



Weekly News Update

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The RAPID Weekly News Update is a weekly collection of unclassified media and news bulletins focused on noteworthy improvised explosive attacks and trends in the EOD/C-IED community. To subscribe to this weekly publication and/or to receive additional IED-related reports, please request a RAPID login at <https://rapid.a-tsolutions.com> using your government (.mil or .gov) email account.



People gather at the site of a bomb explosion at a road in Kaduna, Nigeria on Sunday, April 8, 2012. (AP Photos/Emma Kayode)

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AFPAK

1. [Security, Pakistan] Army Kills 14 Militants In NW Pakistan

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-pakistan-militants-idUSBRE83703Y20120408>

Pakistani helicopter gunships attacked hideouts on Sunday in a tribal area near the border with Afghanistan on Sunday, killing 14 suspected militants, military sources said.

Ten suspected militants were injured in the operations in two areas of the Orakzai tribal agency. The casualty figures provided by the Pakistani military could not be independently verified and militants often dispute official accounts.

Pakistan's army and air force have been conducting operations against militants in Orakzai and the neighboring Kurram tribal region since the beginning of the year.

The Pakistan Taliban, al Qaeda and other militant groups fighting Western forces in Afghanistan are entrenched in Pakistan's northwestern tribal areas. A series of military offensives have failed to clear the region.

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2. [Attack, Afghanistan] Suicide Attacks Kill 19 In Afghanistan

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-afghanistan-blasts-idUSBRE8390GS20120410>

Suicide bombers killed at least nineteen people in attacks across Afghanistan on Tuesday, including 11 Afghan police, as insurgents ramped up violence ahead of the traditional summer fighting months.

Two bombers, including one wearing a head-to-toe covering burqa, blew up a car laden with explosives on the airport road outside the western city of Herat, killing eight civilians and three police, provincial governor spokesman Mohiddin Noori said.

Twenty-three people were wounded in the attack, which took place in a usually peaceful part of the country near the border with Iran.

In volatile southern Helmand province, three suicide attackers targeted the district governor's office in Musa Qala district, killing eight police. Two of the bombers were shot dead, but one managed to detonate explosives.

"The first one opened fire on Afghan police. In response he was killed by our forces, while the second one detonated himself and police killed the third," said Dawood Ahmadi, spokesman for the Helmand provincial governor.

A NATO spokesman on Monday said insurgents had so far shown no sign of planning a repeat of last year's unified spring offensive against foreign and Afghan forces, preferring isolated attacks on small units and bases.

The Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility for the Helmand attack, saying it had been targeting the district governor and police chief, as well as other government officials.

"Our Mujahidin are resisting and have brought huge fatalities to the enemy," Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi said.

The Taliban last year launched "Operation Badr" - named after a famous seventh century victory by the Prophet Mohammed - vowing to target NATO military bases, convoys and Afghan government officials, as well as foreign companies.

They mounted high profile suicide attacks on heavily-guarded Afghan and foreign bases in the months after, culminating in a September attack on the U.S. embassy compound in Kabul by militants who occupied a nearby building site.

NATO's spokesman, German Brigadier General Carsten Jacobson, said last year's attacks, including the assassination of the head of the Afghan government peace council in charge of reconciliation efforts, had failed to revitalize the insurgency.

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But the Taliban may be emboldened with the planned post-summer withdrawal of 23,000 U.S. soldiers, and with 2012 being the final year of NATO's surge in troop numbers ahead of the pullout of most combat troops by end-2014.

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3. [Special Interest, Afghanistan] No Sign Of Spring Offensive By Taliban, NATO Says

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-afghanistan-insurgents-idUSBRE83909L20120410>

Afghan insurgents have so far shown no sign of planning a repeat of last year's spring offensive against foreign and Afghan forces, preferring isolated attacks on small units and bases, a NATO spokesman said.

With the traditional summer fighting months only weeks away, German Brigadier General Carsten Jacobson said available intelligence did not point to a unified Taliban assault.

"No announcement has been made by the insurgency, but we are looking at what they are doing at the moment. We are looking at this year with very open eyes," Jacobson told Reuters in an interview.

"They are focusing on attacks on individual posts, on small groups, outposts of soldiers. We haven't seen any cohesive action," he said late on Monday.

The Taliban last year launched "Operation Badr" - named after a famous seventh century victory by the Prophet Mohammed - vowing to target NATO military bases, convoys and Afghan government officials, as well as foreign companies.

They mounted high profile suicide attacks on heavily-guarded Afghan and foreign bases in the months after, culminating in a September attack on the U.S. embassy compound in Kabul by militants who occupied a nearby building site.

Jacobson said the attacks of last year - which also included the assassination of the head of the Afghan government peace council in charge of reconciliation efforts - had failed to revitalize the insurgency.

But the Taliban may be emboldened with the planned post-summer withdrawal of 23,000 U.S. soldiers, and with 2012 being the final year of NATO's surge in troop numbers ahead of the pullout of most combat troops by end-2014.

A suicide bomber on Tuesday killed three police and six civilians in western Herat province, while the head of an eastern peace council was assassinated last week in another blow to efforts to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban.

"We are waiting, how they are positioning themselves in their attempt to regain momentum. We are very optimistic that we will be, as last year, able to stop all the efforts that they are throwing against us," Jacobson said.

More than a decade after U.S.-backed forces toppled the Islamic militant government from power, the Taliban are still a potent threat, not only waging attacks in their southern strongholds but also in the once-peaceful centre of the country.

Western commanders have attributed smaller scale attacks to battlefield reverses for the insurgents, who they say now prefer to rely on surprise strikes and suicide attacks rather than confronting foreign troops directly.

NATO-led forces are beefing up Afghan security forces ahead of the 2014 withdrawal in hopes the fledgling military and police can beat back insurgent groups and help secure the nation as the Western presence winds down.

In a step toward complete transition to Afghan forces, Afghanistan and the United States reached a deal on Sunday to curb night raids on Afghan homes, giving Kabul a veto over the operations despised by local people as a privacy intrusion.

Jacobson said Afghan special forces - though their numbers were still growing - were already capable of leading night raids while U.S. troops would have a support and advisory role.

He said their training should not be directly compared against Western mentors, who were taught roles beyond anti-insurgency operations.

"Afghan National Security Forces have to deal with the challenges that are waiting for them," Jacobson said. "They are not an army that has to be trained for endeavors outside Afghanistan's borders or overseas, or any role like that."

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4. [Attack, Pakistan] Unknown Militants Detonate Girls' School In NW Pakistan

Saturday, 7 April 2012

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/235012.html>

Suspected militants have blown up a girls' primary school building in Mohmand tribal region of northwestern Pakistan, where troops are fighting the Taliban, Press TV reports.

Militants used explosive material to dynamite a government- run school in Lakarro area of Mohmand tribal region early Saturday morning, leaving no casualties as the school building was vacant at the time of the blast.

Taliban militants have destroyed 92 government-administrated schools, mostly girls' schools, in Mohmand Agency over the past three years.

Militant group Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has banned female education in northwestern Pakistan in a move that has affected thousands of girls there and caused the number of enrolments to drop dramatically.

TTP warns parents against sending their daughters to school, describing education as 'unnecessary' or 'harmful' for girls.

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5. [Attack, Afghanistan] IED Explosion Kill NATO Soldier In Southern Afghanistan

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://www.khaama.com/ied-explosion-kill-nato-soldier-in-southern-afghanistan-072>

An International Security Assistance Force service member was killed following a roadside bomb explosion in southern regions of the country on Thursday.

The incident takes place a day after 2 NATO service members were killed following insurgents attack in southern and eastern parts of the country.

The statement issued by NATO-led International Security Assistance Force confirmed a NATO soldier was killed following an improvised explosive device explosion in southern Afghanistan.

The statement did not disclose further information regarding the exact location of the incident and nationality of the deceased soldier.

International Security Assistance Force generally do not disclose identities of the NATO soldiers killed in Afghanistan saying, "It is ISAF policy to defer casualty identification procedures to the relevant national authorities."

At least 108 NATO service members including 68 US troops, 14 British soldiers and 26 soldiers from the other NATO member countries have been killed in various incidents across the country since the beginning of 2012.

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6. [Security, Afghanistan] ANA Soldiers Learn IED-Defeating Techniques

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://www.dvidshub.net/news/86630/ana-soldiers-learn-ied-defeating-techniques#.T4cpI9nhfLA>

When Afghan National Army soldiers go on patrol, staying safe and combat effective means that they need to be aware of improvised explosive devices and what to look for.

ANA soldiers graduated a course designed to help them identify and minimize the damage caused by IEDs, April 12. The course covered types of IEDs and ways to prevent them from injuring soldiers and civilians.

“I learned to find IEDs and how to take care of them,” said Sgt. Abdul Khaleq, a squad leader with Route Clearance Tolay, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps. “We learned about all kinds of IEDs from mass-produced to homemade. We were also shown all different kinds of pressure plates and switches, so we know what to look for.”

Pressure plates are devices that cause IEDs to explode when stepped on or rolled over by a vehicle. The enemy can also use manual control switches, waiting for someone to pass before setting off the IED.

U.S. Marine advisers taught the course and showed the soldiers their tactics, techniques and procedures for stopping IEDs.

“My favorite part of the course was how to face a suicide bomber and de-escalate the situation, said Kaleq, 23, from Baghlan province. “The whole class was interesting, but that was my favorite part.”

The graduates plan on teaching other ANA soldiers what to look for while on missions.

“At first I will teach my fellow soldiers what to look for, then I can go look for IEDs and hopefully save lives,” said Kaleq.

Another part of the course covered how to reduce casualties, both with soldiers and civilians.

“I was interested in the cordons,” said Pvt. Meraj Kahn, driver with Route Clearance Tolay about keeping an area clear of soldiers and civilians in case an IED explodes before it can be disabled.

The soldiers are glad that they learned about IEDs, because they are all interested in saving lives.

“I’m glad I graduated, and it is an honor,” said Kahn, 25, from Jalalabad. “I want to be able to save lives and this class will help me with that. The Marines taught us good information on the IEDs, and it was a good class overall.”

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7. [Special Interest, Afghanistan] Afghanistan, U.S. Reach Deal On Controversial Night Raids

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-afghanistan-nightraids-idUSBRE83703920120408>

Afghanistan and the United States reached a deal on Sunday to curb night raids on Afghan homes, giving Kabul a veto over the operations despised by most local people and clearing the way for a wider pact securing a U.S. presence.

Night raids on suspected militants have helped fan rising anti-Western sentiment ahead of a withdrawal by most Western combat troops to be completed by 2014, but are backed by NATO commanders as a key anti-insurgent tactic.

Their conduct had been one of the biggest hurdles in negotiations on a broader strategic pact governing a future U.S. role in the country, including advisers and special forces soldiers to help safeguard stability for at least a decade.

The deal, which has taken months of negotiation, was signed by Afghan Defense Minister General Abdul Rahim Wardak and NATO's top commander in the country, U.S. Marine General John Allen.

"Today we are one step closer to the establishment of the U.S.-Afghan strategic partnership. Most importantly, today we are one step closer to our shared goal and vision of a secure and sovereign Afghanistan," Allen said at the deal's signing.

Under the agreement, Afghan authorities will have control over prisoners taken in night raids and decide whether to allow U.S. interrogators access to detainees.

An Afghan judge would also have to grant a warrant approving operations, although the document said Afghan authorities would have to set up judicial processes "capable of issuing timely and operationally secure judicial authorizations".

Analysts have warned that stronger curbs on night raids for quick-reaction NATO forces could hamper operations and reduce the impact of one of the most effective anti-insurgent tactics, a prospect which will privately worry NATO commanders.

U.S. troops will continue to take part in operations, but a new elite force of Afghan special operations commandos will lead raids with American forces along to give advice and support.

"From now on all night raids will be conducted by the Afghan national army, police and intelligence in close coordination with Afghan judicial bodies," Afghan Defense Minister Wardak told a news conference.

The United States would provide all necessary equipment and technical advice to Afghan special operations forces, the document said.

AFGHAN COMPLAINTS

Many Afghans, in complaints backed by President Hamid Karzai, say the raids violate their privacy, especially that of women in conservative areas, where support for the ethnic Pashtun-dominated Taliban is strongest.

Only Afghan forces, the document said, would be able to search residential homes or compounds, while Afghan police and soldiers would have to protect women and children, as well as culturally sensitive places.

A joint U.S.-Afghan committee will decide which raids to carry out and an Afghan judge must then review its recommendation and decide whether to issue a warrant.

There is also growing sensitivity over the presence of foreign troops after a series of incidents, including the massacre of 17 Afghan villagers for which a U.S. soldier was charged, and the burning of copies of the Koran at a NATO base.

The two countries last month signed a deal transferring a major U.S.-run prison to Afghan authority, leaving military raids of Afghan homes as the primary sticking point to achieving a broader strategic partnership deal.

Jawed Ludin, the deputy foreign minister and top negotiator in talks on the strategic deal, said on Saturday both sides had failed to communicate the benefits of the pact and dampen anxiety that foreigners were preparing to abandon the country.

The United States has been pressing to wrap up the long-delayed strategic partnership deal with Afghanistan ahead of a NATO summit in Chicago in May while at the same time trying to draw the Taliban and other insurgents into peace talks.

Ludin said when the night raids deal was concluded, work would start immediately on the wider security pact, which will require a vote of approval in the fractious Afghan parliament.

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AFRICOM

8. [Security, Nigeria] Nigerian Authorities Seize Cache Of Explosive Devices In Raids

Friday, 6 April 2012

<http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/04/06/nigerian-authorities-seize-cache-of-explosive-devices-in-raids/>

Nigerian authorities say they seized dozens of explosive devices and rocket launchers during raids on two homes in the restive northern Gombe area.

Police official Bitrus Asha says 60 improvised explosive devices and bomb-making materials were confiscated at a house in Gombe Thursday, and five people arrested.

A sixth person was arrested at the second house in the Barunde suburb of Gombe, where 51 rocket launchers turned up along with several dozen bags of fertilizer, and acid that can be used in making bombs.

Police have not confirmed if the suspects are members of the radical Islamic group Boko Haram, which has carried out deadly attacks in Nigeria.

Boko Haram has said it wants to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria and does not acknowledge Nigeria's government and constitution.

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9. [Security, Sudan] Sudan Accuses South Of Assaulting Oil Area

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/11/us-sudan-southsudan-clashes-idUSBRE83A0E020120411>

Sudan said on Wednesday it would use "all legitimate ways and means" to oppose what it said was South Sudan's assault on an oil-producing border region disputed between the two countries and long marred by clashes.

The two former civil war foes have accused each other of provoking the clashes in the disputed area around Sudan's South Kordofan border state. South Sudan, which declared independence in July, has been locked in a dispute with Khartoum over oil payments and other issues.

Sudanese rebels said the Khartoum government was carrying out air and ground attacks in South Kordofan on Wednesday. Sudan's military spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

South Sudan's army (SPLA) said it had repulsed an attack on Tuesday and pursued Sudanese troops into the disputed Heglig area, vital to Sudan's economy because it has an oil field that accounts for about half of its 115,000 barrel-a-day output.

But Khartoum said it was an aggression.

"On Tuesday morning and afternoon, areas of South Kordofan state, most notably Heglig, were brutally attacked by the SPLA, supported by the state of South Sudan, using mercenary forces and rebel groups," Sudan's Information Ministry said in a statement.

"The government of Sudan announces it will oppose this flagrantly aggressive behavior by all legitimate ways and means."

Al Jazeera television on Tuesday quoted a government source in Khartoum as saying South Sudan's army had taken control of the Heglig oil area, but South Sudan's military spokesman Philip Aguer said he could not confirm the report.

He was not immediately available to comment on Wednesday.

The South Kordofan state has seen an insurgency since June by rebels who had fought as part of the southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army during the civil war.

Fighting spread to the nearby Blue Nile state in September.

When Sudan was partitioned under a 2005 peace deal that ended the civil war, tens of thousands of fighters who had sided with the south were left north of the border. Sudan accuses Juba of continuing to back the insurgents, which South Sudan denies.

The rebels, renamed the SPLA-North, said they were fighting government forces in the villages of Toma and Hassan, about 45 km (28 miles) west of Rashad town, on Wednesday.

"The Sudanese army is using air strikes, and there is fighting on the ground," SPLA-N spokesman Arnun Lodi said.

Violence in the border regions has hampered negotiations over partition-related issues including demarcating the border, determining the status of citizens in one another's territory and dividing up debt.

Importantly, the two still need to work out how much landlocked South Sudan - which took about three quarters of what was the united country's oil output when it seceded - should pay to export crude using pipelines and other infrastructure in Sudan.

South Sudan shut down its output of about 350,000 barrels a day in January after Khartoum started taking some oil to make up for what it called unpaid fees. Oil accounted for about 98 percent of South Sudan's state revenues.

About 2 million people died in Sudan's civil war, waged for decades over ideology, ethnicity, religion and oil.

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10. [Trend, Mali] Mali President Toure Resigns In Deal With Coup Leaders

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17653882>

President Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali has formally resigned as part of a deal with coup leaders to end the crisis gripping the West African state.

International mediator Djibril Bassole, Burkina Faso's foreign minister, confirmed a letter of resignation had been submitted.

The resignation paves the way for the coup leaders to step aside and the parliamentary speaker to take over.

Mali has been grappling with a separatist uprising in the north.

It intensified after the coup by army officers on 22 March.

Mr Bassole, who represents the West African regional bloc Ecowas, met Mr Toure in the Malian capital, Bamako.

"We have just received the formal letter of resignation from President Amadou Toumani Toure," he told reporters.

"We will now contact the competent authorities so that the vacancy of the presidency would be established and so that they take the appropriate measures."

Under the agreement, the Malian parliamentary speaker, Dioncounda Traore, will take over as interim president and govern with a transitional administration until elections are held.

Once he has been sworn in, Mr Traore has 40 days to organise this poll, the deal stipulates.

Mr Traore, who has been in Burkina Faso since the coup was launched, said as he left for Bamako: "I am leaving for Mali with my heart full of hope.

"My country has known enormous difficulties, but I am leaving with the hope the people of Mali will come together to face this adversity head-on."

Ecowas has lifted sanctions it imposed after the coup and an amnesty has been agreed for the coup leaders.

The coup, led by Capt Amadou Sanogo, took place amid accusations from the army that the government had not done enough to suppress the insurrection in the north.

Since the coup, key towns in northern Mali have fallen to Tuareg separatist rebels and their Islamist allies.

The Tuaregs have called for their newly-named territory of Azawad to be recognised as independent, although this has been rejected by the international community.

There are two main groups behind the rebellion: the secular National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and Ansar Dine, an Islamist group.

