

Drama as PM abducted, freed in Libya

AGENCIES

Gunmen seized Prime Minister Ali Zeidan from in Tripoli yesterday and held him for several hours before he was freed, in the latest sign of Libya's lawlessness since Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in 2011.

AFP reported that the Libyan premiere was abducted in the early hours from the Corinthia Hotel by former rebel militiamen angry at the weekend capture by US special forces of a Libyan al-Qaeda suspect in Tripoli.

He appeared in good health arriving at government headquarters after his ordeal, waving to waiting well-wishers as he climbed out of an armoured personnel carrier.

The pre-dawn seizure of Zeidan came five days after US commandos embarrassed and angered Libya's government by capturing senior al-Qaeda suspect Abu Anas al-Libi off the streets of Tripoli and whisking him away to a warship.

Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdelaziz said Zeidan was freed six hours after being seized before dawn.

"He has been freed but we have no details so far on the circumstances of his release," Abdelaziz told AFP.

Ironically the premier had moved to the hotel for security reasons.

Government spokesman Mohamed Kaabar told the state IANA news agency that the premier had been "freed, not released." He did not elaborate on how he had been freed.

Moments before news broke of Zeidan's release, Deputy Prime Minister Al-Seddik Abdelkarim had vowed that the government

HIGHLIGHTS ON LIBYA DRAMA

Ali Zeidan was abducted from the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli by militia gang. Ironically, he was staying there for increased security.

He is believed to be captured by former rebels in protest of a US raid that captured key al-Qaeda leader Abu Anas al-Libi.

Kidnapping Group said they put Zeidan under "arrest" under orders from the public prosecutor.

Prime minister was freed six hours after his capture.

Tweets that he is 'fine' and vows not to resign despite militia's threats.



Ali Zeidan, left, in a press meet after being freed yesterday.



Corinthia Hotel

would not give into the demands of the perpetrators of a "criminal act".

"The government will not give in to blackmail by anyone," he said.

Zeidan, who made no immediate comment when he arrived at government headquarters, went straight into a meeting with his ministers and members of the General National Congress -- Libya's highest authority.

Ministers had already met in his absence earlier in the day for an emergency session convened after his abduction.

A government statement said Zeidan had been taken "to an unknown destination for

unknown reasons by a group" of men believed to be former rebels.

But the prime minister appeared to play down his kidnapping, characterizing it as an internal political problem.

"I want to reassure the foreigners inside Libya that this issue happened within the context of political Libyan disagreements and the foreigners are not being targeted," he said.

The Operations Cell of Libyan Revolutionaries, comprising former rebels and which had roundly denounced Libi's abduction and blamed Zeidan's government for it, said it had "arrested" Zeidan

under orders from the public prosecutor.

But, according to a BBC report, Justice Minister Salah al-Marghani said the prosecutor general had issued no arrest warrant.

The cabinet also said that ministers were "unaware of immunity being lifted or of any arrest warrant" for the premier.

Later, another group of ex-rebels, the Brigade for the Fight against Crime, said it was holding Zeidan, according to the official IANA news agency.

The two groups loosely fall under the control of the defence and interior ministries but largely operate autonomously.

Two years after the revolution that toppled Gaddafi, Libya's new authorities are struggling to rein in tribal militias and groups of former rebels.

Many Libyans blame political rivalries for the problems plaguing a country awash with militias and weaponry left over from the 2011 rebellion.

Zeidan had on Tuesday condemned the US capture of Libi in Tripoli, claiming his capture was a flagrant violation of Libyan sovereignty.

Libi -- real name Nazih Abdul Hamed al-Raghie -- was on the FBI's most wanted list with a \$5million bounty on his head for his alleged role in the 1998 twin bombings of two US embassies in East Africa.

He is reportedly being held aboard a US Navy ship in the Mediterranean.

US President Barack Obama said on Tuesday Libi was involved in plots that killed hundreds of people and would be brought to justice.



US GOVT SHUTDOWN

Obama to consider Republican offer

AFP, Washington

The White House yesterday said President Barack Obama would be open to a Republican plan for a short-term debt ceiling hike -- but only if no conditions are attached hold him to "ransom."

