

# Anti-Gaddafi fighters capture Sirte's port

*Gaddafi vows martyrdom; humanitarian crisis looming*

AFP, Sirte

Anti-Gaddafi fighters overran Sirte's port yesterday, scoring a strategic victory in their battle for control of the defeated Libyan leader's birthplace, his loyalists' most important bastion.

In their other main redoubt of Bani Walid, however, Muammar Gaddafi's forces went back on the offensive after loyalist radio in the desert town broadcast a message from the fugitive strongman rallying resistance to a weeks-long siege by National Transitional Council (NTC) forces.

Hundreds of fearful civilians have fled Sirte, a Mediterranean city 360 kilometres east of Tripoli, as the new regime's forces have closed in from east, south and west.

And as the NTC troops zeroed in on the centre of the sprawling city where Gaddafi diehards are believed to be holed

up, the threat of intense street fighting hung over the remaining residents.

"There were clashes in the night and we now are controlling the port," said Commander Mustafa bin Dardef of the NTC's Zintan Brigade.

NTC troops said that fighting raged yesterday morning around Sirte's Al-Batahady University where they had come under sniper fire from pro-Gaddafi forces hidden on the campus.

In Gaddafi's radio message, a transcript of which was carried by a loyalist website, the toppled strongman told his supporters that he was still fighting on the ground and was ready to die a martyr.

"Heroes have resisted and fallen as martyrs and we too are awaiting martyrdom," Gaddafi said.

The toppled despot hailed the fierce resistance put up by Bani Walid, which had been a major recruiting ground for his regime's elite army units.

Fleeing residents spoke of dwindling supplies of food and water and said Gaddafi forces were trying to prevent people from leaving, while doctors warned of a growing humanitarian crisis.

"There's no food, no electricity, we were eating just bread," said Saraj al-Tuweish, who got out with his extended family of some 60 people yesterday.

On Monday, some 2,000 fleeing civilians registered on the western coast road out of Sirte alone, but by midday (1000 GMT) yesterday just 30 families had got out.

The collapse of the mains supply has left residents without access to clean drinking water, triggering an epidemic of water-borne diseases.

"We have medicines but no nurses to treat the constant flow of patients, mainly children, suffering from vomiting and gastrointestinal diseases," said a Ukrainian working in Libya for 8 years.

# Palestinians, US battle for UN Council votes

AFP, United Nations

Palestinian envoys are battling for UN Security Council votes to back their effort to win full UN membership, while the United States is using its diplomatic big guns to make the bid fail.

The Security Council held its first meeting to discuss the application on Monday and is to meet again today to formally send the request made by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas to a membership committee.

The Palestinian campaign faces an uphill struggle as the United States has vowed to veto any resolution backing their application. No vote at the 15-member council is expected for several weeks however and frenzied lobbying has started.

On top of campaigning at the UN, the Palestinians are to send high level delegations to council members Bosnia, Gabon and Nigeria in a bid to win backing, Palestinian envoy to the UN, Riyad Mansour, told reporters.

The United States and Israel, which insist that only direct negotiations can produce an accord, are lobbying furiously for council members to oppose or abstain in the resolution.

If the resolution does not get nine votes in favour it will fail and the United States will not have to use its veto.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton raised the Palestinian bid with Lebanon's Prime Minister Nijab Mikati at the UN headquarters before Monday's meeting, US officials said. Lebanon holds the council presidency in September and has backed the Palestinian bid.

She also raised the case Monday with Colombia's Foreign Minister Maria Angela Holguin.

However, a senior UN official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on the sidelines of the Clinton-Mikati talks that he saw "little hope" for new talks.

Nine of the 15 council members already recognize the Palestinian state, but diplomats say the Palestinians will struggle to get nine votes.

Only China, Russia, Lebanon, India, South Africa and Brazil have declared themselves certain to vote for the Palestinian bid.

"This is an exercise in which there will be tremendous pressure on members of the Security Council, but we trust in our friends," Mansour said.



## Obama's UN address 'gibberish'

*Says Fidel Castro*

AFP, Havana

Cuba's Fidel Castro blasted Barack Obama's speech to the United Nations as "gibberish" on Monday, saying the US president used a rambling address to justify the "unjustifiable."

In his first published column since July, the 85-year-old revolutionary icon slammed US and Nato intervention in Libya as "monstrous crimes" and said Obama -- whom he called the "yankee president" -- used a bully pulpit at the UN General Assembly last week to try and sway global opinion.

In Monday's piece he came out swinging, saying Obama distorted the situations in Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Afghanistan, North Korea, Libya and the Palestinian conflict, and that the US leader used "a long rant to explain and justify the inexplicable and unjustifiable."

"Who understands the gibberish of the president of the United States before the General Assembly?" Castro asked.

Castro also took issue with the "fascist methods by the United States and its allies to confuse and manipulate global opinion".

"Has any nation been excluded from the bloody threats of this illustrious defender of international peace and security?" Castro said of Obama, whose UN quotes he cited extensively in his column.

"Who gave the United States such privileges?" asked the veteran leader.