The MNLA is made up partly of Tuaregs who had fought in Libya on the side of Col Muammar Gaddafi and returned to Mali after he was killed.

The latter has started to impose Sharia law in some towns.

Among the towns to have fallen to the Tuaregs is Timbuktu, the 1,000-year-old desert city which is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

Unesco warned that the fighting could damage Timbuktu's historic structures.

Human rights group Amnesty International has warned of a major humanitarian disaster in the wake of the rebellion.

Meanwhile, Ecowas is preparing a force of up to 3,000 soldiers which could be deployed to stop the rebel advance.

The Tuaregs, who inhabit the Sahara Desert in the north of Mali, as well as several neighbouring countries, have fought several rebellions over the years.

They complain they have been ignored by the authorities in Bamako.

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11. [Attack, Nigeria] Bomb Kills At Least 16 In Nigeria's Kaduna

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-nigeria-bomb-idUSBRE8370EZ20120409>

A car bomb killed at least 16 people and wounded dozens more in the northern Nigerian town of Kaduna on Easter Sunday, after security officers stopped the vehicle carrying it from approaching a church, witnesses and police said.

There was also an explosion around 200 km (125 miles) southeast in the central town of Jos on Sunday evening, the national emergency management agency said. A military spokesman said it was a "minor explosion" and nobody was killed.

No group claimed responsibility for the Kaduna attack, but the apparent targeting of a Christian place of worship will stir memories of a string of deadly assaults by Islamist militants Boko Haram on Christmas Day last year.

A spokesman for the Kaduna state emergency management agency said 16 people had so far been confirmed dead, while 35 more were critically injured and receiving treatment in hospitals.

Kaduna police commissioner, Mohammad Jinjiri Abubakar, said police were pursuing a suspect vehicle when it crashed into another car and caused a massive explosion.

Abubakar did not say whether they knew who was behind the attack or what the bomb was intended for. Local residents said the bomber had tried to approach a church with his vehicle but was turned back at a police roadblock and then pursued.

"A suicide bomber in a vehicle was moving towards the ECWA Church and the All Nations Christian Assembly," said Tony Udo, a Kaduna resident.

"Security agents accosted and repelled him. While he was driving away, the bomb went off at Junction Road, near the Stadium roundabout, killing the bomber and some commercial motorcyclists," Udo told Reuters.

He said the blast shattered windows in the church and nearby houses and vehicles.

ISLAMIST INSURGENCY

Britain and the United States last week warned their citizens living in Africa's biggest oil producer that violence was likely during the Easter period. Nigeria has ramped up security across the Muslim north.

Nigeria's population of more than 160 million is split roughly equally between a largely Christian south and a mostly Muslim north. Kaduna sits close to the dividing line and was the nucleus of post-election violence last year which killed about 800 people.

President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian who won that election, has been criticized for not getting a grip on the insurgency by Islamists in the north.

Boko Haram, a movement loosely styled on Afghanistan's Taliban, has killed hundreds this year in bomb and gun attacks that mostly target police, the military and the government.

The group says it wants its imprisoned members released and sharia, Islamic law, applied throughout Nigeria.

Nigerian authorities and diplomats believe attacks on churches and on Christian holidays are part of an attempt to stoke a religious conflict.

In the remote northeast town of Maiduguri, Boko Haram's homeland, the military outnumbered the public on some streets on Sunday.

"Patrols (are) being intensified to forestall any breakdown in law and order," a spokesman for the joint military task force told Reuters.

In Nigeria's second biggest city Kano, where coordinated attacks in January killed 186 people, authorities deployed trucks of soldiers and a helicopter to try to prevent violence.

"I will stay away from church because we have been told by our pastor to be careful. We are afraid, everybody is afraid because we don't know when the next attack will come," said Jenifer Paul, a housewife in Kano.

Boko Haram set off a series of bombs across Nigeria on Christmas Day last year, including one at a church outside the capital Abuja that killed at least 37 people and wounded more than 50.

The Pope condemned "savage terrorist attacks" against Christian churches in Nigeria in his Easter message on Sunday.





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12. [Attack, Nigeria] Explosion Hits Central Nigeria's Jos

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-nigeria-explosion-idUSBRE8370EG20120408>

An explosion hit Nigeria's central town of Jos on Sunday, an emergency agency said, hours after a car bomb 200 kilometres northwest in Kaduna killed at least 16 people.

"NEMA confirms that an hour ago an explosion occurred in Tudun Wada area of Jos. Security personnel moved to the scene as injured are being evacuated," a spokesman for the national emergency management agency (NEMA) said.

Jos sits on the dividing line between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and largely Christian south and religious and ethnic clashes regularly flare up.

Earlier on Sunday a bomb exploded in the northern town of Kaduna after security officers stopped the vehicle carrying it from approaching a church, witnesses and police said.

At least 16 people were killed but the final death toll is likely to be higher, an emergency agency spokesman said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the Kaduna attack, but the apparent targeting of a Christian place of worship will stir memories of a string of deadly assaults by Islamist militants Boko Haram on Christmas Day last year.

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13. [Security, Mali] Algerian Hostages In Northern Mali Released

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-mali-algeria-hostages-idUSBRE83709420120408>

Seven Algerian diplomats taken hostage in rebel-held northern Mali have been released, Algeria's El Watan newspaper reported on its website on Sunday, citing its correspondent in Mali.

There was no immediate comment on the report from the Algerian authorities.

The diplomats were abducted late last week from the town of Gao, part of a swathe of territory in northern Mali now under the control of Tuareg-led separatists.

A spokesman for the separatists said an Islamist group with ties to the separatists was behind the abduction.

The hostages include Algeria's consul in Gao and six consular staff, according to the Algerian foreign ministry.

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14. [Security, Tunisia] Police Clash With Anti-Government Protesters In Central Tunis

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-tunisia-protest-idUSBRE8380CI20120409>

Police clashed with thousands of anti-government protesters who tried to storm Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis on Monday, defying a ban on demonstrations in the area - a focal point of the revolt that ousted Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali over a year ago.

About 2,000 protesters marching from the nearby headquarters of the main labor union, which has been at the forefront of opposition to the Islamist-led government, were met by riot police at the interior ministry on Bourguiba Avenue.

The moderate Islamist Ennahda party, which won elections last year, is under pressure from secular parties and the labor union not to give religion too prominent a place in public life - and from Salafist parties wanting the opposite.

Protesters on Monday also likened Ennahda to the Trabelsi family of Ben Ali's wife Leila, widely blamed by Tunisians for the rampant corruption of the final years of his rule. "The people are sick of the new Trabelsis," protesters chanted.

Police beat back protesters with batons and fired tear gas to break up the crowd, chasing stone-throwing demonstrators down side streets in scenes reminiscent of the tactics used during Ben Ali's 23 years as president, when Tunisia was a police state and freedoms severely restricted.

"The people want the fall of the regime," protesters chanted, echoing the demand that was coined in Tunisia during the 2011 revolution and sparked the Arab Spring uprisings.

"No fear, no terror, the street belongs to the people," the crowds chanted as they confronted police.

Hundreds more protesters were heading towards the central street from other areas after an online call to march on Bourguiba Avenue on the April 9 Martyrs' Day holiday, marking the suppression of pro-independence demonstrators by French colonial troops in 1938.

Tunisia has changed enormously since the revolution, with a democratic system now in place and ordinary people able to speak and demonstrate freely for the first time in memory.

The interior ministry decided to ban rallies on Habib Bourguiba Avenue in late March after local hotels, restaurants and other businesses complained that repeated protests and counter-protests were snarling traffic and disrupting business.

Tunisia's revolution ousted Ben Ali in January 2011. In October, in the country's first free elections Ennahda won 40 percent of seats in the constituent assembly that will draft the new constitution.

From the outset, Ennahda has faced strong opposition from secular parties and Tunisia's powerful labor union, who fear it will impose conservative religious values on a country long known for its liberal and secular outlook.

Ennahda has promised not to ban alcohol or enforce the veil but has also faced pressure from conservative Salafi Islamists pushing for a greater role for religion in public life.

The party, which leads the government in coalition with two secular groups, has tried to steer a middle course but the clashes with protesters are likely to cause controversy.

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15. [Trend, Mali] Sahara States At Odds Over Mali Rebels

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-mali-north-idUSBRE83808Y20120409>

Sahara Desert states differed on Sunday over whether to crush or talk to the rebels who have seized northern Mali - a mix of Tuareg separatists and Islamists with links to al Qaeda.

At a meeting of regional countries in Mauritania, Niger said the rebels' gains should be reversed before any talks, but Algeria warned that military intervention risked further complicating the situation.

The rebels, bolstered by guns and fighters from Libya's war last year, routed Malian troops, in disarray after a March 22 coup, to carve out a zone the size of France and declare an independent state of "Azawad".

Mali's government had long had a weak hold over its northern zone, but its neighbors now fear a void that will exacerbate regional instability, terrorism and smuggling.

Mauritania, Algeria, Niger and Mali had set up a joint military command headquarters before the lightning rebel push, although it had struggled to coordinate efforts against what they see as an Islamist threat in the Sahara.

Niger, which has suffered its own sporadic Tuareg rebellions, said there could be discussion of some of the demands of the separatist National Movement for the Liberation of Azwad (MNLA).

But Foreign Minister Mohamed Bazoum echoed international rejection of the group's claim for independence as "absurd and unacceptable".

"We need to work to redress the balance of forces on the ground before we can talk about negotiations," Bazoum said at the opening of the meeting in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott.

"We need to organize a confrontation with the terrorist groups ... Mali's north must be cleared of terrorism and it seems to me we have the ideal opportunity," he said.

West Africa's ECOWAS group had been mulling an intervention to prevent any further rebel push until the coup meant restoring civilian rule became the regional bloc's priority.

The junta pledged on Saturday to leave power within days, paving the way for the possibility for an intervention but it remains unclear when boots could be put on the ground.

Bazoum said Niger, Mauritania and Algeria, as Mali's closest partners in the north, should engage in diplomacy but be ready to intervene militarily, if needed.

Algeria, the region's biggest power, took a different tack, saying talks were the only way out. France, colonial ruler over all the states at the table, has also pushed for dialogue with the separatist rebel movement.

"The solution can only be a political one. It cannot be the result of a military effort which could instead worsen an already complex and precarious situation," Abdelkader Messahel, Algeria's delegate minister for African affairs, said.

Algeria's position in Mali has been further complicated by the kidnapping last week of its consul and six other staff from its mission in Gao, one of the northern towns seized by rebels.

Algeria's El Watan newspaper reported on its website on Sunday that the diplomats had been freed, but Algerian officials in Nouakchott were unable to confirm that.

Nearly a week after Malian government forces were completely routed across the north, it remains unclear which groups really control main towns or swathes of territory.

The MNLA separatists, which are more prominent in Gao than the Islamists, denied any involvement in the kidnapping.

Ahead of the El Watan report that the diplomats had been freed, French RFI radio said MUJWA, a splinter group from al Qaeda's North Africa wing, AQIM, had claimed the kidnapping.

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16. [Attack, Nigeria] Shooting, Bombing Kill Dozens In Northern Nigeria

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/04/09/shooting-bombing-kill-dozens-in-northern-nigeria/>

Police in northeastern Nigeria say suspected members of the radical Islamist group Boko Haram shot dead a 6-year-old girl and wounded two infants Sunday, after a suicide car bombing earlier in the day killed at least 36 people.

A Yobe state police spokesman told VOA the gunmen stormed the house of a police corporal in the town of Potiskum and shot three of his children. The spokesman said the officer narrowly escaped the attack.

The bombing happened earlier Easter Sunday in the city of Kaduna, where witnesses said security personnel prevented the attacker from reaching a group of several churches.

Saidu Adamu, Kaduna state's information commissioner, told VOA the explosion damaged several buildings on the city's main road and struck an area where motorcycle taxis do business. He said it appeared the bomb had detonated prematurely, and that despite the casualties, the attack could have been much worse.

"I want to believe that we are so lucky that possibly the person who was carrying the bomb could not reach his target, and the bomb's timer was against him." He noted that the city's streets are mostly empty on Sundays and said it was "lucky" the attack did not come on a work day.

A second blast hit later Sunday in the central city of Jos, wounding several people. The explosions came after foreign diplomats warned of possible attacks on one of the holiest days on the Christian calendar.

Four bombs killed 44 people in Nigeria on Christmas Day last year, including more than 30 at a Catholic church near the capital, Abuja.

Adamu said authorities stationed 30 to 50 security personnel at Kaduna churches Sunday, and that the measures were "highly effective." He also said citizens play an important role in maintaining security.

"Without peace we can never have any municipal government, so I want to assure that Kaduna state government will continue to do its best, but I also want to call on people to understand that security is a business of all."

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Sunday's attacks.

The radical Islamic group Boko Haram has killed hundreds of people this year in Nigeria and claimed responsibility for the Christmas Day bombings.

Boko Haram, which means "Western education is a sin" in the Hausa language, is fighting to turn northern Nigeria into a strict Islamic state.

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17. [Attack, Somalia] Somalia Bombing Kills 11

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gusnaX2MmLBiewXsDjGiZSrFW3uw?docId=CN.G.141cd2e58507825eb45bec7ea8103713.a51>

A bomb blast in a market in the strategic Somali town of Baidoa on Monday killed at least 11 people and wounded many more in the latest in a string of attacks in the war-torn nation, an official said.

"At least 11 people -- most of them women and children -- were killed by a bomb placed in a busy market," said lawmaker Mohamed Ibrahim Habsade.

The attack was the worst in Baidoa since the town was wrested from Al-Qaeda allied Shebab insurgents by Ethiopian-backed Somali forces in February.

"Many more were injured in the explosion, which was biggest since we took control of the town," Habsade said.

Witnesses said the bomb was detonated after Somali government troops entered the market, but that the majority of those killed were civilians.

"This was a disaster," said Adan Hassan, a witness. "I saw several dead bodies of at least nine civilians, most of them women -- the explosion occurred as people were shopping."

"Around 35 people were injured, some of the seriously," said Abdirahman Waney, another witness.

Baidoa, located 250 kilometres (155 miles) northwest of Mogadishu, was the seat of Somalia's transitional parliament until the hardline Shebab captured it three years ago.

African Union troops deployed in the town last week, the first time the force has dispatched troops outside the capital Mogadishu since the 10,000-strong force was set up five years ago.

The AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) sent 100 Burundian and Ugandan soldiers to Baidoa following Ethiopia's capture of the town from the hardline Shebab.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for Monday's bombing, but the Shebab have launched a series of recent guerrilla attacks and vowed to topple the Western-backed government.

Last week, six people including two top Somali sports officials were killed in an attack on the newly reopened national theatre in Mogadishu by a female suicide bomber, narrowly missing the prime minister and seven other ministers.

A broad offensive by Ethiopian and Kenyan forces in southern and western Somalia has forced the rebels from many of their strongholds, while AU troops in Mogadishu have advanced on to the outskirts of the city.

Despite the losses, the Shebab -- Somalia's most brutal militia -- remain a serious threat to internationally backed efforts to restore stability in the Horn of African country plagued by a devastating civil war since 1991.

The absence of an effective government in Somalia since it plunged into a civil war two decades ago has allowed armed groups, pirate gangs and extremist militia to carve up the country into mini fiefdoms.

Although the Shebab have lost ground recently, analysts warn that they still remain a serious threat to efforts to restore stability in Somalia.

Since abandoning fixed positions in Mogadishu in August, the Shebab have been chased out of most of their strongholds, with the notable exception of the southern port of Kismayo, switching instead to guerrilla attacks.

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18. [Attack, Libya] UN Convoy Targeted In Explosion In East Libya

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-libya-explosion-idUSBRE8390T220120410>

A bomb was thrown at a convoy carrying the head of the United Nations mission to Libya on Tuesday, a U.N. spokeswoman said, but no one was hurt in the explosion.

The attack in the eastern city of Benghazi is the first of its kind targeting a foreign mission since last year's revolt overthrew Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and is likely to raise concerns about instability in the country.

"While on a visit to Benghazi the head of the U.N. support mission in Libya had what appeared to be an explosive device thrown at his convoy. No one has been hurt and the authorizes are investigating," said the U.N.'s Hua Jiang.

The head of mission, Ian Martin, is a British citizen who was appointed to the post in September last year by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. He has also worked as a U.N. envoy in conflict zones including Gaza, East Timor, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. He was previously Secretary General of human rights organization Amnesty International.

A security official who was traveling with the convoy, but declined to give his name, said the home-made device was thrown while the convoy's five armored vehicles was pulling into the parking area of the Supreme Security Committee's building where they had a meeting.

The attacker missed the convoy and the device exploded about four meters away from the convoy, a Libyan intelligence source told Reuters, leaving a small hole in the road.

It was unclear who had thrown the bomb, but security analysts have warned that in the security vacuum left by Muammar Gaddafi's fall, there is a risk that loyalists of the former leadership or Islamist militants could mount an insurgency along the lines of the one in Iraq after the United States invaded and toppled Saddam Hussein.

The attack on the U.N. head of mission could have an impact on plans by international oil companies to re-start their operations in Libya.

They have been sending out teams to inspect the oil fields they abandoned during the revolt last year, and are preparing to send expatriate staff back in.

If there is a heightened risk of attacks on Western targets, they might have to reconsider those plans.

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19. [Trend, Mali] Mali Coup Leader Rejects Possible ECOWAS Intervention

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17662913>

Mali's coup leader has rejected the intervention of foreign troops in the rebel-held north - and hinted at his continuing role in ruling the country.

The comments come just days after a deal was brokered that is supposed to return the West African state to constitutional rule.

The parliamentary speaker is to be sworn in this week as interim president and the junta hand over power.

Mali was plunged into crisis after a separatist uprising that led to a coup.

The putsch, led by Capt Amadou Sanogo, took place nearly three weeks ago amid accusations from the army that the government had not done enough to suppress the insurrection in the north that began in January.

Since the coup, key towns in northern Mali have fallen to Tuareg separatist rebels and their Islamist allies.

The West African regional bloc Ecowas has said it is preparing a force of up to 3,000 soldiers, which could be deployed to wrest back control of the north.

Last week, Capt Sanogo formally asked for Ecowas's help in defeating the rebels, but in televised remarks on Monday night he said he was only asking for equipment and logistical support.

Journalist Martin Vogl in the capital Bamako told the BBC West African mediators have told him that they are annoyed at his latest comments - and see Capt Sanogo's rejection of boots on the ground as a slap in the face.

The parliamentary speaker, Dioncounda Traore, is due to be sworn in on Wednesday as interim president - and under the constitution he has 40 days in which to organise elections.

