

Nato accused of aiding rebels' Tripoli push

Fighting rages in plains south of the regime stronghold

AGENCIES, Tripoli

A senior Libyan official yesterday accused Nato of intensifying its bombing campaign and backing foreign mercenaries to lay the groundwork for an advance by rebels trying to topple Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim told The Associated Press in an early morning interview that the alliance's increased bombings represent the "final phase" of the air campaign. But he said the push will fail and that civilians will be the ones to pay the price.

The intensified campaign, he said, is focused on targeting civilian infrastructure and police checkpoints, and providing additional weapons to rebel fighters.

Kaim also said Libyan forces have evidence that Colombian mercenaries

funded by the West and its Arab allies have joined the rebel fighters trying to advance toward the capital Tripoli from the western rebel-held city of Misrata.

Nato began airstrikes against Libya in March. The coalition and its Arab allies are operating under a UN mandate to protect civilians.

Some countries in the coalition have interpreted that mandate broadly, with France acknowledging it has provided weapons to rebels operating in the mountains and other countries providing non-lethal aid to rebel-held areas.

Meanwhile, rebels pressed ahead yesterday with day two of a Nato-backed offensive after seizing a desert hamlet some 50 kilometres from Tripoli.

At the same time, insurgents said forces from their western coastal enclave of Misrata had pushed to within a short distance of Zlitan, some

60 kilometres further west, with 20 killed on both sides.

Reinforced with French weapons parachuted into the North African country and backed by Nato-led air strikes aimed at destroying Gaddafi's frontline armour, the rebels attacked regime forces in the plains southwest of the capital.

The area targeted by that offensive is seen as strategic as it also features the garrison city of Gharyan, a government stronghold in the Nafusa mountains.

"We waited before launching this assault and finally got the green light from Nato... and the offensive began," a rebel leader in Zintan, a hill town, said on Wednesday.

An AFP correspondent embedded with the rebels said there were intense exchanges of artillery, mortar and cannon fire with government troops dug in around Gualish.



PHOTO: AFP

South Sudanese dancers practice their routine in Juba yesterday two days before South Sudan secedes from the north and becomes the world's newest nation.

South Sudan ratifies new constitution

US to keep UN troops in South Kordofan

AFP, Juba

South Sudan's legislative assembly has ratified the nation-in-waiting's new constitution, the information minister said yesterday, denying that it put too much power in the president's hands.

"The new constitution is out," Barnaba Marial Benjamin told AFP.

Benjamin insisted that the people of the country had been widely consulted on the constitution and rejected suggestions that it concentrated too much power in the hands of the president.

There has been some controversy in the run-up to the fledgling nation's full independence on Saturday, about the draft transitional constitution with many complaining that non-government figures had been excluded from the consultation process.

Meanwhile, maintaining a UN peace-keeping presence in the disputed northern Sudan state of South Kordofan state is "vital" to peace and humanitarian efforts, the United States said yesterday.

Washington's UN envoy Susan Rice also said the United States was "extremely concerned" by Khartoum's decision to force the departure of the UN mission on July 9, the day south Sudan officially gains its independence from Sudan after decades of war.

Civil society groups have warned that it could tighten the grip on power of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the ruling party of the south.

On Saturday, the Carter Centre, a monitoring group set up by former US president Jimmy Carter, repeated that warning.

"The current draft of the transitional constitution contains a number of provisions that appear likely to concentrate power in the central government," a statement said.

South Sudan's president Salva Kiir is expected to sign the constitution during Saturday's independence ceremony.

A draft version of the constitution caused separate controversy in April for stating that the contested border region of Abyei was a part of the south's territory.

Killings in Syria 'must stop'

Says UN chief

AFP, Geneva

UN chief Ban Ki-moon called yesterday on the Syrian regime to stop the killings in its crackdown on anti-government protests, stressing that "we cannot go on like this."

"In Syria meanwhile, the killing continues. This must stop," said the UN secretary-general.

"I call on the Syrian leadership to deliver on its commitments and to allow our UN humanitarian assessment team and the human rights fact-finding mission mandated by the Human Rights Council in," he said.

Human rights groups say that more than 1,300 civilians have been killed since anti-regime protests started nearly four months ago.

China rejects Jiang Zemin's death reports

AFP, Beijing



Jiang Zemin

China's official media yesterday strongly denied the reports claiming former president Jiang Zemin had died after days of intense speculation about his health.