## Egypt polls to start on November 28

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's parliamentary election, the first since a revolt ousted president Hosni Mubarak in February, will start on November 28, the official MENA news agency reported yesterday.

"The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has set November 28 as the start of the first stage of the parliamentary election, which will be held over three rounds," it reported.

Senate elections will follow starting on January 29, the agency quoted a military official as saying.

The announcement comes after the caretaker cabinet voted on amending a contentious law under which two thirds of parliament will be elected through a proportional representation system and the rest via a simple majority.

## Yemen minister escapes assassination bid

AFP, Aden

Yemeni Defence Minister Mohammad Nasser Ahmad Ali escaped an assassination bid by a suicide bomber yesterday in the southern port city of Aden but 10 of his party were wounded, a security official said.

"A suicide bomber driving a car packed with explosives drove into the minister's motorcade as he was driving out of a tunnel," the official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He added that the minister survived the attack but 10 people travelling with him were wounded.

The attack came as Ali was heading to a hotel in Aden where he has been staying on a duty visit to the restive south.

Troops have been engaged in deadly fighting for months with Al-Qaeda linked militants in Abyan province, east of the city.

Yesterday's assassination attempt was the second against Ahmad in less than a month.

On August 30, the minister escaped unharmed when a bomb targeting his convoy exploded near Al-Kud, a village in Abyan province the army had recaptured from al-Qaeda two days earlier.

Two soldiers were killed and several others were wounded in the August blast. As in yesterday's assassination attempt, the minister had been visiting troops battling al-Qaeda in the troubled southern province.

The latest violence comes just two days after armed tribesman allied with dissident General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar killed a Yemeni general from the elite Republican Guard troops loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh.



**Pakistani children displaced by flood eating food at a makeshift camp in Mirpurkhas in the flood-hit Sindh province yesterday. More than 350 people have been killed and over eight million people have been affected this year by floods that officials say are worse in parts of Sindh province than last year, when the country saw its worst ever disaster.**

PHOTO: AFP

## NEWS IN brief

### Strauss-Kahn claims immunity in US civil case

AFP, New York

Former IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn sought dismissal of a US civil case on Monday, claiming immunity from prosecution and saying the hotel maid's "false" sexual assault claims had hampered his efforts to right the global economy.

Criminal charges were dropped in August when prosecutors lost faith in the credibility of maid Nafissatou Diallo, but she is pursuing her civil case for undisclosed monetary damages from the French one-time presidential hopeful.

Strauss-Kahn was forced to resign as managing director of IMF when he was arrested in May and charged with the sexual assault and attempted rape of Diallo in his suite at the Sofitel hotel in

### Fresh allegations in Berlusconi sex scandal

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi may have told a businessman to lie to investigators about paying callgirls to attend parties he hosted, the Ansa news agency said yesterday.

The businessman, Gianpaolo Tarantini, is on trial accused of having spent nearly \$41,000 on recruiting dozens of women for Berlusconi's private parties in 2008 and 2009 in order to win lucrative contracts.

Quoting a decision by a Naples court, Ansa said Berlusconi could be questioned about claims that he asked Tarantini to make false declarations in the callgirl probe. And this could lead to a full investigation against the prime minister, the agency said.

### Trial to begin for doctor charged in Jackson death

AFP, Los Angeles

Michael Jackson's doctor Conrad Murray finally goes on trial yesterday over the self-styled King of Pop's death two years ago from an overdose of a powerful drug.

Prosecutors and defence lawyers will make their opening statements at the Los Angeles Superior Court, where a jury of seven men and five women will decide Murray's fate over the next five weeks.

The doctor is accused of giving Jackson an overdose of the powerful sedative propofol -- which Jackson himself referred to as "milk" -- to help alleviate his insomnia.

## Coffee may prevent depression

BBC ONLINE

Women who drink two or more cups of coffee a day are less likely to get depressed, research suggests.

It is not clear why it might have this effect, but the authors believe caffeine in coffee may alter the brain's chemistry. Decaffeinated coffee did not have the same effect.

The findings, published in Archives of Internal Medicine, come from a study of more than 50,000 US female nurses.

The Harvard Medical School team tracked the health of the women over a decade from 1996 to 2006 and relied on questionnaires to record their coffee consumption.

Just over 2,600 of the women developed depression over this time period.

Compared with women who drank one cup of caffeinated coffee or less per week, those who consumed two to three cups per day had a 15% decreased risk of developing depression.

Those who drank four or more cups a day cut their risk by 20%.

Regular coffee drinkers were more likely to smoke and drink alcohol and were less likely to be involved in church, volunteer or community groups. They were also less likely to be overweight and have high blood pressure or diabetes.

Even after controlling for all of these variables, the trend of increasing coffee consumption and lower depression remained.

The researchers say their findings add weight to the work of others which found lower suicide rates among coffee drinkers.

They suspect caffeine is the key player - it is known to enhance feelings of wellbeing and energy.