But the agreement signed on Friday between Ecowas and Mali's military rulers said this time limit would be impossible to stick to given that Tuareg rebels now control the northern half of Mali, the AP news agency reports.

Spelling out details of that deal, Capt Sanogo said that he would help decide how the country would be run after the 40 days set out in the country's constitution for a transition of power.

"It was very clear in the framework agreement that after 40 days we would sit down with Ecowas to decide on another team to lead the transition," Capt Sanogo said.

Correspondents say it now seems clear that the junta leader will remain a key player as Mali tries to pull itself out of crisis.

Amadou Toumani Toure has formally resigned as president as part of the deal.

Ecowas has also lifted sanctions it imposed after the coup and an amnesty has been agreed for the coup leaders.

Human rights group Amnesty International has warned of a major humanitarian disaster in the wake of the fighting in the north.

The Tuaregs, who inhabit the Sahara Desert in the north of Mali, as well as several neighbouring countries, have fought several rebellions over the years.

They complain they have been ignored by the authorities in Bamako.

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20. [Law Enforcement, Sudan] Sudan Halts S.Sudan Talks After Fresh Border Fighting

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/11/us-sudan-talks-idUSBRE83A0HP20120411>

Sudan has stopped all talks with South Sudan on ending a row over oil payments and other disputes after new fighting broke out in the oil-producing border area, Sudan's state radio said on Wednesday.

Khartoum would immediately withdraw its negotiating team from talks sponsored by the African Union in Addis Ababa and also order a general army mobilization, the radio said. It gave no further details.

Sudan earlier accused Juba of having attacked the disputed Heglig border area where Sudan controls a large oil field vital to its economy. South Sudan said its army had acted in self defence after being attacked by Sudanese forces from Heglig.

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21. [Security, Somalia] 'Al Shabaab Have Infiltrated The Golis Mountains' Says President Farole

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

http://www.garoweonline.com/artman2/publish/Somalia_27/Somalia_Al_Shabaab_have_infiltrated_the_Golis_Mountains_says_President_Farole.shtml

Puntland President Dr.Abdirahman Mohamed Farole says Al Shabaab insurgents have been infiltrating the Golis Mountain range in north eastern Somalia, Radio Garowe reports.

President Farole who spoke to BBC Somali, on Tuesday said that the terrorist organization Al Shabaab have been infiltrating Puntland through land and sea heading to the Golis Mountain range after classifying it as a strategic area.

"After exiting Mogadishu last August, Al Shabaab's top officials and foot-soldiers have been entering the Golis mountain range by land and sea. We received information that Al Shabaab agents have been traveling in Yemeni made speedboats," said President Farole.

Puntland President Dr.Abdirahman Mohamed Farole Photo (Garowe Online)

President Farole said that a top assassin for the Al Shabaab was spotted in Las'anod and there has been no efforts to help apprehend him. Adding that Al Shabaab agents frequently take advantage of unsecured areas in Sool and Sanaag to reach the Golis Mountain Range located in Bari and Sanaag regions.

Al Shabaab agents have also been infiltrating Puntland through the main highway connecting most major cities in Somalia. Al Shabaab agents operating in south central Somalia fled their major strongholds such as Baidoa and Beledweyne earlier this year and some were reported traveling north through Galkayo and Garowe. Authorities in Garowe on Sunday apprehended persons which have been suspected of belonging Al Shabaab.

President Farole was asked if he could repel the insurgency without help from neighboring countries. Answering that the Puntland military was successful in the Galgala campaign in August 2010 which flattened the insurgency which at the time was not officially linked to Al Shabaab. "If we need military assistance then we will request it but I am confident that our military will suppress the insurgency," said President Farole.

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22. [Security, Nigeria] Boko Haram Captures Five Runaway Members In Kaduna

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201204110239.html>

Three armed men suspected to be members of the Boko Haram sect Monday evening, stormed Kabala West Junction, along Nnamdi Azikiwe express road in Kaduna Metropolis and whisked away five people suspected to be their members.

Although details of the arrest were sketchy, LEADERSHIP gathered that, the armed men who were dressed in mufti had trailed the five persons to Kabala west Junction, and forcefully picked them up.

An eyewitness, Malam Abubakar who witnessed everything, told LEADERSHIP on phone that the people went to the place well-armed. HE SAID: "they arrested five people who were inside a Golf Car and went away with the car.

"The people were not wearing security uniforms, in fact they were wearing casual dress," he added.

Another source disclosed that the incident created panic in the area, saying, "When they came, we thought they were security operatives, they were three and each had sophisticated weapon."

"They were shooting sporadically into the air and went straight for the five people and whisked them away in their car and the Gulf,"

A top security source who confirmed this said: "the five people may be members of the Boko Haram who have left the group. You know even Boko Haram are tired of killing innocent people, so, some of them are already detaching themselves from the struggle," he said.

The Police Public Relations, Aminu Lawan told LEADERSHIP that, "our men never carried out any such operation in Kabala West."

Meanwhile, the five people arrested by the unknown gunmen were still in the captor's custody as at the time of writing this story.

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23. [Security, Sudan] South Sudan Choosing The 'Path Of War'

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/south-sudan/9200747/South-Sudan-choosing-the-path-of-war.html>

The fighting brought Sudan's successor states closer to all-out conflict than at any time since they split into separate nations last July.

South Sudanese forces pushed more than 40 miles into territory internationally recognised as belonging to its neighbour, capturing the Heglig oilfield which accounts for about 55 per cent of Sudan's daily oil production.

President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan hit back by sending Antonov bombers to strike the town of Bentiu in the South yesterday. His neighbour had "chosen the path of war", said Mr Bashir, while Sudan's ambassador to the United Nations warned that Khartoum was ready to "retaliate deep inside South Sudan".

When Sudan was one nation, the Arab Muslim north and the black African south fought the continent's longest and bloodiest civil war, which ended in 2005 with a settlement that allowed the South to secede.

But the two neighbours never agreed on their 1,200-mile frontier, nor on the division of oilfields which lie mainly in the disputed border areas. There are grave fears that this week's fighting marks the beginning of a new conflict.

"Taking Heglig was the first time that the South's forces have stepped onto Sudanese territory, and that is a major escalation," said John Ashworth, a regional analyst based in Kenya's capital, Nairobi.

"For Khartoum then to bomb Bentiu, which is nowhere near the border, that again is a major escalation. No one can be 100 per cent sure whether this is a return to full war, or military brinkmanship to force better negotiating positions when it all calms down again."

Britain and America sympathised with the South during the long civil war and were quick to recognise its independence. Both were unusually blunt in condemning South Sudan's incursion into its neighbour and the capture of Heglig.

Henry Bellingham, the Foreign Office minister responsible for Africa, called this "completely unacceptable" and urged "both sides to establish a ceasefire and withdraw all forces immediately from one another's territory". Mr Bellingham added: "Neither government should expect to receive support or understanding from the international community if they deliberately lead their country down this path."

But President Salva Kiir of South Sudan defied international pressure on Thursday, saying that he would not order his troops out of Heglig or the surrounding area, which he claims as the South's territory.

“Last night I never slept because of the telephone calls,” he said. “Those who have been calling me, starting with the UN secretary-general yesterday, he gave me an order that I’m ordering you to immediately withdraw from Heglig. I said ‘I’m not under your command’.”

Later however, South Sudan indicated that it would withdraw from Heglig in return for its neighbour relinquishing other disputed territory.

When South Sudan seceded last year, the new country took with it some 75 per cent of the oil reserves belonging to the old Sudan. But the pipeline through which the oil is exported runs through the North to the Red Sea.

The two neighbours have never agreed on how to share the oil or the revenues. In January, South Sudan stopped exporting its oil after accusing Khartoum of imposing unfair transit fees. In the process, Mr Kiir’s government also deprived itself of some 98 per cent of its own revenue.

That makes it almost impossible for either South Sudan or Khartoum to sustain military campaigns. One expert judged that it was “completely unfeasible” for either side to be able to “fight for more than a few weeks”

But the recent clashes have already caused about 100,000 people to flee their homes. Sudan cannot tolerate the loss of Heglig oilfield, making retaliation all but inevitable.



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24. [Security, Mali] Two Children In Mali Killed By Explosive Device

Thursday, 12 April 2012

http://www.taiwannews.com.tw/etn/news_content.php?id=1892385

A hospital official in northern Mali says two children have been killed after playing with an explosive device they found near a military base.

Abdel Aziz Ould Mohamed said a third child lost a leg in Wednesday's accident in the historic town of Timbuktu.

The deaths happened near a military base controlled by a militant Islamist Tuareg faction that wants to impose Shariah law in Mali's moderate north together with al-Qaida's North Africa branch.

Mali has been plunged into political crisis since the West African country's democratically elected president was overthrown in a coup last month.

Tuareg rebels affiliated with a separate secular movement in the region have declared their independence, but the power vacuum in the region has allowed extremist groups to take root.

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25. [Security, Guinea-Bissau] Bissau Soldiers Control Capital In Apparent Coup

Friday, 13 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/13/us-bissau-idUSBRE83COJW20120413>

Soldiers in Guinea-Bissau seized government offices and controlled main roads in the capital on Friday after attacking the former prime minister's home in an apparent coup to derail his election to the presidency, diplomats and residents said.

Unidentified soldiers attacked Carlos Gomes Junior's residence in the crumbling coastal capital Bissau with machine guns and heavy weapons fire on Thursday evening, sending residents scurrying for the safety of their homes.

The whereabouts of Gomes Junior, the presidential candidate of the ruling PAIGC party who was known to be unpopular with elements of the restless military in the coup-plagued West African state, remained unknown on Friday.

Armed soldiers guarded the offices of the presidency, the state broadcaster and other key locations and main roads in and out of the city, which was otherwise calm as Friday dawned. Most TV and radios were off the air.

The former prime minister won close to an outright majority in last month's first round of voting in a presidential election. He was widely expected to be elected in a run-off set for April 29.

"It's very well known that the army didn't like Carlos Gomes Junior and he was about to be elected. So they either had to kill him or make sure he wasn't elected," one Bissau-based diplomat, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

But there was no immediate communique from the military.

Government ministers and other officials, including the judicial police chief, were in hiding. At least one, Interior Minister Fernando Gomes, said they feared for their lives.

In Bissau, one political source, who asked not be named, said soldiers had arrested the country's interim president, Raimundo Pereira, a former parliament speaker who is also a PAIGC member.

On one radio station that was broadcasting, RDP Africa, the son of Guinea-Bissau national election commission chief Desejado Lima da Costa said soldiers had invaded and looted his father's house. "They didn't find my father or mother, they are in a safe place," Camilo Lima da Costa told the radio.

"ATTEMPTED COUP D'ETAT"

Late on Thursday, foreign ministers of the West African regional grouping ECOWAS, who were meeting in the Ivory Coast to discuss the situation in another regional state, Mali, that suffered a coup last month, condemned the events in Guinea-Bissau.

"As in the case of Mali, ECOWAS formally and rigorously condemns such an attempted coup d'etat," Ivorian Foreign Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan said. "It's unacceptable and it's not accepted by ECOWAS."

Guinea-Bissau Foreign Minister Mamadu Djalo Pires, who was at the meeting, called for an "energetic reaction" from the international community against what he called "a coup d'etat".

Guinea-Bissau, whose weak governance has made it a haven for Latin American drug cartels transshipping cocaine to Europe, is electing a president to replace Malam Bacai Sanha, who died in a Paris hospital in January after a long illness.

Gomes Junior's rival in the run-off, Kumba Yala, had said he would boycott the vote over alleged first-round rigging.

Only hours before the attack, Yala, a former president who claims ethnic ties with the mostly Balanta military, had warned of "consequences" if campaigning for the second round went ahead.

Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony which won independence in 1974, is one of the world's most fragile and volatile states. Its main official export is cashew nuts and an ordinary Bissau Guinean lives on less than \$2 a day.

Political assassinations, health problems and meddling by an oversized military have prevented any president from serving a full term since multi-party politics began in 1994. Gomes Junior had supported downsizing the military

Top military officials in Bissau have been accused by the United States of being drugs runners. Gomes Junior's critics say even he is complicit in the trade, a charge he denies.

But it was not clear what faction or factions of the military had carried out Thursday's attack.

The shooting came just days after news that Angola, also a former Portuguese colony, was ending its two-year-old military mission to help modernize the army in Guinea Bissau. The mission was designed to help end military coups in the country.

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26. [Attack, Turkey] Gunfire From Syria Wounds Three Inside Turkey

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-turkey-syria-gunfire-idUSBRE83807920120409>

Two Syrian refugees and one Turkish translator were wounded on Monday when the Kilis border refugee camp in Turkey's southern Gaziantep province came under fire from the Syrian side of the border, a Turkish foreign ministry official said.

"After this incident the Syrian Charge d'Affaires in Ankara was called and we demanded an end to this," the official said.

Mohammad Abdelqader, a refugee in the camp who said he had witnessed the shootings, said two Syrians had been killed and two more had been wounded in the attack. Reuters could not immediately confirm that report.

Earlier the British-based opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported fierce clashes between Syrian security forces and rebel fighters close to a border crossing between the Syrian town of Azaz and the Turkish town of Kilis.

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27. [Attack, Yemen] Islamists Fight Army In Central, South Yemen, 21 Killed

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-yemen-violence-idUSBRE8390KC20120410>

At least 21 people were killed in Yemen on Tuesday in renewed fighting between troops and al Qaeda-linked militants in the southern city of Lawdar and a militant attack on a checkpoint in central Maarib province, officials and residents said.

Eight soldiers and five militants were killed and four soldiers wounded when al Qaeda-linked gunmen in vehicles attacked an army checkpoint in Abar, 300 km (185 miles) east of the capital Sanaa, in Maarib province, a local official said.

In Lawdar, where 57 people were killed on Monday in clashes between government forces and Ansar al-Sharia (Partisans of Islamic Law) fighters, six militants and two tribal gunmen fighting alongside the army died in renewed clashes.

President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who took over in February after a year of mass protests against his predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh, is under pressure from Washington to fight the increasingly strong branch of al Qaeda in his country.

Ansar al-Sharia said on Monday it had captured four tanks and anti-aircraft guns and a large cache of arms and ammunition in fighting with government troops in Lawdar.

It also said in a statement that military officials had exaggerated when they said 40 militants had been killed in Monday's fighting in Lawdar - but that its own fighters had killed 50 soldiers during the day.

Residents said fighting intensified on Tuesday with warplanes bombing two sites held by the Islamist fighters 10 km (6.2 miles) west of Lawdar, destroying at least one of the tanks the group had seized.

A Defense Ministry website said some of the militants killed on Monday were foreigners, including some Saudis.

Vehicles laden with fighters and arms left the southern city of Jaar, which militants took a year ago, for Lawdar, witnesses said, while a local official in Lawdar said more tribesmen from neighboring towns had joined the fight against the Islamists.

Ansar al-Sharia seized control of part of the southern province of Abyan during the turmoil that led to Hadi replacing Saleh as president. A split in the army during that period threatened to start a civil war.

Saudi Arabia and the United States backed the transfer of power to Hadi in the hope that it would help prevent the country sliding into chaos, which might have enabled al Qaeda to establish a foothold near key oil shipping routes.

Conflict with Islamists in the south is only one of several challenges facing Hadi, who took office vowing to fight al Qaeda only to have more than 100 soldiers killed in attacks by militants in his first few days in power.

UNCLASSIFIED

Yemen's main airport in Sanaa was paralyzed for a day on Saturday when officers and tribesmen loyal to Saleh forced it to close in protest at the sacking of the air force commander, a half-brother of Saleh. A government official said they backed down only after pressure from the United States and Gulf countries, which had crafted the deal that made Hadi president.

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28. [Security, Yemen] Yemen Army Kills 30 Militants In Clashes

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/11/us-yemen-militants-idUSBRE83A0E520120411>

Yemeni troops killed at least 30 suspected al Qaeda-linked fighters in a third day of clashes on Wednesday, as the government sought to gain the upper hand in its increasingly violent confrontation with Islamist militants.

Local officials and residents said the fighting occurred on Jebel Yasuf, a mountain 10 km (6 miles) from the southern town of Lawdar, where dozens of people have been killed since Monday after Ansar al-Sharia militants attacked an army camp.

At least eight people were killed in continued fighting in the vicinity on Tuesday.

Militants, emboldened by a year of upheaval in Yemen, want to exploit weakened government control to spread their influence. In Abyan, where Lawdar is located, they already hold large swathes of territory.

A senior government official said the fighting around Lawdar marked a turning point in the army's confrontation with Ansar al-Sharia (Partisans of Islamic Law) following a series of defeats by the militant group.

"The battle of Lawdar is considered a decisive one for the army against the terrorist groups and a prelude to the cleansing of all towns seized by militants in the province of Abyan," said the official. He said 10 militants had also been captured.

The Defense Ministry said in a text message it had destroyed a number of checkpoints set up by militants on a main road linking Lawdar to the neighboring province of al-Bayda, re-opening the route.

It also cited unnamed military sources as saying that Saudi Arabian, Pakistani and Somali nationals were among the militants killed in the Lawdar area.

President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi vowed to fight al Qaeda and its affiliates when he took office earlier this year after his predecessor quit under pressure from anti-government protesters and foreign powers anxious to halt a slide into mayhem.

Militants have since stepped up their operations against the army, carrying out a string of deadly attacks. In return, the Yemeni air force has launched air strikes on suspected militant strongholds and the United States has joined in with drones.

The United States and Saudi Arabia - both targets of al Qaeda's Yemen-based wing - fear Yemen is becoming a major front in its campaign against the militant network, which has been dealt a number of blows over the past year, not least the killing of its founder and leader Osama bin Laden.

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29. [Attack, Egypt] New Blast Hits Egypt Gas Pipeline Serving Jordan, Israel

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-egypt-blast-idUSBRE83801120120409>

An explosion hit the Egyptian pipeline carrying gas to Israel and Jordan on Monday for 14th time since the uprising against President Hosni Mubarak began last year, security sources said.

The blast took place in the northern Sinai at the entrance of the Mediterranean coastal town of Al-Arish. Residents in the city told Reuters they had heard the sound of the explosion.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks on the installation that crosses the increasingly volatile Sinai Peninsula. Security in Sinai was relaxed after the fall of Mubarak in 2011 as the police presence thinned out across Egypt.

The pipeline has been shut since an explosion on February 5.

Egypt's 20-year gas deal with Israel, signed in the Mubarak era, is unpopular with some Egyptians, with critics accusing Israel of not paying enough for the fuel.

Previous explosions sometimes have forced weeks-long shutdowns along the pipeline run by Gasco, a subsidiary of the national gas company EGAS.

Egypt said in November it would tighten security along the pipeline by installing alarms and recruiting security patrols from Bedouin tribesmen in the area.

