

Al-Qaeda group seizes south Yemen town

Rebels say Saleh helped terrorists; shelling kills 5

AGENCIES

An al-Qaeda group tightened its grip on a Yemeni coastal town while in the capital Sanaa a truce was holding yesterday between President Ali Abdullah Saleh's forces and armed rebels, hours after it was agreed.

Armed men believed to be from al-Qaeda appeared to have full control of the coastal city of Zinjibar in the flashpoint province of Abyan.

"About 300 Islamic militants and al-Qaeda men came into Zinjibar and took over everything on Friday," a resident said. The army had withdrawn from Zinjibar after a battle with militants in March, but later regained control.

Opposition groups have accused Saleh of using the al-Qaeda threat to win aid from regional powers seeking his government's help in battling the militants. The groups have said they could do a better job of containing al-Qaeda than the president.

Dissident Yemeni generals yesterday accused embattled President Ali Abdullah Saleh of surrendering the southern province of Abyan to "terrorists" and called for more troops to defect.

In a statement, the generals, who are led by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, accused Saleh of "surrendering Abyan to an armed terrorist group" and called "on the forces of the army to join the peaceful popular revolution."

They also called on the army to fight the "terrorists" in Abyan.

Meanwhile, five civilians were killed yesterday in an artillery duel between the Yemeni army and suspected al-Qaeda militants in the southern city of Zinjibar, capital of Abyan province, a medic said.

The medic added that Al-Razi hospital in nearby Jaar had received 15 wounded civilians.

In Sanaa, pedestrians and cars returned to streets where pitched bat-

les during nearly a week of fighting killed at least 115 people.

The violence heightened fears that the country perched beside a vital oil shipping lane might descend into civil war.

The latest violence, pitting Saleh's forces against members of the powerful Hashed tribe led by Sadeq al-Ahmar, was the bloodiest since pro-democracy unrest erupted in January and was sparked by Saleh's refusal to sign a power transfer deal.

The ceasefire deal included a withdrawal of armed tribesmen from government buildings and moves to normalize life in the Hasaba district of Sanaa, where fighting with machineguns, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars prompted thousands of residents to flee the city.

Fighters loyal to a powerful opposition tribal chief have already begun surrendering government buildings in Sanaa, a mediator said yesterday.



Former Republican vice presidential candidate and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin (L) greets a rider yesterday during a motorcyclists' rally arranged to honour US war veterans in Washington Dc. Speculations are high that Palin may stand for 2012 presidential run.

PHOTO: AFP

Mladic denies Srebrenica massacre role

BBC ONLINE

Former Bosnian Serb army chief Ratko Mladic has told his son he did not order the Srebrenica massacre of 1995.

Darko Mladic made the statement in Belgrade yesterday, a day before his father is due to lodge an appeal against being transferred to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

Some 7,500 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed at Srebrenica.

The massacre is one of the key charges against Gen Mladic. He was arrested on Thursday after 16 years on the run.

Darko Mladic spoke out after visiting his father in detention at Serbia's war crimes court.

"He said that whatever was done in Srebrenica, he had nothing to do with it."

"He saved so many women, children and fighters... His order was first to evacuate the wounded, women and children and then fighters. Whoever did what behind his back, he had nothing to do with it."

The statement came as supporters of the general were due to hold protests in Belgrade to voice their opposition to his arrest and likely extradition.

To some Serbs Gen Mladic remains a national hero.



Forces kill five in Syrian town

AFP, Nicosia

Security forces shot dead five people in Rastan yesterday after the army surrounded the central Syrian town near Homs at dawn, an activist said on condition of anonymity.

"Five civilians were killed in Rastan today by fire from the security forces as they and the army cordoned off the town," the militant said, adding that other people were wounded and taken to hospital in Homs.

Earlier yesterday, several people were wounded when Syria's security forces unleashed "intense gunfire" in the central towns of Rastan and Talbisa, which were encircled by tanks at dawn, a human rights activist said.

Rebels hail G8 ahead of Gaddafi 'exit' talks

AFP, Benghazi

Libyan rebels applauded a G8 call for Muammar Gaddafi to go ahead of a visit today by South Africa's president for talks that officials said will focus on an "exit strategy" for the strongman.

"The entire world has reached a consensus that Colonel Gaddafi and his regime have not only lost their legitimacy but also their credibility," rebel leader Mustafa Abdul Jalil said in a statement from the rebels' Benghazi bastion late on Saturday.

"I would like to welcome the position taken... by the G8 where members emphasised the necessity of Colonel Gaddafi's departure," the statement said.