## ROW WITH MEDVEDEV

## Finance minister's ousting shocks Russia

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday faced warnings of looming trouble for the Russian economy after President Dmitry Medvedev ousted his finance minister in the most bitter clash inside the elite for years.

Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, who had been in his job since 2000 and won global plaudits for his work, resigned after objecting to the plan that would make Medvedev prime minister when Vladimir Putin returns to the Kremlin.

Kudrin is the first casualty of Russia's new political strategy and his dissent exposed unexpected cracks over the scheme for the 2012 elections within a ruling establishment that usually never airs its disputes in public.

His exit could also disturb Western investors who have long been reassured by Kudrin's adamant resistance to the extravagant spending demands by Russian ministers and his canny saving of the proceeds from Russia's oil exports.

Barely flinching, Kudrin told Medvedev: "I do indeed have differences with you." In a final act of defiance, he refused to resign on the spot but hours later the Kremlin confirmed that Medvedev had signed the resignation decree.

Although clearly approved by Putin, the drama means Russia's ruling duo are losing the country's most respected economist at a time when a new global financial crisis is raising fears over Russia's dependence on oil exports.

"This local event is a strong negative signal for Russia's investment case," Russia's leading private bank Alfa Bank wrote in a note to clients.



PHOTO: AFP

**A tourist looks at souvenirs at the Hanuman Dhoka world heritage site in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. Yesterday was World Tourism Day.**

## Hip-hop Shakespeare

*London to stage his plays in 37 dialects*

AFP, London

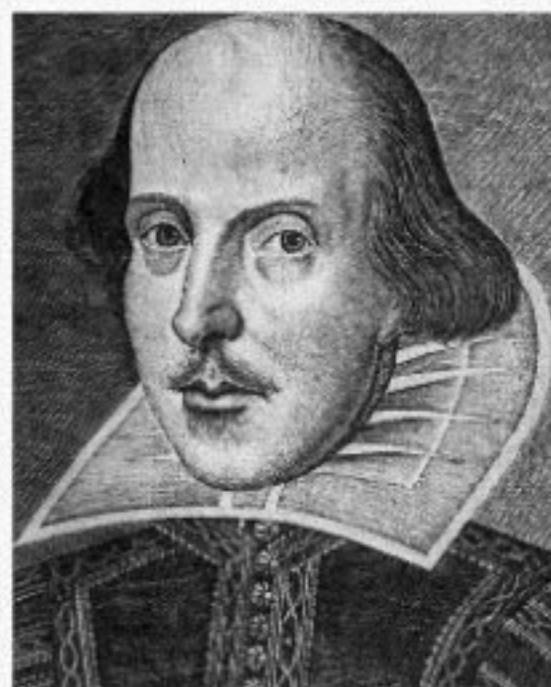
Actors from around the world will converge on London next year to stage all of Shakespeare's plays in 37 different dialects and styles, from a hip-hop "Othello" to "The Comedy of Errors" in Farsi.

The six-week marathon at Shakespeare's Globe theatre begins on April 23 and is timed to coincide with festivities celebrating the London 2012 Olympic Games.

From the opening production of "Troilus and Cressida" by a Maori company from New Zealand -- complete with the haka warrior dance -- the programme will showcase talents from all corners of the planet, from Argentina to Belarus.

A company from South Sudan, the world's newest nation, will take part with a production of "Cymbeline" in Juba Arabic, while Afghanistan's Roy-e-Sabs company will leave Kabul for the first time to show "The Comedy of Errors".

Fans can take in the whole season for just £100 (115 euros, \$155), or pick and



choose with tickets costing from £5 a show to stand in the Globe's yard.

Among the performances is a version of "The Tempest" from a company in Bangladesh and a rendition of "Richard III" in Mandarin by the National Theatre of China. "The Merchant of Venice", a play often accused of being anti-Semitic, will be performed

in Hebrew by Israel's Habima national theatre company.

A British company will perform a version of "Love's Labour's Lost" in sign-language, and a Chicago-based troupe will mix up and set the passion of "Othello" to original beats.

Many of the plays will feature dance and music as they reinterpret Shakespeare's tales for modern audiences.

A Pakistani company will feature live singers and musicians playing bhangra music in its Urdu production of "The Taming of the Shrew", and a version of "Coriolanus" is being staged by the expressive Japanese company Chiten.

## Hunger worsening in N Korea

AFP, Washington

Relief groups on Monday made a new plea to the United States to offer food assistance to North Korea, warning that hunger was worsening and could develop into a major crisis next year.

The United States earlier this month gave flood relief to North Korea, with which it has tense relations, but it has held off from approving food shipments due to concerns that the communist regime will use the aid for political ends.

The five US aid groups which delivered the flood aid said they monitored distribution to civilians and were alarmed at what they saw in North Korea as heavy rains and winds had destroyed buildings, crops and roads.

"Without immediate and direct intervention there is significant risk for a far greater crisis to unfold in the coming six to nine months," the groups said in a statement.

The relief groups said they are baffled by Obama's administration's inaction over calls made months ago for a food aid.

"Many innocent people are at risk today, and we know that food aid can save lives," said Jim White of Mercy Corps.