Fast moving political maneuvering yesterday led to the first signs that the imbroglio which has sent hundreds of thousands of federal workers home and sparked fears of a debt default, could be drawing to an end game.

House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner, caught between his restive caucus and fears the US could default without a deal to raise the debt ceiling by October 17, made the early running.

"Listen, it is time for leadership," said Boehner, emerging from a meeting with Republican lawmakers to offer a six-week extension of US borrowing authority.

But the Republican plan would not end the partial shutdown of the US government until Obama enters talks on a long-term budget deal -- a step the White House has so far refused to take.

Failure to agree on a budget led to the first government shutdown in 17 years on October 1, the beginning of fiscal year 2014.

AL, OIC call for Eid ceasefire in Syria

REUTERS, Cairo

The Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) yesterday urged Syrian government forces and fighters battling President Bashar al-Assad to stage a ceasefire during the Islamic Eid al-Adha holiday, which falls next week.

Syria's 2-1/2-year-old war has killed more than 120,000 people and forced millions from their homes into refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

With regional powers backing opposing sides in the conflict and Russia blocking Western efforts to force President Bashar al-Assad to quit, there is little sign of an end to the bloodshed.

Most of the Arab world will be on holiday next week when the Eid al-Adha holiday starts.

The Arab League and the OIC called on all warring factions to be "committed to a complete ceasefire and all acts of violence and killing of all kinds for the occasion of Eid al-Adha", the secretary generals of both bodies said in a joint statement.

Meanwhile, a second team of international inspectors arrived in Damascus yesterday to help supervise the destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal under the terms of a UN resolution.

Syria, which is believed to have 1,000 tonnes of sarin, mustard gas and other banned chemicals at some 45 sites, agreed to give up the arms under a rare US-Russian deal.

The inspectors are tasked under a UN Security Council resolution with destroying the arsenal by mid-2014.

CHINA'S FLOATING FISHING CITIES

MAIL ONLINE

The Tanka community in southeast China is home to 7,000 fishermen refusing to conform to modern lives, remaining in their traditional floating homes on the sea.

Their living habits date back to the Tang Dynasty, around 700AD, when local fishermen settled on their vessels to avoid wartime chaos on the mainland.

Before the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, the 'gypsies of the sea' were not allowed to go ashore.

In recent years, with the help of the local government, the fishermen have started to build houses along the shoreline.

However, many of them prefer to still live out on the sea on their floating homes as is their people's tradition.



RED MOSQUE RAID Pakistan re-arrests Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police yesterday said they had arrested former military ruler Pervez Musharraf over the 2007 raid of the Red Mosque in Islamabad, a day after a court granted him bail in a separate case.

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday granted bail to Musharraf over the death of a rebel leader, a move that would have seen him freed after nearly six months of house arrest once the release procedures were completed. He had already been granted bail in two other major cases against him, including one relating to the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

Reports said he was planning to go abroad after securing the bails.

ODDLY enough

Aussie students beat PM in sexist remarks

AFP, Sydney

Students from Sydney University have been handed Australia's annual gold "Ernie" award for sexism for distributing beer holders branded "It's not rape if it's my birthday", organisers said yesterday.

Ernie's founder Meredith Burgmann said the past two years of the awards had been "the worst I can remember" in 21 years due to Julia Gillard's appointment as prime minister, with many of the nominations and a number of the winning remarks about her.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott was among the recipients, taking the "The Clinton" category, for repeat offences.

The politics award went to his conservative colleague Mal Brough for naming a quail dish on a menu at an election fundraiser after due-premier Gillard due to its "small breasts, huge thighs and a big red box".

"The sheer vitriol of some of the attacks on Julia Gillard is hard to stomach," said Burgmann. "The Mal Brough menu was a particularly worthy winner."

US halts some military, economic aid for Egypt

REUTERS, Washington

The United States said on Wednesday it would withhold deliveries of tanks, fighter aircraft, helicopters and missiles as well as \$260 million in cash aid from Egypt's military-backed government pending progress on democracy and human rights.

The decision, described by US officials, demonstrates US unhappiness with Egypt's path since its army on July 3 ousted Mohamed Morsi, who emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood to become Egypt's first democratically elected leader last year.

