

Syria rebels' arms supplies drying up

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Despite widespread pledges of support from western and Arab states, the main Syrian opposition coalition says it has still not seen any significant increase in funding or arms supplies.

Members of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, formed in November, say that there is still no sign of western capitals relaxing their ban on delivering weapons to the rebels and even Gulf Arab governments, which helped arm opposition groups last year, are supplying less each week.

"The supplies are drying up. It is still Syrian expats – individuals – who are providing the funding by and large," said a Syrian businessman who has helped fund the opposition since the uprising began 22 months ago.

As it has become increasingly clear that large-scale external assistance is unlikely to materialise, the many locally-based rebel groups have found ways of sustaining themselves militarily and financially, but have largely given up hoping for a sudden breakthrough.

As a result, he said, the fragmented rebel forces have given up hopes of a sweep through the country and are focusing instead on a gradual attrition: besieging isolated government military bases to stop the regime using planes and helicopters against them and ultimately to capture weapons, to compensate for the meagre supplies from abroad.

In November, the rebels succeeded in bringing down some government aircraft with shoulder-launched missiles captured in a regime base, but Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said sightings of such missiles had faded in recent weeks.

Over the past two months, the US, UK and France as well as other European states and the Gulf monarchies have declared the newly formed national coalition "the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people", in what they hoped would be a turning point in bringing some cohesion to the deeply divided opposition and in forging links between those in exile and rebel commanders inside Syria.

Such links have continued to be elusive, however, and the new coalition and its backers are blaming each other, in rows reminiscent of the problems that dogged its forerunner, the Syrian National Council.

Western governments have made disbursements of aid dependent on proven control over rebel forces in Syria and credible assurances that the assistance would not further the aims of extremist Islamist groups such as the Nusra Front, declared a terrorist organisation by the US. Opposition leaders complain that without significant aid they have little hope of rallying support or exerting any control over the chaotic anti-Assad effort.

Tsunami as 7.5 quake hits Alaska

AFP, Washington

A major 7.5-magnitude earthquake shook an area in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of the US state of Alaska yesterday, triggering a potentially destructive local tsunami, the US government said.

The epicenter of the quake, which occurred at 08:58 GMT, was located 102 kilometers west of Craig, Alaska, at a depth of nine kilometers, according to the United States Geological Survey.

The strength of the tremor was initially put at 7.7, but it was later downgraded to 7.5. Several aftershocks measuring from 2.5 to 4.8 hit the area in the wake of the first one, the USGS said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Gaddafi son's trial to be held in February

PTI, Cairo

Libya has said that Saif al-Islam, the political heir of the country's late leader Gaddafi will go on trial in February.

"Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, former PM Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi and Gaddafi's former spy chief, Abdullah al-Senussi will be put on trial as soon as questioning is completed within the next month, as expected," Justice minister Salah Maraghi said on national television in a statement.

The trial was originally set for September, 2012, but was postponed in the light of Abdullah al-Senussi's extradition to Libya from Mauritania as prosecutors hoped he could provide more evidence against Saif al-Islam, state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Saif, 40, was considered the most likely successor to Col Gaddafi and actively supported his father's attempts to quash the country's rebellion in 2011, the report said.

Gaddafi's regime was overthrown in October 2011 by opposition forces with Nato's assistance after a seven-month civil war. Gaddafi, who ruled the country for almost 42 years, was captured and killed by rebels near Sirte, his home town, on October 20.

Gaddafi's second son, Saif, was captured in November 2011 by a militia group from the western mountain town of Zintan, where he has been held ever since.

Saif is also wanted by the International Criminal Court, but Libyan officials have refused to hand him over to The Hague.

Sangma launches new party

Forms alliance with opposition

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Former Indian Parliament Speaker Puno A Sangma, who had quit Nationalist Congress Party last year to contest the presidential elections, yesterday floated a new party National People's Party (NPP) and joined hands with BJP-led NDA.

Launching the outfit, Sangma said it has been active for long as a recognised party from Manipur.

The former Lok Sabha Speaker, who is the president of the NPP, said however that his daughter Agatha, a lawmaker, his home state Meghalaya, will be "in NCP for the time being on technical grounds" but sounded confident that "she will fight next elections as an NPP candidate."

Agatha had to resign as a federal minister in Congress-led UPA government on NCP's directions after she had campaigned for her father in the July presiden-



tial elections in defiance of the party.

"Book will be the national symbol of the party because we believe that only literacy and education can empower the weaker sections," said PA Sangma.

He said the party would contest the Meghalaya assembly elections due soon and is ready with the names of 33 candidates.

Sangma, who had unsuccessfully contested the presidential elections last year against Pranab Mukherjee, said his party will give due importance to tribal and women issues.

"Though the party is meant for all and its membership is open for everyone, it is going to be tribal centric," said Sangma.

Sangma had quit Congress, along with Sharad Pawar, on the issue of foreign origin of Congress President Sonia Gandhi in 1990s to float NCP.



PHOTO: AFP

Police stand guard as protesters wave the Union flag during clashes in Belfast, Northern Ireland on Friday. Some nine officers were injured and 18 people arrested in fresh violence yesterday. Tensions have risen in the British province since councillors voted on December 3, 2012 to limit the number of days the Union flag can fly over the City Hall to 17, outraging loyalists who believe Northern Ireland should retain strong links to Britain.

Sudans meet to push security, oil deals

AFP, Addis Ababa

The rival presidents of Sudan and South Sudan met for face-to-face talks yesterday to push forward stalled security, oil and border deals, and to discuss the fate of the contested Abyei region.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and his Southern counterpart Salva Kiir met alongside African Union mediator Thabo Mbeki, while tensions remain high after the latest in a string of accusations that Khartoum had bombed South Sudan.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who is hosting the talks, also attended the first meeting between the former civil war foes for over three months, when they signed a raft of key deals that have yet to be implemented.