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30. [Special Interest, Russia] Russian Opposition Holds First Red Square Protest

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-russia-opposition-kremlin-idUSBRE8370BN20120408>

Russian police let hundreds of activists roam Moscow's Red Square freely on Sunday in the first anti-government protest held next to the Kremlin, though it detained three activists for an attempt to set up a tent.

Russian authorities had so far made the Red Square off-limits for political demonstrations. Last week they sealed it off and detained dozens of activists who had sought to hold a silent protest against Vladimir Putin's rule.

But police showed leniency on Sunday as hundreds of activists walked around the spacious square wearing white ribbons and carrying white flowers, the symbols of popular protests that erupted in Moscow and other Russian cities following a disputed parliamentary election in December.

"I feel like I've come to another planet, I do not understand what is happening. This is the Kremlin," said activist Vitaly Zalomov at the protest, which was dubbed "White Square".

"Where are the police?"

Putin faced the largest protests in its 12-year rule in recent months, but after his victory in a March 4 presidential election the fragmented opposition movement has lost some of its momentum.

The Kremlin has agreed to limited political reforms in response to the demonstrations, but rejected the protesters' main demand for a rerun of the December 4 parliamentary election, which government critics say was rigged.

The opposition said it would keep up the fight in local elections and street protests.

Activists argue that the authorities violate their freedom-of-assembly right when they demand to agree the location and the timing of a protest in advance.

The police broke up the first opposition rally in December saying it had not been authorized, and another protest in March when protesters did not leave a central Moscow square at an agreed time. Other demonstrations were peaceful.

"PEOPLE COME TO DEMONSTRATE"

Located next to the Kremlin, the official residence of Russian presidents, the Red Square is one of Moscow's main tourist attractions, home to the ancient St. Basil's cathedral and the mausoleum of Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin.

"The Red Square is also gradually becoming a place where people come to demonstrate," said activist Pavel Shelkov, who was detained by police and held for four hours after attempting to protest there on March 31.

Sunday's action, organized through social networks, has not been agreed with the authorities, organizers said, but most protesters were careful not to provoke the police or form large groups.

Opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Udaltsov handed out leaflets calling on Putin to go and asked their supporters to hold a similar protest outside parliament, where Putin is due to make a speech on Wednesday.

Police closely watched the action but interfered only once when environmental activist Evgeniya Chirikova tried to set up a tent, a symbol of continuous street protests similar to those that toppled governments in the Middle East.

Police detained Chirikova along with two other activists. About one hundred of her supporters gathered outside the central police station where she was being held to demand her immediate release.

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31. [Attack, Greece] Small Bomb Damages Greek Reform Ministry

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-greece-bomb-idUSBRE8380BM20120409>

A small makeshift bomb exploded on Monday outside a branch of a Greek ministry tasked with cutting 150,000 public sector jobs by 2015, causing damage but no injuries, police said.

Windows were smashed and desks and computers were damaged in the blast at the Administrative Reform Ministry building. A car was also damaged in the explosion.

"There was no warning call and the risk of someone being injured was big, as the building is centrally located," said a police official who declined to be named.

The bomb was made of at least five gas canisters, police said.

The ministry is tasked with reforming Greece's bloated public sector, a key demand by the country's international lenders.

The attack was the second in under a week. A similar bomb exploded at the office of former Prime Minister Costas Simitis on Tuesday last week.

Greece's coalition government, led by technocrat Prime Minister Lucas Papademos, denounced that attack as an attempt to destabilize the country ahead of national elections expected on May 6.

Gas canister attacks on police and businesses are frequent in Greece. Small bomb attacks against politicians have risen since the country adopted harsh austerity measures under the terms of two successive bailouts by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

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32. [Security, Iraq] Fugitive Saddam Deputy Urges Resistance In Video

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/08/us-iraq-politics-douri-idUSBRE83706N20120408>

The most senior member of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's entourage still at large has criticized the present government and urged former Iraqi Baathists to reorganize their resistance to it, according to a video broadcast on Baathist websites.

The video appeared to show Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, the head of Saddam's Baath party and the highest-ranking member of his government still at liberty. Saddam, a Sunni, was toppled and his party banned after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

The broadcast was not dated and Douri's identity could not be independently confirmed. Douri released a recording last year criticizing Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for rounding up former Baath party members in Iraq.

"We have to restart immediately... to rebuild the revolutionary Baath party," he said in the video broadcast on the 65th anniversary of the formation of Iraq's Baath party.

The video showed a man closely resembling Douri sitting in a Saddam-era uniform in front of the old Iraqi flag, flanked by a group of bodyguards, just as he did when delivering speeches in the past.

After the invasion, Douri was ranked sixth on the U.S. military's list of 55 most wanted Iraqis and a \$10 million reward was offered for his capture.

In the video, he criticized the present Shi'ite Iraqi government and the Arab governments that backed it and accused them of treason and conspiracy against Iraqi insurgents who fought against the U.S. military after the invasion. U.S. officials have accused him of organizing the insurgency.

"Nine years have passed since the invasion and occupation and these corrupt traitors have turned their backs on the heroic Iraqi resistance," Douri said.

He also warned Sunni Arab countries over what he called the "invasion of Safavid" - an apparent reference to Shi'ite Muslim Iran's growing influence over Iraq's government, in a region increasingly divided along a Sunni-Shi'ite faultline.

"We put it before your eyes and in your hands, the Safavid Persian enemy today stands at the doorstep," he said.

Baathists were banned from politics after the 2003 invasion, but the government says many former party members have organized into insurgent groups resisting the rise to power of the Shi'ite majority following the fall of Saddam.

Maliki ordered the arrest of hundreds of former Baathists last year just before the last American troops left the country, causing a crisis that threatened to unravel a fragile power-sharing deal among Sunni, Shi'ite and Kurdish blocs.

Many Sunni Iraqis now fear Maliki is trying to consolidate his position by ousting their leaders from the power-sharing agreement, depriving the Sunni minority of a voice in government.

Douri was the deputy head of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council under Saddam, and took over the Baath Party leadership after Saddam was executed in 2006.

He has seldom been seen since 2003. In a statement in 2009, he called on Sunni insurgent groups to move into politics.

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33. [Attack, Gaza Strip] Israeli Collaborator,' Two Others Hanged In Gaza

Saturday, 7 April 2012

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Hamas-Hangs-3-Palestinians-146521405.html>

In the Gaza Strip, members of Hamas say they have executed three Palestinian men, one of whom was accused of "collaborating" with Israel.

Officials of Hamas, which controls the Gaza territory, say the three condemned prisoners - the alleged Israeli agent and two men accused of murder - were hanged at dawn Saturday at an unidentified "security center."

Aiding Israel is an offense punishable by death under the Palestinian administration, as is murder.

Hamas said the three men all had been convicted and found guilty, but it gave no details of the proceedings against them.

The United States, the European Union and other nations list Hamas as a terrorist organization. The militant group seized full control of Gaza in 2007 in a violent split with the more moderate Palestinian Authority, which is based in the West Bank.

Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have agreed several times during the past year to end their disputes and form a unity government under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas. He was elected president of the Palestinian Authority in 2005 and has remained in office since his term expired in 2009.

Under Palestinian regulations, any executions should be approved by Abbas, but Hamas rejects his authority and refuses such consultations. The Palestinian Authority has not executed anyone since 2004, but the practice has continued in Gaza under Hamas control.

The accused Israeli collaborator who was killed Saturday is believed to be the first prisoner hanged for such crimes in about nine months.

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34. [Security, Turkey] Turkey Denounces Cross-Border Attack On Syrian Refugees

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Turkey-Denounces-Cross-Border-Attack-on-Syrian-Refugees-146739435.html>

Ankara has reacted angrily to an incident Monday in which Syrians were shot while seeking refuge in Turkey, with the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman warning that "necessary steps" will be taken if such incidents are repeated. The incident comes as Syrian forces intensify their crackdown on the opposition ahead of Tuesday's United Nations cease-fire deadline.

The Turkish government strongly condemned Monday's incident, accusing the Syrian military of firing on Syrian refugees after they crossed over into Turkey. The incident occurred at the Kilis refugee camp on the Syrian border. Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Selcuk Unal says it was an unprovoked attack.

"Some Syrian civilians were trying to enter the Turkish border, [when] some of them were wounded and shots were fired at them. Two of those injured have died after entering Turkey. And two of the Syrian nationals who were inhabitants of the camp in Kilis were wounded. One police officer and a Turkish female translator working in the camp were also slightly injured," Unal said.

The Syrian charge d'affaires was summoned to the Turkish Foreign Ministry to receive a formal complaint. Ankara is becoming increasingly alarmed over the deepening Syrian conflict and the growing numbers of Syrian refugees fleeing into Turkey. Observers expect Monday's shootings to add to that sense of alarm. Foreign Ministry spokesman Unal says Damascus has been warned there can be no repeat of such events.

"All the Syrian nationals or who've escaped from the persecution from Syria are under Turkey's full protection, and if these affairs are repeated, we will take necessary measures," Unal said.

Unal refused to say what those necessary measures might be. But Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned last month that if the crisis in Syria continues, his government is considering creating a safe haven in Syria for refugees from the conflict. Unal said that option remains on the table.

"No announcement has been released on that issue so far. That is one of the options we have been considering," Unal said.

Last week, Prime Minister Erdogan warned his country is prepared to take steps against Damascus if the current United Nations efforts to resolve the conflict fail. According to Turkish observers, that seems increasingly likely. Instead of winding down their operations in compliance with Tuesday's U.N. cease-fire deadline, Syrian security forces have escalated their crackdown. Damascus has also made last-minute demands for the Syrian rebels to lay down their weapons before Syrian security forces withdraw. The rebels have rejected that demand.

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35. [Attack, Gaza Strip] Israeli Airstrike Wounds Two Palestinians

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-04-07/Israeli-strike/54102858/1?csp=34news>

An Israeli airstrike wounded two Palestinians in the Gaza Strip near the Egyptian border on Saturday, officials said.

Israel's military said its air force targeted Palestinians in the town of Rafah attempting to launch a rocket from Gaza into Israel.

Gaza health official Adham Abu Salmia said two people were wounded in the strike.

The leader of the Islamic militant group Hamas, which controls Gaza, vowed on Friday to abduct more Israeli soldiers to pressure the Jewish state to release Palestinian prisoners.

Speaking at a conference in the capital of Qatar, Khaled Mashaal said that such kidnappings are the only way to secure the release of Palestinians held in Israeli jails. Mashaal has made similar statements before.

Last year, Hamas struck a deal with Israel to swap an Israeli soldier held by Hamas for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, including many jailed for helping carry out bombings.

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36. [Security, Syria] Fighting Rocks Syria Less Than 24 Hours To Deadline

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-syria-idUSBRE83602720120409>

Syria's conflict spilled over into Turkey on Monday and government forces battled rebel fighters near the border in clashes that appeared to doom a ceasefire less than 24 hours before a U.N.-brokered deadline for a Syrian army pull-back.

Under a deal brokered by U.N.-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, Syria is to begin withdrawing troops from around urban centers by Tuesday, paving the way for a truce to start 48 hours later.

But the prospect of a ceasefire looked increasingly dim, with no let-up in violence around the country where forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have battled to crush a popular revolt against his rule for more than a year.

In a last-minute move, Assad has demanded written guarantees from opposition fighters that they put down their weapons, prompting Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister Naci to say that the April 10 deadline was now effectively void.

"April 10 has become void. After Kofi Annan's visit tomorrow (to Turkey) a new stage will start," state-run broadcaster TRT quoted Koru as saying on its website.

Less than 24 hours before the deadline, fierce fighting raged on the ground, with two Syrian refugees and a Turkish translator wounded by gunfire from Syria at a refugee camp on Turkish territory, according to Turkish officials.

It was not clear if the camp was deliberately targeted or hit by stray bullets.

In clashes inside Syria near the Turkish border, rebels killed at least six members of the Syrian security forces and customs officials, according to the opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It said the fighting took place in the village of Salama, between the Syrian town of Azaz and the Turkish town of Kilis. Eight rebel gunmen were wounded in the fighting.

In Damascus province, four soldiers were killed in the bombing of a convoy as Syrian forces swept villages arresting opposition suspects. Two policemen were killed in clashes with gunmen in the city of Aleppo, the British-based Observatory said.

Colonel Qassem Saad al-Deen, spokesman for the Free Syrian Army in Syria, said on Sunday that at least 1,000 people had been killed during the past week, most of them civilians.

DEADLINE

Western powers suspect Assad is using the time since he met Annan in Damascus a month ago to mount a military offensive aimed at clearing the country of rebel strongholds.

Since the outbreak of the uprising in March 2011, Syria has blamed the unrest on foreign-backed terrorists determined to use violence to destabilize the government. Assad, who has ruled for 10 years since succeeding his late father, Hafez al-Assad, has laid out his own reform program but it has been dismissed by the opposition.

The severity of Assad's crackdown, in which the United Nations says 9,000 people have been killed, has triggered Western condemnation and sanctions, as the Syrian economy ground to a halt and its pound halved in value.

Under the U.N. plan, the Syrian government and opposition must stop fighting at 6 a.m. (0300 GMT) on April 12, if Damascus meets its deadline 48 hours earlier to pull back troops from cities and cease using heavy weapons.

Russia and China -- who have so far sided with Assad -- urged both sides to stop fighting and give Annan's peace plan a chance to work.

Reports from anti-Assad activists say the army is trying to seize back swathes of northwestern Idlib province from rebel control, using tanks and helicopters and driving terrified villagers north and west to the Turkish frontier.

The Observatory on Sunday reported shooting and shelling in a number of cities. At least 21 people were killed in Homs, Deraa, Idlib, Deir al-Zor and Hama province, and at least 12 government soldiers died in clashes, it said.

Syria has placed tight restrictions on media access, making it hard to verify witness accounts.

Russia, Assad's most important ally, stopped short of pressing him to rein in his army.

"Attempts to force a solution on Syria from outside will lead only to an escalation of tension," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said. "Everything must follow from respect for Syria's sovereignty, and violence must be stopped."

Syria on Sunday put up an obstacle to implantation of the truce on Sunday by saying it wanted written guarantees from opposition forces.

"Syria has a plan for a military pullback already in place and being implemented, but completing and achieving the main goal would definitely require the guarantees from the other side and those supporting them to abide by the terms of calm," Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi said in a statement.

A rebel commander said this was just a smokescreen.

"The regime will not implement this plan. This plan will fail," the Free Syrian Army (FSA) chief Colonel Riad al-Asaad told Reuters. "We have given our word that if the regime commits to the plan then we will too."

"We will never hand over our weapons," he added.

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37. [Security, United Kingdom] Bomb Found In Newry 'Could Have Killed'

Friday, 6 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-17638397>

A bomb found in Newry, County Down, contained a significant amount of explosives that had the potential to kill, police have said.

The device was made safe by an Army bomb team. It was left near the Cloghogue roundabout close to the Forkhill turnoff in the city.

The A1 which runs between Belfast and Dublin was closed for a time in both directions while the bomb was examined.

It is not yet known what type of device it was.

Road closures in the area caused long tailbacks for much of Friday.

A sliproad on the north-bound lane of the A1 is expected to remain closed to traffic for much of Friday evening.



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38. [Attack, Kosovo] One Killed, Five Hurt, In Northern Kosovo Bomb Blast

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/36135-one-killed-five-hurt-in-northern-kosovo-bomb-blast>

An ethnic Albanian from Kosovo was killed and his wife and four children wounded Sunday in a bomb explosion at their home in Kosovska Mitrovica, police said.

The bomb was placed overnight on the window ledge of the victims' home, in the Serb-majority northern part of town, police added.

The blast occurred around 1.20 am (2320 GMT), police said, adding that they were not ruling out ethnic motives for the crime.

Northern Kosovo is almost exclusively populated by Serbs who do not recognize the government in Pristina and there is frequent tension between the two communities.

Tension flared earlier this week when a Serbian delegation was stoned in Pristina Wednesday as it headed to a meeting with Kosovo officials to discuss the implementation of agreements reached in EU-sponsored talks.

The incident was condemned by the European Union.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008 and it has been recognized by 89 countries, including most of the EU members and the United States.

But Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs still consider Kosovo as Serbia's southern province.

Since early 2011 however, Kosovo and Serbia have engaged in an EU-sponsored dialogue aimed at solving everyday problems that both Serbs and Albanians face in the territory. Several agreements have been reached so far.

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39. [Attack, Syria] Six Soldiers Killed On Syria Deadline Day

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-syria-shelling-idUSBRE83906A20120410>

Syrian tank and mortar fire hit the cities of Homs and Hama and insurgents killed six soldiers on Tuesday, opposition activists said, on the day President Bashar al-Assad was to withdraw his forces 48 hours ahead of a planned ceasefire.

The anti-Assad Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the soldiers were killed in attacks on two checkpoints on the highway running through the remote eastern desert town of Marqada, south of the Turkish border.

There was no report of the attacks from the official Syrian news agency, SANA. Syria says it has already pulled back some of its troops from the cities in keeping with its undertaking to United Nations and Arab League peace envoy Kofi Annan.

His peace plan calls for rebel forces to stop shooting as the army withdraws so that all forms of violence cease at dawn on Thursday.

The Observatory, a British-based activist information centre that has collated reports on the violence in Syria for the past year, said there was no clear sign of troop withdrawals.

It reported a clash between rebels and army in Deraa in the far south and said the battered opposition stronghold of Khalidiya in the city of Homs was again heavily shelled.

Activists said the Homs bombardment began at breakfast time.

"Shelling woke me this morning at 8.30 and I can now hear one shell every 10 minutes or so," said Waleed Fares, describing what he said was mortar rounds striking neighborhoods in the centre and east of Homs, hub of the 13-month-old uprising.

One 90-second video recorded surreptitiously by an activist showed a large group of soldiers in combat gear at a normally busy intersection in Homs. There was no one else on the streets.

EXPLOSIONS AT NIGHT

In Hama, Manhal Abu Bakr heard shelling start up overnight and said tanks were still patrolling the city.

"At 2 a.m. we heard two shells fall and the sound of tanks moving around the streets," he said.

"There is no gunfire now. They shell us at night so that it is hard to film," he said via Skype. Internet video, which Abu Bakr said was filmed in Hama overnight, showed nighttime explosions in a built-up district.

There were no immediate reports of civilian casualties. The Observatory said most other cities were relatively calm on Tuesday after heavy bloodshed in recent days.

There were no immediate reports of action from the rebel Free Syrian Army, whose commanders have said they will order a ceasefire only if they are satisfied that Assad's forces have indeed pulled back and stopped offensives.

The Observatory said there was an overnight bombardment in the town of Mara in Syria's northern province of Aleppo.

