troops backed by heavy armour pounded Syria's southern flashpoint town of Daraa yesterday, an activist told AFP by telephone.

The militant, Abdullah Abazid, told AFP Syrian forces were bombarding Daraa with heavy artillery and that "at least 25 martyrs have fallen."

"There are still bodies sprawled on the streets," he said as loud explosions and shooting could be heard in the background.

"They are pounding the town with heavy artillery and machine guns," Abazid said, adding that snipers posted on rooftops were also shooting.

Rights activists said a 3,000-strong military force swarmed into Daraa in the early hours yesterday, with tanks taking up positions in the town centre and snipers deploying on rooftops.

A witness had earlier reported at least five bodies in a car that had been raked by gunfire.

"We saw with our own eyes, they were in a car that was riddled with bullets," the witness said, adding that he was on a rooftop and could hear intense gunfire reverberating across the town.

"The minarets of the mosques are appealing for help. The security forces are entering houses. There is a curfew and they fire on those who leave their homes. They even shot at water tanks on roofs to deprive people of water."

TSUNAMI AFTERMATH Japan begins massive search for bodies

AP, Shichigahamamachi

Soldiers prodded marshy ground with slender poles and cleared mounds of rubble by hand yesterday as 25,000 troops mounted Japan's largest search yet for the bodies of nearly 12,000 people missing in last month's earthquake and tsunami.

The operation was the third intensive military search since the March 11 disaster, which splintered buildings, flattened towns and killed up to 26,000 people along Japan's northeastern coast. With waters receding, officials hope the team, which also includes police, coast guard and U.S. troops, will make significant progress during the two-day operation.

In the town of Shichigahamamachi, a line of about two dozen Japanese soldiers walked in unison across soggy earth and muddy pools, plunging their poles about 2 feet (60 centimeters) into the muck to ensure that they don't miss any bodies buried below.

The search focused on a marsh drained in recent weeks by members of the army's 22nd infantry regiment using special pump trucks.

Several other soldiers cleared mountains of rubble by hand from a waterfront neighborhood filled with gutted and teetering houses. Four people in the neighborhood were missing, said 67-year-old Sannojo Watanabe.

17 killed, 24 hurt in Beijing fire

AFP, Beijing

Seventeen poor migrants died when a fire swept through an illegally constructed Beijing building yesterday, state media and officials said, in the latest accident to highlight lax Chinese fire safety.

Another 24 people were hurt in the fire that broke out at about 1 am (1700 GMT Sunday) in the four-storey building in the capital's southern Daxing district, the state-run Xinhua news agency said.

It was put out by firefighters about an hour later.

The building in Jiugong town was illegally built by a local resident who leased out its ground floor to a couple who ran a garment processing business, Xinhua said.

West Bengal worst governed state

Says Indian home minister

PTI, Kolkata

Ahead of the crucial third phase of Assembly polls, Home Minister P Chidambaram yesterday said that West Bengal was the "worst-governed" state in the country and blamed the CPI(M) and its cadres for spreading violence and turning the state into a "killing field".

He also said that the state's finances were in a "precarious" condition.

"For too long we had a government that had neglected governance. West Bengal is the worst-governed state in the country and our immediate concern is law and order," he told reporters here.

Chidambaram, who was here to campaign for the Congress-Trinamool Congress combine, said, "For the last two to four months I have been bringing to the notice of Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and his colleagues that law and order is deteriorating." However, the chief minister was in a state of denial and the 'bubble' burst when Netai (where nine people were killed) occurred, he said.

"I squarely blame the CPI(M) and its cadres for procuring arms and spreading violence and turning the state into a killing field," he said.

Chidambaram said, "I sincerely hope that after the change of government, the



P Chidambaram

Centre and the state government will work together to stop the killings."

Seventy-five constituencies will go to polls on Wednesday in the state in the third phase of assembly election which is crucial for the Congress-Trinamool alliance.

Chidambaram said that since 2004 revenues of all states had increased and no state had to resort to overdraft for the last four to five years, the only exception being West Bengal.

Describing the state's cash position as "precarious", Mr. Chidambaram said that during 2010-11, West Bengal had taken overdraft on seven occasions and during 2011-12 it has already taken one.

"It is one of the debt-stressed states where the tax-GDP ratio is the lowest among general category states."

2 shot dead, scores hurt at huge Yemen protests

AFP, Sanaa

Yemeni security forces and loyalists of embattled President Ali Abdullah Saleh shot dead two protesters and wounded scores in separate demonstrations yesterday, medics and witnesses told AFP.

"Security forces shot dead a protester and wounded 30 others, eight of them by live rounds," a medical source in Ibb, south of Sanaa, told AFP.

At least 30 others needed treatment for tear gas inhalation, witnesses said.

In the southeastern province of Al-Baida, gunmen "belonging to the ruling party" opened fire at a sit-in, killing one protester, according to a witness.

Another witness identified the victim as Saleh Abdullah.

In Taiz south of the capital, police and "gunmen in civilian clothes" opened fire with live rounds and tear gas, wounding 50 protesters, 25 with bullets, and leaving at least 250 suffering from breathing problems, witnesses said.

They said hundreds of thousands of people had gathered in the flashpoint city to pressure Saleh to step down immediately despite a US-backed Gulf plan for a transition of power.

The protesters, who have been demonstrating across Yemen since late January, rallied against a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plan under which Saleh would quit in 30 days with immunity from prosecution.

"No rest, no respite for the executioner," they shouted.

The witnesses said security forces erected concrete barriers to block roads leading to the Taiz governor's office and also deployed armoured vehicles.

In Sanaa, where demonstrators calling for

Saleh's ouster have staged a sit-in at a square since February, thousands of teachers -- both men and women -- marched on the education ministry.

"No studying, no teaching until the down-fall of the president," they chanted.

Witnesses said thousands of people also protested in Mukalla in southeast Yemen and in the Red Sea city of Al-Hudaydah.



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A Yemeni demonstrator pulls down an image of President Ali Abdullah Saleh during a protest calling for an end to his regime in Yemen's Ibb province, 190 km southwest of the capital Sanaa yesterday.