

Yemeni air force bombs Qaeda-held city

15 protesters killed as soldiers opened fire on a demonstration

REUTERS, Sanaa/Taiz

The Yemeni air force bombed an al Qaeda-held southern city yesterday and residents in another city said soldiers had opened fire on a demonstration and run protesters over with bulldozers, killing at least 15.

In the latest sign Saudi Arabia's neighbour was moving toward civil war, six soldiers were killed in what appeared to be an ambush near Zinjibar, a coastal city taken over a few days ago by Islamist and al Qaeda militants.

Residents said jet fighters later strafed militant positions with bombs.

Global powers are worried the country, already on the verge of financial collapse and home to al Qaeda militants, could turn into a

failed state that threatens the oil-rich region and Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter.

A brief calm was shattered on Sunday when forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh opened fire on protesters in Taiz, killing at least 15 people and wounding hundreds, hospital sources said, adding the death toll was almost certain to rise.

"Most of the wounded were hit by live bullets, but some were run over by bulldozers," a medical source said from a field hospital.

Fresh protests are planned on yesterday in Taiz, where Saleh's troops have burned tents used by demonstrators and parked armored vehicles in a protest area known as "Freedom Square."

Security forces arrested dozens yesterday, trying to head off the rally demanding an end to Saleh's nearly 33 year rule.

"Security forces are chasing youths in alleys after soldiers close down the city's entry points," said pro-reform activist Boshra al-Maqtari.

Opposition leaders have accused Saleh of allowing the city of Zinjibar, on the Gulf of Aden, to fall to al Qaeda and Islamist militants in order to raise alarm in the region that would in turn translate into support for the president.

The six soldiers were killed and dozens wounded as they were traveling to Zinjibar, a security official and others said. The official did not know who was responsible for the attack.



PHOTO: AFP

Yemeni anti-government protesters flash the V sign for "victory" as they shout slogans during a demonstration calling for the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa yesterday.

Gaddafi's 'reign of terror' nearing end: Nato chief

REUTERS, Tripoli/Varna

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's "reign of terror" is coming to an end, Nato Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said yesterday.

Nato warplanes have been raising the pace of their air strikes on Tripoli, with Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziyah compound in the center of the city being hit repeatedly.

Meanwhile, South African President Jacob Zuma arrived yesterday in Tripoli for talks with Gaddafi on ending a conflict with rebels fighting to oust the Libyan strongman, an AFP correspondent said.

Britain said on Sunday it was to add "bunker-busting" bombs to the arsenal its warplanes are using over Libya, a weapon it said would send a message to Gaddafi that it was time to quit.

"Our operation in Libya is achieving its objectives ... We have seriously degraded Gaddafi's ability to kill his own people,"



Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Rasmussen told a Nato forum in Varna, Bulgaria.

"Gaddafi's reign of terror is coming to an end. He is increasingly isolated at home and abroad. Even those closest to him are departing, defecting or deserting."

Britain and other Nato powers are ratcheting up their military intervention in Libya to try to break a deadlock that has seen Gaddafi hold on to power despite a rebel uprising against his four-decade rule and weeks of air strikes.

Gaddafi denies attacking civilians, saying his forces were obliged to act to contain armed criminal gangs and al Qaeda militants. He says the Nato intervention is an act of colonial aggression aimed at grabbing Libya's plentiful oil reserves.

South African leader Jacob Zuma was expected to arrive in Tripoli yesterday, his second visit since the conflict began, to try to broker a ceasefire on behalf of the African Union.

NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE

Japan voters want PM to go

REUTERS, Tokyo

Seventy percent of Japanese voters want to get rid of Prime Minister Naoto Kan, a survey showed yesterday, marking more bad news for the unpopular government chief likely to face a no-confidence vote as early as this week.

Kan is under fire for his handling of the humanitarian aid to victims of an earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan's northeast on March 11 and the world's worst nuclear crisis in 25 years triggered by the disaster.

Japan's biggest opposition Liberal Democratic Party said last week it would submit a no-confidence motion to parliament to force Kan to resign or call a snap election.

