

NEWS IN *brief*

US puts Abu Hamza in detention

AFP, New York

A US judge ordered that the radical Islamist preacher Abu Hamza be kept in detention, after a brief court hearing yesterday in New York where the terror suspect was told of the 11 charges he faces.

Hamza, who lacked his trademark hook on the stump of his right arm, did not speak at the hearing which followed his extradition from Britain and was a prelude to a formal arraignment due Tuesday where he will be formally charged.

Hamza, 54, will face terrorism charges over a kidnapping in 1998 in Yemen, the establishment of a terrorist training camp in the United States, and for "facilitating violent jihad in Afghanistan," the



Somali president names new PM

AFP, Mogadishu

Somalia's president yesterday appointed a little known businessman as prime minister as his administration sought to rebuild stability after more than two decades of anarchy and war.

"We have named Abdi Farah Shirdon Said as country's new prime minister after long discussions," said President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who himself only took office last month after being chosen by parliament in a UN-backed process.

The appointment is one of the first key steps of the new administration, which brought to an end the eight years of transitional rule by the corruption riddled and Western-backed government.

Tibetan self immolates in China

AFP, Beijing

A writer who spoke out against Chinese repression of Tibet has burned himself to death, a rights group said, the 53rd person to set themselves ablaze protesting Beijing's rule.

The International Campaign for Tibet said in a statement that Gudrub, 42, called for freedom for the region and the return of the exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama while flames engulfed him in Tibet's Nagchu county on Thursday.

China's Tibetan-inhabited areas have seen an explosion in such protests since February 2009, with at least 53 Tibetans setting themselves alight, mostly

WB offers India \$500m edu loan

AFP, New Delhi

The World Bank on Friday offered India a \$500 million loan aimed at improving access to secondary education and enhancing its quality, a statement said.

The government plans to use the funds to construct 11,000 new secondary schools and repair 60,000 existing ones, while upgrading 44,000 pri-

37 militants killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Thirty-seven Taliban militants have been killed in fighting with the security forces in Afghanistan, the interior ministry said yesterday.

The deaths occurred during overnight joint operations by the Afghan police and army and Nato-led coalition forces.

The raids were conducted in Kabul, Faryab, Kandahar, Zabul, Wardak and Helmand provinces,



This picture shows missing five-year-old British girl April Jones. British police yesterday charged a family friend, Mark Bridger, with April's murder although her body had still not been found.

SYRIA CIVIL WAR

50 killed as rebels take border town

AFP, Damascus

Nearly 50 soldiers and rebels were killed yesterday in clashes near Syria's northern border, as Turkey hit back against what it said was new mortar fire from inside Syria.

Damascus, for its part, said four Turks were among a convoy of "terrorists" killed in the heart of Aleppo, just hours after UN condemnation of deadly jihadist bombings in the country's commercial capital.

Forty government soldiers and nine rebels were killed when rebels took a town in the northwestern province of Idlib near the border, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The fighting lasted more than 12 hours, it added.

Turkish officials said they were sure a mortar round that struck yesterday morning was fired by pro-government forces in Syria, and not rebels who have been fighting for nearly 19 months to oust President Bashar al-Assad. No casualties were reported.

The Turkish army responded with four mortar rounds, the governor's office said, adding that the Syrian fire had come from loyalists who were firing at rebels near the border.

The cross-border exchanges came despite unanimous condemnation from the UN Security Council on Thursday of deadly shelling from the Syrian side further east in Sanliurfa province that killed five people.

Nationwide, at least 88 people were killed on Saturday -- 38 soldiers, 32 rebels and 18 civilians -- according to the Observatory, which gave a death toll of 133 for Friday.

Since the uprising against Assad's rule erupted in March last year, more than 31,000 people have been killed, according to the group.



Pakistan cricketer turned politician Imran Khan waves to supporters at the start of a rally on the outskirts of Islamabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Libyan troops surround pro-Gaddafi stronghold

Atrocities feared as inhabitants call for Int'l help

CNN ONLINE

Libyan troops are surrounding the city of Bani Walid, awaiting orders to enter what had been a stronghold for late dictator Muammar Gaddafi as those inside appeal to the international community for help.

Bani Walid was a holdout of pro-Gaddafi loyalists until the very end of the fighting late last year.

Massoud al-Waer, a local official, told CNN late Friday that Bani Walid was under siege with no food or fuel able to get in, nor even fresh oxygen for its main hospital.

