

# Seized Iran arms blow up in Cyprus

12 dead, 62 injured

AFP, Mari

Huge blasts in a seized Iranian arms cache at a Greek Cypriot naval base in southern Cyprus killed at least 12 people yesterday, triggering power and water outages at the height of the summer.

In what Commerce Minister Antonis Paschalides called a "tragedy of Biblical dimensions" for the small Mediterranean island, the explosions devastated the adjacent Vassiliko power station.

The plant accounts for almost 60 percent of supply.

The blasts also caused massive damage to homes in the nearby village of Mari, forcing the evacuation of its population of 150 people, its mukhtar or headman, Nikos Asprou, told AFP.

Government spokesman Stefanos Stefanou said 62 people were injured, two of them seriously, announcing three days of official mourning with flags on state buildings to be flown at half-mast.

Defence Minister Costas Papacostas and Greek Cypriot National Guard commander Petros Tsaliklides resigned over the blasts at an emergency cabinet meeting, Stefanou said.

The defence ministry had held talks last week about the storage conditions after National Guard chiefs reportedly expressed concerns about them being kept in the open as temperatures touched 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

"Decisions were taken on protecting the material but unfortunately this was not possible as time ran out," Stefanou said, promising a "thorough investigation".

The official CNA news agency said the death toll of 12 killed could rise as a number of people were posted as missing at the blast site which had been reduced to scorched earth.

Firefighters were called to tackle a small fire in the storage area at 4:24 am (0124 GMT) and the explosions followed at 5:50 am (0250 GMT), according to public radio.



Smoke billows from a destroyed power station in Mari yesterday after huge blasts in a seized Iranian weapons cache at a nearby Greek Cypriot naval base in the south of the Mediterranean island killed at least 12 people, state media said.

## VOLGA BOAT ACCIDENT Rescuers raise nearly 50 bodies

AFP, Kamskoye Ustye

Russian rescuers recovered nearly 50 bodies yesterday from an overcrowded pleasure boat that sank in the Volga River in an accident the Kremlin blamed on disregard for safety.

Divers reported raising 49 bodies off the vessel, the Bulgaria, which went down in a heavy storm on Sunday on one of Russia's main rivers with 208 people on board.

Only 80 people were rescued in the first moments after the accident and no one was found alive yesterday.

President Dmitry Medvedev proclaimed Tuesday a day of national mourning and demanded a complete review of all Russian transport.

## NEWS IN brief

### Turkish opposition lawmakers take parliamentary oath

AFP, Ankara

Lawmakers from Turkey's main opposition party took the parliamentary oath yesterday, ending a row with the ruling party over the detention of several deputies elected in June's polls from behind bars.

The Republican People's Party (CHP), which holds 135 seats in the 550-member legislature, had boycotted the opening ceremony of the parliament in June along with Kurdish deputies in protest at the imprisonment of the elected lawmakers.

The CHP and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) issued a joint statement yesterday, calling on all deputies who had refused to take the oath to be sworn in and participate in parliamentary work.

### South Sudan to become UN member this week

AFP, United Nations

South Sudan, which declared its independence on Saturday, will become the 193rd member state of the United Nations this week, the UN said yesterday.

According to the Journal of the United Nations, the Security Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Admissions was to hold a closed meeting later yesterday on South Sudan's admission.

On Wednesday, the Security Council considers a resolution recommending the admission of South Sudan, accompanied by a short statement by the Security Council president, German Foreign Affairs minister Guido Westerwelle.

There will also be a debate in which the country's new president, Salva Kiir, will take part.

Thursday, the UN General Assembly will meet in the morning to formally announce South Sudan's membership.

South Sudan's request for UN admission arrived over the weekend, according to one Western diplomat.

### Ambush, bombs raise tension in Thailand's restive south

REUTERS, Yala, Thailand

A married couple died in an ambush by suspected Muslim militants in Thailand's deep south yesterday and four bombs wounded 12 people in what one analyst said might be a signal by separatists to incoming Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra.

Police said a rubber tapper and his wife died of multiple gunshot wounds when they were ambushed while travelling on a motorcycle in Narathiwat province.

In nearby Yala province, three booby traps went off in quick succession at a rubber plantation, the first blowing off the leg of a rubber tapper and the other two wounding security and bomb disposal officers sent to the scene.

## China's top general criticises US exercises

AFP, Beijing

China's top military officer said yesterday the timing of US naval exercises in the South China Sea was "inappropriate," after talks with his US counterpart aimed at cooling the territorial dispute.

General Chen Bingde urged the US to be "more modest and prudent in words and deeds", amid growing tensions over China's claims in the strategic and potentially resource-rich region, and also criticised Washington over its military spending.

He accused the US of "placing too much pressure on taxpayers" in the wake of the economic crisis, in unusually provocative remarks before a foreign visitor.

"On various occasions, the US side has expressed that it does not have the intention to intervene in the disputes in the South China Sea," Chen told reporters after meeting Admiral Mike Mullen in Beijing.

"However, we are observing the latest joint



General Chen Bingde

exercises between the US and other countries, for example the Philippines and Vietnam.

"We acknowledge that those exercises were there in the past, however the timing of these joint exercises is inappropriate as we see it."

The Philippines recently finished 11 days of naval exercises with the United States close to the South China Sea, although both sides emphasised the event was held annually and aimed at deepening defence ties.