"The position taken by the G8 is reflective of the will of the international community as well as the demands and aspirations of the Libyan people."

On Friday, G8 leaders from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States called for

Gaddafi to step down after more than 40 years in the face of pro-democracy protests turned full-fledged armed revolt.

Russia at the same time finally joined explicit calls for Gaddafi to go.

The Libyan regime responded saying any initiative to resolve the crisis would have to go through the African Union.

Kaaim confirmed the visit today of South African President Jacob Zuma, without indicating whether Gaddafi's departure would be discussed.

Turkey last month gave the international community, including the African Union, a proposed "roadmap" to end the Libyan turmoil by removing Gaddafi and opening the way for comprehensive political transition.

In its latest operational update released yesterday, Nato said it struck a vehicle storage facility in Tripoli and a command and control node near the capital, as it targeted Kadhafi's Bab al-Aziziya compound for a fourth successive day.

French minister resigns on sex crimes

AFP, Paris

A French junior minister accused of sexual harassment resigned yesterday, two weeks after former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested in New York on sex crime charges.

Civil service minister Georges Tron, accused of sexually harassing staff at the town hall where he is mayor, said in his letter of resignation to President Nicolas Sarkozy that he would continue the fight to prove his innocence.

Prosecutors this week launched a preliminary investigation after a lawyer for two former municipal employees in the Paris suburb of Draveil accused Tron of harassment.

The resignation was announced in a statement by the prime minister which praised Tron for his "courage" in taking a decision which was in the "general interest" and did not in any way affect the outcome of the probe.

Tron said in his resignation letter that he would disprove the "vindictive" accusations against him by two women, one of whom he said was sacked for fraud and the other for "undignified behaviour."



Georges Tron

NEWS IN brief

Japan PM could face no-confidence motion

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's centre-left Prime Minister Naoto Kan, under fire for his handling of the response to the March 11 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, faces the threat of a no-confidence motion this week.

Although Kan's opponents have only a slim chance of rallying enough support for a successful motion in the Diet legislature, the move would be a fresh headache for the PM, who has been in office for less than a year.

Head of Georgia's rebel Abkhazia region dies

AFP, Sukhumi

The head of Georgia's rebel Abkhazia region, Sergei Bagapsh, died in a Moscow hospital yesterday, as analysts predicted his successor will stay a pro-Russian course.

Bagapsh, 62, who died after lung surgery, "was a staunch supporter of friendship and alliance with Russia," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in a statement.

Shuttle Endeavour prepares to leave space station

AFP, Washington

The US space shuttle Endeavour yesterday prepared to undock from the International Space Station and jet back to Earth, wrapping up its final journey before entering retirement, NASA said.

Endeavour's last mission is the penultimate flight for the 30-year US shuttle program, which will end for good after the Atlantis mission to the orbiting research

Cooling system restored at Japan's plant

REUTERS, Tokyo

Tokyo Electric Power has restored the cooling system of the nuclear reactor and fuel pool at the No. 5 unit of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi power plant in northeastern Japan, an official of the plant operator said yesterday.

Tokyo Electric, known as TEPCO, said the cooling facility restarted at 12:49 pm and was expected to lower temperatures which had risen at the reactor and fuel pool after the cooling system stopped working late

'Ethnic cleansing' evident in Sudan's Abyei

Say monitors

AFP, Juba

Fresh satellite images of Sudan's flashpoint Abyei area provide evidence of war crimes committed by the northern army, including "state-sponsored ethnic cleansing," monitors alleged yesterday.

Northern troops overran the contested border region last week, drawing condemnation from world powers, who have warned the action is a threat to peace between north and south.

Tens of thousands of people fled southwards when Khartoum's troops and tanks, alongside northern-aligned militia gunmen, poured into the area.

Khartoum ordered the official termination of the UN's north-south peacekeeping mission on July 9, the date the south is to declare full independence following a referendum, said Sana state news agency.

The Satellite Sentinel Project, which obtained and analysed the images, said they show "extensive and wanton destruction and appropriation of property without the

justification of military necessity."

The latest set of images show for the first time the extent of the destruction.

"We focused satellites on Abyei because everyone concerned believed that if the Sudan government would try to undermine the north-south peace, it would do so through Abyei," said Clooney in a statement.

"We now have undeniable proof of the Khartoum regime's war crimes in Abyei," he added.

The evidence is being sent to the UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court, who have already issued arrest warrants for President Omar al-Bashir on genocide charges in the western Darfur region.

"The totality of evidence from satellites and ground sources points to state-sponsored ethnic cleansing of much of the contested Abyei region" the US-based group said in the statement.

