

Fugitive Libyan leader denies fleeing to Niger

US Says Gaddafi poses danger, asks NTC to control arms

AFP, Tripoli

Fugitive former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi denied he lies yesterday reports he has fled to Niger, while the remnants of his battered forces were pinned down by fighters of the regime that ousted him.

As pockets of fighting continued, Libya's new leadership and the United States called on neighbouring countries to close their borders to Gaddafi stalwarts.

The ex-leader, whose whereabouts are unknown, remained defiant in his first address for several days, telling his countrymen: "They have nothing else to resort to apart from psychological warfare and lies."

Speaking by telephone on the Damascus-based Arrai Oruba television channel, he added: "They last said Gaddafi had been seen in a convoy

heading towards Niger.

"They want to weaken our morale. Do not waste time on this weak and ignoble enemy."

Kadhafi also said Nato, which has been carrying out daily air raids against his forces under a UN mandate since March 31, "will be defeated" as its "logistical capacities will not allow it" to press on with its campaign.

"We are ready in Tripoli and everywhere to intensify attacks against the rats, the mercenaries, who are a pack of dogs," he said.

Since his Tripoli headquarters was overrun on August 23, Gaddafi has made



several appeals for resistance in tapes aired by Arrai, which is run by former Iraqi Sunni MP Mishan al-Juburi.

The NTC fears Gaddafi will try to slip over one of Libya's borders, and Niger strongly denied he was in the country after a convoy carrying other senior ousted regime officials fled there on Monday. The United States said Gaddafi was not believed to be among them.

In a bid to cut off Gaddafi's potential escape routes, the NTC said it had dispatched a team to the Niger capital Niamey, and the United States said Gaddafi aides who entered Niger were being detained.

New regime forces, meanwhile, were poised to battle loyalist troops still holding out in the strongholds of Bani Walid, southeast of Tripoli; Sabha in the deep south and the coastal city of Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown.

Gaddafi 'sold 20% of reserve gold' in final days

AFP, Tripoli

Former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi sold more than 20 percent of Libya's gold reserves, worth more than \$1 billion, in the final days of his regime, the country's central bank governor said yesterday.

Qassem Azzoz said 1.7 billion dinars worth of gold, or around 29 tonnes, were sold to local merchants as the regime ran short of cash.

"The gold was liquidated in order to pay salaries and to have liquidity, in Tripoli in particular," Azzoz said.

According to central bank officials the gold likely made its way out of the country to Tunisia and beyond.

Azzoz added that the bank's total assets now stand at around \$115 billion, of which \$90 billion is abroad.

Missiles looted from arms warehouse

US urges NTC to control arms

AGENCIES

A potent stash of Russian-made surface-to-air missiles is missing from a huge Tripoli weapons warehouse amid reports of weapons looting across war-torn Libya.

They are Grinch SA-24 shoulder-launched missiles, also known as Iglu-S missiles, the equivalent of US-made Stinger missiles.

Meanwhile, The United States and the international community urged Libya's new rulers yesterday to prevent weapons proliferation in a region battling terrorism.

"I agree that there is a threat of the proliferation of the weapons from Libya and we are greatly concerned -- all the nations are very concerned -- about small weapons, rifles and weapons similar to that, but also explosives and shoulder-fired air defence systems," General Carter Ham, the head of the Africa command, Africom, told a press conference on Algiers.

A CNN team and Human Rights Watch found dozens of empty crates marked with packing lists and inventory numbers that identified the items as Iglu-S surface-to-air missiles.

Grinch SA-24s are designed to target front-line aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles and drones. They can shoot down a plane flying as high as 11,000 feet and can travel 19,000 feet straight out.

Fighters aligned with the National Transitional Council and others swiped armaments from the storage facility, witnesses told Human Rights Watch.

Berlin police foil bomb plot

AFP, Berlin

Berlin authorities said they arrested two men yesterday on suspicion of acquiring chemicals for a possible bombing, ahead of the September 11, 2001 attacks' anniversary and a papal visit this month.

Police took a 24-year-old German of Lebanese origin and a 28-year-old Palestinian from the Gaza Strip into custody and raided their homes as well as a mosque in the working class neighbourhood of Wedding, a spokesman told AFP.

He said authorities had launched the investigation, reportedly codenamed "Rainshower", several months ago but did not provide further details.

A probe on the men has been launched on "suspicion of preparing a major violent crime against the state".

