

# France air drops arms to Libya rebels

AFP, Tripoli

France has air dropped arms to Libyan rebels in mountains south of Tripoli who are eyeing an assault on the capital, it said yesterday, a day after anti-regime forces captured a network of weapons caches.

But the increasingly emboldened rebels were under a deadly assault from veteran strongman Muammar Gaddafi's forces in the third-largest city Misrata, where rockets killed one civilian and wounded six late Tuesday, residents said.

In London, British Foreign Secretary William Hague said yesterday the cash-strapped rebels had received the first \$100 million from a fund set up by international donors.

France's *Le Figaro* daily said yesterday it had seen a secret intelligence memo and talked to well-placed officials, saying the air drops were designed to help rebels encircle Tripoli.

It said the arms were unloaded from planes above the Djebel Nafusa region, where Berber tribes have risen to join the revolt against Gaddafi's four-decade rule and seized several provincial towns.

Later yesterday, Colonel Thierry Burkhard, spokesman for the French general staff, told AFP the shipments were essentially light arms such as assault rifles to help civilian communities protect themselves from regime troops.

On Tuesday, rebels overcame heavy multiple rocket fire from loyalist troops to seize bunkers in the desert about 25 kilometres from the hill town of Zintan, an AFP correspondent said.

The capture of rockets, machine guns and other munitions was a major boost for rebel hopes of driving on to Tripoli from the front line on the other side of the Nafusa mountains, now just 50 kilometres from the capital.

In London, Hague told lawmakers the National Transitional Council (NTC), the rebel leadership based in the eastern city of Benghazi, had received in the past week the "first \$100 million of international funding through the temporary financing mechanism set up by the contact group for vital fuel and salaries."

In other developments Gaddafi's health minister, Mohammed Hijazi, was in Egypt yesterday to ask officials for medical supplies to meet shortages in Libya.



Non-Afghan soldiers leave after taking part in a military operation against Taliban militants that attacked the Intercontinental hotel in Kabul yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Taliban attack on Afghan hotel kills 21

AFP, Kabul

Heavily armed Taliban militants stormed a top Kabul hotel, sparking a ferocious battle involving Afghan commandos and a Nato helicopter gunship that left at least 21 dead including the nine attackers.

Officials said all of the gunmen were killed during the night-time raid on the hilltop Intercontinental Hotel, frequented by Westerners and Afghan officials, part of which was left in flames as tracer bullets lit up the sky.

The state-owned 1960s hotel was hosting delegates attending an Afghan security conference and a large wedding party when the insurgents struck.

Pakistani authorities and the government in Madrid said a Spanish man -- reportedly a pilot working for a Turkish airline -- was also killed at the hotel.

# Sudan parties sign Kordofan accord

AFP, Khartoum

The Sudanese government and the northern branch of the ex-rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed on Tuesday a deal to resolve their differences in the embattled border state of South Kordofan.

The agreement stipulates that "any disarmament shall be done in accordance with agreed upon plans and without resorting to force."

The SPLA from the two states are to be integrated into the northern army "over a period of time and with modalities to be agreed upon," or demobilised.

The issue of governance in Kordofan is also discussed and a formula is put forward to settle it within 30 days.

Heavy fighting has raged in South Kordofan since June 5 between government forces and militia aligned to the ex-rebel army the SPLA.

The conflict has dramatically escalated tensions between north and south prior to southern independence on July 9.

# Indian PM open to Rahul's succession

AFP, New Delhi

India's embattled prime minister indicated yesterday he was open to the idea of heir-apparent Rahul Gandhi succeeding him, even as he rejected criticism that he had become a "lame-duck" leader.

Asked about statements from senior members of his Congress party that the time may have come for 41-year-old Gandhi, the scion of India's Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, premier Manmohan Singh said he had no objection in principle.

"Personally, if you ask me, the general proposition that younger people should take over, I think, is the right sentiment," the 78-year-old told newspaper editors and the Press Trust of India, while indicating he had no plans to resign.

"Whenever the party makes up its mind, I will be very happy to step down, but so long as I am here, I have a job to do," he said.

Speaking to editors in an effort to revive his image, Singh also promised a cabinet reshuffle to infuse fresh energy into his administration, which has been hit by a series of high-profile corruption scandals. The reshuffle was a "work in progress", he said.

