

US, allies eye post Gaddafi era in Libya

REUTERS, Misrata

Western and Arab nations meet in Abu Dhabi yesterday to focus on what one US official called the "end-game" for Libya's Muammar Gaddafi as Nato once again stepped up the intensity of its air raids on Tripoli.

At the United Nations, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) said its investigators had found evidence linking Gaddafi to a policy of raping opponents, while in the US Congress a bipartisan group proposed that President Barack Obama use frozen Libyan government assets to pay for humanitarian aid for Libyan people caught up in the civil war.

Nato air strikes resumed in Tripoli on Wednesday night after a lull that followed the heaviest day of bombings since March. Thousands of Gaddafi troops advanced on Misrata on Wednesday, shelling it from three sides and killing at least 12 rebels.

Ministers from the so-called Libya

contact group, including the United States, France and Britain, as well as Arab allies Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan, agreed in May to set up a fund to help the rebels in the civil war.

They are expected to firm up this commitment in the United Arab Emirates capital and press the rebels to give a detailed plan on how they would run the country if Gaddafi stood down as leader of the oil producing North African desert state.

"The international community is beginning to talk about what could constitute end-game to this," one senior US official told reporters.

"That would obviously include some kind of ceasefire arrangement and some kind of political process ... and of course the question of Gaddafi and perhaps his family is also a key part of that," the US official said.

Both Libya's rebel Transitional National Council (TNC) and its Western allies have rejected Libyan government ceasefire offers that do not

include Gaddafi's departure, saying he and his family must relinquish power before any talks can begin.

US officials on Wednesday announced delivery of the TNC's first US oil sale, part of a broader strategy they hope will get money flowing to the cash starved group.

British Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt, who will be at the Abu Dhabi talks, said the group would be briefed by the International Stabilisation Response Team which is helping the rebel council plan for post-conflict rebuilding.

Nato defence ministers met in Brussels on Wednesday, but there were few signs of willingness to intensify their Libya mission, which after four months has failed to oust Gaddafi.

Gaddafi says the rebels are a minority of Islamist militants and the Nato campaign is an attempt to grab Libya's oil.

In Tripoli, a fire broke out early yesterday morning at the hotel housing foreign journalists, a Reuters witness said.



PHOTO: AFP

Relatives mourn extrajudicial killing victim Sarfaraz Shah during his funeral in Karachi yesterday after he was shot by Pakistani paramilitary soldiers. Pakistani authorities have arrested five soldiers for shooting dead a young man at point blank range after the killing was filmed live and broadcasted on television, shocking human activists.

End Aids by 2020

UN chief to world leaders

BBC ONLINE

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called for global action yesterday to end the Aids disease by 2020.

"That is our goal - zero new infections, zero stigma and zero Aids-related deaths," Ban said at a UN summit on Aids in New York.

The three-day meeting marks the 30th anniversary since the discovery of HIV the virus that leads to Aids.

Meanwhile, African leaders called for greater resources to battle the pandemic across the world.

Some 34m people have Aids, but about half of them do not know they have the disease, according to the UN.

"Today, we gather to end Aids," Ban said at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly meeting on Wednesday.

NEWS IN brief

Death toll reaches 30 from killer germ outbreak

AFP, Berlin

The death toll from the outbreak of a lethal strain of E coli centred in northern Germany rose to 30 yesterday after the national health centre reported two more fatalities.

The Robert Koch Institute said at least 29 people had now died in Germany, up from the 24 it reported Wednesday, in addition to a Swedish woman who fell victim of the infection after returning from a visit to the country.

German Health Minister Daniel Bahr expressed hope Wednesday that the worst of the outbreak was over, with the number of new infections beginning to fall.

Italy to take Brazil to Hague court

BBC ONLINE

Italy said yesterday it will go to the international court in The Hague in a bid to overturn Brazil's decision not to extradite an Italian fugitive.

Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi expressed "great regret" at Brazil's Supreme Court ruling over Cesare Battisti.

Battisti was released from prison in Brazil following the court's decision.

The former left-wing rebel escaped from an Italian jail in 1981, while awaiting trial for four murders in the 1970s. He has always denied the charges.

China says no expiry date on Communist Party rule

REUTERS, Beijing

China's Communist Party sees no reason why it cannot stay in power indefinitely, having made the nation into the envy of the world with its economic success, one of the Party's top official historians said yesterday.

Li Zhongjie, a deputy head of the Party's History Research Center, made it clear that China will use the impending 90th anniversary of the Party's founding as a time for rousing pride, rather than reflection on a history that has spanned war, revolution, mass famine and deadly purges.

Under the Party's rule, China had made leapfrog developments, Li told a news conference, and he said it was foolish to expect any party to want to give up power.