But the State Department said it would not cut off all aid and would continue military support for counterterrorism, counter-proliferation and security in the Sinai Peninsula, which borders US ally Israel.

It also said it would continue to provide funding that benefits the Egyptian people in such areas as education, health and the development of the private sector.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State

John Kerry yesterday said that Washington's suspension of military hardware deliveries to Egypt could be lifted based on the behaviour of the country's rulers.

Kerry said the deliveries could resume if Cairo makes headway toward restoring civilian rule.



The split decision illustrates the US dilemma in Egypt: A desire to promote democracy and human rights along with a need to cooperate with a nation of strategic importance because of its control of the Suez Canal, its 1979 peace treaty with Israel and its status as the most populous nation in the Arab world.

The military-backed authorities have cracked down hard on the Brotherhood since ousting Morsi. On August 14, security forces smashed two pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo, with hundreds of deaths, and then declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew. Many of it's leaders have been arrested since.

The US position also exposed differences with its key Gulf ally Saudi Arabia, which welcomed Morsi's ouster and has promised extensive financial support to Egypt's new government.

Speaking to reporters in a conference call, US officials said the United States would withhold deliveries of M1A1 Abrams tank kits made by General Dynamics Corp, F-16 aircraft produced by Lockheed Martin Corp, and Apache helicopters and Harpoon missiles built by Boeing Co.

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to tell him about the US decisions, speaking for about 40 minutes in what one US official described as a friendly conversation.

'Snowden deserves Nobel Prize'

CNN ONLINE

The father of NSA leaker Edward Snowden told reporters in Moscow that he thinks his son deserves a Nobel Peace Prize.

He arrived there yesterday for his first visit with his son since the former government IT contractor fled the United States after leaking National Security Agency spy program details to the media.

US authorities have charged him with espionage and theft of government property.

Snowden received asylum in Russia on August 1. Snowden the son has kept a low profile, apparently not even telling his father where in Russia he is living.

Snowden sr has said that he does not expect his son to receive a fair trial in the United States and would not want him to come home, until that changes.

Malala bags EU rights prize

AFP, Strasbourg

Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai, the teenage activist nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, won the EU's prestigious Sakharov human rights prize yesterday, drawing a fresh threat of murder by the Taliban.

To thunderous applause announcing the European Parliament prize, the assembly's president Martin Schulz said "Malala bravely stands for the right of all children to be granted a fair education. This right for girls is far too commonly neglected."

The parliament's vote for Malala from a shortlist of three nominees "acknowledges the incredible strength of this young woman," Schulz added.

The 16-year-old has become an emblem of the fight against the most radical forms of Islamism. She was shot in the head by the Pakistani Taliban on October 9 last year for speaking out against them and has gone on to become a global ambassador for the right of all children to go to school.

In Pakistan, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) immediately vowed a fresh attempt on her life "even in America or the UK."

"She has done nothing," TTP spokesman Shahidullah Shahid told AFP. "She is getting awards because she is working against Islam."



Planet without a star!

AFP, Washington

Astronomers said Wednesday they have found a lonely planet outside the solar system floating alone in space and not orbiting a star.

The gaseous exoplanet, dubbed PSO J318.5-22, is just 80 light years from Earth and has a mass only six times that of Jupiter. Having formed 12 million years ago, the planet is considered a newborn among its peers.

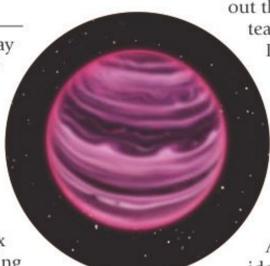
"We have never before seen an object free-floating in space that looks like this. It has all the characteristics of young planets found around other stars, but it is drifting

out there all alone," said research team leader Michael Liu of the Institute for Astronomy at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

"I had often wondered if such solitary objects exist, and now we know they do."

The researchers, whose study was published in the Astrophysical Journal Letters, identified the planet from its faint and unique heat signature using the Pan-STARRS 1 wide-field survey telescope on the Haleakala volcano of Hawaii's Maui island.

They suggested the newly found planet may have the lowest mass of all known freely floating objects.



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