Hong Kong broadcaster ATV announced late Wednesday that Jiang had died, citing unspecified sources and giving no details. It said it would air a special one-hour programme on Jiang but later cancelled the broadcast.

The Japanese daily Sankei Shimbun also reported early yesterday that Jiang had died in Beijing, quoting "a source involved in Japan-China relations."

The state-run Xinhua news agency quoted "authoritative sources" in its report quashing the rumours but gave no other immediate details.

Speculation the 84-year-old was seriously ill emerged on Friday when he failed to appear at celebrations marking the 90th anniversary of the Communist Party.

On Wednesday, searches for his name and other terms such as "myocardial infarction" and "condolences" on the popular Twitter-like Weibo service were blocked, in an indication censors were stopping information from leaking out.

China routinely censors online content it deems politically sensitive.

NEWS IN brief

Police frees children killing hostage-taker

AFP, Muar, Malaysia

Malaysian police yesterday shot in the head a man who took 30 pre-school children and four teachers hostage at a kindergarten, ending a dramatic seven-hour standoff.

Authorities said all the children and their teachers were rescued unharmed after a sharpshooter ended the crisis in southern Malaysia with a single shot after a team of elite police stormed the building.

Police had to take action after numerous attempts to secure a surrender -- from police negotiators, a local psychiatrist, and desperate family members -- all failed.

400 arrested in Belarus protest

AFP, Minsk

Belarusian authorities arrested about 400 people in the latest country-wide opposition protests against President Alexander Lukashenko's regime, rights group Vyasna said yesterday.

The protests went ahead on Wednesday evening in several cities in response to a call on Internet group "Revolution through the Social Network", the sixth such rally in a month.

At least 180 people were arrested in Minsk and 220 in other regional centres, Vyasna said in a statement.

Russia bans opposition from travel

AFP, Moscow

Two prominent Kremlin critics said yesterday they had been barred from leaving Russia over a pamphlet attacking a billionaire gas trader and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Former minister Boris Nemtsov and his political ally Vladimir Milov said they had learned of the decision by telephone Wednesday while attending a human rights panel in Brussels.

The decision was immediately condemned by European Parliament lawmakers and resulted in another sharp diplomatic exchange in which the foreign ministry accused the EU of interfering in Russia's domestic affairs.

Lebanon govt wins confidence vote

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's government won a vote of confidence in parliament yesterday, as the prime minister vowed his cabinet would cooperate with a UN-backed court charging Hezbollah members in the 2005 murder of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri.

Moments after the pro-Western opposition walked out, Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Hezbollah-dominated government secured 68 out of a possible 128 votes in parliament, where the Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah and its allies hold a slight majority.



PHOTO: AFP

Participants run in front of fighting bulls during the first San Fermin Festival bull run yesterday in northern Spain. The festival is a symbol of Spanish culture that attracts thousands of tourists to watch the bull runs despite heavy condemnation from animal rights groups.

Canada ends Afghanistan mission

AFP, Kandahar

Canada ended its combat mission in Afghanistan yesterday, closing the curtain after nine years and the death of 157 men, saying it was "extremely proud" of gains made against the Taliban.

The departure of nearly 3,000 troops, who took on some of the heaviest fighting in the southern province of Kandahar, comes as Western forces begin to announce gradual drawdowns of troops ahead of a full withdrawal in 2014.

After spending more than \$11 billion dollars on the war and with popular support sapped at home, most of the nearly 3,000 Canadian soldiers have packed up and gone home.

Canadian soldiers first deployed to Afghanistan in early 2002.

Yemen VP presents new transition plan

Saleh makes first appearance after attack

AGENCIES

Yemen's acting leader has put forward a new plan to end the country's political stalemate, which would keep President Ali Abdullah Saleh in power longer than outlined in earlier initiatives, an opposition source said yesterday.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, his face burned and his hands covered with bandages, appeared on television yesterday for the first time since he was wounded in a bomb attack on his palace in Sanaa.

Saleh, who has been hospitalised in Saudi Arabia since the June 3 attack, was barely recognisable and sat stiffly as he spoke in the pre-recorded statement broadcast on Yemeni television.

He said he had undergone "more than eight successful operations from the burns sustained



Ali Abdullah Saleh (before and after the blast)



in the accident" and called for dialogue.

Saleh thanked Vice President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi "for his efforts in bridging gaps between all political parties" in Yemen.