Death toll in Haiti floods rise to 23, 6 missing

CNN ONLINE

The death toll from flooding and landslides after torrential rains hit Haiti earlier this week climbed to 23 Wednesday, the country's civil protection department said.

Floodwaters from the rains swept through homes, tent cities and medical facilities, a report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

"The situation continues to deteriorate," Beat Rohr, director of CARE in Haiti, said Tuesday.

Russia opposes any UN resolution on Syria

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday said it opposed the UN Security Council adopting any resolution on Syria, risking a major dispute with the West over the response to the crackdown on Syrian protesters.

"Russia is against any resolution of the UN Security Council on Syria and this has been stated more than once at presidential level," foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich told reporters.

"The situation in this country, in our opinion, does not pose a threat to international peace and security," he said, quoted by Russian state media.

Britain and France have drawn up a new resolution which demands that President Bashar al-Assad end violence against the opposition and lift the siege of protesting cities. It also calls for an arms embargo on Syria.

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron on Wednesday sternly warned Russia and China against blocking the resolution: "If anyone votes against that resolution, or tries to veto it, that should be on their conscience," he said.

Human rights groups say more than 1,100 people have been killed throughout the country since the opposition protests against the Assad regime erupted in mid-March.

But Lukashevich insisted the situation in Syria was "best dealt with by the Syrians themselves."

The spokesman acknowledged that the situation in Syria remained tense, but appeared to blame this on actions by extremists rather than the regime itself.

US urges allies not to rush Afghan pull out

AFP, Brussels

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates urged Nato allies yesterday not to rush out of Afghanistan as he vowed that a US troop drawdown next month would not mean a hasty exit for Washington.

Gates, who attended his final Nato meeting in Brussels before retiring at the end of the month, said the alliance was making "substantial military progress on the ground" and repeated that it was too early to know the impact of Osama bin Laden's death on the war.

"I also reiterated my belief that these gains could be threatened if we do not proceed with the transition to Afghan security lead in a deliberate, organised and coordinated manner," he told a news conference.

"Even as the United States begins to draw down next month, I assured my fellow ministers that there will be no rush to the exits on our part -- and we expect the same from our allies," he said.

Chirac mocks Sarkozy in memoirs

BBC ONLINE

Former French President Jacques Chirac has mocked his successor and party colleague Nicolas Sarkozy in memoirs covering his 12 years in office.

He described his fellow UMP conservative as "irritable, rash, overconfident and allowing for no doubt, least of all regarding himself".

He praised Socialist Francois Hollande, tipped as Sarkozy's main rival if they stand in the 2012 election.

Some analysts suggest Chirac is taking revenge for perceived slights.

Sarkozy failed to support Chirac during the 1995 election which put him in office and, following his re-election in 2002, made

fun of the older man's love of Japan and sumo wrestling - a point raised in the memoirs.

He won the 2007 election, in which Chirac had to stand down because he had served two consecutive terms in office.

An Ifop opinion poll last summer suggested Chirac was France's most admired political figure, with Sarkozy placed just 32nd.

Volume II of Chirac's memoirs is due to be published next week but extracts have appeared in the French press.

"We do not share the same vision of France, we do not agree on the basics," Chirac writes in his book.



Jacques Chirac

Insurgents kill nine Afghan wedding guests

REUTERS, Jalalabad

Insurgents shot dead nine wedding guests and wounded five more in Afghanistan's turbulent east, local officials said yesterday, the latest attack on revellers who engage in what militants say is un-Islamic activity.

Ahmadzia Abdulzai, a spokesman for the governor of Nangarhar province, said the guests were shot dead in their sleep late on Wednesday after the wedding party in the Dur Baba district on the border with Pakistan.

The groom, his father and cousins were among the dead, district chief Haji Hamesha Gul said, adding that some were also his own relatives.

They were sleeping outside, common among Afghans in the hot summer months, when the gunmen opened fire, he said. There were no immediate claims of responsibility.

Though the Taliban denied responsibility, they have made it clear they oppose music and dancing.

IRAN NUKE PROGRAMME

World powers express deep concern

AFP, Vienna

World powers expressed "deeper concern" yesterday about the intention behind Iran's controversial atomic drive in face of its refusal to answer questions about possible military dimensions to the work.

A day after Iran announced it was expanding uranium enrichment -- the most sensitive part of its nuclear programme -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States expressed their concerns in a joint statement to a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-member board of governors here.

It was vital that Iran clarify the issues and provide "prompt access to a range of places, individuals, and information associated with the PMD issue," they said, referring to the possible military dimensions.

Earlier, the US ambassador to the IAEA, Glyn Davies, hit out at Iran's plans to triple its uranium enrichment capacity in defiance of multiple UN sanctions.



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