Second West Bank mosque vandalised

AFP, Yatma Village

Vandals graffitied a West Bank mosque, torched two Palestinian cars and uprooted olive trees overnight in attacks which locals yesterday blamed on Jewish settlers.

The mosque in Yatma village some 10 kilometres south of Nablus was spray-painted with Hebrew graffiti reading "price tag" and "Migron" in reference to a settlement outpost where Israeli troops demolished three homes on Monday.

Hardline settlers have adopted what they call a "price tag" policy under which they attack Palestinians and their property in response to Israeli government measures against settlements.

It was the second time in three days that vandals, believed to be settlers, had attacked a mosque.



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visits the crash site of a plane with Russian ice hockey team, Lokomotiv Yaroslavl, on board on the bank of the Tushna River, northeast of Moscow and people light candles, inset, during a commemorative service for the victims yesterday. Russia yesterday mourned the deaths of 43 people in the crash.



PHOTO: AFP

Syrian forces storm village, kill 3 defectors

AFP, Damascus

Syria, accused by France of "crimes against humanity," yesterday sent its security forces storming into a north-western village where they killed three military defectors, rights activists said.

The head of the Observatory, Rami Abdel Rahman, later told AFP the killings occurred during a raid on the house in Ibleen of a brother of one of defectors, Hussein Harmouche.

Two other deserters were arrested, Abdel Rahman said, reached by telephone from Nicosia.

Harmouche, an officer, announced his defection in a June video widely distributed on the Internet and broadcast on Arab satellite channels, giving as the reason his refusal "to fire on unarmed civilians."

Palestinians launch UN campaign

Leaders meet to finalise bid

AFP, Ramallah

The Palestinians yesterday began a campaign in support of their UN membership bid, as their senior leaders met to fine-tune the plan to become the UN's 194th member state.

The launch of the campaign, dubbed "National Campaign for Palestine: state 194," is part of the build-up to September 20, when Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas is expected to submit the formal membership request.

Abbas yesterday was meeting senior Palestinian representatives including the central committee of his Fatah party, the PLO's executive committee and leaders of various Palestinian political parties.

The gathering to discuss details of the bid is likely to be one of the last that the Palestinian leadership will hold before the formal membership request is submitted to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Abbas is to submit a formal request for Palestinian UN membership to Ban on September 20 and will address the General Assembly on September 23 in a speech officials say will be broadcast on giant screens in Palestinian cities.

The request is expected to seek full membership for a Palestinian state on the lines that existed before the 1967 Six Day War.

The bid is opposed by Israel and Washington, which has warned it will block the membership plan in the Security Council.

Sonia Gandhi returns to India

Crisis-hit Congress hopes to lift its dented morale

REUTERS, New Delhi

Sonia Gandhi, leader of India's ruling Congress party, returned home yesterday after more than a month of medical treatment in the United States which had left the government rudderless to deal with the biggest protests in decades.

The absence of the powerful 64-year-old, who runs the country from behind the scenes, has caused serious problems for the coalition government, accused of mishandling the anti-corruption protests and facing challenges from the opposition that have frequently halted parliament proceedings.

"She came back this morning and she is fine," Congress party spokesman Janardan Dwivedi told Reuters.

Her illness added to an already long list of problems besieging Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has fallen behind schedule with a reform agenda he himself considers vital to bringing India's economic growth closer to double-digits.

Congress party officials hope her return will lift morale in the centre-left party, but analysts point out that her



absence did not affect day-to-day running of India.

The recent protests led by 74-year-old activist Hazare forced the prime minister to back down and agree to tougher anti-corruption legislation.

Concern remains whether the Italian-born Gandhi will be well enough to take the reins of her divided party and a drifting coalition government sagging in opinion polls.

Broadcaster CNN-IBN, citing party sources, said she may need another month to recover.

The Congress party has declined to comment on the nature of her illness. But several media outlets have said she

was treated for cancer at the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre in New York.

After leaving for surgery, Gandhi promoted her politically inexperienced son Rahul to help manage the party in her absence. He is widely expected to be the next prime minister if the Congress party returns to power in 2014 elections.

Rahul was sharply criticised for his handling of the protests in August, largely remaining out of view and not convening any meetings with the officials Sonia had appointed, along with him, to run her affairs in her absence.

The government was also sharply criticised for failing to head off a bomb attack at the capital's High Court yesterday which killed 12 people. The court has no CCTV cameras and handheld scanners were not working on the day of the attack.