The speech lasted only a few minutes and was followed by

footage of fireworks lighting up the sky in Yemen.

A Gulf Arab initiative that would have seen Saleh resign 30 days after signing it fell through three times when he backed out at the last minute, leaving the country in political limbo.

An opposition leader said Vice President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who is at the helm while Saleh recovers in Riyadh, had approached the opposition with an alternative to the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) initiative.

Malaysia trips

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The ministry will also request the Malaysian high commission in Dhaka to verify the documents of visa seekers critically, noted the minister.

Under the amnesty declared last month, Malaysia will start registering the irregular migrants on July 18, which was earlier scheduled for July 11.

The authorities will issue work visas to them in three months. Of a total 5 lakh Bangladeshi workers, around 3 lakh would be regularised.

According to Mosharraf, some unscrupulous brokers and travel agencies are sending jobseekers as tourists and students. They would be in serious troubles as Malaysia is preserving biometric records of all the passengers on arrival.

The records would enable them to cross-check data and detect any fraudulence during the registration of the

workers. This could ultimately invite danger for Bangladesh's labour market there, observed the minister.

He maintained the SB has prevented around 500 Malaysia-bound tourists from boarding planes in the last six months.

The meeting decided to warn the 23 listed travel agencies, involved in visa processing, about passengers going to Malaysia as tourists and students, said an official of the civil aviation and tourism ministry.

The ministry will also ask the airlines operating Dhaka-Malaysia flights to be cautious in issuing boarding cards to students and tourists, he added.

Officials from foreign and home ministries, SB of police and Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training attended the meeting, chaired by Khandker Mosharraf Hossain.

World set to miss UN hunger reduction goal: Report

AFP, Geneva

The world is on course to miss United Nations hunger reduction targets set in 2000, despite successes in curbing extreme poverty, a UN report said yesterday.

In 2000, the world body's 192 member states launched eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015 and the 2011 progress report showed mixed results on the first target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

The first key goal includes halving the proportion of people who are undernourished but the figure has only dropped from 20 percent in 1990 to 16 percent and has been stagnating for years.

The alarming trend on hunger reduction comes as the Horn of Africa is experiencing what the UN has described as its "worst drought in 60 years", affecting some 10 million people.

The UN progress report expressed concern over the fact that the proportion

of people going hungry worldwide was not dropping dramatically despite a significant reduction of extreme poverty was being achieved.

It added the UN's food agency would undertake a sweeping policy review this year.

The UN took heart in the fact that sustained growth in some developing countries, particularly in Asia, looked set to help the world meet the target of halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.

Despite the economic and financial crises, "current trends suggest that the momentum of growth in the developing world remains strong enough to sustain the progress needed to reach the global poverty-reduction target."

The global poverty rate is projected to fall below 15 percent by 2015, significantly below the target of 23 percent, said the UN, citing data from the World Bank.

ETHNO-POLITICAL VIOLENCE Gunmen kill 10 more in Karachi

Death toll rises to 49 in 3 days of clashes

AFP, Karachi

At least 10 passengers were killed and 20 injured when armed men opened fire on two buses in Pakistan's port city of Karachi, officials said.

"Unknown armed men intercepted two buses on a road in Banaras Chowk neighbourhood and shot indiscriminately on the passengers, killing at least 10 and wounding 20 others," provincial home ministry official, Sharfuddin Memon, told AFP.

He said identity of the attackers -- who escaped via the narrow lanes of the neighbourhood after the assault -- was not immediately known.

At least 49 people have been killed so far in the Pakistan's biggest city in a third consecutive day of bitter violence blamed on political and ethnic tensions, officials said.

Ambulances had been racing through the city's troubled areas all day, ferrying bodies and the injured to hospitals.

The killings have been blamed on loyalists of former coalition partners the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP), which represent different ethnic communities and straddle volatile political fault-lines.

Accidents in China coal mines kill 8

AFP, Beijing

Nearly 70 miners were trapped underground and at least eight have died in a spate of mining accidents that have jolted China's dangerous mine industry in recent days, state media reported yesterday.

Four miners were killed in a gas explosion in a mine in western-most China's Xinjiang region yesterday, with one seriously injured, Xinhua news agency said.

Meanwhile the death toll in a flooded mine in south China's Guangxi province rose to four, with 18 still trapped inside, Xinhua said in a separate report.

China's coal mines have a notoriously poor safety record.