

Gaddafi to accept supervised polls

Son tells Russian envoy

AFP, Tripoli

Russian envoy Mikhail Margelov was in Tripoli yesterday seeking to mediate in Libya's conflict, as Muammar Gaddafi's son said the strongman is ready to accept internationally supervised elections.

Gaddafi's eldest son Seif al-Islam told an Italian newspaper that elections were the only way to break the stalemate.

"It's (elections) the only painless way to break out of the impasse in Libya," Seif told the daily *Corriere della Sera* correspondent in Tripoli.

"We could hold them within three months. At most by the end of the year. And the guarantee of transparency could be the presence of international observers," Seif was quoted yesterday by the paper as saying.

The elections, he added, could be

supervised by the European Union or African Union, the United Nations or even Nato as long as a "mechanism" was put in place to ensure there were "no suspicions of vote rigging."

"Let's go to the polls, and may the best man win," Seif told the reporter at a hotel in Tripoli.

Margelov, the Africa envoy of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, was meeting Libyan Prime Minister Baghdadi al-Mahmudi, Russia's Interfax news agency said.

Margelov's spokeswoman Varvara Paal told AFP in Moscow that the envoy during his one-day visit would meet the prime minister and the foreign minister but was not scheduled to meet Gaddafi.

Repeating Moscow's call for the Libyan leader to step down Margelov said: "Gaddafi is not inscribed in the future of Libya."

Last week, Margelov travelled to the Libyan rebel stronghold of Benghazi. He has said that Moscow would be prepared to offer a preliminary "roadmap" for settling the conflict.

At least five anti-Gaddafi rebels were killed and 30 wounded when they came under sniper attack in three villages they seized on Wednesday in western Libya, hospital sources said yesterday.

The attacks took place in the villages of Zawit Bagoul, Lawania and Ghannymma, the hospital sources told an AFP correspondent in the western town of Zintan.

The rebels overran the three villages on Wednesday as they sought control of a key junction connecting the towns of Yafran and Zintan.

Nato warplanes early yesterday destroyed an apparently empty hotel in the centre of the Libyan capital, an AFP journalist reported.



People take pictures of a burning vehicle on Wednesday in Vancouver, Canada. Vancouver broke out in riots after their hockey team the Vancouver Canucks lost in Game Seven of the Stanley Cup Finals.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia backs Ban for 2nd UN term

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday became the last permanent member of the Security Council to support UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's re-election, saying it would back his candidacy in a vote due later in the day.

"We are ready to support the candidacy of the esteemed Ban Ki-moon for a second term as UN Secretary General at yesterday's upcoming vote," Interfax quoted foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich as saying.

The 66-year-old former South Korean foreign minister has already received backing from the European Union, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay and Chile as well as UN Security Council members United States, China, France and Britain.

NEWS IN brief

E coli infected burgers: Six French children hospitalised

AFP, Lille

Six children were hospitalised in France with E coli infections after eating meat that manufacturers said could come from Germany, where an outbreak of the bacteria has killed 38 people.

The children, the youngest of whom is 20 months old, had eaten defrosted hamburgers made by the French company SEB which said the meat was taken from animals slaughtered in three European countries and processed in France.

US scandal-hit lawmaker

Weiner to step down



BBC ONLINE

US lawmaker Anthony Weiner told friends yesterday that he plans to resign his seat in Congress after an internet sex scandal, US media have reported.

Weiner cited pressure from his Democratic colleagues as the reason for his decision, the New York Times said. He has been under pressure after lying about a series of online chats with women in which he sent lewd photos.

Prince Harry could return to Afghanistan duty

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Harry has been given the green light to return to action in Afghanistan as an attack helicopter pilot, newspapers said yesterday.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) refused to confirm the reports in The Sun and the Daily Mirror, while the prince's office said the claim was "hypothetical" because the prince had not yet completed his training on the Apache helicopter.

Suspected suicide blast hits

Nigerian police HQ

AFP, Abuja

A powerful bomb blew up inside the Nigerian police headquarters yesterday, killing a suspected suicide bomber and wounding several bystanders, witnesses and officials said.

The blast tore into a police car park at the compound in the capital Abuja, throwing people to the ground and destroying several vehicles, they said.

If confirmed as a suicide blast, it would be the first such bombing in Nigeria as it faces a growing threat from Islamic militants, a security expert told AFP.