In Douma, a suburb of the capital Damascus, an activist said tanks were still on the fringes of town on Tuesday morning.

Residents of Deraa, where the popular revolt against Assad erupted in March 2011, reported sporadic gunfire.

"Security is everywhere and you feel they have redeployed in key locations," said Nayef Hassan, an engineer.

Security forces and the army remained stationed in Deraa, said an activist who called himself Abu Firas, and security checkpoints still separated districts of the old city.

"The troops at checkpoints are appearing in strength to say 'we are present'," he said.

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40. [Security, Iran] Iran Says Arrests "Major Terrorist Group" Linked To Israel

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-iran-israel-arrests-idUSBRE8390MJ20120410>

Iran said on Tuesday it had identified a "major terrorist group" it said was affiliated to its arch-foe Israel and had arrested some of its members, the official IRNA news agency reported, citing a report by the country's Intelligence Ministry.

"Iran's Intelligence Ministry announced it has identified a major terrorist group from the Zionist regime (of Israel) and has arrested some of its protected operational members inside the country," IRNA reported without making clear when the arrests had taken place.

The semi-official Fars news agency said the suspects were arrested "while preparing to carry out terrorist acts", adding that a considerable number of bombs, machine guns, military and communication equipments were seized.

Tehran has in the past accused Israel of being behind the killings of its nuclear scientists.

The Islamic state blamed Israel in January when a nuclear scientist was killed by a bomb placed on his car by a motorcyclist in Tehran.

Iran denies Western suspicions that its nuclear program has military goals, saying it is for purely peaceful purposes.

Fars cited the Intelligence Ministry's statement as saying that further information would be announced later.

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41. [Special Interest, Iran] Iran Can Stand 2-3 Year Oil Blockade: Ahmadinejad

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-iran-oil-sanctions-idUSBRE8390CT20120410>

Iran has enough funds to withstand a total embargo on its oil sales for two to three years, Iranian media quoted President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying days before the resumption of talks with world powers on Tehran's nuclear programme.

The European Union is set to impose a total embargo on Iranian crude oil from July following similar measures imposed by the United States to try to force Iran to abandon uranium enrichment.

"We must say to them that we have that much saved that even if we didn't sell oil for two to three years, the country would manage easily," a report on Tuesday from Fars news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying during a visit to Hormuzgan province.

The United States and its allies hope the sanctions on Iran's energy and financial sectors will force it to abandon uranium enrichment which they suspect is aimed at developing nuclear weapons. Iran says its goals are entirely peaceful.

Iran is due to resume talks this week with Western countries plus Russia and China on its nuclear programme.

The International Energy Agency recently said that the wide-ranging sanctions against Iran could reduce its oil exports by as much as 1 million barrels per day, or 40 percent, from the middle of the year.

European member states, including Greece, Spain and Italy have been significant customers to Iran and are scrambling to find alternative supplies before the ban is introduced.

Ahmadinejad accused Western countries of being solely interested in plunder, Fars reported.

"Whoever wishes to abuse Iran's rights, the young people of Hormuzgan will punch them in the mouth to the extent that they won't be able to find their way home," he said.

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42. [Law Enforcement, United Kingdom] Abu Hamza Us Extradition Backed By European Court

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17657814>

The European Court of Human Rights has backed the extradition of Abu Hamza and four other terror suspects from the UK to the US.

The Strasbourg court held there would be no violation of human rights for those facing life and solitary confinement in a "supermax" prison.

Judges said they would consider further the case of another suspect because of mental health issues.

Prime Minister David Cameron said he was "very pleased" with the news.

"It's quite right that we have a proper legal process, although sometimes you can be frustrated by how long things take," he added.

The court's decision is one of its most important since 9/11 because it approves of human rights in US maximum security prisons, making it easier for the UK to send suspects to its closest ally.

There could still hypothetically be an appeal against the court's ruling in its final Grand Chamber - but in practice, very few cases are re-examined in that final forum.

The men have three months to try to persuade the Grand Chamber to reopen the entire case and examine it. If the men fail to launch an appeal, they will be extradited to the United States.

The family of one of the men, Babar Ahmad, who has been held for a record of nearly eight years without trial, said he would fight on against extradition.

Last week, he appealed in a BBC interview to be charged and tried in the UK because his alleged crimes were committed here.

Home Secretary Theresa May welcomed the ruling, and said she would work to ensure that the suspects were handed over to the US authorities "as quickly as possible".

The US Justice Department also said it was "pleased" about the decision on the five.

"We look forward to the court's decision becoming final and to the extradition of these defendants to stand trial in the United States," it said in a statement.

In the case of the sixth suspect, Haroon Aswat, it said officials would "consult" with the UK's Home Office about the additional submission requested.

The European Court said there would be no breach of human rights if the men were to be held in solitary confinement at ADX Florence, a Federal Supermax jail in Colorado, used for people convicted of terrorism offences.

Abu Hamza is unlikely to be held at that jail because of his disabilities. The court also held that the life sentences each man faces would not breach human rights.

But in Mr Aswat's case, judges said they could not yet give the go-ahead to extradition because they needed to see more submissions on his schizophrenia and how that would be treated were he sent to the US.

The court said that the range of activities and services at ADX Florence was better than that at many European prisons.

It said: "Having fully considered all the evidence from both parties, including specifically prepared statements by officials at ADX Florence as well as letters provided by the US Department of Justice, the court held that conditions at ADX would not amount to ill-treatment.

"As concerned ADX's restrictive conditions and lack of human contact, the court found that, if the applicants were convicted as charged, the US authorities would be justified in considering them a significant security risk and in imposing strict limitations on their ability to communicate with the outside world.

"The court finds that there are adequate opportunities for interaction between inmates. While inmates are in their cells talking to other inmates is possible, admittedly only through the ventilation system.

"Save for cases involving the death penalty, it has even more rarely found that there would be a violation of Article 3 (that no-one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) if an applicant were to be removed to a state which had a long history of respect of democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

Abu Hamza is charged with offences relating to hostage taking in Yemen and an alleged plot to set-up a terrorism training camp in the United States. Haroon Aswat is also accused in connection to the training camp.

Babar Ahmad and Talha Ahsan are accused of supporting terrorism through a website operated in London.

The final two men, Adel Abdul Bary and Khaled al-Fawwaz, allegedly played a part in organising the 1998 US Embassy bombings in East Africa.

Responding to the ruling, the law firm representing Babar Ahmad and others in the case - Birnberg Peirce and Partners - said the court had made its decision "in large part on the basis of disputed statistics provided by the UK government to which the applicants were not permitted to respond".

It also stressed that the judgement did not address the "burning issue" of "why in all logic, fairness, and practical common sense are not British citizens (whose UK actions are forming the basis of prosecution in the US, and where all of the evidence on which they are being tried was accumulated in its entirety in

the UK by UK police and shipped lock stock and barrel to US prosecutors), being tried in their own country?"

In an unrelated case earlier this year, the European Court blocked the deportation from the UK of a different radical cleric, Abu Qatada, to Jordan, saying he faced an unfair trial.

Shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper welcomed the ruling against Abu Hamza, but added: "The government now needs to focus on dealing with Abu Qatada, who could have less than a month left of his strict bail conditions, and where the government's own decision to water down counter-terror powers could mean he is allowed to move around London."

Lib Dem MP Julian Huppert - who sits on the Home Affairs Select Committee - acknowledged that the US had "a proper legal system", but said the case flagged up "genuine concerns" over extradition.

He called for authorities to "be more active about charging people who are accused of terrorist activities here in the UK". More needed to be done, he added, to make the system "fast and prompt".

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43. [Special Interest, Iran] Kofi Annan Seeks Iran's Help In Syria Crisis

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/04/11/kofi-annan-seeks-irans-help-in-syria-crisis/>

Special envoy Kofi Annan said Wednesday in Tehran that Iran could help solve the crisis in Syria, where activists reported fresh violence near the capital Damascus a day before an international cease-fire is supposed to take effect.

Iran is one of Syria's strongest allies, and former U.N. chief Annan went there to bolster support for his faltering plan to stop the country's slide toward civil war.

"Iran, given its special relations with Syria, can be part of the solution," Annan said during a news conference with Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi. "The geopolitical location of Syria is such that any miscalculation and error can have unimaginable consequences."

The conflict in Syria is among the most explosive of the Arab Spring, in part because of the country's allegiances to powerful forces including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Shiite powerhouse Iran. The uprising that began more than a year ago seeks the ouster of authoritarian President Bashar Assad.

Iran has opposed any foreign intervention in the crisis and Salehi insisted that "change in Syria" should come under the leadership of Assad.

Syria's regime defied the Tuesday deadline to pull out troops from cities and towns that was set in the deal brokered by Annan and launched fresh attacks on rebellious areas.

But Annan insists there is still time to salvage the truce by 6 a.m. Thursday, the deadline for government and rebel fighters to cease all hostilities.

"We've been in touch with them (Syrian rebels) and have had positive answers from them. ... I think by 6 in the morning on the 12th, Thursday, we should see a much improved situation on the ground," Annan said.

"It is possible to do it and it should be in the interests of the people of Syria," he added.

Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay, who met Annan on Tuesday, said the international envoy "appeared worried to me." Atalay told Turkey's TV 24 channel that the Syrian regime is not fulfilling its promise and while withdrawing its forces from one area, it is deploying them in another.

He added that if Annan's plan does not succeed in ending the violence in Syria, "the world will rethink. This time, the U.N. Security Council will have no excuses. It will be more difficult to use their veto right." He was referring to Russian and Chinese vetoes of two past Security Council resolutions condemning Assad's regime for the crackdown on protesters.

There was more violence on Wednesday, putting the chances of a truce even deeper in doubt. Syrian troops took control of large parts of villages and towns near the border with Turkey.

Syrian state-run news agency SANA said gunmen shot and killed army Brig. Gen. Jamal Khaled in the Damascus suburb of Aqraba on Wednesday morning. It added that Khaled's driver, a soldier, was also killed in the attack.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights activist group reported clashes in the Barada Valley region on the outskirts of Damascus between troops and army defectors as government forces stormed the area. The Observatory said dozens of people were wounded.

Activist Fares Mohammed said two people were killed and dozens wounded when government troops stormed and shelled Barada valley as well as damaging tens of homes.

"Many of the wounded lost limbs as a result of shelling by tanks," he said.

The Local Coordination Committees, an activist network, reported shelling of several rebel-held neighborhoods in the central city of Homs.

The Observatory said "tens of army vehicles" are deploying in the southern town of Maaraba.

The Observatory added that two people were killed in the eastern town of Qoriah during raids by regime force.

Activist Mohammed Abu Nasr said Syrian forces entered the border town of Azaz, about two miles from the Turkish border and set homes of activists on fire.

In a letter to the U.N. Security Council, obtained by The Associated Press, Annan said Tuesday that Syria has not pulled troops and heavy military equipment out of cities and towns, and that the regime's last-minute conditions put the entire cease-fire at risk.

The council strongly backed Annan, with all 15 members -- including Syrian allies China and Russia -- approving a media statement expressing "deep concern" at the failure by Damascus to withdraw its troops and heavy equipment.

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44. [Security, Israel] Israel Mulls Missile Defense For Gas Rigs

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2012/04/10/Israel-mulls-missile-defense-for-gas-rigs/UPI-17141334075177/

Israel is considering basing the David's Sling counter-missile system on offshore gas installations amid concerns they could be attacked with anti-ship missiles or boats packed with explosives.

David's Sling, being developed by Rafael Advance Defense Systems, isn't expected to be operational until 2013 but another Rafael air-defense system, Iron Dome, has already been deployed.

It's designed to shoot down short-range missiles and rockets and has done so with considerable success in recent months.

David's Sling, sometimes known as Magic Wand, is intended to counter medium-range missiles, such as cruise missiles, and is considered more effective in defending offshore platforms.

The navy is operating Israel Aerospace Industries Heron drones for maritime surveillance that includes the gas fields.

"The area we'll need to protect at sea will significantly increase with the construction of the new gas rigs," a senior naval officer told The Jerusalem Post.

The main gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean are Leviathan, 80 miles west of Haifa, a major Israeli port and naval base, and Tamar, 50 miles off Israel's northern coast.

These fields, discovered in 2009-10, are of immense strategic value to Israel because they make the Jewish state energy-independent. So they present important targets for the country's enemies.

Leviathan contains an estimated 16 trillion cubic feet of gas and Tamar 9 tfc.

The resources will transform the economy of Israel, which has had to import virtually all of its energy requirements, when they start producing. Tamar is scheduled come on-stream in 2013 and Leviathan by 2017.

The Israeli navy hasn't decided what missile defense system it will deploy offshore. Apart from David's Sling, it has been considering the Barak-8 system, developed and built by state-owned IAI. That system is used on naval vessels to intercept anti-ship cruise missiles.

Israel's naval commanders are particularly concerned about Syria's acquisition of two Russian-built coastal-defense Bastion anti-ship systems with 72 supersonic Yakhont SS-N-26 cruise missiles that significantly bolster Syria's naval capabilities.

Russia's Interfax news agency said the missiles were ordered under a 2007 contract worth an estimated \$300 million.

The Yakhont delivery caused considerable alarm in Israel, which has long outgunned Syrian naval forces.

The SS-N-26, with a range of 190 miles and a maximum speed of Mach 2.5, carries a warhead of 440 pounds of high explosive, enough to sink a large warship, such as an aircraft carrier.

Such a weapon could pulverize an offshore gas platform.

The Yakhont's nearest U.S. counterparts, Raytheon's BGM-109 Tomahawk and Boeing's AGM-84 Harpoon, are subsonic. The best French equivalent, MBDA's MM-40 Exocet, only has a range of 45 miles.

The Israelis say they fear some of the Yakhonts could end up in the hands of Hezbollah, Iran's main proxy in Lebanon and a key Syrian ally.

While Middle East security experts doubt that, given the need to protect the Russian naval base being built at Tartous, one of Syria's main ports, Syria has provided Hezbollah with thousands of missiles and rockets in recent years.

In the opening phase of the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, the Iranian-backed Shiite movement seriously damaged an Israeli corvette off the Lebanese coast with a Chinese-designed C-801 missile provided by Iran via Syria.

On March 15, 2011, the Israeli navy intercepted the Liberian-flagged freighter Victoria carrying 50 tons of Iranian weapons reportedly destined for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group operating in the Gaza Strip.

The arms included six Chinese-designed C-704 radar-guided anti ship missiles the Iranians call the Nasr. It carries a warhead containing 280 pounds of high explosive.

The protection of the gas fields and their infrastructure gives the navy responsibilities and it's seeking new ships and equipment at a time when Israel's armed forces are having to cope with hefty cuts in defense spending.

"Until now, the navy had focused on protecting Israel's sea lines of communication, which span the length of the Mediterranean and around the Maghreb region of North Africa," the Post observed.

"Some 99 percent of all goods arriving in the country come by sea, including security-related supplies and military hardware."

The navy is thus seeking to acquire four new warships larger than the Sa'ar-class corvettes it currently operates. For budgetary reasons, these will likely be built by Israel Shipyards in Haifa than bought from abroad.

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45. [Attack, Syria] Syrian Officer Killed In Roadside Bomb Attack

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://news.yahoo.com/syrian-officer-killed-roadside-bomb-attack-state-tv-124607724.html>

Syria accused "terrorists" of planting a roadside bomb that blew up in Aleppo, killing one officer and wounding at least 24 cadets and officers in an attempt to sabotage a U.N.-backed ceasefire, state media said on Thursday.

"At eight in the morning a terrorist group targeted a bus carrying a number of officers driving to work in Aleppo," it said. The blast killed a lieutenant-colonel and civilians were among the wounded.

There was no independent confirmation of the blast in Syria, where media access is severely restricted.

The Syrian news agency SANA said a "terrorist group" in the northern province of Idlib detonated the roadside bomb, targeting a vehicle belonging to the security forces.

A member of President Bashar al-Assad's Baath party was killed in a drive-by shooting in the city of Deraa during the morning, it said.

The attacks were reported in the hours following a dawn ceasefire brokered by U.N. peace envoy Kofi Annan who is trying to mediate an end to 13 months of fighting between Assad and his opponents, including the rebel Free Syrian Army.

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46. [Special Interest, Israel] Ultra Fast Laser-Based Explosive Scanner Accelerates Airport Security Checks

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

http://defense-update.com/20120411_laser-scanner.html

Laser Detect Systems Ltd (LDS), an Israeli Electro-Optics Company has launched a breakthrough in explosive detection systems. The company announced today it completed testing of an innovative laser-based explosive scanner capable of detecting hard to detect liquid explosives in three to five seconds. Current explosive scanners are limited in their capability to detect certain types of explosives, hence the limitations imposed on carrying liquids on board passenger aircraft.

The new Israeli scanner called LDS 5500D is a desktop laser-based explosive scanner enabling accurate and reliable detection of explosive materials and hazardous compounds in liquid, gel or powder form. The scanner employs advanced laser gated Raman spectroscopy scanning methods, enabling the scanner to achieve a high level of detection, and superior processing speed.

The system successfully completed an exhaustive testing by explosive detection experts, led by the Israel's internal security agency services. The tests included a wide range of inspections evaluating its detection capabilities and sensitivity, detecting and identifying a wide range of explosive materials, including those considered so far undetectable by other means.

"We developed our new laser scanner in cooperation with Israel's security agencies, according to Israeli operational security concepts. Meeting these standards, LDS 5500D offers the best performance among the systems available in the market today" said Eli Venezia, President & Chairman of LDS. "In terms of high sensitivity, low false alarm rate and throughput, our system offers a great improvement over current standards, performing a typical inspection in 3-5 seconds." Venezia added.

The LDS 5500D scans a wide range of standard, or improvised explosive materials in liquid, gel, powder or solid form, including materials contained in sealed plastic or glass bottles, as well as those materials mixed or diluted with other substances attempting to deceive existing sensors. LDS 5500D can also detect traces and residues of explosives on already inspected objects. Other applications of the LDS 5500D include reliable detection of narcotics, and forensic identification of chemicals in liquid, solid, gas and powder form.

LDS plans to unveil the new system at the upcoming Counter Terror Expo 2012 taking place in London, April 25-26. The company will be presenting jointly with IDO Security Inc, an Israeli company whose innovative "shoes on" walk through metal detector, the Magshoe, is already a fixture for metal detection in shoes and the lower extremities at numerous airport checkpoints worldwide.

"The global market for fast, ultra sensitive and reliable explosive detection scanners is estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars and our new systems position LDS in a leading position in this field." Said Venezia. At the Counter Terror Expo 2012 LDS will also present the LDS 6500R, Remote Scan system, a laser-based explosive detector capable of detecting standard and improvised explosive devices (IED)

from a standoff distance. This laser scanner can also detect and identify hazardous materials and chemical warfare agents from tens of meters distance from the suspicious object.