Gandhi is widely viewed as a leader-



Rahul Gandhi

in-waiting, but has so far avoided roles in the cabinet, preferring instead to focus on building up a youth movement of the ruling Congress party.

The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has ruled India for most of the post-independence era, providing three prime ministers. Rahul is the son of the current Congress president, Italian-born Sonia Gandhi.

Speculation that he might be poised to replace Singh has mounted in recent months, but the unmarried party US-educated politician -- known as the "prince" to his detractors -- has also made some missteps.

# Clashes with militants kill 30 troops in Yemen

AFP, Aden

A Yemeni air strike killed four civilians and wounded 12 near the militant-held southern city of Zinjibar yesterday as fighting on the ground left 30 soldiers and at least 14 militants dead.

The civilians were travelling in a convoy of vehicles that had left Zinjibar for the main southern city of Aden but was forced to stop when fighting erupted between government troops and the militants, witnesses said.

A colonel was among the 30 soldiers killed on the front line between the army and the militants, a military source said.

14 militants were also killed and several wounded in the battle.

More than 100 troops have been killed since the militants who call themselves Partisans of Sharia (Islamic law) seized control of most of Zinjibar on May 29.

# Pakistan can't afford to match India militarily

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan cannot afford to match the induction of modern weaponry by India, which possibly has a greater capacity to sustain a war, Pakistani Defence Minister Chaudhry Ahmad Mukhtar has said.

"If we only try to match them (India) militarily and buy the sort of armament which they have, we will probably not be able to afford it," Mukhtar said.

Explaining his contention, he noted that India's economy is "six to seven times bigger than" Pakistan's and its trade volumes were "five to six times greater."

"The capacity of India and Pakistan to fight was for 20 to 22 days. Now India has inducted a lot of armaments, may be they can last for 45 days, we will not be able to do so," Mukhtar said in an interview to BBC Urdu.

Mukhtar noted that the two countries were taking steps to improve relations in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

# Suu Kyi warned on political involvement

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's regime yesterday told pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to halt all political activities and warned her that plans for a first national tour since being freed could spark riots and chaos.

It is the first time since being released last year that the authorities have explicitly warned Suu Kyi to stay out of politics.

The state-run New Light of Myanmar reported that the home affairs ministry had informed Suu Kyi that her party was breaking the law by maintaining party offices, holding meetings and issuing statements.

"We are deeply concerned that if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi makes trips to countryside regions, there may be chaos and riots, as evidenced by previous incidents," the govt sources said.

No schedule has been announced for the democracy icon's trip around Myanmar

but her immediate response indicated she had no intention of cancelling the planned tour indefinitely.

# 5 lakh expat

FROM PAGE 1 Under the deal, government officials may go to factories where Bangladeshis work to register them. The two countries will also share information to crack down on traffickers who exploit Bangladeshi workers.

"The objective is to ensure that these people are not exploited either by human traffickers, syndicates or third parties," the minister said.

Malaysia announced last week that it will offer amnesty to those who come forward from July 11 for two weeks. Some will be able to keep their jobs, while others will be deported without facing such penalties as caning for overstaying.

The country remains on a US human trafficking watch list, according to the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which the State Department released this week.

"There remain many serious concerns regarding trafficking in Malaysia, including the detention of trafficking victims in government facilities," the report said.

Hishammuddin admitted Malaysia was still in the process of tackling the problem.

"I agree with them. I think we should still be on the watch list because we have only just rolled out these measures" such as fingerprinting workers, he said.

# Suranjit tells of 'some

FROM PAGE 1

In a report placed in the House on scrutinising the constitution amendment bill, Suranjit, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on law ministry, said he also had to go soft on religion based politics.

"I compromised for the greater good of the people although it seems contradictory [to other provisions of the constitution]," he said in a written statement tagged with the committee's report.

Committee member Fazle Rabbi Mia placed the report in parliament and read out the written statement on behalf of Suranjit.

In the statement, Suranjit

said he was a member of the constitution draft committee in 1972 and did not compromise on many issues at that time. He gave the note of dissent as his 24 proposals on constitution amendment were not accepted.

"But now, I understand politics is tough and complicated. I have witnessed the politics of fraudulence, cheating and farce," he said, adding that while working as the co-chair of the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment and chief of the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry he had to compromise on some issues.

