

Nato intensifies air campaign in Libya

China holds talks with rebels; Moscow readies peace bid

AFP, Tripoli

Explosions rattled the Libyan capital yesterday as Russia prepared to send an envoy on a shuttle mission to try to broker a negotiated settlement between its Cold War ally and the rebels.

Meanwhile, Beijing said yesterday that a Chinese diplomat met with the leader of Libya's opposition, in the first announcement of any contact with the group.

Four explosions were heard at 11:35pm Thursday from the centre of Tripoli, followed by others about 15 minutes later.

Then at 1:45am, four powerful blasts shook the district where Gaddafi's residence is located not far from the city centre.

An army barracks in the same sector had been the target of several raids last week.

Earlier this week, government spokes-

man Mussa Ibrahim said Nato air raids on Libya had killed 718 civilians and wounded 4,067 since they were unleashed on March 19 and up to May 26.

In Washington, US military chief Admiral Mike Mullen pointed to "some signs, certainly in the last few days, that Kadhafi is becoming more and more isolated."

He noted the defection of oil minister Shukri Ghanem, who had been a key figure in the regime, along with a group of "young generals" who had also parted with Gaddafi.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Moscow will be sending an envoy to Tripoli and the rebels' capital of Benghazi to mediate, the Italian news agency ANSA reported, quoting diplomats.

Medvedev stressed the importance of a negotiated settlement at talks with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Rome.

"We would like as much as possible

for the problem to be resolved through negotiations and not by military means," Medvedev told reporters.

Russia has enjoyed close ties with Gaddafi's regime and abstained from the UN Security Council vote in March that gave the go-ahead for international military action in Libya.

But it has increasingly distanced itself from the regime and at a G8 summit in France last week, Medvedev pledged to ramp up diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

China, which also abstained in the Security Council vote, announced yesterday that it had opened talks with the rebels.

China's ambassador to Qatar, Zhang Zhiliang, held talks with Mustafa Abdul Jalil of the rebel National Transitional Council (NTC) in recent days, foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said in a statement.

'Burn in hell'

Srebrenica widows give verdict on Mladic

AFP, Srebrenica

As the image of Ratko Mladic appeared on a television screen placed on a plateau in the vast Srebrenica cemetery, a stony silence descended on the 20 women watching.

Seated among the gravestones of the more than 4,500 victims of the Srebrenica massacre buried at the Potocari memorial centre, one of the women broke the silence, hissing: "I hope God makes him burn in hell".

"If only we could judge him here. I would like them to bring him here and we would tear him alive into little pieces," said Hanifa Djogaz, glaring at the general on his first appearance at a UN war crimes court in The Hague.

Her cousin Mejra Djogaz, who lost two sons in the worst single atrocity in Europe since World War II, echoed the sentiment.

"He has killed all our loved ones. Only the mothers (of Srebrenica) could judge him. He should be given to the

children who are left without their parent for them to judge him," she said.

Watching a live broadcast from the courtroom, the women were seated in the middle of the cemetery surrounded by thousands of simple white grave stones that dot the inclines of the memorial centre.

The women, almost all elderly and wearing headscarves, are the wives and mothers of some of the over 8,000 Muslim men and boys killed after Bosnian Serb troops led by Mladic overran Srebrenica almost 16 years ago, in July 1995.

"It is good that he appears in court even if it is late. He should have been in court a long time ago," Nura Alispahic, whose son Azmir was killed by Serbs.

Alispahic saw the killing of her son on television a few years ago when a home video shot by the paramilitary unit that killed her son along with five other men surfaced.

"I was watching the news and they announced 'you will see something you have never seen before: mothers



will recognise their sons, sisters their brothers", she recalled.

For long Europe's most wanted man for atrocities committed during Bosnia's 1992-95 war that killed 100,000 people, Mladic was arrested in northeast Serbia last Thursday.

The 69-year-old is accused of masterminding the Srebrenica massacre and the 44-month siege of the capital Sarajevo from May 1992 in which 10,000 died.

Mladic refused to enter a plea yesterday to 11 counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, denouncing the charges as "obnoxious".

NEWS IN brief

Indian guru's hunger strike starts today

AFP, New Delhi



India's most famous yoga guru prepared to go on a "fast unto death" to protest against corruption after last-ditch efforts yesterday by the government to persuade him to call off his protest failed.

Swami Ramdev vowed to start his hunger strike today in front of tens of thousands of supporters in a huge tent erected in the Indian capital.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sent two ministers to hold talks with the guru yesterday but the effort failed.

Blast outside central Iraq mosque kills 17

AFP, Tikrit

A bomb placed outside a mosque frequented by provincial officials in the central Iraqi city of Tikrit killed at least 17 people and wounded 50 after the main weekly Muslim prayers yesterday.

The attack came a day after a spate of coordinated bomb attacks in western Iraq killed 10 people, raising questions over the capabilities of Iraqi security forces with just months to go before all US forces must pull out.

Four killed in British oil refinery blast

AFP, Pembroke

An explosion at one of the largest oil refineries in western Europe killed four contractors and sent a massive fireball shooting into the sky, British police said yesterday.