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47. [Security, Syria] Syrian Clashes, Protests Erupt As Cease-Fire Frays

Friday, 13 April 2012

<http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/04/13/syrian-clashes-protests-erupt-as-cease-fire-frays/>

Syrian security forces shot and killed a protester in Hama and clashes erupted near the Turkish border as a day-old ceasefire between the government and opposition showed signs of fraying on Friday.

Mass opposition protests swelled in several flashpoint areas across the country. Activists say a protester died after forces fired on a group of demonstrators heading towards Hama's central square.

Activist groups and Turkish villagers say Syrian troops and rebel forces clashed near the Turkish border. Some of the fighting was reportedly heavy.

The unrest has erupted a day after the Syria government said it would abide by a cease-fire brokered by U.N.-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan. The plan calls for the government to withdraw forces from urban areas and end its violent year-old crackdown on dissent.

It calls for rebels to stop fighting. The Syrian government said it would respond to attacks launched by armed militants despite the cease-fire.

Diplomats say the U.N. Security Council is poised to vote as early as Friday on deploying an advance team of observers to Syria.

Western nations have been pushing the Security Council to send two waves of observers to Syria to monitor and enforce the cease-fire. A draft resolution calls for Syria to give the observers full and unimpeded freedom of movement across the country.

It also demands Syria withdraw troops and heavy weapons from population centers.

Sipan Hasan with the Syrian Center for Democracy Support, a Netherlands-based group, says Friday's clashes are no accident on the part of the Syrian army.

"The Syrian regular army is attempting to finish this situation as soon as possible. And they are trying to finish those people. What we have heard is the Syrian army is moved to looking for those groups.""

The U.N. says more than 9,000 people have been killed in Syria's unrest over the past year.

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PACOM

48. [Security, Philippines] IED Fragments Recovered From Palawan Blast Site

Saturday, 7 April 2012

<http://usnewsลาสvegas.asia/phl-regions/ied-fragments-recovered-from-palawan-blast-site/>

Explosive ordnance units from the Palawan Provincial Police Office (PPPO) have recovered what appeared to be fragments of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the blast site in El Nido, Palawan, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported on Saturday.

Items recovered included positive and negative terminals, nine-volt battery case, mobile phone metal case, leg wire and pink and yellow plastic containers which investigators believed were used at the packing case of the IED.

The NDRRMC said the items were recovered in front of the Entalula Beach Resort at Zone 3 in El Nido, Palawan which was rocked by the first blast at around 5:20 p.m. Thursday.

Wounded in the incident was Aiza Gay Martinez Mallari, 23, a cook at the resort. Mallari was taken to the Dr. Reyes Clinic in Corong-Corong, El Nido for treatment.

She was throwing garbage outside the resort when an explosive went off near her.

Ten minutes later, another explosion took place in Puerto Royal Express bus station behind the Petron gasoline station in Barangay San Jose, Puerto Princesa City.

Wounded in the second blast were Marivic Aria, 28, who suffered minor injuries in her left ankle, and Cenon Magdayo, 75, who incurred minor bruises in the forehead and ankle.

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49. [Security, India] IED Recovered In Assam

Saturday, 7 April 2012

<http://www.indiablooms.com/NewsDetailsPage/2012/newsDetails070412u.php>

A powerful Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was recovered by security forces in Baska district in Assam on Saturday during the "Raising Day" observed by the outfit group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), police said.

"The IED was recovered from the Tamulpur area and it was planted by suspected militant of Paresh Baruah led anti-talk faction group of ULFA," a police official said.

The bomb was later defused by the army bomb squad.

Meanwhile, the pro-talk ULFA observed the foundation day at Kakpathar designated camp in Tinsukia district.

In other hand, a major fire incident reported in the Numaligarh oil refinery in Golaghat district on Saturday evening.

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50. [Security, India] 16.5 Tonne Of Explosive Seized

Saturday, 7 April 2012

http://zeenews.india.com/news/bihar/bihar-16-5-tonne-of-explosive-seized_768823.html

About 16.5 tonne of ammonium nitrate was seized by mining department officials from Pachna village in Bihar's Sheikhpura district on Saturday.

Deputy development commissioner cum district mining officer GK Pramhans said acting on a tip off, the officials raided a house and sized 330 bags the explosive weighing about 16.5 tonne.

The explosive is suspected to have been used for mining purposes, he said adding its value was estimated to be Rs. 11lakh, he said.

The house owner is absconding and probe into the case is on, Pramhans added.

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51. [Attack, India] Balochistan Sectarian Attack Kills Four Shias

Monday, 9 April 2012

http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/pak-balochistan-sectarian-attack-kills-4-shias_769243.html

Four members of the minority Shia Hazara community were killed and two other injured in a sectarian attack in Pakistan's southwestern Quetta city on Sunday, police said.

Gunmen on two motorcycles fired indiscriminately at a group of Hazara men who were standing outside a shop at Prince Road in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, shortly after 7.30 pm.

Four men were killed instantly, witnesses and police officials said.

The two injured persons were taken to a nearby hospital in a serious condition.

The attackers fled before police cordoned off the area. The shooting caused panic and shops closed down after the attack.

Angry members of the Hazara community gathered outside the hospital where the bodies and injured were taken and demanded the arrest of the gunmen.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack. Dozens of members of the Hazara community have been killed in sectarian attacks in Quetta and nearby areas. These attacks have been blamed by Shia groups on the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba.

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52. [Security, North Korea] North Korea Readies Longer Range Rocket; Japan, S.Korea Wary

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/09/us-korea-north-rocket-idUSBRE83802D20120409>

North Korea has readied a rocket for a launch from a forested valley in its remote northwest this week that will showcase the reclusive state's ability to fire a missile with the capacity to hit the continental United States.

Pyongyang says the rocket, to be launched this week, will only carry a weather satellite, but South Korea and the United States say it is a test of a ballistic missile. And although the risk of it veering off course is low, guidance remains its weakest point.

In a rare move, reporters were taken to the new Sohae launch station, close to the border with China, where work was in progress to ready the 30-metre high Unha-3 rocket and its satellite.

The three-stage rocket was on the launch platform, indicating the launch will go ahead on plan between April 12-16.

"Supreme Commander Kim Jong-un made a very bold decision, that is why you are allowed to be this close to the launch site," site director Jang Myong Jin told visiting foreign journalists on Sunday.

North Korea announced plans to launch the satellite-bearing rocket to coincide with the 100th birthday celebrations of its founder, Kim Il-sung, a move that will help cement the prestige of his grandson Kim Jong-un, who took power in December.

The second stage booster is planned to separate in the seas to the west of the Philippines, about 3,000 km (1,860 miles) from the launch site, and experts say that represents the first possible landfall for the rocket if things go wrong.

If North Korea does achieve a successful separation of the third stage - something it says it achieved in 2009, but most experts say failed to put a previous satellite into orbit - that would show it had improved its technology and the capacity to produce a missile that could carry an intercontinental nuclear warhead.

Pyongyang has also shifted its launch site, and the new, more sophisticated site on the west of the Korean peninsula reduces the risk of debris falling on Japan, which was overflowed in a previous test-launch of a missile.

This launch will take the rocket down the west coast of the Korean peninsula. Japan, which fears a repeat of a 2009 firing over its territory, has put its missile batteries on alert to shoot the rocket down.

"They have come pretty far on the question of range, but they still need a lot to resolve in the precision technology needed for (warhead) re-entry and guidance," a South Korean military official who spoke on condition of anonymity said.

The Unha-3 is likely the same three-stage liquid-fueled ballistic missile the North fired in 2009 over Japan which eventually splashed down after a 3,800 km flight, military experts in South Korea said.

The new rocket is believed to have a design range of more than 6,700 km (4,160 miles), and can carry a payload of up to 1,000 kg.

At its closest point, Alaska in the United States is about 5,000 km from North Korea.

The launch will be the first at the Sohae rocket station, construction of which began in 2007. It is a large, sophisticated facility with specialized assembly and transport, according to analysis from military specialist consultancy IHS Jane's Defense Weekly.

While most international observers doubt that the Unha-2 rocket launched in 2009 managed to put a satellite into orbit, few experts believe there is a high risk the Unha-3 will land on a densely populated urban area.

The biggest risks are a massive failure of the guidance system that could send the rocket north over China, the North's main political and economic backer, or the destruct mechanism not functioning if it does veer off course, said Markus Schiller from Schmucker Technologie in Munich, an expert on North Korean missile systems.

"There always is a residual risk, of course, that several things might go wrong and lead to unforeseen disaster ... but this risk is very low, actually approaching zero," Schiller said in an emailed response to questions.

"It is far more likely that the rocket itself fails and blows apart."

The launch site is located 50 km (30 miles) from North Korea's border with China.

"The worst case scenario is it strays into China or South Korea if the rocket goes out of control," said an expert on rocket technology at a South Korean state-run research institute, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue.

While North Korea's 23 million people live in poverty and many are at risk of malnutrition, the prestige of developing rocket technology and nuclear weapons capacity is the most important issue for Pyongyang, which sees it as a deterrent against invasion.

The North is believed to have stockpiled enough fissile material to manufacture up to 10 nuclear bombs and South Korea's Yonhap news agency said on Sunday it was preparing for a third nuclear test.

Government officials in South Korea have calculated the North is spending \$19 million on this launch.

"I believe North Korea is developing many technologies simultaneously - technologies on rocket that can deliver nuclear warheads, materials that can cope with high temperature when reentering the atmosphere and on the miniaturization of nuclear bombs," said the South Korean rocket expert.

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53. [Security, Philippines] Philippines Warship, Chinese Vessels In Standoff

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/asia/Philippines-Warship-Chinese-Vessels-in-Standoff-146949645.html>

A Philippine naval ship, two Chinese vessels and at least eight fishing boats are in a standoff near a shoal in the South China Sea that the Philippines says is well within its territory. However, China says the fishermen are in its sovereign waters. Both sides say they are trying to come to a diplomatic solution.

Illegal poaching discovered

The Philippine Navy says in recent days its patrol ship discovered illegal poaching by Chinese fishermen in waters off of Scarborough shoal, 230 kilometers west Zambales, Philippines. The country argues that is well within the 370 kilometer exclusive economic zone designated by international law.

The head of the navy says officers went on board eight boats and found coral, large clams and live sharks which are listed as endangered by the Philippines. He says they were not able to arrest the fishermen because two Chinese government boats arrived and positioned themselves between the fishing boats and the Philippine patrol ship.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario summoned China's ambassador and says he reiterated the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which states a country has sovereignty over waters that are 370 kilometers from its coastline. He says their first round of talks hit an impasse. "I mentioned that, if the Philippines is challenged, we are prepared to secure our sovereignty," he said.

China claims sovereignty over practically the entire South China Sea, based on a centuries old map. Apart from the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have partial or entire claims in the sea, which has abundant waters, potential vast reserves of oil and natural gas and some of the most highly traveled sea lanes.

In the past year, the Philippines has complained of numerous run-ins with China on the South China Sea. China maintains its historical claim.

China says law enforcement activities a violation

A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Liu Weimin, told a briefing Wednesday that China has "launched solemn representations" with the Philippines about the incident on the shoal locally named Huangyan.

He says the attempt by the Philippines to carry out the so-called law enforcement activities in waters off of Huangyan Island is in violation of Chinese sovereignty as well as the consensus between the two countries to maintain peace and stability of the South China Sea.

In a statement, the Chinese ambassador's office urged the Philippines to stop what it called illegal activities by the Navy and demanded its ship to leave the area.

Vessels stalled

The U.S.-built Gregorio Del Pilar, positioned at the mouth of the lagoon, continues to pen-in the two Chinese government ships and the fishing boats. The navy says nothing has been taken off the boats. Meanwhile, the Philippine Coast Guard says it will deploy a patrol boat to keep watch over the Naval ship, which is the Philippines one and only warship.

Del Rosario says he is confident the situation will not escalate into armed conflict. He pointed out the solid economic partnership the Philippines has with China and both countries' commitment to building friendly relations.

Three weeks ago the Philippines launched a two-year cultural exchange with China that is intended to help solidify friendly relations between the two countries. Beijing's own launch was Wednesday.

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54. [Attack, Philippines] 22 Scout Rangers Wounded In Asg Attack In Sumisip, Basilan

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.zambotimes.com/archives/46132-22-Scout-Rangers-wounded-in-ASG-attack-in-Sumisip,-Basilan.html>

Twenty-two Scout Rangers were wounded when suspected members of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) while the soldiers were patrolling off Abong-Abong Peak in Sitio Pansol, Barangay Baywas, Sumisip, Basilan Tuesday morning.

Major Harold Cabunoc, Philippine Army spokesperson, said the wounded soldiers were immediately transported via helicopters to a government hospital in Zamboanga City.

Initial reports said five of those wounded remained in critical condition. The 17 others are now in stable condition, having been peppered only slightly by shrapnel. Their names were not immediately available.

Cabunoc said the patrolling soldiers were about 850 meters away from the former ASG stronghold in the area when the explosion took place at past 8 a.m. Tuesday.

The PA spokesperson added that elements of the 104th Brigade under Col. Ricardo Visaya are now conducting security and pursuit operations against the ASG members.

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55. [Security, India] Odisha Hostage Crisis: Naxal Leader Panda's Wife Freed, Offers To Mediate

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Odisha-hostage-crisis-Naxal-leader-Pandas-wife-freed-offers-to-mediate/articleshow/12615262.cms>

The wife of a senior Maoist leader was released by a local court on Tuesday citing lack of evidence against her even as the Odisha government was locked in discussions with Maoist factions over a prisoner swap for the release of hostages, Italian Bosusco Paolo and BJD MLA Jhina Hikaka.

The acquittal of Subhashree Panda, wife of CPI(Maoist) leader Sabyasachi Panda, came a day after the government rejected demands for outright release of jailed Naxals in exchange for the freedom of Paolo and Hikaka. The release could speed up the process of winning their release. Government officials, however, said the court's acquittal of Subhashree was not related to the kidnap talks, even as she offered to mediate in the crisis.

"It's the victory of truth. The government entangled me in false case and arrested me. Now I have been given justice by the court. I fought the case and won my legal battle in court," Subhashree told TOI.

Blaming the government of dilly-dallying to resolve the hostage crisis, Subhashree offered to mediate in facilitating Paolo's release. "If the government approaches me, I am ready to play the role of an interlocutor to end the hostage crisis," she said. But accusing the government of playing games with the Maoists, Subhashree said, "The government should make its stand clear through the media as to how many demands of the Maoists have been fulfilled. The government is in problem due to its own double standards."

Citing her own case as an example, she said, "I fought and won my case at the court but the government says that it has facilitated my release. If the government has released me, then why has a fresh warrant been issued against me? The government should make its stand clear."

While leaving for Bhubaneswar, Subhashree, fearing a re-arrest, said, "I have learnt that police have issued a warrant against me for my alleged involvement in the Nayagarh armoury loot case. If the government says that it has let me free, then how has it issued a warrant against me? I may be arrested at any moment."

Earlier, wearing a sari and sporting sunglasses, Subhashree was produced in court amid tight security at around 9.45am. After the judgment, she along with her father Dhanurdhar Das and mother Jyotirmoyee Das, reached Gunupur sub-jail at around 10.45am to pick up her belongings.

Subhashree was first arrested in a case relating to Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in January 2010 and acquitted by the high court in September 2011. She was rearrested by Rayagada police on October 21, 2011, for her involvement in a gun battle between security personnel and Maoists in Kutinguda forest under Gudari police limits. She has been lodged in Gunupur jail ever since.

Advocate Pattnaik told TOI that the police had arrested Subhashree on charges of being present, along with her husband, at the encounter site during the gun battle. Police had given a list of 18 witnesses against Subhashree. While 13, including 10 policemen, were examined by the court, the rest did not turn up. Subhashree's statement was recorded on April 5 and the verdict was kept reserved.

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56. [Trend, India] Odisha Hostage Crisis: Will Release Italian Through Democratic Process, Says Maoist Leader

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/Odisha-hostage-crisis-Will-release-Italian-through-democratic-process-says-Maoist-leader/articleshow/12619434.cms>

Naxal leader Sabyasachi Panda has released a fresh audio tape hinting that they are ready to free the Italian hostage in their custody, according to Times Now.

The Maoists have announced that they will release Paolo Bosusco through a democratic process.

In his message, Panda has said that they have received a copy of joint statement by the Odisha government and the mediators.

On Tuesday, Panda's wife Sushashree Panda was acquitted by a local court and freed from jail.

The Maoists had sought her release along with others as a pre-condition to release the Italian taken hostage in their custody.

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57. [Trend, Nepal] Nepal Army 'Completes' Peace Process With Maoists

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17676538>

Nepalese soldiers have moved into camps where thousands of former Maoist rebels have lived for more than five years.

The former rebels have now come under control of the army in what is seen as a key step to securing peace six years after the end of Nepal's civil war.

About 9,000 former fighters have been confined to camps since 2006, awaiting a political settlement.

About 6,000 of them are to be integrated into the army. The remainder will get a financial settlement.

Containers holding thousands of Maoist weapons are also being handed over to the army, officials say.

However, the BBC's Surendra Phuyal in Kathmandu says that the much-awaited Maoist-army integration process - the last hurdle in the peace process - could take months to complete.

But our correspondent says that officials remain upbeat that the former rebel force and the national army will become one unified entity.

Maoist military chief Nanda Kishor Pun told the BBC that the two forces have been introducing and welcoming each other.

"It's final now. The peace process is over. The armies have merged now," he said.

Officials say that about 3,000 former combatants may opt for voluntary retirement within the next three to four days.

Opposition parties have welcomed the development saying it has transformed the Maoist party from a military force into a civilian one.

But Maoist hardliners have sharply criticised their party leaders' decision. They say the move amounts to a surrender.

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58. [Attack, India] Seven Security Men Injured In Maoist Attack

Monday, 9 April 2012

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-04-09/ranchi/31312640_1_maoist-attack-security-personnel-jawans

Seven security personnel were injured in an encounter with suspected members of CPI (Maoists) near Chessmo Sanya village on the borders of Latehar and Garhwa districts on Monday. Three of the injured security personnel are members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), three others belong to the Jharkhand Jaguar (JJ) and another works for the Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA).

This is the second incident in a week in which security forces faced the attack of the Maoists. Last Thursday, two security personnel were killed and the chopper, which was to airlift the jawans from Ranchi, was attacked by the rebels.