Vietnam and the United States are to hold joint naval activities this month, with the US Navy again saying they are long-planned and unconnected to recent tensions.

Mullen is the first chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff to visit China since 2007.

In a joint press conference, Chen said the pair had "found a lot of common ground", but that there were still "different opinions on certain issues," and accused the United States of spending too much on its military.

## LIBYA WAR Rebels battle to keep grip on hamlet

AFP, Gualish

Libyan rebels said yesterday they clashed with forces loyal to Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi in the vicinity of Gualish, a desert hamlet southwest of Tripoli.

"There is a battle in the mountain of Zarat, near Kikla (about 15 kilometres) north of Gualish," said Wael Brashen who commands a small rebel unit in the area.

Meanwhile, Tripoli is negotiating a way out of the Libyan crisis with France not with its rebel foes, the son of Gaddafi said in an interview published yesterday.

Seif Al-Islam also cited intelligence reports indicating that France is sending airborne troops to western Libya to fight alongside the rebels and attack Tripoli.

"We are in fact holding real negotiations with France and not with the rebels," he said during the interview with the Algerian daily El Khabar.

## Murdoch urged to drop BSKyB bid amid scandal

AFP, London

Britain's Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg urged Rupert Murdoch yesterday to scrap his bid for satellite broadcaster BSKyB amid the tabloid phone-hacking scandal engulfing the media baron's empire.

Australian-born Murdoch is in London to take personal charge of dealing with the furore that forced the closure of the populist News of the World, Britain's biggest-selling weekly newspaper.

The government had looked set to decide in coming days on whether Murdoch's News Corporation should take full control of BSKyB by acquiring the 61 percent it does not already own, but now faces calls to delay the ruling.

Clegg, the Liberal Democrat party leader, called on Murdoch to "reconsider" the bid, saying it would be "decent and sensible" to do so.

Rupert Murdoch is now in town in London seeking to sort things out," Clegg told BBC television after meeting the parents of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler, who was allegedly targeted by the hacking.

"I would simply say to him: look how people feel about this; look how the country has reacted with revulsion to the revelations. So do the decent and sensible thing and reconsider; think again about your bid for BSKyB."

His call comes as Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt consulted media and fair trading watchdogs to see whether their advice to him on the takeover still stood following the hacking scandal.

The News of the World had been dogged by allegations of voicemail hacking for years. A royal reporter and a private investigator were jailed in 2007.



Rupert Murdoch

## INDIAN TRAIN WRECK Death toll tops 68

PTI, Fatehpur

The death toll in the Sunday's train accident near Malwan station on the Howrah-Delhi Grand Chord in Fatehpur district went up to 68 with 30 more bodies, including that of a Swedish national, being recovered from the mangled compartments of the ill-fated Delhi-bound Kalka Mail.

"68 bodies have been recovered so far. 259 people are undergoing treatment at a hospital here," Fatehpur Superintendent of Police Ram Bharose said. The deceased include 14 women.

Sandeep Mathur, Chief Public Relations Officer of North Central Railway, said in Allahabad that two Swedish nationals were among the dead.

## Mobs storm US, French embassies in Syria

AFP, Damascus

Angry mobs stormed the American and French embassies in Syria yesterday, after the two Western envoys visited the city of Hama, a flashpoint for protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The foreign ministry in Paris said three French staff were wounded in the embassy attack, while a US official said "no staff were injured."

Guards at the French embassy had to fire three warning shots, the foreign ministry said.

As Syrian security forces looked on, Assad supporters smashed their way into the compound with a battering ram, broke windows and destroyed the ambassador's car, according to a spokesman in Paris.

An AFP photographer at the scene said several windows in the French embassy were broken and Syrian flags were raised. "A car belonging to an embassy staffer was damaged and a picture of the Syrian president was stuck on it," he said.

The US embassy official told AFP: "Today there was an attack by a mob on the US embassy," adding the crowd caused some damage to the mission.

Yesterday's embassy attacks come four days after US Ambassador Robert Ford and his French counterpart Eric Chevallier visited the central city of Hama, 210 kilometres (130 miles) north of Damascus, sparking outrage in the capital.

Their visits took place amid fears of a bloody crackdown after Friday prayers the next day by Assad's forces, with tanks encircling the city.

## Japan idled reactors could restart after stress test

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's idled nuclear reactors could restart work if they pass the first stage of two-step post-Fukushima safety checks, the government said yesterday.

Still, without a timeframe for the tests, concerns remain about summer power shortages that could hurt the economy.

Last week's surprise announcement that the government would conduct stress tests

alarmed corporate Japan and outraged some local authorities, who had been prepared to approve reactor restarts after receiving safety assurances from the government.

The first stage of the stress tests will target reactors which have already completed routine checks and are ready for restart. The checks will assess resistance to severe earthquakes and other events more extreme than those for which they were designed.

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## SEA BORDER MOVE

## Lebanon warns Israel

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's president yesterday warned Israel against "unilateral decisions" in the demarcation of a shared maritime border, as a feud over offshore gas reserves between the two states deepens.

"President Michel Sleiman warns against any unilateral decisions Israel may take on maritime borders which would be a breach of international law, as is Israel's habit," Sleiman's office said in a statement.

Sleiman also said the issue would be up for talks at the first meeting of Lebanon's new government.