

Libya leaders commit to 'moderate' Islamic rule

Warn against any human rights violation

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's new leaders pledged "moderate" Islamic rule and affirmed their commitment to human rights yesterday, even as their fighters were accused of committing possible war crimes.

A defiant Muammar Gaddafi, meanwhile, vowed from hiding to battle on until victory as his forces launched surprise fightbacks on three fronts.

Interim Libyan leader Mustafa Abdul Jalil received a hero's welcome when he made a public speech in Tripoli's main square late on Monday.

Thousands celebrated last month's fall of the Gaddafi regime in Martyrs' Square, two days after Abdel Jalil, the head of the ruling National Transitional Council (NTC), arrived in Tripoli from Benghazi in the east.

Moderate Islam would be the main source of legislation in post-Kadhafi Libya, he told the crowd.

"We will not accept any extremist

ideology, on the right or the left. We are a Muslim people, for a moderate Islam, and we will stay on this road," he said.

Abdel Jalil's comments came as Amnesty International released a new report yesterday in which it accused Gaddafi's regime of crimes against humanity but also said NTC fighters had committed possible war crimes.

But Amnesty acknowledged that the war crimes allegedly committed by the now governing opposition were of a "smaller scale" than those carried out by Gaddafi's regime, which it says may be responsible for crimes against humanity.

In a statement issued in its eastern bastion Benghazi, the council's executive committee said it "strongly condemns any abuses perpetrated by either side," and promised to investigate any incidents brought to its attention.

"The NTC is firmly committed to human rights and the rule of law, both international and local," it said.

Meanwhile, Gaddafi, in a statement

read out on Syria-based Arrai Oruba television, vowed to defeat those behind the "coup" that ousted him.

"It is not possible to give Libya to the colonialists again," the one-time strongman said. "All that remains for us is the struggle until victory and the defeat of the coup."

On the battlefield, Gaddafi's remaining forces launched ferocious counterattacks Monday on the oil refinery town of Ras Lanuf in the east, on the road towards Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte, and at Bani Walid south-east of the capital Tripoli.

Striking deep behind enemy lines, Gaddafi fighters killed at least 17 NTC soldiers at Ras Lanuf, an NTC military spokesman told AFP, updating an earlier toll.

The unexpected counter-offensive by Gaddafi loyalists came despite the flight to neighbouring Niger of 32 members of his inner circle during the past 10 days.



Libyans celebrate during the speech of Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Chairman of the Libyan Transitional Council, at the Martyrs' Square, in Tripoli, on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

PHONE HACKING SCANDAL MPs recall James Murdoch



BBC ONLINE

James Murdoch is to face more questions from MPs investigating the News of the World (NoW) phone-hacking scandal.

Culture committee chairman John Whittingdale said he was recalling News International's chairman to give more evidence.

It comes after MPs heard conflicting evidence over how much Murdoch knew about the practice at the NoW.

Separately, it has emerged the mother of a 7/7 bombing victim is to pursue a civil case against News International.

The case of Sheila Henry, whose son, Christian Small, was killed in the 2005 Russell Square explosion, will be one of six test cases for civil damages claims against News Group Newspapers over phone-hacking claims.

At the High Court, Lord Justice Vos has been considering applications from a number of alleged phone-hacking victims to decide whose will be heard as test cases in the new year.

Actor Jude Law, MP Chris Bryant, interior designer Kelly Hoppen, sports agent Sky Andrew and ex-footballer Paul Gascoigne are also bringing cases.

The court also heard new information had been found at News International.

Carbon tax bill presented at Aussie parliament

AFP, Sydney

Cheers and howls erupted in Australia's Parliament House on Tuesday after Prime Minister Julia Gillard presented a bill for a contentious new pollution tax to combat climate change.

The deeply divisive levy will mean the nation's biggest producers of carbon emissions will be forced to pay to pollute from July 1, 2012 -- initially at a fixed price before moving to a market-based trading scheme.

Gillard faces bitter opposition by the conservative opposition, which argues it will be ineffective.

Thousands of people have protested at rallies nationwide against the levy, accusing Gillard of lying when she said ahead of her narrow August 2010 election win there would be no carbon tax under a government she led.

Iran to pardon US 'spy' hikers

AFP, Washington



President Mahmud Ahmadinejad said in interviews yesterday that Iran would release two US hikers jailed for spying in a couple of days on bail which their lawyer said had been set at \$500,000 each.

"I am helping to arrange for their release in a couple of days so they will be able to return home. This is of course going to be a unilateral humanitarian gesture," Ahmadinejad told The Washington Post.

"It is a unilateral pardon" of the hikers, he added.

In a separate interview with US network NBC News, Ahmadinejad said Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal would be released "in two days" but their lawyer Masoud Shafii told AFP that they would be freed only when bail had been paid.

The pair, who were detained in 2009, were both sentenced to eight years in jail last month on charges of espionage and illegal entry in a case that has further strained relations between Washington and Tehran.

"The Americans will be freed when the bail is paid," their lawyer told AFP.

Asked by the Post how the pair would return to the US, Ahmadinejad said that "they are free to choose".

Bauer and Fattal, were arrested near the mountainous Iraq-Iran border in July 31, 2009, along with a third hiker, Sarah Shourd, who was granted bail on humanitarian and medical grounds and allowed to leave the country in September last year.

Israel's blockade of Gaza illegal: UN experts

REUTERS, Geneva

Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip violates international law, a panel of human rights experts reporting to a UN body said yesterday, disputing a conclusion reached by a separate UN probe into Israel's raid on a Gaza-bound aid ship.

The so-called Palmer Report on the Israeli raid of May 2010 that killed nine Turkish activists said earlier this month that Israel had used unreasonable force in last year's raid, but its naval blockade of the Hamas-ruled strip was legal.