AUSTERITY CUTS
Greece set to
unveil new
cabinet

AFP, Athens

Two Greek government lawmakers quit yesterday over their party's unpopular austerity policies as PM George Papandreou was to name a new government to deal with the country's debt crisis.

George Floridis, a 55-year-old former deputy finance minister, announced his departure from the ruling party's parliamentary group and a 2nd deputy and frequent critic, 59-year-old Hector Nasiokas, announced his intention later in the day.

Both deputies had criticised the government's wage cuts and tax hikes, part of an adjustment effort mandated by the EU and the IMF in return for a massive loan rescue last year.

He declined to give the figure of initial investment, but said it would depend on different phases. The company has set aside \$160 million for the project as a bank guarantee.

Obama insists Libya action legal

White House issues a 30-page report to Congress

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama insisted yesterday that the current US military action in Libya was legal, rejecting rising criticism from Congress over the goals and justification of the operation.

In a 30-page report to lawmakers, the White House argued that US participation in the NATO-led assault on Muammar Gaddafi's forces did not require congressional authorization as the US role was only a supporting one.

The report said the US involvement in the UN-authorised operation did not rise to the kind of direct, offensive warfare that needed to be endorsed by lawmakers under the 1973 War Powers Resolution.

"US forces are playing a constrained and supporting role in a multinational coalition," the report said, noting that the use of force was being used solely to protect civilians, enforce a no-fly zone and an arms

embargo.

A senior administration official added: "we are not engaged in any of the activities that typically over the years in war powers analysis has been considered to constitute hostilities within the meaning of the statute."

The report also put US costs at \$715 million for military and humanitarian operations in Libya since unrest began in the north African country earlier this year and the projected price tag through September is about \$1.1 billion.

The document was compiled after House Speaker John Boehner sent a scathing letter to the president warning that US operations would be illegal come Sunday because they lacked formal congressional approval.

The War Powers Resolution gives presidents 60 days to get authorisation for a military deployment and, failing that, sets a further 30 days to withdraw them from harm's way.

Hackers shut down CIA website

BBC ONLINE

The hacker group Lulz Security claimed yesterday it has brought down the public-facing website of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

The alleged attack on CIA.gov occurred on the same day the group opened a telephone request line so its fans could suggest potential targets.

On its Twitter feed, the group wrote: "Tango down CIA.gov - for the lulz".

The CIA website was inaccessible at times on Wednesday but appeared to be back up yesterday.

LulzSec's claim could not immediately be verified.

It was unclear if the outage was due to the group's efforts or to the large number of internet users trying to check the site.

Portugal gets new PM

AFP, Lisbon

Pedro Passos Coelho was handed the task Wednesday of implementing a drastic austerity package for Portugal when the president named him as the new prime minister after his recent election win.

Passos Coelho, leader of the centre-right Social Democrat party (PSD), pledged he would quickly form a coalition government with the right-wing CDS-PP "to take stock of the urgent situation in the country."

There was no time to waste in tackling the country's economic woes, he said.

In the June 5 election, 46-year-old Passos Coelho dealt the Socialists, in power since 2005, their worst election defeat since 1987.

Since then, President Anibal Cavaco Silva has held talks with party leaders although there was never any real likelihood that anyone but the PSD would take charge.

Passos Coelho's main challenge will be to implement a programme of spending cuts and economic reforms Lisbon agreed last month in exchange for a 78-billion-euro (\$110-billion) bailout from the European Union and International Monetary Fund.

The official coalition agreement was scheduled to be signed at a public ceremony yesterday (Thursday), Passos Coelho told journalists shortly before the president's announcement.



Pedro Passos Coelho

ARAB UNREST
Russia, China warn West against interference

AFP, Moscow

Russia and China oppose outside interference in the unrest in the Arab world, the two presidents said yesterday in a declaration, as the West seeks their support for increasing pressure on Syria.

The sides believe that the search for settling the situation in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa should take place in the legal field and through political means," said the declaration signed by Presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Hu Jintao.

"Outside forces should not interfere in internal processes in the countries of the region."

Rather, the conflicts should be solved by "launching broad national dialogue about rebuilding stability and social order and the promotion of democratic and economic reforms," the statement said.