Many eminent jurists, civil

society members and a few other political parties while participating in dialogues organised by the special committee had strongly demanded scrapping of the status of Islam as state religion to uphold secularism.

They also demanded constitutional ban on religion based politics. But the parliamentary special committee did not agree.

In consultation with the special committee, ruling Awami League chief and Prime minister Sheikh Hasina proposed maintaining Islam as the state religion and allowing political parties based on religion.

# Court accepts

FROM PAGE 1

additional secretary of the industries ministry Nurul Amin. Both of them are on the run. Nine other accused are now in jail.

The court ordered attachment of property of the two fugitives.

It directed the authorities to produce all accused before the court on August 1 and execute the order against the fugitives by the time.

Public Prosecutor Kamal Uddin Ahmad said that yesterday was the deadline for submitting the probe report of the further investigation into the cases and the investigation officer had already submitted the supplementary charge sheets.

After hearing and scrutinising the charge sheets, the court accepted the charges against the new accused, he added.

He also said the execution of arrest order against Paresh Barua would be carried out with the help of the foreign ministry since he is a foreign citizen.

On Sunday, the investigation officer of the cases Muniruzzaman, also CID senior assistant superintendent of police, submitted two separate supplementary charge sheets against 11 new suspects including former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami.

# Dhaka, Delhi want to settle

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signed during the visit. They said border dispute would be one of the key issues at the official talks when Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna pays a three-day visit to Dhaka from July 6. He is due to hold talks with his Bangladesh counterpart Dipu Moni on July 7.

Krishna's visit is likely to be followed by the visit of Indian Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram when the two sides are expected to finalise the draft of the border-related agreements.

Officials said Bangladesh and India are currently conducting a joint survey of un-demarcated border and adversely possessed territories, and headcount in 162 enclaves. The survey is expected to be completed before Palaniappan's visit.

Prior to Manmohan's

visit, Indian Water Resources Minister Salman Khurshheed will visit Dhaka in August.

Meanwhile, Indian Congress Party chief Sonia Gandhi will pay a two-day visit to Dhaka from July 24 to attend an international conference on autism.

According to the home ministry's estimates, Bangladesh has 3,000 acres of land inside India, 51 enclaves (7,000 acres of land) and 6.5 kilometres of un-demarcated border. Similarly, India has around 3,500 acres of land and 111 enclaves (17,000 acres of land) adversely possessed inside Bangladesh. If the enclaves are exchanged, Bangladesh will gain 10,000 acres of land.

Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh are situated in four districts -- Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nilphamari. All and of the

Bangladeshi enclaves are in Cooch Behar district of India's West Bengal state.

Of the 6.5 km un-demarcated border, 1.5 km is at Doykhata in Nilphamari district, 2 km at Muhurir char in Feni and 3 km at Lathitila in Moulvibazar. Bangladesh and India share a long international border of around 4,156 km.

Officials said both the sides are also conducting survey for installing boundary pillars along 35.5 km stretch of Bangladesh-India border. There are frequent disputes between the people and border guards of the two countries due to non-existence of such pillars.

Meanwhile, Indian Home Secretary GK Pillai told The Assam Tribune that Delhi is trying to settle all border disputes with Bangladesh by September

so that the entire international border can be fenced by the end of next year.

The Assam Tribune in its June 27 issue quoted Pillai as saying that the present level of cooperation between India and Bangladesh is very encouraging and Dhaka has already played a major role by removing the camps of ultras and nabbing the leaders of militant outfits.

The Indian home secretary said the pace of construction of fencing along the border with Bangladesh has been increased, and the government plans to resolve all border disputes to complete the task by the end of 2012.

He mentioned that although the fencing is put up 150 yards behind the zero line, in some patches, Delhi has been able to persuade Dhaka for the fencing right on the zero line.

# Iran tested nuke-capable missiles

Says Britain

AFP, London

Iran has carried out secret tests of ballistic missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload in breach of UN resolutions, British Foreign Secretary William Hague said yesterday.

Hague's comments came a day after Iran said they had fired 14 missiles in an exercise.

In a statement to lawmakers, Hague said: "Iran has also been carrying out covert ballistic missile tests and rocket launches, including testing missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload in contravention of UN resolution 1929."

Referring to Iran's plans to triple its capacity to produce 20 percent enriched uranium, he said Iran's claims of peaceful power are.

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