The standoff -- and possible military offensive -- stems from the death of a Libyan revolutionary fighter from Misrata credited with capturing Gaddafi last year.

Omrar Shaaban and two other fighters were kidnapped near Bani Walid in July. He was released two months later, at which point he was in bad shape physically. After being transferred to a hospital France, Shaaban died September 24 of the aftereffects of gunshot wounds.

One day after his death, the country's General National Congress authorised the

Libyan ministries of defense and interior to use force, if necessary, to arrest those responsible for allegedly kidnapping and torturing Shaaban.

The national assembly also called for the release of the others being detained in Bani Walid, giving those in the city 10 days to comply -- or else the North African nation's military would take action. The deadline for that ultimatum was Friday.

And over the past week, Libyan army troops and militia members from different parts of the nation -- including Misrata -- mobilized and surrounded Bani Walid.

Bani Walid and Misrata have a longstanding rivalry.

Yet many in Bani Walid remained defiant Friday accusing the government of neglecting them.

Hundreds of Bani Walid residents have been arrested by armed militias, according to the human rights advocacy group Amnesty International.

Many continue to be detained without being charged, or put in trial, across Libya, and have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated, Amnesty said.

Turkey and Syria: Why neither side wants war

CNN ONLINE

Despite Turkey's shelling of Syria, Middle East expert Fawaz Gerges says neither side wants an escalation of a conflict that has the potential to spill over into a regional war that would be extremely difficult to end.

It is important to stress at the outset that we do not know if the shells that landed on Turkish border towns, killing at least five people, were ordered by Bashar al-Assad's government; all we know is the shelling came from the area where Syrian positions had been firing at rebels.

Syria has admitted its shelling killed Turkish civilians, has apologized, and has promised that the incident will not be repeated, Turkey's deputy prime minister says. Syria's information minister has pledged an investigation into how and why the shell came to be fired at Turkey.

The big point is that the Assad regime is desperately trying to prevent outside military intervention in its war-torn country, and does not want to provide a pretext for Turkey to do so, knowing that it would be disastrous.

Similarly, the Turkish government has no interest in military escalation against its neighbor. According to surveys, public opinion in

Turkey is strongly against all-out war with Syria.

Equally important is the fact that, although Nato and the United States have expressed solidarity with Turkey, a Nato member, they are urging restraint. Western powers, particularly the United States, do not have the desire or political will to intervene militarily in Syria. Without the full backing of Nato and the US, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan would be reluctant to embark on any large-scale military venture against Syria.

So while we have seen a lot of escalation in the last 48 hours we need to put it into context: Neither side has an interest in turning this low-intensity war into something more serious, a full-blown confrontation.

What the incident tells us is that Syria has now descended into all-out war. The spillover of the Syrian war has reached not just Turkey but also Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, with frequent armed clashes and casualties. If these skirmishes intensify and escalate, the potential of a region-wide war cannot be overlooked.

This is why Western powers, particularly the United States, are reluctant to intervene militarily in the Syrian civil war, lest they exacerbate an already dangerous situation: They want the civil war to remain an internal conflict where it can be contained.



Pope's butler gets 18 months in jail

AFP, Vatican City

A Vatican court yesterday sentenced Pope Benedict XVI's former butler Paolo Gabriele to 18 months in prison for stealing secret papal documents that revealed fraud scandals and intrigue.

Presiding Judge Giuseppe Dalla Torre initially gave the ex-butler three years but immediately reduced the sentence on the grounds of his past service to the Catholic Church and his apology to the pope for betraying him.

The Vatican's spokesman Federico Lombardi told journalists after the verdict that the pope was "very likely" to pardon Gabriele, who is now under house arrest pending a decision on whether or not he will appeal the verdict.

Gabriele was immediately led away by Vatican gendarmes, passing under a large portrait of Pope Benedict hanging in the 19th-century courtroom.

"I am convinced that I acted solely out of love, I would say visceral love, for the Church of Christ and for its leader on Earth," Gabriele said in a final statement to a hushed court when asked for his plea by the presiding judge.

"I do not feel that I am a thief," the 46-year-old father of three said.

The former butler was found guilty of leaking hundreds of sensitive Vatican documents in a case that has been dubbed "Vatileaks" and included allegations by a former governor of the city state of massive fraud within its walls.

Uproar as graft claims hit India's Gandhi clan

Sonia's son-in-law implicated in real estate scam

STAR REPORT

A new anti-corruption party accused the son-in-law of India's most powerful politician, Sonia Gandhi, of large-scale graft Friday at a news conference targeting the country's famed ruling dynasty triggering a political storm.