Suu Kyi plans landmark Myanmar political tour

AFP, Hong Kong

Democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi said yesterday she is planning a political tour of Myanmar, a move likely to test her popularity and the limits of her freedom after being freed six months ago.

Suu Kyi, who spent seven years in detention until last November, was asked at a videoconference in Hong Kong to confirm reports she will launch political rallies across the nation.

"I hope to travel... in the month of June," the Nobel Peace Prize winner told over 1,000 academics, students and public gathered at the University of Hong Kong.

"Where I will be going I can't tell you yet. We are trying to work out the itinerary," she said.

Suu Kyi's travels around the country have landed her in trouble with the Myanmar authorities several times in the past, but the 65-year-old said she had not been given any



safety assurance on her latest planned tour.

"I have not been given any safety assurance," she said, but added that it was the "duty of the government" to protect every Myanmar citizen.

Suu Kyi's most recent stint in detention came after her convoy was attacked in 2003 in an ambush apparently organised by a regime frightened by her popularity.

She was arrested along with many party activists and later moved back to her Yangon home -- where she had spent most of the past two decades in detention -- and placed under house arrest for a third time.

The junta said four people were killed in that attack but her National League for Democracy party put the toll at nearly 100.

The tour will be a test of both Suu Kyi's popularity following an election that has left her sidelined from politics, and of her freedom to travel around the country unhindered by the authorities.

India, Pakistan meet on glacier dispute

PTI, New Delhi

After a gap of three years, defence secretaries of India and Pakistan yesterday met here to discuss the long-pending Siachen issue.

Defence Secretary Pradeep Kumar is leading the Indian delegation at the two-day talks with his Pakistani counterpart Lt General (Retd) Syed Ather Ali.

India and Pakistan decided to resume the talks last year after Prime Ministers of both the countries met in Thimpu.

Pakistani delegation has two civilian officials and four military officers, the Indian side includes Special Secretary R K Mathur, DG of Military Operations Lt. General A.M. Verma and Surveyor General S. Subha Rao.

NEWS IN brief

Taliban co-founder disclosed Osama's hideout to US

PTI, London

Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar leaked the whereabouts of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden to American investigators under a "deal" in which US promised to withdraw its troops from the militant group's strongholds in Afghanistan, a media report has claimed.

The details of the extraordinary "deal" emerged after a confidential American briefing was found at bin Laden's hide-out in Pakistan's garrison town of Abbottabad, the Sunday Mirror reported.

According to the paper, reports in Pakistan claim that Baradar ? co-founder of the Taliban and one of bin

Ex-navy commando, brother detained after Pak base attack

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistani security officials have detained a former navy commando and his brother in connection with last week's militant attack on a naval air base, intelligence officials and relatives said yesterday.

The brazen assault on the PNS Mehran base in Karachi, the headquarters of Pakistan's naval air wing, embarrassed the military and raised doubts about its ability to protect its bases after a similar raid on the army headquarters in the city of Rawalpindi in 2009.

Kamran Ahmed, who was sacked from the navy about 10 years ago, and his younger brother, Zaman, were picked up from the eastern city of Lahore on Friday, five days after the attack that killed at least 10

Obama promotes Dempsey to top uniformed US military post

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama yesterday promoted US Army General Martin Dempsey, who commanded an armored division in key battles in Iraq, to the United States' top uniformed military post.

"With nearly 40 years in uniform, Martin Dempsey is one of our nation's most respected and combat-tested generals," Obama told reporters in a brief announcement at the White House.

"In Iraq, he led our soldiers (through) a brutal insurgency. Having trained Iraqi forces he knows that nations must ultimately take responsibility for their own security," the US president said, as he called on the Senate to confirm Dempsey's nomination "as

PRO-MLADIC VIOLENCE

Serbian police detain 180

Mladic to challenge extradition

AGENCIES, Belgrade

Serbian authorities detained 180 people who had attacked police injuring 32 during a protest against the arrest of Bosnian Serb wartime general Ratko Mladic, an Interior Ministry spokeswoman said yesterday.

Many of those at the Sunday night rally in Belgrade were young people, some not even born during Bosnia's 1992-95 war. Dozens of those detained by riot police wearing helmets, protective gear and shields were minors, reports Reuters.

