

Gaddafi forces attack Misrata port in Libya

Italy joins allies in campaign

AFP, Misrata

Forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi yesterday attacked the besieged city's port, wounding African refugees and forcing a humanitarian ship to stay out to sea, an AFP journalist said.

Several Grad rockets hit the port 12 kilometres east of the city and an International Organisation for Migration (IOM) ship came to rescue refugees stood offshore as a security precaution.

Doctor Khalid Abu Falra at the city's main hospital said "several refugees were wounded by the bombardment" at around 1330 GMT, when journalists counted around a dozen blasts.

"There may be deaths -- we have no details for the moment," Abu Falra added.

Warplanes from Nato were overflying the city of Misrata, where explo-

sions were also heard after a 24-hour period of relative calm. Witnesses said the aircraft launched at least one ground strike.

"Nato asked that the IOM boat leave the port," said a rebel source, adding that "around 20 vehicles" containing Kadhafi loyalists were approaching.

Fighting had waned earlier in Misrata, where rebels said they had ejected forces loyal to the Libyan strongman to the city's outskirts.

Misrata remains besieged by Gaddafi's troops to the east, south and west, with its only access to the outside world by sea. The airport, which has been badly damaged, is in the hands of regime forces, according to the rebels.

Yesterday's Grad attack came as a minibus containing seven Western journalists and four Libyan escorts was at the port, and three nearby blasts caused them to dive for cover beneath

the vehicle.

Meanwhile, Italy is ready to allow its air force to take "targeted action" against selected military objectives in Libya, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said on Monday.

In a telephone conversation he had informed US President Barack Obama "that Italy has decided to respond positively" to an appeal by the head of the Nato military alliance, Berlusconi said in a statement.

"Italy has decided to augment the operational flexibility of its planes through targeted actions against specific military objectives on Libyan territory in the context of contributing to protecting the Libyan civilian population," he said.

In this way, "Italy remains within the limits set by the (Nato) mandate for the operation and the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council."



PHOTO: AFP

A picture shows the damaged offices of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi after they were hit by Nato bombs in the Bab Al-Aziziya district of Tripoli on Monday where a Libyan official said 45 people were wounded.

Yemen govt, opposition to sign deal

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's government and opposition will travel to Riyadh today (Wednesday) to sign an agreement brokered by Gulf states to end three months of deadly unrest, officials on both sides told AFP.

"We have received an invitation from Saudi Arabia to sign in Riyadh an agreement on the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative," said Sultan al-Barakani, the deputy secretary general of Yemen's ruling party.

A leader from the Common Forum, a coalition of Yemen's parliamentary opposition, said a delegation from his group would also head to Riyadh Wednesday to sign the agreement.

Barakani said the ambassadors of the United States, European Union members, GCC states and UN representative will witness the signing.

AFGHAN JAILBREAK Signs of 'inside' job

65 escapees caught

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan President Hamid Karzai's office said yesterday that there were signs of "cooperation and facilitation from inside" in a huge prison break in which hundreds of Taliban inmates escaped.

The acknowledgement, which follows an initial report from the justice minister, is highly embarrassing for Afghan officials and security forces amid warnings that the jailbreak could hand the Taliban a huge boost.

Authorities said yesterday they have recaptured 65 prisoners who were among about 500 inmates who as.

The prisoners, mostly insurgents, escaped overnight Sunday through a kilometre-long tunnel that the Taliban said took them five months to dig.

A manhunt was launched to recapture the escapees who, according to the Taliban, included more than 100 rebel commanders.

"Joint security forces have recaptured 65 of the prisoners who escaped from Kandahar prison."

More than 130,000 international troops, mainly from the United States, are in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban and other insurgents.

SYRIA UNREST

UK, France and Italy press for sanctions

BBC ONLINE

European countries have called for "strong measures" to halt repression in Syria, as its government steps up a campaign against peaceful protests.

In a joint statement, France and Italy urged the EU and UN to put pressure on Syria to end its crackdown.

The UK said it was working to send a "strong signal" to Damascus. The US has said it is considering sanctions.

More gunfire was heard in the city of Deraa yesterday, a day after troops and tanks were deployed.

