

UN court jails ex-Yugoslav army chief

AFP, The Hague

A UN court yesterday sentenced ex-Yugoslav army chief Momcilo Perisic to 27 years in jail for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including for his role in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

Judges found Perisic, 67, guilty of 12 of the 13 charges levelled against him, including for his role in the 1992-95 siege of Bosnian capital Sarajevo, the shelling of Zagreb by Croatia Serbs in May 1995—and the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995.

Chief of the Yugoslav army's general staff between 1993 and 1998, Perisic gave personnel, officers, weapons and logistical support to the Bosnian Serb army as well as the self-proclaimed republic of Krajina's army, knowing it would be used to wage war against Muslim civilians, the judge said.

Bosnian Serb forces murdered some 8,000 Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in Europe's worst atrocity since World War II.

Talks on for surrender of Gaddafi bastion

Gaddafi rumoured in Niger

AFP, Wishtata

Libya's new authorities launched a fresh bid yesterday to stave off a battle in Bani Walid, one of Muammar Gaddafi's last bastions, amid speculation the toppled strongman has crossed into Niger.

Gaddafi's spokesman, Moussa Ibrahim, insisted his boss is still in Libya ready with his sons to fight to the death, even as rumours swirled that the fugitive dictator had fled in a military convoy during the night.

Representatives of Bani Walid, southeast of Tripoli, urged Libya's new leaders to declare a general amnesty, saying that the Wishtata meeting had cleared the suspicions of its people.

"We are here to spare bloodshed," a Bani Walid leader, Sheikh Abdel Qadir Mayad, told the gathering, even as NTC fighters took up forward positions ready to storm the town.

"Bani Walid has reached the stage where they realise the previous system is over. Bani Walid is with Libya, it is not an exception," said the sheikh.

Officials meanwhile told AFP that a 200-vehicle convoy had crossed during the night

into Niger and was on Tuesday heading towards the capital Niamey.

The convoy drove through the city of Agadez, a stronghold of the former Tuareg rebellion the ousted Libyan leader once supported, a Niger military source said on condition of anonymity.

The new Libyan leadership in Tripoli simply confirmed it knew of a convoy crossing into Niger.

Niger Foreign Minister Mohamed Bazoum was adamant the ousted Libyan leader was not in the convoy.

No clashes were reported on Monday in Kadhaifi's hometown of Sirte or the southern oases of Sabha and Al-Jufra.

However, Nato said its warplanes had on Monday bombed a military radar site, a command and control bunker, four armed vehicles, for surface to air missile systems and two "military settlements" at Sirte.

An AFP correspondent said forces of the new regime on Tuesday disarmed a pro-Gaddafi tribe east of Sirte, seizing 150 light weapons.

The operation was launched at dawn by fighters of the "Zintan Martyrs' Brigade" deployed in the Umm Khunfis frontline district some 100 kilometres east of Sirte.

Turkey freezes all ties with Israel

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a total freeze on military and trade ties with Israel yesterday and threatened to visit Gaza as the one-time allies' diplomatic spat intensified.

As Israel insisted that it wanted to avoid relations becoming even worse, Erdogan declared a suspension to all military and commercial links.

And despite pleas from top diplomats at the weekend to end their row over last year's attack on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla, the prime minister risked further offence by berating Israel for behaving like "a spoilt child".

Last week, Turkey announced that the Israeli ambassador Gaby Levy was being expelled and all bilateral military agreements were suspended as it angrily rejected the findings of a United Nations probe into the deadly flotilla raid.

Now in his first official reaction since that announcement, Erdogan went even further.

"We are totally suspending our trade, military, defence industry relations," he told reporters.

"Further sanctions" against Israel would follow, he added. Once Israel's closest friend in the Muslim world, Turkey has been increasingly critical of the Jewish state since Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

There was widespread outrage in May last year when eight Turkish nationals and an American of Turkish descent died on the Mavi Marmara, the lead ship of the six-vessel convoy taking aid to the Palestinian territory of Gaza, in a raid by Israeli special forces in international waters.