The northern Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) has defended its role.

At least 39,000 people have fled Abyei since the clashes broke out.

Maltese say yes to divorce

AFP, Valletta

Overwhelmingly Catholic Malta has voted to legalise divorce, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi announced yesterday, after votes were counted following a referendum the day before.

Gonzi, who campaigned against the introduction of divorce in the last European country where it is illegal, said it was now up to the parliament to enact a law legalising the dissolution of marriage.

"This is not the result that I wished for, but the will of the people has to be respected and parliament should enact a law for the introduction of divorce," the prime minister said.

Malta is one of only two countries in the world -- the Philippines is the other -- that bans divorce. Chile was the last country to legalise divorce in 2004 after overwhelming public pressure.

Jonathan takes oath as Nigerian's president

AFP, Abuja

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan took the oath of office yesterday following elections judged as the country's fairest to date though marred by deadly post-poll riots.

Jonathan, 53, was sworn in amid tight security at a colourful ceremony witnessed by more than two dozen heads of state in the capital of Africa's most populous country.

Jonathan, a 53-year-old southern Christian, comfortably beat his main opponent, an ex-military ruler from the mainly Muslim north, in the April 16 vote followed by three days of rioting which killed more than 800 people.

A WEEK IN POWER

Mamata focuses on basic issues

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

After being sworn in as the chief minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee has completed seven days in office on Friday, a week in which she has literally taken the city of Kolkata by storm.

A week is hardly time enough to assess her as chief minister but she has already moved into "back-to-basics" business and surprise a few with her sudden but stern decisions.

Since taking over West Bengal's chief minister on May 20, Mamata has been keeping the bureaucrats on toes often staying late in the Writers' Building, the state secretariat, and paying unscheduled visits to government-run hospitals whose functioning and hygienic condition have been under question mark.

Mamata, who rode to power on the slogan of "Maa, Mati and Manush", moves in her car with windows drawn down, insists on stopping at all traffic lights and walks into crowds talking to them and reciprocating their greetings. Her approach to administration



sharply contrasts with her predecessor Buddhadeb Bhattacharya.

On three consecutive days on her way to the secretariat, Mamata, who also holds Health portfolio, ordered her convoy to divert to SSKM Hospital, Bangur Institute of Neurology and Sambhunath Pandit Hospital to see for herself the conditions there in the light of numerous complaints about lack of care and facilities in state-run hospitals.

Her surprise visit to Bangur Institute of Neurology on last Thursday produced fireworks as the Hospital Director failed to give satisfactory answers to an eager

CM who wanted to know the cause of mismanagements there.

The next day, the director was suspended.

Unlike her predecessor, Mamata is not into ambitious announcements on any economic and industrial front but is focussing on basic issues like health which touch ordinary people on a day-to-day basis.

With massive fiscal deficit of Rs 2.5 lakh crore, she, in reality, can hardly do go for major announcements about ambitious schemes.

Mamata has promised soon after becoming the chief minister that she would solve a long-drawn agitation in Darjeeling Hills demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland by Gorkha Janamukti Morcha within three months.

Mamata also made a poll promise that, if elected, the military operation against Maoists would be called off.

But the crucial question is: will she be able to persuade the federal Indian government led by her ally Congress party to do that?

US defence firm hit by cyber-attack

BBC ONLINE

US defence firm Lockheed Martin yesterday said it has come under a significant cyber-attack, which took place last week.

Few details were available, but Lockheed said its security team had detected the threat quickly and ensured that none of its programmes had been compromised.

The Pentagon said it is working to establish the extent of the breach.

Lockheed makes fighter jets, warships and multi-billion dollar weapons systems sold worldwide.

Lt Col April Cunningham, speaking for the US defence department, said the impact on the Pentagon was "minimal and we don't expect any adverse effect".

Lockheed Martin said in a statement that it detected the attack on 21 May "almost immediately" and took counter-measures.

As a result, the company said, "our systems remain secure; no customer, program or employee personal data has been compromised".

But they are still working to restore employee access several days after the attack took place.

Lockheed Martin is the world's biggest aerospace company and makes F-16, F-22 and F-35 fighter jets as well as warships.

India pledges support for Palestine

PTI, Singapore

India yesterday has affirmed a "continuing commitment to Palestine" and voiced support for "the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable, and united State of Palestine."

Addressing the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) Committee on Palestine in Bali, Minister of State for External Affairs, E Ahamed, said: "India welcomes the recent reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas on the West Bank and Gaza."

At the panel session, Ahamed spelt out India's emphatic endorsement of the Palestinian struggle for a "united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital."