

Rebels offer Gaddafi safe exit if he quits

Plan Tripoli attack; Turkey recognises NTC

AGENCIES

Muammar Gaddafi is welcome to live out his retirement inside Libya as long as he gives up all power, Libya's rebel chief told Reuters yesterday in the clearest concession the rebels have so far offered.

Gaddafi has fiercely resisted all international calls for him to go and vowed to fight to the end, but members of his inner circle have given indications they are ready to negotiate with the rebels, including on the Libyan leader's future.

Gaddafi is still holding on to power, five months into a rebellion against his 41-year rule and despite a Nato bombardment and an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for crimes against humanity.

"As a peaceful solution, we offered that he can resign and order his soldiers to withdraw from their barracks and positions, and then he can decide either to stay in Libya or abroad," rebel leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil said in an interview.

"If he desires to stay in Libya, we will

determine the place and it will be under international supervision," said Jalil, who heads the rebels' National Transitional Council.

Meanwhile, buoyed by French arms drops and intensified Nato air strikes on the regime's frontline armour, Libya's rebel army said it is poised for an offensive that could put it within striking distance of Tripoli.

Rebel fighters are readying an advance out of their hilltop enclave in the Nafusa Mountains, southwest of Tripoli, in the next 48 hours in a bid to recapture territory in the plains on the road to the capital, spokesman Colonel Ahmed Omar Bani said.

South Africa, which has taken a lead role in mediation efforts, said that President Jacob Zuma would hold talks in Moscow today with representatives of the International Contact Group on Libya as well as Russian officials.

Turkey, meanwhile, recognised Libya's rebel council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people and vowed to do "everything" possible to end the fighting.



Members of the anti-Muslim Australian Protectionist Party (APP) protest outside the 'Uprising in the Muslim World' Khilafah Conference, 2011 in Sydney yesterday. Around a thousand Australian Muslims attended the conference hosted by the controversial Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir which called for the creation of a global caliphate or Islamic government.

PHOTO: AFP

Mideast peace quartet to meet July 11

AFP, Washington

Envoys from the Middle East diplomatic Quartet will meet in Washington on July 11, a senior US official said Saturday, ahead of a Palestinian bid to seek UN recognition of their state in September.

The United States had hesitated for months over organizing the meeting before securing substantial progress towards a return to negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States make up the Quartet on the Middle East.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton will participate in the meeting.

NEWS IN brief

Israel questions Jew spiritual leaders over 'racist' book

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli police briefly detained a rabbi yesterday over his endorsement of a controversial book that justifies the killing of non-Jews in certain circumstances, a police spokesman said.

The rabbi's detention and questioning of rabbi Yaakov Yosef, son of one of Israel's leading religious leaders, prompted his supporters to take to the streets in parts of Jerusalem, burning tyres and blocking the city's light railway.

The book, "The King's Torah", reportedly says babies and children of Israel's enemies may be killed in certain circumstances since "it is clear that they will grow to harm us."

It also says non-Jews are "uncompassionate by nature" and that attacks on them "curb their evil inclination."

Belarus blocks social media sites to check protests

AFP, Minsk

The authoritarian government of Belarus blocked access to popular social networking sites yesterday in an attempt to prevent opposition protests on a national holiday.

The respected rights group Vesna said the government also detained dozens of activists, including Stanislav Shushkevich, Belarus' first post-Soviet leader. Many other activists were called in by the KGB and warned not to protest, Vesna spokesman Valentin Stefanovich said.

The government is trying to contain swelling public discontent as Belarus suffers its worst financial crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union.

193 rhinos killed this year in South Africa

AFP, Johannesburg

Nearly 200 rhinos were killed in South Africa in the first half of 2011, with most slaughtered in the world-famous Kruger National Park, environmental group WWF said yesterday.

South Africa lost 193 rhinos in the first six months of the year, the group said in a statement. Last year a record 333 rhinos were killed in South Africa, which is home to about 70 percent of the world's rhino population.

Authorities have arrested 123 suspected poachers so far this year, with six convictions. But the stepped-up law enforcement efforts have yet to slow the slaughter.

Tropical Storm Arlene kills 16 in Mexico

AFP, Pachuca

At least 16 people were confirmed dead in Mexico after Tropical Storm Arlene drenched much of the country with heavy rains and left hundreds of thousands homeless, officials said Saturday.

The first named storm of the Atlantic season barreled ashore along Mexico's Gulf coast on Thursday, dumping several centimetres (inches) of rain in areas still recovering from last year's wettest season on record.

Much of the country was subjected to the foul weather including the capital Mexico City and its outskirts.

Some 278,000 people were left homeless or otherwise impacted by the storm, according to provisional tallies.

Hezbollah rejects Hariri warrant

AFP, Beirut

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah on Saturday ruled out the arrest of four members of his militant group indicted by a UN court for the 2005 assassination of Lebanese former premier Rafiq Hariri.

In his first reaction to charges filed by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, Nasrallah rejected the verdict along with "each and every void accusation" by the Netherlands-based STL, which he said was heading for a trial in absentia.

"No Lebanese government will be able to carry out any arrests whether in 30 days, 30 years or even 300 years," said the Shia leader whose group dominates the current government.

The STL on Thursday issued warrants against 4 Hezbollah members.

Mladic to boycott war crimes court



REUTERS, Amsterdam

Former Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic will boycott the UN war crimes court, where he is scheduled today to enter a plea against charges of genocide during the Bosnian war, his lawyer said.

Arrested in May after 16 years on the run, Mladic formally was charged by the Yugoslavia tribunal in The Hague last month when the defendant general rejected war crimes charges against him as "obnoxious" and "monstrous."

The 69-year-old career soldier is due to enter a plea today. "Mladic is not going to appear in the courtroom tomorrow unless he is forced to. He does not want to do it because he does not have his team of lawyers yet," Saljic told Reuters.

Mladic is accused over a campaign to seize territory for Serbs after Bosnia, following Croatia, broke away from the Yugoslav federation in the 1990s as the Balkan state broke up during five years of war that killed at least 130,000 people.

If Mladic boycotts the hearing or refuses to enter a plea at Monday's hearing, judge Alphens Orije will likely enter one of "not guilty" for him. It is unlikely that the tribunal would force Mladic to appear in court against his will.

"The tribunal has no official indication or confirmation that Mladic is not going to appear so I am unable to comment," court spokeswoman Nerma Jelacic said.

Pakistan's attitude towards terror 'altered'

Says Indian foreign secretary

PTI, New Delhi

Pakistan's attitude towards tackling terrorism has "altered", a "concrete" development that India should take note of, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao has said.

"I think the prism through which they see this issue has definitely been altered," Rao told Karan Thapar on "Devil's Advocate" programme on CNN-IBN.

She was replying to a question on whether India saw a change in Pakistan's attitude towards terrorism during the recently concluded Foreign Secretary-level talks.

Asked whether it was a positive development, Rao said it was an outcome that India must take note of.

"I think when they speak of the fact that non-state elements in this relationship need to be tackled, that we must look at safe havens and sanctuaries, that we must look at fake currency, we must look at all the aspects that are concerned with the business of terror, I think that is a concrete development," she said.

Rao, however, said she would not expect Pakistani officials to talk about the strategic link between the Pakistani state and militancy and terror.

Asked whether her Pakistani counterpart Salman Bashir accepted the revelations made by Mumbai attacks case accused David Headley in a Chicago trial court, Rao said the strategic link between the Pakistani state and militancy and terror needed to be broken.

STRAUSS-KAHN CASE Maid worked as hooker

PTI, New York

The Guinean maid, who accused former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn of sexual assault, was also working as a prostitute, a media report has claimed.

"The New York Post" reported that the 32-year-old maid at the Sofitel Hotel was doing double duty as a prostitute, collecting cash on the side from male guests.

"There is information... of her getting extraordinary tips, if you know what I mean," a source close to the defence investigation told The Post.

The woman also had "a lot of her expenses hair braiding, salon expenses -- paid for by men not related to her," the source said.

Strauss-Kahn, 62, was accused of forcing the maid to perform oral sex.

Palestinian Authority faces budget crisis

BBC ONLINE

The Palestinian Authority had to cut salaries paid to its civil servants by half as it faces a major budget shortfall, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said yesterday.

Fayyad called on "donors and our Arab brothers" to come to their aid, saying that international donors - notably Arab countries - had failed to deliver promised funding.

Donors had provided only \$330m of a total \$970 commitment for the year.

The authority has been relying on bank loans to tide it over until now.

However, in a recent report the World Bank noted that Palestinian borrowing was "unsustainable" - it was nearing its borrowing limit.

"Today is a day of crisis," said the prime minister in Ramallah yesterday.

Britain to review family immigration rules

AFP, London

Britain is to review the application of EU human rights rules that allow immigrants to bring their families into the country, the Home Office said yesterday.

The review will look at how Britain deals with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights which guarantees "the right to a family life".

The Sunday Telegraph newspaper reported the case of Peace Musabi who fled Burundi seeking asylum in Britain. She was given "indefinite leave to remain" after her files were lost and has now won permission to bring her three children into Britain under Article 8.