The two presidents also expressed concern over the situation in Libya, calling for an end to hostilities between the forces of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi and the rebels.

Russia has said it opposes 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.

Black holes tell tale of the infant Universe

AFP, Paris

Astronomers have detected faint X-ray signals that they believe were emitted by giant black holes billions of years ago when the Universe was a toddler, a study in the journal *Nature* said yesterday.

The probe looked at more than 250 galaxies, the farthest of which was 13 billion light years from Earth -- in other words, emissions that came only 700 million years or so after the "Big Bang" that created the cosmos.

The findings support the theory that super-sized black holes play a dual role of destruction and creation at the heart of galaxies, its authors said.

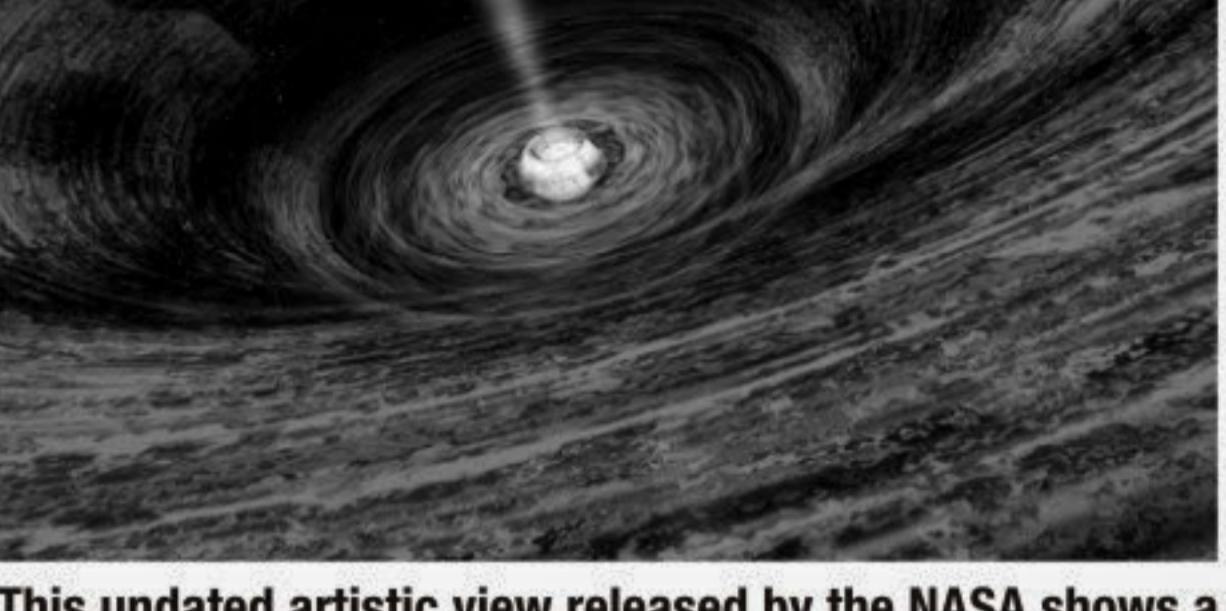
"These observations indicate that extremely massive black holes already existed as early as 700-800 million years after the Big Bang, which suggests that either they were born massive to start with, or they experienced rapid growth bursts," said Yale University cosmologist Priyamvada Natarajan.

"Either scenario tells us much more than we previously knew, which is very exciting."

The black holes were discovered indirectly, thanks to telltale high-energy X-ray signals which escaped through thick clouds of dust and gas in their host galaxies.

Ancient black holes have already been spotted in previous research, but this is the first wide-scale trawl to look across a range of galaxies.

Interesting-looking galaxies were selected from a scan of the skies by the Hubble Space Telescope. The search was then finetuned using another NASA orbital telescope, the Chandra X-Ray Observatory.



This undated artistic view released by the NASA shows a close-up of a supermassive black hole.

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AUSTERITY CUTS

Greece set to
unveil new
cabinet

AFP, Athens

Two Greek government lawmakers quit yesterday over their party's unpopular austerity policies as PM George Papandreou was to name a new government to deal with the country's debt crisis.

The government has made all improvements to the PSC so the arrangement serves the best interest of the country, the finance minister said.

ConocoPhillips Vice-President Lafferrandre said the company would give priority to safety and environmental issues during exploration work