Social activist Arvind Kejriwal, who launched his as yet unnamed new party earlier in the week, accused Gandhi's businessman son-in-law Robert Vadra of benefiting from murky deals in real estate linked to property group DLF.

"We want to know how his wealth grew from five million rupees (\$90,000) to three billion in a span of three years?" he told the news conference in which he handed out papers he claimed were sourced from the registrar general's office.

However, a spokesman for real estate firm DLF said the business relationship with Vadra was "completely transparent and was conducted to highest standards of ethics".

And breaking his silence on the controversy, Robert Vadra, owner of Artex which specialises in jewellery and handicraft exports, yesterday appeared to dismiss the allegations.

"Thank you so much for your concern. I am fine and can handle all the negativity. I have lost people I loved, what can be worse," Vadra said in his post on a social networking site.

Furious Congress dubbed the charge as "baseless and utterly irresponsible", our New Delhi correspondent reports.

"There can be no case of corruption against Vadra," Manish Tewari, a spokesman for the ruling Congress party, said. "Members of the new party are indulging in petty politics and we are not interested in this kind of tactics."

However, the main opposition BJP



PHOTO: AFP

Priyanka Gandhi and Robert Dadra

demand a probe.

Kejriwal and Bhushan provided details of the business relationship between the property giant and Vadra.

They alleged that the seed money for Vadra's property acquisitions came from "unsecured, interest-free" loans to the tune of Rs 65 crore given by DLF which, in turn, sold a bulk of these properties to Vadra at a price far below the market price.

Kejriwal and Bhushan alleged that the government of Haryana state, ruled by Congress, had given DLF 350 acres of land to build a housing project in which Vadra has seven flats.

Vadra is married to Sonia's daughter Priyanka. Italian-born Sonia's 42-year-old son Rahul is widely seen as being the future prime minister of India.

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APPOINTMENT OF CONTRACTOR

Vest lets FB users hug from afar

AFP, San Francisco

A vest developed in Massachusetts Institute of Technology lets Facebook users hug one another no matter how far apart they are.

A Like-A-Hug vest on display Friday at the website of designer Melissa Kit Chow was touted as "wearable social media" that inflates to embrace wearers whenever Facebook friends "Like" items they post at the social network.

Like-A-Hug lets hugs "be given via Facebook, bringing us closer together despite physical distance," Chow said in a post describing the vest.

And, provided the sender is also wearing Like-A-Hug, a recipient can return a hug by squeezing their own vest to deflate it.

Rohingya groups

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, sources said a group of RSO leaders had been staying in a Cox's Bazar hotel for a few days before the Ramu attacks.

Some of these leaders belonged to Abdullah Mohammad Salamatullah's faction in the militant organisation, sources claimed.

A police official confirmed that they have been gathering information in this regard but would not disclose any progress for the sake of investigation.

As law enforcers have information on the presence of some RSO leaders in Cox's Bazar immediately before the attack, suspicion fall on other Rohingya groups too, the official added.

The person close to the RSO told this correspondent that several hundred rioters who came to Ramu from Garzania and Naikhanchhari in

Bandarban were RSO members.

They belonged to Muammer Yunus-led faction and Yunus's follower Hafez Abdullah and Mahmudullah played key roles to mobilise them.

Another group of Rohingyas came from Cox's Bazar.

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a banned Islamist militant organisation of the country, had close links with the RSO, JMB's explosives expert Boma Mizan said during interrogations.

Some JMB operatives received training from RSO arms experts in camps in remote hilly area of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (Huji) Bangladesh, another outlawed Islamist outfit, too had strong connections with RSO.

Internal groupings under the leadership of Yunus, Salamatullah and a

few other leaders have been weakening the RSO gradually since the late 90s.

Having the blessings of Nurul Islam, known as a boss of RSO, Salamatullah has been elevated to the top of the organisation.

There was also rivalry among RSO, ARNO and NUPA. More than a year ago, Salamatullah strove to unite all the Rohingya militant groups to regain strength.

The Istehadul Tullabul Muslemin -- known as student front of RSO -- acts as the main force behind all Rohingya terror operations. Its leaders are well trained in arms and explosives and also provide arms training to others.

An Islamic political party and its student wing leaders also played a significant role in bringing attackers from Cox's Bazar and some other areas, the source close to RSO added.

The Daily Star earlier