Deraa has been at the centre of protests against President Bashar al-Assad.

But there have been numerous reports of a crackdown and arrests around Syria in recent days, despite the lifting of an emergency law last week.

Syria's security forces have shot dead more than 400 civilians in their campaign to crush the month-long pro-democracy protests, according to Sawasiah, a Syrian human rights organisation.

It has called on the UN Security Council to convene and start proceedings against Syrian officials in the International Criminal Court.

According to a UN Security Council diplomat, the UK and other European states are circulating a draft statement condemning the violence in Syria.

Speaking at a joint news conference with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said France and Italy were calling for an end to violence.

"We issue a strong call on the authorities in Damascus to end the violent repression," he said.

But Sarkozy said France would not inter-

vene in Syria without a Security Council resolution.

The UK reiterated the call to halt violence.

"The United Kingdom is working intensively with our international partners to persuade the Syrian authorities to stop the violence and respect basic and universal human rights to freedoms of expression and assembly," said Foreign Secretary William Hague.

"We must see acts of genuine reform not repression."

Meanwhile the US state department warned American citizens to stay away from Syria, and for those who were there to leave while there were still commercial flights.

It added that some non-essential embassy staff and all embassy dependants would be leaving.

The BBC's Owen Bennett-Jones, in neighbouring Lebanon, says the Syrian government disputes the Western view that the demonstrations have been non-violent.

In a statement carried by the official news agency, it said it had sent troops to several cities on the request of citizens who were worried about "armed extremists".

Arrests were made and those people would be processed through the civil courts, the government statement added, following the lifting of emergency laws last week.

The agency said some soldiers were killed in the fighting as the army moved into the southern city of Deraa.

Gunfire can be heard on video footage which has been put on the internet and is said to have been filmed yesterday.

On Monday witnesses said the army had advanced into Deraa, using several tanks to support thousands of troops. Security forces also reportedly opened fire in a suburb of Damascus.

British police said yesterday they have no specific intelligence about a security threat to Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding but vowed "robust" action against planned Muslim protests.

Scotland Yard said more than 5,000 police, including specialist protection and firearms officers, would be on duty for Friday's ceremony at Westminster Abbey, while military personnel would also line the route.

But Jones insisted officers would take "robust, decisive" action against any protesters trying to disrupt the big day.

Flash flood warnings were also issued by the NWS in Arkansas, as a tornado that slammed the central town of Vilonia late Monday that has claimed the lives of four people, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management spokeswoman Renee Pressler confirmed to AFP.

The National Weather Service (NWS) issued a flash flood warning for three counties in the southwest of the state.

Three other people were killed when their vehicles were swept from the road in severe flooding in the state's northwest, Pressler added.

They move into a student house with two other friends

Sept. 2001

William and Kate meet at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, both study art history

Dec. 2003

Pair believed to be a couple after Kate splits from her previous boyfriend

June 2005

They graduate from St Andrews

Sept. 2002

They move into a student house with two other friends

AP

Nigeria votes after riots

Fresh blasts cast shadow on security

AFP, Kano

Fresh bomb blasts jolted Nigeria yesterday as the country voted for state governors, the last of three landmark elections that have triggered deadly unrest.

Three bomb blasts hit the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri but no casualties were reported, police said.

The governorship vote comes after April 16 presidential elections led to widespread rioting across the mainly Muslim north of Africa's most populous nation, leaving more than 500 dead, according to a local rights group.

Unrest broke out despite what some observers said appeared to be Nigeria's cleanest vote for head of state since a return to civilian rule in 1999.

The election won by President Goodluck Jonathan exposed deep divisions in Nigeria, particularly between the country's economically marginalised north and predominantly Christian south, home to its key oil industry.

Some of the estimated 74,000 people displaced by the riots, many of whom are living at increasingly squalid military and police barracks, expressed fears of voting.

WIKILEAKS

US blunders at Guantanamo exposed

AFP, Washington

The United States has botched the handling of inmates at Guantanamo, holding men for years without reliable evidence while releasing others who posed a grave threat, according to leaked secret files.