Her immigration status would not normally give her the right to bring dependants into Britain.

Prime Minister David Cameron's government took office in May 2010 vowing to sort out the giant backlog in asylum cases. He campaigned on returning net immigration figures to tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands.

In a keynote speech in April, Cameron said that Britain had seen its largest ever population influx under the Labour governments of premiers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Net immigration was at 2.2 million between 1997 and 2009.

He vowed to root out abuse of the system and get Britain's borders "under control" to take immigration off the agenda.

Immigration is a sensitive topic in Britain, following a surge in the last decade, regularly featuring high in opinion polls of voter concerns.



Taiwan city declares 'Lady Gaga Day'

AFP, Taichung

A city in Taiwan declared Sunday (yesterday) "Lady Gaga Day" as the pop diva's first visit to the island sparked a frenzy among dedicated fans and local media.

Lady Gaga, sporting a black and white wig, red trousers and a red dress with leopard-print sleeves, was given a key to Taichung city by the mayor at a ceremony attended by hundreds of enthusiastic supporters.

"On behalf of Taichung, I now declare today 'Lady Gaga Day'...which also belongs to all of her fans," mayor Jason Hu said.

The 25-year-old singer, ranked this year's most powerful celebrity by Forbes magazine, is among the most popular international entertainers in Taiwan.

China's monopoly on rare earth metals faces challenge

Survey finds "21st-century gold" on the Pacific floor

AFP, Paris

China's monopoly over rare-earth metals could be challenged by the discovery of massive deposits of these hi-tech minerals in mud on the Pacific floor, a study on yesterday suggests.

China accounts for 97 percent of the world's production of 17 rare-earth elements, which are essential for electric cars, flat-screen TVs, iPods, superconducting magnets, lasers, missiles, night-vision goggles, wind turbines and many other advanced products.

These elements carry exotic names such as neodymium, promethium and yttrium but in spite of their "rare-earth" tag are in fact abundant in the planet's crust.

Considering the difficulty of obtaining these metals, the 17 elements have sometimes been dubbed "21st-century gold" for their rarity and value.

Production of them is almost entirely centred on China, which also has a third of the world's reserves. Another third is held together by former Soviet republics, the United States and Australia.

But a new study, published in the journal Nature Geoscience, points to an extraordinary concentration of rare-earth elements in thick mud at great depths on the Pacific floor.

Japanese geologists studied samples from 78 sites covering a major portion of the centre-eastern Pacific between 120 and 180 degrees longitude.

The material had taken hundreds of millions of years to accumulate,

depositing at the rate of less than half a centimetre (0.2 of an inch) per thousand years.

But question is whether the technology exists for recovering the mud at such great depths -- 4,000 to 5,000 metres -- and, if so, whether this would be commercially viable.

The market for rare-earth elements has tightened considerably over the last couple of years.

China has slashed export quotas, consolidated the industry and announced plans to build national reserves, citing environmental concerns and domestic demand.

These moves led to a fall of 9.3 percent in China's exports of rare-earth metals last year, triggering complaints abroad of strategic hoarding and price-gouging.

Call for peace

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would be forced to put on veil or stopped from participating in sports or cultural activities.

"They [politicians] are rather siding with the social and religious leaders," said Irene Khan, former secretary general of Amnesty International, while delivering valedictory speech at the closing of two-day conference of South Asian Women Network (SWAN) at the city's BIAM Auditorium.

Over 70 South Asian rights activists, development experts and academics attended the event titled "Women of South Asia and the Green Economy" that discussed various aspects of women empowerment and equitable development.

Women are the most marginalised despite the

fact that they make immense contribution to every sphere of life. Women in South Asia get almost half the wage the men get, she said.

In the last three years, average income of men in India increase by 26 percent, while of women three percent. In Pakistan men's it increased by 17 percent, while for women one percent during 2003-06. Thus inequality between men and women keep growing, she said.

Citing a UN report of last year, she said South Asia is in the second worst position in gender inequality measures. Half the adult women in the region are illiterate, while life expectancy of women is five years less than that of the men though women live

longer for biological reasons.

Referring to domination of personal laws over criminal laws in Bangladesh, Irene Khan said in many of the cases the women who are victims of violence do not go to criminal courts in fear that they will not get justice.

In Bangladesh, the constitution recognises women as equal citizens. In reality, however, women are second class at homes, she said urging women organisations to address the issue strongly.

SWAN Convenor Prof Veena Sikri and Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam also spoke at the closing of the two-day conference.