

Nat'l assembly approves new Libya cabinet

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's national assembly yesterday gave its approval to a cabinet presented by prime minister designate Ali Zeidan weeks after rejecting his predecessor's line-up.

Zidan's list includes a mixture of liberal figures and Islamists as he tries to build a coalition acceptable to all parties.

The previous prime minister, Mustafa Abu Shagur, was dismissed after Congress voted down his cabinet.

Only two-thirds of the assembly's 200 members attended the session.

The head of congress and Libya's interim leader, Mohammed Magarief, said he had been advised by security guards to end the session early.



PHOTO: AFP
This image obtained from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of the State of New York shows the South Ferry subway station in New York after it was flooded by seawater during Hurricane Sandy's rampage on Tuesday. The storm carved a trail of devastation across New York City and New Jersey killing more than 55 people as millions remained without power.

Syria peace envoy ends China tour, urges help

Air strikes pound rebels as death toll crosses 36,000

AFP, Damascus

Syrian warplanes pounded rebel bastions yesterday as peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi urged China to help end an escalating conflict now said to have killed more than 36,000 people.

In a week that has seen unprecedented air strikes, regime fighter jets again pummeled rebel-controlled areas east of Damascus where clashes have raged for months.

The raids were carried out a day after 30 civilians, including five children, were killed in air strikes and fighting around the capital's eastern suburbs, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Visiting Beijing, UN and Arab League peace envoy Brahimi said he hoped China would play an active role in helping to bring a halt to Syria's violence.

Greeting Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in

front of reporters, Brahimi said he hoped "China can play an active role in solving the events in Syria," without elaborating.

During the talks, Yang said the situation in Syria had reached a crucial stage but a political solution was the only way to end the bloodshed.

Brahimi's two-day visit to China, which ended yesterday, came after he met Russia's foreign minister in Moscow on Monday.

Clashes erupted around Damascus and in the north-western province of Idlib, where rebels attacked high-way military checkpoints and battles raged over the rebel-held town of Maaret al-Numan and the Wadi Daif army base.

Fighting also shook the northern city of Aleppo and a motorcycle bomb attack near a Shia Muslim shrine southeast of the capital killed at least eight people and injured dozens, reports said.

SYRIA CRISIS

Hurricane Sandy, climate change and some thoughts

STAR REPORT

The United States is reeling under the impact of a massive hurricane named Sandy, the second to hit the northeastern states in two years. Flooding and widespread blackouts have crippled New York city and parts of New Jersey. Even the upcoming US election is taking a back seat, as President Barack Obama and his rival Mitt Romney have quit the campaign trail to oversee the federal response.

Throughout, there has been frequent talk of global warming as a potential driver of such events, but scientists and the media are still struggling with how to communicate the complexities.

Surprisingly neither candidate is talking about one of the most critical issues of our time, climate change. The media is also surprisingly quiet on the issue.

However, for the first time in 24 years, the words "climate," "warming" or "greenhouse effect" were not used once in the presidential debate cycle. Meanwhile, "oil" and "natural gas" were mentioned 56 times.

Environmentalists have warned us repeatedly that the temperatures of this world is rising alarmingly to the extent that some islands in the Pacific are slip-

ping beneath the waves, while at each of the earth's poles, there is open sea where ice used to dominate.

But the western world, the major contributors to global warming, has been adamant. But the writing is on the wall.

To put that in context, the US has just experienced the warmest eight months on record, when 60 percent of the nation experienced moderate-to-exceptional drought conditions, 44,000 wildfires burned 7.7 million acres, and US corn production reached its lowest yield in 17 years.

In 2011, the 14 most severe weather events in the country cost the US close to \$140 billion. And now comes Hurricane Sandy, which is on track to be the largest storm ever to hit the East Coast, with damage estimated in the tens of billions.

The US has to break its silence on climate change; accept that its current energy-intense lifestyles are responsible for the increasingly violent weather patterns; and tax or otherwise limit the fossil fuels that are emitting climate-altering greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

These natural disasters should send a strong message to the powerful men and women of this planet that time for action is now. After all, this Earth doesn't need to save itself, but we do.

Could Sandy cost Obama key election states?

AFP, Washington

Less than a week before the US presidential elections, political pundits are eyeing two key states, Pennsylvania and Virginia, struggling to recover in the wake of the monster storm.

Superstorm Sandy's effect on election day in those states next Tuesday is just speculation at this stage, but both are vital to President Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney's White House ambitions.

Pennsylvania, solidly Democratic for the past two decades, appears to suddenly have come into play -- even though Obama is leading his Republican rival by 49.5 percent to 44.8 percent in an average of polls there by the RealClearPolitics website.

But the president's support is drawn heavily from metropolitan areas of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and less from more conservative rural areas. Havoc on city streets, if widespread outages continue, might depress turnout and could see Romney gain an edge.

Pennsylvania's 20 electoral college votes could prove crucial in the "every vote counts" tight race to the 270 electoral college votes needed for victory.

Scanting a shift in the air, two Republican super PACs were set to spend

some \$3.2 million flooding the Keystone State with television ads in a last minute all-out push, the Philadelphia Inquirer said.

Romney's political director, Rich Beeson, said in a Tuesday memo that "this expansion of the electoral map demonstrates that Governor Romney's momentum has jumped containment from the usual target states and has spread to deeper blue states."

The Obama campaign reportedly countered the Republican blitz with its own television ads, which began broadcasting across the state on Tuesday.

And it mocked Romney's decision to air new ads in states like Pennsylvania and Michigan as a sign of "weakness," saying the former Massachusetts governor had concluded he had no path to victory through swing states.

Pennsylvania analyst G Terry Madonna told McClatchy newspapers that Romney's chances of scoring an upset in the state remained low.

"He's still not doing well enough in the Philly and Pittsburgh suburbs. It's close enough that you can't say 'never.' But four points with little more than a week out is hard to make up."



Iran puts nuke drive on hold, temporarily Says Ehud Barak

AFP, London

Iran averted a showdown over its nuclear programme by putting a third of its medium-enriched uranium to civilian use, but the respite may be short-lived, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said Tuesday. Speaking to the Daily Telegraph while on a visit to London, Barak said it was "probable" that a tipping point in Israel's standoff with Iran over its nuclear programme would have been reached before the US presidential election next month had Iran not diverted the fuel in August.

The decision put back any immediate plans Iran had for acquiring a nuclear bomb, but Barak told the British newspaper the "moment of truth" had only been delayed by "eight to 10 months".

Tensions are running high between Israel and Iran with the possibility of Tehran acquiring an atomic weapon.

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Key states in the US election 2012

With just a week to go before the US presidential election, the outcome is still wide open

11 states are still undecided. They represent **146 electoral college votes to be fought over** by Barack Obama and his challenger Mitt Romney