The blast at the Chevron refinery near Pembroke, on the coast of southwest Wales, could be heard across the area and sent fire crews scrambling to the scene.

Police said maintenance work was being carried out on a storage tank when the incident occurred. One seriously injured man was airlifted to a nearby hospital.

Canada chooses youngest ever speaker

AFP, Ottawa

Andrew Scheer, 32, on Thursday became the youngest ever Speaker of the House of Commons, the most powerful job in Canada's parliament.

The seven-year veteran Conservative MP from Saskatchewan province in western Canada who reportedly watches the British House of Commons in his spare time beat out six others vying for the post in a secret ballot.

In 2006, he was named assistant deputy speaker and later promoted to deputy Speaker.

Massive protests sweep Syria

34 shot dead by security forces

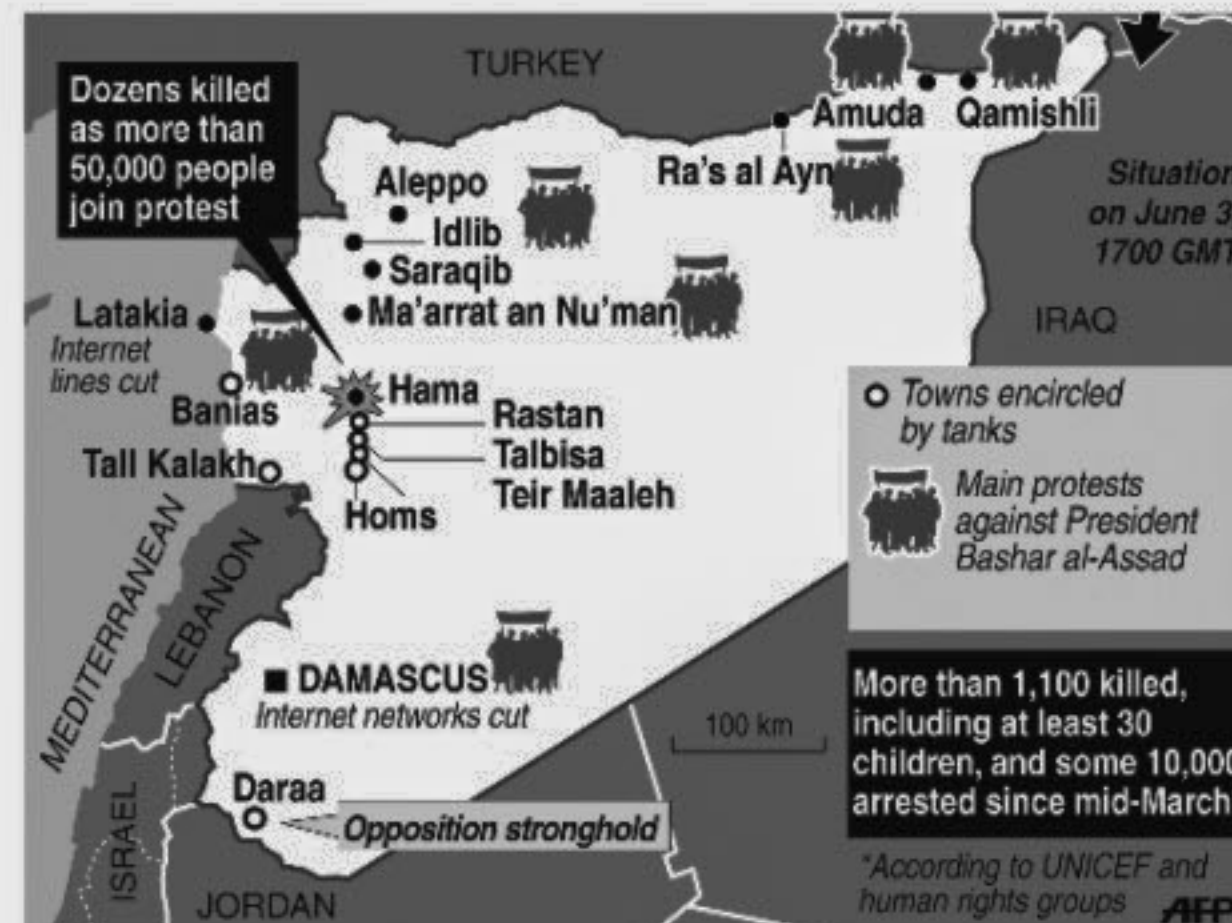
AFP, Damascus

Security forces fired on vast crowds of protesters in the central city of Hama yesterday killing 34, as the largest anti-regime demonstrations yet swept Syria, rights activists said.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon expressed alarm at the heightened Syrian government crackdown on protests, while a US-based monitoring firm said two-thirds of networks in protest-wracked Syria were cut off from the Internet yesterday.

"At least 34 people were killed in Hama by security forces but the toll could rise as there are people who were gravely wounded," said Rami Abdel Rahman who heads the London-based Syrian observatory for human rights.

Security forces unleashed



"intense gunfire" against a crowd of more than 50,000 people in Hama, Abdel Rahman said, reached by telephone from Nicosia.