A panel of five independent UN rights experts reporting to the UN Human Rights Council rejected that conclusion, saying the blockade had subjected Gazans to collective punishment in "flagrant contravention of international human rights and humanitarian law".

The four-year blockade deprived 1.6 million Palestinians living in the enclave of fundamental rights, they said.

"In pronouncing itself on the legality of the naval blockade, the Palmer Report does not recognise the naval blockade as an inte-

gral part of Israel's closure policy towards Gaza which has a disproportionate impact on the human rights of civilians," they said in a joint statement.

Israel says its Gaza blockade is a precaution against arms reaching Hamas and other Palestinian guerrillas by sea.

The four-man panel headed by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer found Israel had used unreasonable force in dealing with what it called "organised and violent resistance from a group of passengers".

Turkey has downgraded ties with Israel over the incident.

Richard Falk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and one of the five experts who issued yesterday's statement, said the Palmer report's conclusions were influenced by a desire to save Turkish-Israeli ties.

About one-third of Gaza's arable land and 85 percent of its fishing waters are totally or partially inaccessible due to Israeli military measures, said Olivier De Schutter, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, another of the five.



PHOTO: AFP

Children play in floodwater in Ayutthaya, a town of Thailand yesterday. Rising waters have left over 70 people dead and affected the homes and livelihoods of 4.3 million people, officials said there.

3 soldiers killed in Yemen

AFP, Aden

Suspected al-Qaeda militants killed three Yemeni soldiers and wounded five yesterday in new fighting for the southern city of Zinjibar, medical and military officials said.

"We have received the bodies of three dead soldiers," said a medical official at Aden's military hospital, adding that five others were wounded.

A military official confirmed the casualty toll, adding that the fighting was for control of parts of Zinjibar which are still held by the al-Qaeda linked militants.

Recruitment of cops stuck

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public administration ministries. It says it even needs changes in the home ministry itself for the recruitment to work.

Home ministry sources said creating 673 cadre posts in the force caused a problem since police demanded 10 more grade-1 posts, the top end of the pecking order.

At the moment the force only has one grade-1 post--Inspector General of Police (IGP)--and all policemen are under his jurisdiction. They say that creating 10 more grade-1 posts will require another higher post that will have control over the 10 grade-1 posts.

Police headquarters proposed the 10 grade-1 posts, including one for Special Branch, one for CID,

one for Police Staff College, one for Rab, one for DMP, one for National Bureau of Police Counter Terrorism and three for police headquarters, a source said.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday formed a committee to find out problems in recruiting the non-cadre posts--constables to sub-inspectors--and to make recommendations for re-arranging the police organogram for the new 673 cadre posts. It is supposed to have its job done within two weeks and send the recommendations to the Prime Minister's Office.

The committee was formed in an inter-ministerial meeting held at the home ministry where Home Minister Shahara Khaun and Prime

Minister's adviser HT Imam were present.

Meeting sources said the creation of the 10 grade-1 posts in the police department were opposed by the high officials of other ministries and they gave an example of the health ministry, which has around 2,100 cadre posts with no grade-1 posts.

Police sources said they have around 1,691 cadre posts with one grade-1 (IGP) and 1,39,448 non-cadre posts.

Yesterday's committee is led by Md Eunusur Rahman, additional secretary to the home ministry, and it is comprised of one official each from finance and public administration ministries, the PMO and the police headquarters.

Laughter is the best medicine

AFP, Paris

A rattling good laugh with friends will help you deal with pain thanks to opiate-like chemicals that flood the brain, according to a British study released today.

Researchers carried out lab experiments in which volunteers watched either comedy clips from "Mr Bean" or "Friends," or non-humorous items such as golf or wildlife programmes, while their resistance to mild pain was monitored.

Another test was conducted at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where the volunteers watched either a stand-up

comedy show or a theatrical drama.

In lab conditions, the pain came from a deep-frozen wine-cooler sleeve which was slipped onto the arm or from a blood-pressure cuff that was pumped to the threshold of tolerance.

For the Fringe Festival, the volunteers were asked to do a tough exercise--leaning against the wall with their legs at right angles, as if sitting on a straight-backed chair--before and immediately after the performance, to see if laughter had helped with the pain.

Just 15 minutes of laughter increased the level of pain tolerance by around 10 percent, the study found.

In the lab experiments, the neutral,

non-funny programming had no pain-alleviating effect at all. Nor did watching drama at the Fringe Festival.

However, the study notes two important distinctions.

The only laughter that worked was relaxed, unforced laughter that creases the eyes, as opposed to a polite titter.

And this kind of belly laugh is far likelier to happen when you are with others, rather than being alone.

In laughter, the release comes from an involuntary, repeated muscular exertion that comes from exhaling without drawing a breath, the scientists believe.

US poverty rate hits record high

AFP, Washington

The US poverty rate rose in 2010 to 15.1 percent, the highest rate since 1993, the Census Bureau reported yesterday in another sign of a sputtering economy following a deep recession.

The report showed a sharp increase in poverty from 14.3 percent in 2009, and a fourth consecutive rise in the number of people below the poverty threshold, to 46.2 million.

The US definition of poverty is an annual income of \$22,314 for a family of four, and \$11,139 for a single person in 2010.

The survey showed struggles for the rest of Americans, with median household income falling 2.3 percent to \$49,445.

The poverty rate for blacks and Hispanics was much higher than for the overall population at 27.4 percent and 26.6 percent, respectively. Among regions, the South had the highest poverty rate at 16.9 percent and the highest percentage without health insurance, 19.1 percent.

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Owners of Land Plots
Are Invited
To Discuss
Their Proposals

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