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59. [Security, North Korea] U.S. Moves Anti-Missile Ships Into Place Ahead Of North Korea's Rocket Launch

Monday, 9 April 2012

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57411516/u.s.moves-anti-missile-ships-into-place-ahead-of-north-koreas-rocket-launch/

North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong-Un, appears ready to continue the family tradition of provoking enemies, including the U.S.

The isolated country is getting ready to launch a new rocket that could reach the United States, and there are indications that it is preparing for another nuclear test.

CBS News correspondent David Martin reports that the world's most secretive society is making no secret of its plans to fire off this rocket and launch a satellite into space. Not just North Korean media but foreign reporters as well were taken on a tour of the launch site, shown the satellite, and given a look inside mission control.

The launch is expected to take place sometime later this week, despite objections from the U.S. and countries in the region that it violates a ban on the testing of ballistic missile technology.

To hear the North Koreans tell it, the satellite launch is a peaceful use of space timed to mark the 100th birthday of their country's founding father, Kim Il-Sung.

Its trajectory is expected to take it due south in order to put the satellite into polar orbit. But U.S. officials say that is just an excuse to test a three stage rocket that would be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead far enough to reach the Hawaiian islands and parts of Alaska.

The U.S. is sending a giant seaborne radar to the test area, long with a half dozen other anti-missile ships. The Japanese are deploying Patriot anti-missile batteries. And airlines are rescheduling flights to avoid the area.

The most likely U.S. response will be to cancel 240,000 tons of food aid that would help North Korea feed its undernourished people.

It might not end there. Activity has been spotted at North Korea's nuclear test site, which means the North could be preparing for another underground nuclear explosion.

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60. [Security, Thailand] Police Issue Car Bomb Alert

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/288328/police-issue-car-bomb-alert>

Police have urged the public to keep an eye out for five stolen pickup trucks in the deep South that could contain car bombs.

National deputy police chief Worapong Chiewpreecha said cooperation from residents in Songkhla's Hat Yai district and in Yala province was needed to help monitor vehicles entering the so-called safety zones and designated Songkran celebration venues.

Pol Gen Worapong urged the locals to keep a close watch out for five stolen pickup trucks that could be used to transport bombs.

A source said the five stolen vehicles are a grey Toyota Hilux (licence no 3384) registered in Lampang; a green Mitsubishi L200 (licence no 1137) registered in Pattani; a brown Isuzu (licence no 9179) registered in Pattani; a brown Isuzu (licence no 2256) registered in Yala; and a bronze Isuzu (licence no 4883) registered in Songkhla.

Pol Gen Worapong yesterday met senior police in the three southern border provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat at the Southern Border Provinces' Police Centre in Yala to tell them to boost security during the upcoming Songkran festival.

They also discussed the progress of investigations into the March 31 bomb blasts in Hat Yai and Yala which killed 14 people, including a Malaysian tourist, and wounded hundreds.

Evidence seized from arrested suspects, particularly a stolen Honda Civic sedan which was used in the car bomb attack on Lee Gardens Plaza Hotel in Hat Yai, was found to have some links to the blasts in Yala's Raman district, Pol Gen Worapong said.

However, the suspects had not cooperated with police, said Pol Gen Worapong, adding more evidence would be gathered.

Meanwhile in Yala, 42 CCTV cameras at 25 locations in Raman were damaged in arson attacks in the early hours of Monday, according to the centre's security authorities who yesterday inspected the blaze sites.

A complaint centre attached to the Internal Security Operations Command's 4th Forward Command in Yala yesterday reported that attackers had started setting fire to telephone lines and CCTV cameras at various locations in Raman at 3.30am on Monday.

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61. [Trend, India] Indian Maoists Release Italian Hostage After Nearly A Month

Thursday, 12 April 2012

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/04/indian-maoists-release-italian-hostage-after-a-month.html

An Italian tour guide was freed Thursday by Maoists after nearly a month in captivity, somewhat thinner and worn down by malaria, in return for the release of five jailed members of the rebel group. The insurgent group, which has sought an independent state since its founding in 1967, has rarely targeted foreigners.

Paolo Bosusco, 54, thanked Indian and Italian officials for securing his release, adding that after 22 years in India organizing trips for foreigners, he was calling it quits. "I am very sorry that time has come to leave India," he said, adding that he wasn't sure he would return. "My work is finished."

Video footage and photographs showed him in a fresh white shirt, drawn face and scraggly shoulder-length hair flanked by the Italian ambassador and two policemen soon after he was freed about 5 a.m.

Bosusco referred to being on a "paid holiday" when Italian news program TG1 asked him why he looked so thin. "The Maoists tried to give me what they could, but unfortunately given the conditions in the jungle, I could not eat very much," he said. "I also had malaria twice."

Bosusco was hiking in the jungles of the eastern state of Odisha on March 14 with an Italian friend when he was captured. Maoists later claimed he was seized in part for taking photographs of area tribesmen, a contention he denied Thursday. His Italian friend was released late last month, but a local assemblyman kidnapped in the same area, apparently by a different faction, remains in captivity.

Bosusco's release came after the state government agreed to free Subhashree Panda, the wife of a local Maoist leader, and four other cadres imprisoned on various charges. The Maoists had originally demanded the release of seven prisoners.

"I told them that the Italian is our guest and he should not be held hostage for a very long period," mediator Dandapani Mohanty told local reporters.

B.K. Panwar, head of the Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare Training College in eastern Chhattisgarh, said foreign tourists have traveled to remote tribal areas for years without a problem. But he said the militant group's focus remained the capture and killing of Indian security forces. The willingness of the Odisha government to meet Maoists' demands would only encourage the fighters to strike again, he added.

The Maoists, with about 20,000 armed and 50,000 unarmed members, have a significant presence in a third of India's 28 states. Government figures indicate that more than 10,000 people were killed in Maoist-related violence from 2005 to mid-2010.

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62. [Security, Philippines] Sea Dispute Escalates As China And The Philippines Deploy More Warships

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/04/12/sea-dispute-escalates-as-china-and-philippines-deploys-more-warships/>

The standoff in the South China Sea between the naval forces of the Philippines and China is in danger of escalating, as the U.S. continues to watch anxiously.

China has now sent a third ship to support its claim to the area known as Scarborough Shoal off the northwestern Philippines.

Philippine warships attempting to arrest the crews of a Chinese fishing fleet that had entered the territory sparked the latest dispute between the two Asian countries.

They were stopped from doing so by the arrival of two Chinese surveillance ships, which then ordered the Philippine warships to leave the area.

They refused arguing that its Philippine territory and have since sent a second warship to the area.

"We're not retreating from our own territory," Alexander Pama, Chief Vice Admiral of the Philippine navy said.

China also claims the rich fishing ground as its own despite it being within 200 nautical miles of the Philippines.

"The timing of the dispute suggests China is keen to send a message to the Philippines and the U.S. ahead of their bilateral military exercise, and to assert its authority in the disputed area," Maria Patrikainen, a global insight analyst at IHS told Fox News.

The escalation in naval forces has caused consternation in capital across the Asian region and further afield.

"We urge all parties to exercise full restraint and seek a diplomatic resolution," a State Dept. spokesperson said.

On the surface this would seem to be a minor dispute between two countries but it is in fact part of a much wider problem that may lead to U.S. military involvement.

On any map you buy in China of the country you will see a huge bulge down in the south showing the territory it claims in the South China Sea.

It's an enormous area, which spreads near to the shores of the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei and Malaysia.

It even spreads nearly as far as Singapore.

No other country in the region recognizes China's sovereignty, but that hasn't stopped Beijing from marking its claim by any means it can.

This includes building concrete forts, occupied by troops on isolated coral reefs and placing concrete markers in other areas, even underwater, to support their claim.

And China has been prepared to take military action in the past to take control of some islands.

Back in 1974 China and Vietnam fought a battle over the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. Beijing's overpowering force including submarines won and they have remained under the control of China since then.

The two countries also have an ongoing dispute over the Spratly Islands which last year was in danger of escalating.

Vietnam accused China of cutting cables to their survey ships.

The U.S. military continues to watch China's actions in the South China Sea closely.

It continues to send surveillance planes and ships into the area even at the risk of provoking China.

In 2009 a U.S. ship in the area had a confrontation with Chinese naval forces that claimed the U.S. vessel had entered its waters.

And in 2001 a U.S. intelligence aircraft was intercepted over the South China Sea and was involved in a midair collision that left one Chinese pilot dead and forced the U.S. plane to land in China.

The reasons behind all this interest by competing powers in the South China Sea are twofold.

Outside powers like the U.S. view the area as a key international waterway in which a large part of world trade passes through. Last year the U.S. said maintaining stability in the area is part of its "national interests."

U.S. aircraft carriers regularly pass through the South China Sea on their way to and from the Middle East.

And the second reason is it is widely believed that under the South China Sea there are huge quantities of oil and gas.

China and other nations who claim all, or part of, the area are hoping it will give them energy security.

The difficulty at the moment is that China is seen in many Asian capitals as a bully who wants to grab all of it and will only negotiate with each country separately.

President Obama announced last year that the U.S. would turn its strategic attention more towards Asia to ensure stability there.

The first of the 2,500 U.S. marines that are to be based in Australia have already started arriving.

It has long been feared that this could be the next area in Asia where there may be armed conflict, and the disputes, if not handled properly threaten to lead to a confrontation between Beijing and Washington.

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63. [Attack, Philippines] Two Killed, 18 Injured In Bus Blast In North Cot

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2012/04/12/2-killed-18-injured-in-bus-blast-in-north-cot/>

Two passengers of the Rural Transit Bus, including a ten-year old girl, were killed while 18 others were injured when a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) went off while the bus was moving along the Carmen-Kabacan highway at around 10:40 a.m., Sr. Supt. Cornelio Salinas, North Cotabato police chief, said.

The slain passengers were seated in an area where the IED was planted, he said.

Salinas identified the slain passengeras Gladzin Himpiso, 10, and Rona Mae Causing, 18, both residents of Cabanglasan, Bukidnon.

Injured were Guirea Danggo, 21; Marvin Nacinal,23; Basilisa Anipot, 45; Sonny Balanay, 39; Leo Limsiano, 44; Alvin Diaz, 19; Lovina Ayco, 46; Lea Faviona, 52; Analyn Suyco, 35; Demia Causing, 62; HaraJanine Cosco, 11; Allan Himpiso, Sr., 33; Allan Himpiso, Jr., 6; Judy AnnSumaylon, 9; Smela Luneza, 18; Rosa dela Garbo, 41; Alberto Isidro, 36; and Jenny Bergonia, 34.



The injured passengers were rushed to the Kabacan Medical Specialist Center in Kabacan town and the North Cotabato Provincial Hospital at Amas Complex in Kidapawan City.

The Wednesday blast was the second attack against a Rural Transit Bus this year, police records showed.

On February 7 this year, an IED went off while the bus was in transit along Kabacan-Carmen highway, injuring one passenger. Salinas hinted extortion as the motive behind the blast.

“We saw here a pattern. The suspects would board the bus from Tacurong City-Carmen highway and the blast would happen from Kabacan-Carmen highway,” said Salinas.

The bus company, according to police, had been receiving extortion threats from several armed lawless groups, including the notorious Al Khobar, an extortion ring which they alleged has links with a terror group operating in Southwestern Mindanao.

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64. [Security, India] Explosives Seized In Poonch

Thursday, 12 April 2012

<http://pugodesk.winwinhosting.net/dailyexcelsior/explosives-seized-in-poonch/>

Army and Special Operations Group (SOG) today recovered a consignment of explosive material from village Rangawali in Sabjian area of Poonch district.

Official sources said troops of 40 Rashtriya Rifles and SOG carried out a joint search operation at Rangawali and destroyed a hideout of the militants.

Recoveries made from the hideout included six Chinese grenades, six shells of Rocket Projectile Gun (RPG), 12 Pika rounds, 50 AK rounds, four detonators with wire, one medical kit, two bags and two Pakistan made cigarette packets.

Army and police have launched a search operation in the area in anticipation of movement of the militants following recovery of cigarette packets from the hideout of the militants.

Few days back, Army and police had busted a hideout of the militants in Rajouri district.

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65. [Security, Philippines] Embarrassed By Rocket Crash, North Korea May Try Nuclear Test

Friday, 13 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/13/us-north-korea-rocket-idUSBRE83B1OR20120413>

North Korea said its much hyped long-range rocket launch failed on Friday, in a very rare and embarrassing public admission of failure by the hermit state and a blow for its new young leader who faces international outrage over the attempt.

The isolated North, using the launch to celebrate the 100th birthday of the dead founding president Kim Il-sung and to mark the rise to power of his grandson Kim Jong-un, is now widely expected to press ahead with its third nuclear test to show its military strength.

"The possibility of an additional long-range rocket launch or a nuclear test, as well as a military provocation to strengthen internal solidarity is very high," a senior South Korean defense ministry official told a parliamentary hearing.

The two Koreas are divided by the world's most militarized border and remain technically at war after an armistice ended the Korean War in 1953.

The United States and Japan said the rocket, which they claimed was a disguised missile test and the North said was to put a satellite into orbit, crashed into the sea after travelling a much shorter distance than a previous North Korean launch.

Its failure raises questions over the impoverished North's reclusive leadership which has one of the world's largest standing armies but cannot feed its people without outside aid, largely from its only powerful backer, China.

"(There is) no question that the failed launch turns speculation toward the ramifications for the leadership in Pyongyang: a fireworks display gone bad on the biggest day of the year," said Scott Snyder of the Council on Foreign Relations.

In a highly unusual move, the North, which still claims success with a 2009 satellite that others say failed, admitted in a state television broadcast seen by its 23 million people that the latest satellite had not made it into orbit.

The failure is the first major and very public challenge for the third of the Kim dynasty to rule North Korea just months into the leadership of a man believed to be in his late 20s.

"It could be indication of subtle change in the North Korean leadership in how they handle these things, something that may be different from the past," said Baek Seung-joo of the Korea Institute of Defense Analyses a thinktank affiliated with South Korean Defence Ministry.

"I mean it would have been unthinkable for them to admit this kind of failure in the past, something that could be seen as an international humiliation. The decision to have come out with the admission had to come from Kim Jong-un."

Embarrassingly, the rocket flew for just a few minutes covering a little over 100km to explode over a sea separating the Korean peninsula and China, far less than the last rocket in 2009 that travelled 3,800km, alarming Japan which it over-flew.

The launch is in breach of United Nations Security Council sanctions and drew condemnation from the United States, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

But North Korea looks to have avoided the threat of fresh U.N. sanctions - which neighbor Japan is pushing for - after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that at talks with his Chinese and Indian counterparts they had agreed new sanctions would do nothing to help resolve the situation.

Regional powers are worried that the North is using launches to perfect technology to enable it to build a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the United States.

North Korea has repeatedly defended its right to launch rockets for what it says are peaceful purposes and may have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the failed launch.

China, the North's main backer, again appealed for "calm", although its failure to dissuade Pyongyang from undertaking the launch despite propping up the ailing and impoverished state, showed the limitations of its diplomacy, analysts said.

"North Korea's provocative action threatens regional security, violates international law and contravenes its own recent commitments," White House spokesman Jay Carney said.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command, NORAD, said the first stage fell into the sea west of South Korea, and the remainder was deemed to have failed.

"No debris fell on land," NORAD said. "At no time were the missile or the resultant debris a threat.

CHINA HOLDS KEY DESPITE DIPLOMATIC FAILURE

The launch came just weeks after a "Leap Year" deal that saw Washington agree to provide food aid. Among the promises Pyongyang made in return was not to launch any long range rocket or undertake nuclear tests.

There is likely to be pressure from leading countries to impose more sanctions on the North. But it poses difficulties for China which will likely resist further sanctions even though its own diplomacy failed to stop the rocket launch.

"After giving so much aid to North Korea, it still did not listen to China, and this hurt China-North Korea relations and erodes domestic support in its continued support of North Korea," said Shen Dingli, a professor and regional security expert at Shanghai's Fudan University.

"This also undermines confidence in the U.S.-China relationship, and whether China had done enough to persuade the North. So, China is also a loser, but not as big a loser as if North Korea succeeded in its launch," he said.

If the United States, Japan and South Korea do ratchet up pressure on North Korea that could lead to a show of defiance from the North such as a nuclear test, or an attack like the one in 2010 that saw it shell a South Korean island, killing civilians.

"Rather than any conventional provocation, I think North Korea will watch what U.S. and South Korea are doing and prepare for a nuclear test," said Chung Young-chul, a professor at Sogang University's Graduate School of Public Policy.

PRICE OF FAILURE FOR "SUPREME COMMANDER"

Now led by Kim Jong-un, North Korea had planned to make 2012 the year in which it became a "strong and prosperous nation" and the launch was part of a program to burnish its credentials.

It even, unusually, invited foreign media in to cover the birthday celebrations and showed them the launch site.

Kim was named First Secretary of the Workers Party of Korea earlier this week and on Friday as head of the National Defence Commission, as he accumulates titles and posts similar to those held by his father, Kim Jong-il who died in December.

State newspaper Rodong Sinmun on Friday dubbed him "the sun whom all the party members, service personnel and people of the DPRK (Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea) acclaimed out of their heartfelt desire".

Although North Korea is one of the most tightly controlled states on earth, with no free media and a tight grip on its population, such a high profile failure could trigger a backlash among the country's elite.

"This is the first crisis for the new leader that has just taken over," said Lee Jong-won, a professor at Waseda University in Tokyo.

"It is inevitable that they will look to find who is responsible for the failure, and I wonder what the treatment will be for those in the military and the hard-line officers who have pressed for the launch."

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NORTHCOM

66. [Security, USA] Suspected Bomb In Redondo Beach Cleared

Thursday, 5 April 2012

<http://www.easyreadernews.com/49397/suspected-bomb-in-south-bay-marketplace-cleared-update/>

Shortly after 8 p.m. on Thursday the Redondo Beach Police department was contacted by the U.S. Military about two possibly dangerous active military men in the area. According to Redondo Beach Police Department Capt. Jeff Hink, the pair was suspected of having an explosive device in a white Dodge Ram truck, and they were potentially in Redondo Beach. They were soon spotted in the parking lot of the furniture store Living Spaces standing next to the truck and were taken into custody.

“The military said that they were concerned the individuals may have explosives inside the vehicle,” said Hink. “After identifying the vehicle, [RBPD police] instructed them to comply with police and they were detained without incident.”

The military men, wearing civilian clothes, were moved to the command post of the operation near the close-by Target store and eventually transported to the RBPD jail. The men were detained on suspicion of having an explosive ordinance.

“We will work with military personal to determine what to do with them,” said Hink.