A new UN report has criticised the "excessive" force in the raid but also angered the Palestinians by upholding Israel's right to impose a naval blockade on Gaza to prevent arms reaching the Islamist movement Hamas.

NEWS IN brief

Sonia Gandhi to return India soon

REUTERS, New Delhi

Sonia Gandhi, the head of India's ruling Congress party, is expected home soon after surgery in the United States, providing welcome news for a government accused of mishandling the biggest protests in decades and worsening ties with parliamentary allies.

Indian media said Gandhi, 64, India's most powerful politician who has been absent for a month with an undisclosed illness, could be back in Delhi by Tuesday night.

Broadcaster NDTV, citing Congress party sources, said the Italian-born Gandhi was expected to return to the capital yesterday, but it was not clear when she would return to work.

Israeli missiles to protect S Korea border

AFP, Seoul

South Korea has reached a deal to buy precision-guided missiles from an Israeli company to protect islands near the tense sea border with North Korea, a report said yesterday.

Yonhap news agency said about 50 Israeli missiles would be deployed on two islands in the Yellow Sea, probably late next year. The defence ministry refused to confirm the report.

The missile developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defence System uses global positioning system (GPS) technology and is capable of hitting North Korean artillery hidden in mountain caves, Yonhap said.

Al-Qaeda kill 4 Yemeni soldiers

AFP, Aden

Four Yemeni soldiers were killed and 15 others wounded yesterday as the military advanced on a southern Yemeni city held by suspected al-Qaeda militants, a military official said.

The fierce fighting erupted early yesterday morning on the outskirts of Zinjibar, the capital of the restive southern Abyan province.

Meanwhile, residents said that gunmen were seen fleeing Zinjibar to the neighbouring province of Shabwa, another al-Qaeda stronghold.

The clashes came just a day after the Yemeni airforce struck a mosque and a hospital in the nearby town of Jaar, killing at least seven civilians and an unknown number of al-Qaeda operatives.

Cash-for-Vote Scam Ex-MP held in India

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police yesterday arrested a high-profile lawmaker for allegedly bribing MPs to support the government in a crucial confidence vote three years ago.

The arrest of Amar Singh in the so-called "cash-for-votes" case could mean fresh troubles for the besieged Congress-led government, which has been shaken by a series of graft scandals.

Singh, 55, is accused of bribing three opposition members of parliament to back the government in the confidence vote that was sparked by opposition to a nuclear pact with the United States.

He has denied the allegations.

Diplomacy like a game of rugby says UN chief

AFP, Auckland

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon likened international diplomacy to rugby union yesterday, although he conceded he was unlikely to have his teeth smashed while strutting the world stage.

Visiting New Zealand for this week's Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Ban noted that preparations for the Rugby World Cup were in full swing ahead of the tournament's opening match in Auckland this Friday.

"New Zealand is the magnificent meeting ground of both the world of diplomacy and the world of rugby," said in a speech at Auckland University. "I have come to realize that those worlds are not as different as you might think.

"In rugby, you lose teeth. In diplomacy, you lose face".



PHOTO: AFP

Lone Camp Volunteer Fire Department fire fighter fights a wildfire in Graford, Texas. Wildfires destroyed at least 700 homes across Texas by yesterday as authorities raced to evacuate residents and firefighters battled some of the worst blazes in the state's history.

Assange hits back at Mayawati

TNN, New Delhi

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange rejected UP chief minister Mayawati's allegations yesterday and asked her to admit her errors and apologise after she called Assange mad.

Earlier, the UP CM said she wanted the WikiLeaks founder to be put in a "mental asylum" because she is upset over leaked US diplomatic cables that painted her as an "egomaniac."