The trove of more than 700 classified documents released by the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks showed US officials struggling with often flawed evidence and confused about the guilt or innocence of detainees held at the prison at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Hundreds of inmates who turned out to have no serious terror links were held without trial, based on vague or inaccurate information, including accounts from unreliable fellow detainees or statements from men who had been abused or tortured, the New York Times quoted the documents as saying.

The files also contained revelations about possible Al-Qaeda plots.

A top detainee, senior Al-Qaeda commander Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, told interrogators a nuclear bomb had been hidden somewhere in Europe to be detonated if bin Laden is ever caught or killed.

Mohammed also alleged he had set up two cells to attack London's Heathrow airport in 2002, planning to crash a hijacked airliner into one of the terminals.

Out of the 779 people who have passed through the Guantanamo prison, at least 150 detainees were innocent Afghans or Pakistanis, including drivers, farmers and chefs, according to The Daily Telegraph.

They were rounded up as part of frantic intelligence-gathering in war zones and then detained at Guantanamo due to incorrect information or simply for being at the wrong place at the wrong time, the British daily said.

Overall, US military officers considered only 220 of all the suspects detained at Guantanamo to be dangerous extremists.

Another 380 were deemed to be low-ranking foot soldiers who traveled to Afghanistan or were part of the Taliban, the Telegraph wrote.

Of the 172 prisoners who remain at Guantanamo, 130 have been rated as posing a "high-risk" threat.

GUANTANAMO PRISON Saudi king mooted chips for prisoners

AFP, Berlin

Saudi King Abdullah suggested implanting electronic chips in detainees from Guantanamo after their release to track them, leaked documents on the US lockup in Cuba indicated yesterday.

German news weekly Der Spiegel reported in its online edition from a diplomatic cable dated March 22, 2009.

The cable, classified as "secret", recounts a wide-ranging, 90-minute discussion between King Abdullah and US President Barack Obama's anti-terrorism advisor John Brennan in Riyadh on March 15 of that year.

According to the report, Abdullah expressed concern about how to keep tabs on the men if they were to be released, after Obama pledged in January 2009 to close the camp within a year.

"I've just thought of something," the king said, according to the cable.

The cable continues by stating that Abdullah "proposed implanting detainees with an electronic chip containing information about them and allowing their movements to be tracked with Bluetooth".

EU OPEN BORDER TREATY

France, Italy call for reform

AFP, Rome

France and Italy issued a joint call yesterday for a reform of the European Union's visa-free treaty yesterday that would allow EU member states to reimpose internal border controls more easily.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi agreed on a letter outlining their demands to EU leaders at a summit in Rome following the arrival of thousands of migrants from Tunisia.

"We both believe that in exceptional circumstances there should be variations to the Schengen treaty," Berlusconi told reporters after the talks.

Sarkozy said: "For the treaty to stay alive, it must be reformed."

First signed in 1985 as a giant step towards European integration, the Schengen treaty opening passport-free travel to 400 million people in 25 nations is in the line of fire as divided EU nations squabble over immigration.

A planned reform of Schengen later this year should look at "the possibility of restoring internal border checks temporarily in cases of exceptional difficulty in managing common external borders," the letter said.

NEWS IN brief

Carter in N Korea to ease tension in Korean peninsula

AFP, Seoul

Former US president Jimmy Carter yesterday began a visit to North Korea aimed at easing tensions on the divided peninsula, but South Korea reacted sceptically to the mission.

Carter and three other retired world leaders accompanying him say they also want to assess food shortages and help revive stalled six-party nuclear disarmament talks.

Schoolchildren greeted a smiling Carter and his party at Pyongyang airport with bouquets.

Al-Qaeda number two killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Nato troops in Afghanistan said yesterday they had killed a Saudi described as an "Al-Qaeda senior leader" who was their number two most-wanted insurgent in the country.

The US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said Abu Hafsa al-Najdi, also known as Abdul Ghani, was killed in an air strike in Kunar province, eastern Afghanistan, on April 13.

ISAF said he was responsible for coordinating "numerous high-profile attacks" and that they had been hunting him for four years.

But spokesman Major Michael Johnson told AFP he could not give details on the attacks for "safety and security reasons" and could not say who was number one on the most wanted list because of legal issues.

Tornado, floods kill 8 in central US

AFP,