Rahul and Prime Minister Singh were heckled when they visited blast victims at a Delhi hospital.

Recent opinion polls show support for the centre-left Congress party sharply falling behind the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

WIKILEAKS
Sudan planned for normalising Israel ties

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan told US officials of its desire to normalise ties with Israel, a leaked diplomatic cable said, in a potentially embarrassing revelation for one of the Jewish state's more outspoken critics.

Mustafa Osman Ismail, a senior adviser to President Omar al-Bashir, said one aspect of proposed cooperation with the United States included normalising Sudan's relations with Israel.

Ismail had told then US charge d'affaires, Alberto Fernandez, according to the cable dated July 29, 2008, that Khartoum had drafted a strategy for working with the United States.

The cable was sent some two months after the United States suspended talks on normalising relations with Sudan, partly because of the lack of a resolution with the south on the disputed region of Abyei.

Israel has long accused Khartoum of serving as a base for militants from the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas.

In his meeting with Fernandez, Ismail expressed his frustration at the breakdown in US-Sudanese bilateral talks, despite Khartoum being "so cooperative and flexible during negotiations."

China weighed deal on Taiwan missiles

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's president said China could "offer to eliminate" missiles targeting the island in exchange for a US pledge to stop selling weapons to his government.

Ma Ying-jeou suggested the possibility of a deal in a 2009 meeting with Stephen Young, then director of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto US embassy.

But such an agreement would be a "bad bargain" for Taiwan considering China's other military capabilities, Ma was quoted as saying in the cable.

Ma said that China continued to upgrade its military and add to the more than 1,000 missiles already targeting the island, despite the thaw in ties, according to the cable.

Washington recognises Beijing over Taipei but remains a leading arms supplier to the island -- which China claims as part of its territory awaiting reunification, by force if necessary.

Beijing reacted furiously in January 2010 when the Obama administration announced a \$6.4 billion arms deal with Taiwan.

That package included Patriot missiles, Black Hawk helicopters and equipment for Taiwan's existing F-16 fleet, but no submarines or new fighter jets.

Terrorism fear fading among Americans

AFP, Washington

Fears among Americans of a fresh terrorist attack are receding, a public opinion poll released yesterday suggests, although a majority of New Yorkers feel their city remains a prime target.

Thirty-six percent of Americans surveyed by Quinnipiac University's polling institute were either very worried or somewhat worried that "there will be another terrorist attack on the United States in the next few months."

Ahead of this weekend's 10th anniversary of 9/11, however, 58 percent of New Yorkers believe that another attack on their city resulting in a large number of fatalities is either very likely or somewhat likely.

"Across the nation, fears of another 9/11 have faded a lot," said Maurice Carroll, director of polling at the private university in Connecticut, recalling a Quinnipiac poll in 2006 in which 62 percent feared another attack.

Last week a Pew Research Centre poll found that one in three Americans thought it was just a matter of luck that their nation has been spared a repeat of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

NEWS IN brief

Japan's new PM visits crisis-hit Fukushima

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's new Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda yesterday visited Fukushima for the first time since he took office a week ago, paying tribute to hundreds of workers battling to contain the nuclear crisis.

"You hold the key to the solution to the problem," Noda told some 200 workers at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, which was crippled by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, adding that "without the rebirth of Fukushima, there will not be a rebirth of Japan."

Global tourism hits new record: UN agency

AFP, Madrid

International tourism grew by almost five percent in the first half of the year, recording a record 440 million arrivals, the World Tourism Organisation said yesterday.

"Between January and June of this year, the total number of arrivals reached 440 million, 19 million more than in the same period of 2010," the body said from its Madrid headquarters.

The rise of almost five percent in international tourism over the period set "a new record of 440 million arrivals," the tourism organisation reported.

The emerging economies are the motor for this rise of the sector from the economic crisis which scarred all sectors in 2008.

Suicide rate highest in China

AFP, Beijing

A person tries to kill themselves in China every two minutes, the government and state media said yesterday, giving the country one of the highest suicide rates in the world.

China's suicide rate is 22.23 people out of every 100,000, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said on its website.

"Our nation has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world," the Beijing Youth Daily quoted Beijing Health Bureau spokesman Mao Yu as saying.

About 287,000 people kill themselves in the country of 1.3 billion every year, while about two million try to commit suicide annually.

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