He said the rally was biggest in the city since the mid-March outbreak of a revolt against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's

autocratic rule.

Elsewhere, security forces killed one civilian when they opened fire to disperse a protest in the village of Has in the province of Idlib, Abdel Rahman said.

Thousands of demonstrators yesterday also rallied in and around

Damascus, which so far has been largely spared the protests rocking Syria for more than 10 weeks, another rights activist said.

Near the southern protest hub of Daraa, security forces opened fire to disperse a crowd in Jassem, a rights activist told AFP, as protesters also gathered in nearby Dal and in Kurdish towns of northern Syria.

Residents, meanwhile, said Internet lines were cut in Damascus and the coastal city of Latakia yesterday, in a repeat of a suspension of services at the start of April.

Syrian activists called the latest protests over the dozens of children killed in anti-government protests such as 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib whom activists say was tortured to death, a charge denied by the authorities.

150 killed in Tunisia boat tragedy

AFP, Geneva

Around 150 migrants heading to Italy drowned when their ship capsized off the Tunisian coast, the International Organisation for Migration said in Geneva yesterday.

"The Tunisian Red Crescent confirmed on Thursday that there were still bodies in the water and the recovery operation was ongoing," said the agency in a statement.

The vessel had been packed with refugees, many fleeing the conflict in neighbouring Libya, and was on its way to the Italian island of Lampedusa when it ran aground.

Superbug found in cow's milk

AFP, LONDON

An entirely new strain of the drug-resistant MRSA superbug has been found in cow's milk and people in Britain and Denmark, a study published yesterday said.

The previously unseen variant "potentially poses a public health problem," said lead researcher Mark Holmes of Cambridge University.

There was no general threat to the safety of pasteurised milk and dairy products, but people working with animals could be at risk, said the study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases.

Dubbed a "flesh-eating" bacteria in media reports, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) has emerged as a major threat in hospitals around the world, becoming potentially deadly when it infects wounds.

Climate to wreak havoc on food supply

South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa will be the hardest hit

BBC ONLINE

Areas where food supplies could be worst hit by climate change have been identified in a report published yesterday.

Some areas in the tropics face famine because of failing food production, an international research group says.

The Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) predicts large parts of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa will be worst affected.

Its report points out that hundreds of millions of people in these regions are already experiencing a food crisis.

"We are starting to see much more clearly where the effects of climate change on agriculture could intensify hunger and poverty," said Patti Kristjanson, an agricultural economist with the CCAFS initiative that produced the report.

A leading climatologist told BBC News that agriculturalists had been

slow to use global climate models to pinpoint regions most affected by rising temperatures.

This report is the first foray into the field by the CCAFS initiative. To assess how climate change will affect the world's ability to feed itself, CCAFS set about finding hotspots of climate change and food insecurity.

Focusing their search on the tropics, the researchers identified regions where populations are chronically malnourished and highly dependent on local food supplies.

Then, basing their analysis on the climate data amassed by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the team predicted which of these food-insecure regions are likely to experience the greatest shifts in temperature and precipitation over the next 40 years.

By overlaying the maps, the team was able to pinpoint which hungry regions of the tropics would suffer

most.

With many areas in Africa predicted to become drier, countries such as South Africa which predominantly farm maize have the option to shift to more drought resistant crops.

Professor Martin Parry, a visiting professor at the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College London, responded to the report by saying he thought that CGIAR, the parent body to the CCAFS, had been slow to move into the field of climate change as a key area of research. But he added that this step was very welcome.

But he cautioned: "This gives us a better local picture of where the most vulnerable areas might be... but it doesn't make strong enough connections between the changes in the weather and its impacts on yields."

This made it difficult to plan for adaptations, Professor Parry told BBC News.

Australia's 'child refugee' plan criticised

AFP, Geneva

The UN refugees agency yesterday criticised Australia's plans to include children among 800 asylum seekers to be sent to Malaysia to have their refugee claims assessed.

"We are not able to lend our support to the text as it currently stands because of the absence of the operating protection safeguards we have been calling for," said Adrian Edwards, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

In a deal between Malaysia and Australia, unaccompanied minors will be included in a plan to send 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia for processing.

LAUGHS, FRIENDS AND HUGS

The best things of life are free



THE DAILY MAIL ONLINE

Happiness is not all money in the bank, fast cars and designer clothes, but family, friends and the beauty of nature, a study has found.

A new survey has revealed the things which bring a smile to our faces are in fact life's simple pleasures - available to all, for free, every single day.

When people were asked what their most important pleasures were, 22 per cent of the 2,000 people quizzed picked laughing, swiftly followed by eating good food with great friends, in second place with 21 per cent. A hug was in third place with 19 per cent.

The research suggests that despite the world's focus on materialistic possessions, people still find pleasure in pastimes which do not cost a penny.

Among the other top 10 pleasures listed was the feel of the sun on your face, reading a good book, walking along the beach and getting into bed with clean sheets.

Also popular was watching sunsets, leafing through old photographs and memories and smelling freshly cut grass.

"Family, friends and the beauty of nature make people happiest," said Ralph Walker, head of marketing for Apples from New Zealand, which organised the survey.

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