Meanwhile, Mladic lawyer Milos Saljic has said he would appeal the extradition ruling yesterday.

His family says Gen Mladic is too sick to travel, but the Serbian government is expected to reject the appeal, reports BBC.

The Serbian Radical Party, whose leader is on trial in The Hague, brought in supporters by bus from across Serbia to rally for Mladic. Many came straight from Sunday soccer matches.

During the violence, 32 police and 11 protesters were hurt, and five cars and six shops also suffered damage, police said.

Mladic, indicted for the massacre of 8,000 Muslims in Srebrenica during the war, was arrested on Thursday in a village 100 km northeast of Belgrade after 16 years on the run.

Tanks storm central Syria town

10 wounded

REUTERS, Amman

Tanks stormed the town of Talbiseh yesterday, a day after surrounding it, and at least 10 people were wounded, a resident said, in an expanding military campaign in central Syria to crush dissent against Baathist rule.

"Shelling began at five in the morning, concentrating on a hill in the middle of the town," said the witness, a resident of Talbiseh who managed to leave the town.

He added the wounded, some in critical condition, were rushed to a cultural centre after troops and security forces took over the main clinic in the town, 10 km (6 miles) north of Homs, a tactic the military has used when seizing control of other urban centres.

Protesters vow to stay in major Madrid square

AFP, Madrid

Protesters decrying Spain's economic woes vowed yesterday to occupy a major Madrid square indefinitely as the movement spread to Europe, despite the risk of police action.

Thousands of protesters against political corruption, welfare cuts and unemployment had voted by a show of hands late Sunday to stay in the Puerta del Sol square, agreeing to decide later on the duration.

"We have started something in Sol, we have started to spread to the rest of the world, so this is not the time to stop it," said a protest spokesman in the encampment, a sea of blue-plastic tarpaulin covering the square.

"The support we received internationally was very important, it was something that moved us in Sol, especially the mobilisation in Paris was a very big support, and also the mobilisation in Greece."

Some 20,000 people assembled in Athens' central Syntagma Square on Sunday, police estimated, responding to calls on social networking sites for gatherings across Europe to demand "real democracy".

VOTER INTENTION POLLS

Berlusconi faces defeat in Milan, Naples

AFP, Rome

Italy's centre-left looks set to win mayoral races in Milan and Naples, according to voter intention polls released yesterday, in what would be a major blow for Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

The Digis poll commissioned by news channel SkyTG24 showed Giuliano Pisapia garnering 53.5 per cent of voter intentions in Milan -- Italy's economic capital and Berlusconi's home town -- against Letizia Moratti with 46.5 per cent.

In Naples, Luigi De Magistris was ahead of his rival Gianni Lettieri with 54.5 per cent against 45.5 per cent.

Dalai Lama formally cedes political role

AFP, Dharamshala

The Dalai Lama has formally relinquished his political powers "in a historic move" but will remain the symbol of Tibetan unity, a spokesman for the spiritual leaders said yesterday.

Tibetan exiles elected a Harvard scholar, Lobsang Sangay, 43, in April as their

new prime minister to assume the political duties of the globe-trotting spiritual icon.

"It is a very historic moment. He will still be the religious leader and the symbol of Tibetan unity, but he has formally devolved his political role," the Buddhist monk's spokesman, Tempa Tsering, told AFP.

The Dalai Lama, 75, said in March he would give up his role as the Tibetan movement's political leader, transferring powers to a newly-elected head of the government-in-exile based in the northern Indian hill town of Dharamshala.



Although the Dalai Lama will retain the more significant role of spiritual leader and will still be influential when it comes to major policy-making decisions, the transition will make Sangay a far more prominent figure than his predecessors as prime minister.

The Dalai signed amendments to the constitution of the Tibetan government-in-exile at the weekend to formally cede his political role, Tsering said.

"It was his last political act," he said.

The political powers he held now rest with the Tibetan government-in-exile and its democratic leadership, Tsering said.

"The Dalai Lama will only remain the spiritual head," he said.

He will now spend his time "working more to promote human values and work for better inter-religious understanding," Tsering added.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters occupy the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid, yesterday.