He said "if chief minister Mayawati has a problem with the contents of these communications she need to take it up with Hillary. I ask that Mayawati to admit her error and apologise."

Assange added that asylum in India is welcome for him, "I would be happy to accept asylum, political asylum, in India--a nation I love. In return, I will bring Mayawati a range of the finest British footwear."

LATEST LEAKS



US pushed UN on Taiwan

AFP, Taipei

The United States and other countries persuaded the United Nations to stop using the phrase "Taiwan is part of China", according to a document released by anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks.

The US government obtained the promise in August 2007 after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had publicly referred to Taiwan as part of China, a cable sent from the US delegation at the UN revealed.

"Ban said he realised he had gone too far in his recent public statements, and confirmed that the UN would no longer use the phrase "Taiwan is a part of China", the cable said.

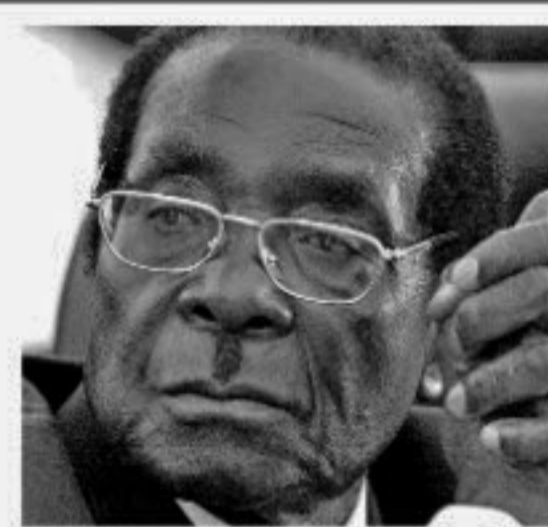
This appeared to be a reference to an episode the previous month when Ban used the phrase after a reporter asked him to comment on a bid by Taiwan to join the UN.

Canada and Japan received similar reassurances from the UN that the phrase -- standard terminology in China -- would no longer be used, according to the cable.

In 1971 the government in Taipei held the UN seat for China, rather than Beijing.

Taiwan launched its 15th bid for a UN seat in 2007, a move which was later blocked.

Beijing insists that Taiwan is part of China awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.



Mugabe suffering from cancer

AFP, Johannesburg

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has prostate cancer and was advised by doctors in 2008 that he had less than five years to live, a leaked US diplomatic cable said.

"Gideon Gono, governor for the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) told the ambassador on June 4 (2008) that President Mugabe has prostate cancer that has metastasized, and according to doctors will cause his death in three to five years," the cable said.

The meeting between then-ambassador James McGee and Gono took place as Mugabe was preparing for a presidential run-off with Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, in a violent election that failed after Tsvangirai pulled out due to deadly attacks on his supporters.

"Gono said Mugabe was physically weak. Despite a strong public face, he had difficulty getting out of his chair," the cable said.

Mugabe, 87, who has ruled Zimbabwe since independence in 1980, has scoffed at rumours that he is sick.

Strike cripples Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A strike to demand the release of political prisoners shut down Indian Kashmir yesterday, as the chief minister warned that protests were denying an entire generation a proper education.

The two-day stoppage, called by separatist groups opposed to Indian rule in the Muslim-majority region, closed businesses, schools and banks in the main city Srinagar and other towns.

"The strike is to demand the release of political prisoners who have been languishing in jails for years without any justification," said Ayaz Akbar, a spokesman for hardline separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani.

In a statement on Tuesday, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said endless strikes and stoppages were having an irreversible impact on the education of young Kashmiris.

"It is the duty of all of us to keep education away from all conflicts, disturbances and politics to safeguard the future of the state," Abdullah said.

Losses on "development fronts can be retrieved but the gaps occurring in education remain unfilled for ever," he added.


The separatist-led strike coincided with a wage-related stoppage by government employees.

Kashmir is divided between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, but claimed in its entirety by both.

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