Ahead of the meeting -- taking place in Ethiopia's presidential palace -- Bashir, Kiir, Hailemariam and Mbeki were seen sitting together talking and laughing.

The talks are expected to carry into the afternoon, although while the leaders are set to leave later on Saturday, diplomats say talks could continue Sunday if an agreement is not reached.

Delegations from Juba and Khartoum were also present, including defence ministers from both countries.

Bashir and Kiir arrived in Ethiopia on Friday, one day after South Sudan accused Khartoum of waging fresh attacks along their disputed border, but they first met separately only with mediators.

The summit of the leaders, whose nations are both struggling with economic austerity cuts following Juba's halting of oil exports through Sudan's pipelines, is the latest of repeated rounds of AU-mediated talks.

Along with a demilitarised border buffer zone, the September pacts allowed for a resumption of South Sudanese oil exports through Sudan.

'Chavez can delay oath and stay in power'

BBC ONLINE

The Venezuelan government yesterday said President Hugo Chavez can begin his new six-year term in office on Thursday, even if he is too ill to attend a swearing-in ceremony.

Vice-President Nicolas Maduro said the Supreme Court could swear in Chavez at a later date.

He dismissed opposition calls for new elections should Chavez not attend. President Chavez is in Cuba struggling to recover from his latest round of surgery to treat cancer.

He has not been seen in public since the operation more than three weeks ago.

Observers have different interpretations of what it would mean if Chavez misses his inauguration on Thursday.

Officials have said that Chavez, 58, has suffered from complications brought on by a severe lung infection that developed after his latest surgery.

Maduro said the president had "a right to rest and tranquillity, and to recuperate".

NEWS IN brief

Obama officially wins presidency

PTI, Washington

US President Barack Obama was officially declared winner of November presidential elections as votes of the Electoral College were tallied and certified by a joint session of the Congress yesterday.

While Obama and Vice-president Joe Biden received 332 Electoral College votes, the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, and his running mate, Paul Ryan received 206 votes.

Snowmobile mishap kills 6 in Italy

AFP, Milan

A snowmobile accident in the Italian Alps left six tourists dead and two others seriously injured on Friday, the ANSA news agency reported.

The eight -- all from eastern Europe, or Russia -- were riding on the vehicle across an unlit slope on Mount Cermis in the Trento region, rescuers said. The cause of the accident was not immediately

\$1.8m for a fish!

AFP, Tokyo

A monster bluefin tuna sold for a record-breaking \$1.8 million in the year's first auction at Japan's Tsukiji fish market yesterday, nearly three times the previous high set last year.

The 222-kilogram fish, caught off Japan's northern city of Oma, fetched a winning bid of 155.4 million yen, said an official at the Tokyo fish market.

The figure dwarfs the previous high of 56.49 million yen paid at last year's inaugural auction at Tsukiji, a huge working market that features on many Tokyo tourist itineraries.

CAR rebels capture 2 more towns

AFP, Paris

Rebels in the Central African Republic captured two more towns overnight, Territorial Administration Minister Josue Binoua told AFP yesterday.

Hopes that the conflict in the Central African Republic may be resolved through negotiation took a hit when rebels said Friday they had not been informed about plans for peace talks that have the support of the United States and the UN Security Council.

The United States on Friday urged all sides in the conflict to seize the opportunity to reach a

Egypt ex-minister cleared of graft

AFP, Cairo

Faruq Hosni, who was Egypt's culture minister for more than two decades under ousted president Hosni Mubarak, was cleared of corruption charges, a judicial source said yesterday.

A criminal court in the Giza suburb of Cairo "found Faruq Hosni not guilty on charges of corruption and illegal enrichment," the source said.

In September, state media reported that he had been accused of illegally acquiring 18 million Egyptian pounds (nearly \$3 million).



A poor Saudi father with his children

Behind the veil of Saudi's riches

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A few kilometres from the blinged-out shopping malls of Saudi Arabia's capital, Souad al-Shamir lives in a concrete house on a trash-strewn alley. She has no job, no money, five children under 14 and an unemployed husband who is laid up with chronic heart problems.

"We are at the bottom," she said, sobbing hard behind a black veil that left only her eyes visible. "My kids are crying and I can't provide for them."

Millions of Saudis struggle on the fringes of one of the world's most powerful economies, where jobs and welfare programmes have failed to keep pace with a population that has soared from 6 million in 1970 to 28 million today.

Under King Abdullah, the Saudi government has spent billions to help the growing numbers of poor, estimated to be as much as a quarter of the native Saudi population. But critics complain that those programmes are inadequate, and that some royals seem more concerned with the country's image than with helping the needy.

In 2011, for example, three Saudi video bloggers were jailed for two weeks after they made an online film about poverty in Saudi Arabia.

"The state hides the poor very well," said Rosie Bsheer, a Saudi scholar who has written extensively on development and poverty. "The elite don't see the suffering of the poor. People are hungry."

The Saudi government discloses little official data about its poorest citizens. But press reports and private estimates suggest that between 2 million and 4 million of the country's native Saudis live on less than about \$530 a month -- about \$17 a day -- considered the poverty line in Saudi Arabia.

Human rights activists in Saudi Arabia say one-fifth of the population in the Persian Gulf powerhouse lives in poverty, Iran based Press TV reports.

According to Saudi activists about 70 percent of people in the country do not own their homes.

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For Further Information, Please Contact Department of Economics

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