The truck was surrounded by the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department Bomb Squad and the entire area was evacuated within minutes. Police set up a perimeter to keep people safe and away from a possible blast zone by evacuating Living Spaces, Nordstrom Rack, Sprouts, Target and the surrounding parking lots. The South Bay Galleria was already closed and was not officially evacuated. Additionally the AMC movie theatre inside the mall was still open and movies were not interrupted by an evacuation because of the venue’s safe distance from the potential epicenter, police said. The bomb squad entered the scene and deployed a robot and personnel entered the area suited up in green and ready to investigate what was in the truck.

“We don’t know the connection to this area at this time,” Hink said.

Television helicopters circled overhead as members of the bomb squad removed suspicious objects from the cab of the truck. After an hour they eventually determined that the men had a ‘flash bang’ in the vehicle, an object used to simulate artillery shells. Police officers determined the area was safe and the yellow police tape that was posted at least 300 feet away from the truck was taken down and the scene was wrapped up around midnight.

“The area is all cleared,” RBPD Sergeant Scott Weibel said. The truck was towed from the parking lot and the investigation has been turned over to the military authorities.

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67. [Security, USA] Seaford Man Makes Bomb Threat, Sets Bus On Fire

Friday, 6 April 2012

<http://capegazette.villagesoup.com/news/story/police-seaford-man-makes-bomb-threat-sets-bus-on-fire/805771>

A Seaford man previously charged in bomb threats at two Georgetown schools, faces more charges in connection with a recent bomb threat and bus fire.

David C. Detwiler, 38, was out on bond for terroristic threatening and other charges in connection with the March 6 bomb threat to the Howard T. Ennis School and a March 13 bomb threat to Georgetown Elementary School, said Master Cpl. Gary Fournier of the Delaware State Police.

Police patrolling the Ennis school April 4 – the day after the second bomb threat in a month – recognized a vehicle owned by Detwiler driving past the school, Fournier said. The officer stopped the car after running its registration information and discovered Detwiler alone in the car. He was in violation of a no contact order with the school after his initial arrest, Fournier said. Police later determined Detwiler made the April 3 bomb threat to the Ennis school.

Police arrested Detwiler but he was taken to an area hospital because of a health condition, Fournier said. Upon his release, Fournier said Detwiler will be charged with terroristic threatening, non-compliance with conditions of bond and 12 counts of reckless endangering. The 12 counts involve risks associated with moving fragile students during the bomb threat evacuation, Fournier said.

In addition to the state police charges, Detwiler will face charges from the state fire marshal in connection with a fire April 3 that damaged three, parked school buses in Georgetown.

The school buses were parked in a parking lot on State Forest Road used by the bus contractor when the buses were not in use. Damages were estimated at \$250,000, said Randall Lee, chief deputy fire marshal.

Lee said they intend to charge Detwiler with second-degree arson, criminal trespass and three counts of third-degree arson.

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68. [Security, USA] Man Faces Heroin Manufacture, IED Charges

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://gazettextra.com/news/2012/apr/10/man-faces-heroin-manufacture-ied-charges/>

As Walworth County sheriff's deputies were arresting a Genoa City man at his residence last month on manufacturing heroin charges, they notice a pipe with a hole drilled in one end, officials say.

The Milwaukee County Bomb Squad was called to the scene and identified the pipe as an improvised explosive device, or IED.

Malik D. Iseini, 33, of N1985 Hafs Road, has been charged with three counts of manufacturing heroin, one count of possession of heroin with intent to deliver, felony possession of a firearm, possession of an IED, resisting an officer and possession of drug paraphernalia. The charges carry enhanced repeater penalties.

Iseini is scheduled for a May 1 preliminary hearing in Walworth County Court. He is being held at Walworth County Jail on a \$10,000 cash bond.

The criminal complaint said that as deputies were executing a search warrant in Iseini's mobile home Mar. 19, they found 23 foil bundles containing a substance that tested positive in a field test for heroin. Deputies also found a section of PVC pipe with a hole "that appeared to be for a fuse," according to the complaint.

The search warrant was obtained after a confidential informant purchased heroin from Iseini in late February, according to the complaint.

The bomb squad identified the pipe as an IED and disposed of it, according to the complaint. Deputies said they also found a .22-caliber rifle in Iseini's mobile home.

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69. [Security, USA] Three Teens Arrested For Setting Off Explosive Devices In Livermore

Wednesday, 11 April 2012

<http://www.ktvu.com/news/news/crime-law/three-teens-arrested-setting-explosive-devices-liv/nMXJC/>

Three teenagers have been arrested after three explosive devices were detonated in a yard in a Livermore neighborhood, authorities announced Wednesday.

Officers responded to a report Tuesday afternoon of either gunshots or explosions going off in the 700 block of South "O" Street.

Upon arrival, the officers discovered that three chemical reaction explosive devices had been detonated on a residential property.

Witnesses provided a suspect vehicle description and an alert was issued.

About 3:45 p.m., officers located and stopped the suspect vehicle in the Livermore downtown area, police said.

Evidence linking the three occupants to the crime was found in the vehicle and they were taken into custody.

Authorities said Andrew Cable, 18, of Livermore and a 16 year-old male and 15-year-old female juvenile. All three are charged with of possession and detonating a destructive device.

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SOUTHCOM

70. [Trend, Venezuela] Kidnapped Costa Rican Diplomat Freed

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/10/us-venezuela-diplomat-idUSBRE8390GK20120410>

A Costa Rican kidnapped during the weekend in the latest attack on foreign diplomats in Venezuela has been freed and is in good health, the government said on Tuesday.

"Thanks to police investigation and pressure, we achieved the liberation of the Costa Rican diplomat," Venezuelan Interior Minister Tareck El Aissami said on Twitter. He promised full details of the operation later in the day.

Guillermo Cholele, a trade attache at the Costa Rican Embassy in Caracas, was seized on Sunday night as he returned to his home in La Urbina, a middle-class neighborhood in the eastern part of the capital.

"He is in good physical state, under police protection en route to meet up with his family," El Aissami said.

Various diplomats stationed in Venezuela have been victims of robberies and "express" kidnappings - usually short abductions motivated by money - in recent months. One consul's daughter was shot dead at a police roadblock.

Local media said Cholele was 55 and had lived in Venezuela with his wife and two children for the past six years. His abductors had demanded a ransom, according to Costa Rica, but it was unclear if anything was paid.

Murders, armed robberies and abductions are rife in Venezuela, which has huge oil wealth alongside deep poverty.

Mexico's ambassador and his wife were briefly kidnapped in January and last year a consul from Chile was shot and beaten in Caracas during an abduction that lasted several hours.

POLITICIZED CRIME

A diplomat from Belarus also was kidnapped last year. Last month, the teenage daughter of a Chilean diplomat was shot dead by police after the car she was in failed to stop at a roadblock in the western city of Maracaibo.

Venezuelan's favorite sport has also been hit. U.S. Major League Baseball player Wilson Ramos of the Washington Nationals was kidnapped while visiting his parents last November. He was held in the mountains for two days before being rescued by security forces.

The country's opposition, which hopes to topple President Hugo Chavez in the October 7 election and end his 13 years in power, says his government only shows any urgency in its fight against crime when foreign or high-profile victims are involved.

Seeking to counter that impression, Chavez's socialist administration launched two new organizations to combat criminality just last week.

While voters appear not to hold the president personally responsible for one of the world's highest crime rates, his government is under growing pressure - and the latest incident quickly became politicized.

Some Chavez supporters suggest the violence against diplomats may be an opposition plot to discredit the government and tarnish the achievements of his self-styled revolution.

Diosdado Cabello, the National Assembly boss and a staunch ally of the president, said he hoped the recent attacks were just a coincidence and nothing more sinister, while pro-Chavez talk show host Mario Silva said the opposition was following the violent playbook of a brief coup against Chavez a decade ago.

"What better way to show the international community that Venezuela doesn't even have the capacity to protect diplomats?" Silva said on Monday night.

"They're following the exact same script."

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71. [Special Interest, Colombia] Colombia Farc Rebel Leader Says Group Is Not Weakened

Saturday, 7 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17648596>

One of the leaders of Colombia's biggest rebel movement, the Farc, says it remains ready for battle.

The leader, known as Ivan Marquez, denied claims by the Colombian military that the guerrillas had been weakened.

In a video message, he defended the Farc's actions and rejected accusations that they were acts of terrorism.

Just hours after the message was uploaded, Farc rebels killed at least six soldiers at a military checkpoint in north-western Choco province.

The soldiers were manning a checkpoint on the road leading from the provincial capital, Quibdo, to Colombia's second largest city, Medellin.

Army General Hernan Giraldo said the soldiers were killed by explosive devices.

He said his men killed three of the rebels in the clashes.

In the Farc video, believed to have been recorded on 24 March, Luciano Marin Arango, better known as Ivan Marquez, said claims that the end of the guerrilla movement had come were wrong.

"There is an intense political and military confrontation and a growing mobilisation of the social sectors," he said sitting at a table in front of a large image of the late Farc leader Manuel Marulanda.

Ivan Marquez, a member of the Farc's secretariat, the group's ruling body, said the rebels were trying to "enlist the solidarity of the people of the world" in their struggle.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos had said last month that recent military strikes had weakened the guerrilla movement.

More than 60 rebels were killed in attacks in eastern Meta and Arauca province in March.

The attacks were part of a new strategy by the security forces aimed at eliminating the rebels' regional commanders and hitting their logistics and supplies.

President Santos had ordered the new strategy after the killing over the past two years of the rebels' top two commanders, Mono Jojoy and Alfonso Cano.

The president said the military had to widen its list of targets to prevent middle-ranking rebels raising through the hierarchy and taking the places of their killed leaders.

"For an organisation like the Farc, the middle ranks, those who are just below the Secretariat, are the most important people," President Santos said.

"They are the ones making the decision on the ground, and these operations hit them at the very heart of their structure," Mr Santos told a security meeting in Chaparral, in central Tolima province in March.

Farc rebels have been fighting to overthrow the government since the 1960s.

Over the past decade they are thought to have lost about half their strength, with about 8,000 guerrillas remaining.

But they remain a powerful force in large areas of rural Colombia, thanks in part to money gained from the cocaine trade.

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72. [Security, Peru] Suspected Shining Path Rebels Kidnap Peru Gas Workers

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17659173>

Suspected rebels in Peru are holding seven workers they kidnapped from a natural gas project, police say.

The Shining Path rebels are reportedly demanding the release of their captured leader "Artemio".

The gunmen initially seized 30 workers on the Camisea natural gas development in the southern region of Cusco, but were later said to have released 23.

Artemio, one of the last leaders of the once-powerful Shining Path movement, was captured in February.

The Maoist group posed a major challenge to the Peruvian state in the 1980s and early 1990s, but is now reduced to small bands involved in cocaine trafficking.

The Camisea project is a major development bringing natural gas from the Amazon across the Andes to consumers throughout Peru.

The workers were seized in a remote jungle region not far from the Apurimac-Ene valley - one of the last strongholds of the Shining Path.

They are employees of Swedish company Skanska, which services Peru's main natural gas pipeline, officials said.

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73. [Attack, Colombia] Six Colombian Soldiers Killed In Farc Ambush

Sunday, 8 April 2012

<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/6-Colombian-Soldiers-Killed-in-FARC-Ambush-146580285.html>

Colombia's military says rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC - have ambushed a military unit, killing six soldiers.

A military spokesman says three rebels were killed in the return fire Saturday about 400 kilometers northwest of the capital, Bogota.

Last month, the Colombian government says it killed more than 30 FARC rebels in a bombing raid.

FARC has been at war with the Colombian government since the 1960s. Their numbers have dwindled over the years, but some analysts estimate the group has as many as 9,000 fighters.

FARC has been designated as a terrorist organization by Colombia, the United States and the European Union.

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74. [Security, Colombia] Alleged Farc Bomb Attack Averted In Southern Colombia

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/23298-alleged-farc-bomb-attack-averted-in-southern-colombia.html>

The Colombian army dismantles 600kg of explosives allegedly planned to be used to attack a military base in the southern Caqueta department.

Eight suspected FARC bomb cylinders were discovered following an anonymous tip-off that the base would be targeted on Sunday night.

The devices were deactivated in a controlled explosion.

An army spokesman said, "The commander of the Tenth Second Brigade is grateful to the population for this opportune information and extends the invitation to keep reporting [suspicions] on the free lines 146 and 147 available 24 hours a day."

Guerrilla activity in Caquera has intensified over recent years, with foreign oil companies being a favored target of attacks.

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75. [Attack, Colombia] Policeman Dead, Four Wounded In 'Farc' Attack

Tuesday, 10 April 2012

<http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/23311-policeman-dead-four-wounded-in-farc-attack.html>

One policeman was killed and four wounded in an alleged FARC attack in the southwestern Cauca department Tuesday, reported local media.

Officer Jhon Rios was hit by repeated automatic gunfire and died at the scene, according to Cauca Government Secretary Edith Milena Cabezas.

The injured were taken to a hospital in the departmental capital Popoyan, with two reportedly in a critical condition.

The ambush took place on a highway in the El Bordo municipality.

Frequent clashes between armed forces and guerrillas have been reported in El Bordo, which sits on a drug transitting route between Colombia and Ecuador.

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76. [Security, Colombia] Colombian Troops Shut Down Farc Rebel Hospital In Bogota

Monday, 9 April 2012

http://www.dialogo-americas.com/en_GB/articles/rmisa/features/regional_news/2012/04/09/aa-farc-hospital

Government forces have succeeded in closing down clandestine FARC-run hospitals in the Colombian capital, and dismantling a section of the guerrilla's support network otherwise referred to as Redes de Apoyo al Terrorismo (RAT).

Two nondescript brick houses, in Bogota's working-class district of Usme were put under surveillance by the National Police's Criminal Investigation and Interpol Directorate (DIJIN) in the weeks leading up to the operation, known as "Republica 130." DIJIN officers observed injured combatants being brought for treatment and recuperation to the house, which was run by FARC nurses known by the aliases of Tatiana and Viviana.

"These women used their knowledge, working in a building that was conditioned not only as a depot for medications but also as a clinic to attend to injured guerrillas and for their rehabilitation," said DIGIN's director, Gen. Carlos Ramiro Mena.

The raid followed an announcement Feb. 26 that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia would no longer kidnap civilians for ransom. But Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has insisted that the FARC stop the practice of kidnapping and all other acts of terrorism before the group begins peace talks with his government.

Last November, government troops killed Guillermo Leon Saenz Vargas, also known as Alfonso Cano. FARC's supreme commander, who was 63, died in a shootout in the mountains of Cauca department, in southwestern Colombia. Shortly after, President Juan Manuel Santos called Cano's death "the most devastating blow this group has suffered in its history."

Under the command of Henry Castellanos Garzon, known as Romana, guerrillas wounded in action in the department of Meta — located south of Bogota with access to vast Sumapaz National Park — would be brought to Usme. There, the rebels, affiliated with FARC's Ariari Front, would be nursed back to health.

In early March, 12 members of the RAT support network were captured, and a small factory that produced military uniforms identical to those used by government troops was seized. These uniforms are said to have then been shipped south into conflict zones, where FARC militants — disguised as government troops — would set up false roadblocks near military installations for kidnapping and extortion purposes.

While these raids in Usme and Meta have yielded significant successes, the information gathered in the operation serves to remind civilians and the government how close the FARC is to Bogota and the ease with which their rebels can reach the city.

The district of Usme has long been problematic for Bogota's police, as it backs onto a large, open high-altitude steppe just 19 miles from the capital. With altitudes ranging from 4,920 to 14,300 feet above sea level, and with entry points that descend from the Andean cordillera into lowland jungles of the departments of Meta and Huila, this is a tricky region to patrol — a fact not lost on Romana and FARC Secretariat member Mauricio Jaramillo, alias El Medico.

Romana, who still eludes security forces, was right-hand man to Jorge Briceno Suarez, alias Mono Jojoy, the FARC's former military commander. Mono Jojoy was killed in a September 2010 attack in Meta. Romana now oversees the same area as his former boss, and in turn is highly active in coordinating the so-called "urban militias" of the rebel group as well as supervising the transport of weapons, munitions and explosives into Bogota.

While Romana remains at large in Meta, DIJIN forces did manage to capture a guerrilla subversive by the name of Jaider Henao Naranjo, alias Diego Guapuchon.

In a press statement, DIJIN's Mena said this subversive was "directly in charge of coordinating the trafficking of weapons, munitions and explosives for this organization into Bogota, most of which were negotiated through the sale of coca in various outlying areas of the town of Mesetas [in the department of Meta]."

In a twist that shows the importance of the police and military operation, Naranjo — captured alongside his brother, Alexis Henao Naranjo — has direct links to Mauricio "El Medico" Jaramillo, the FARC secretariat member in charge of mobile guerrilla units.

With the capture of these urban militias of the FARC, police say they have closed an investigation that has run since November 2011, when a grenade was detonated in northern Bogota, given that Mono Jojoy, Romana and Guapuchon were among top FARC leaders with expertise in explosives.

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77. [Security, Colombia] Army Located 25 Cylinders With Explosives And Three Antipersonnel Mines

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.army.mil.co/?idcategoria=324222>

The continuous operations headed by soldiers from the Army, in Cauca and Huila, allowed the neutralization of three improvised explosive artifact installed by the Farc.

The first action took place when troops from the Apolo task Force, arrived to the municipality of Venadillo, Cauca and located a house bomb from the sixth group of the Farc; in the site were locted25 cylinders which were going to be used against the civilians through launching ramps, also was established that in the site were elaborated non-conventional explosives.

Also the troops confiscated 100 kilos of black gun powder and instruments for the elaboration of improvised explosive artifacts.

After, the troops coordinated the supervision of the neutralization of the explosives which was made in a controlled way.

In other facts soldiers from the Terrestrial Combat Battalion No.31 'Sebastian de Belalcazar' in the rural zone of Río Blanco in the municipality of Baraya, Huila, were located three land mines made up of kilo of explosives which were planted by the Angelino Godoy'.

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78. [Security, Colombia] Huge Hidden Depot Of The Farc Was Found By The National Army In The Department Of Tolima

Monday, 9 April 2012

<http://www.cgfm.mil.co/CGFMPortal/faces/index.jsp?id=13608>

As a result of the continuous military operations deployed by the Army throughout the national territory, in the last hours, two hidden depots with military material, explosives, food and communication equipment, pertaining to the FARC were dismantled in the department of Tolima.

The first finding took place in the path Rionegro of the municipality of Rioblanco, department of Tolima, where soldiers of the Mobile Brigade No.20 of the Task Force of Sumapaz, found a clandestine hidden depot that belonged to the front 21 of the FARC.

During the search carried out by the military personnel, 800 cartridges of different calibers, 31 hand grenades, 3,500 meters of detonating cord, 450 electric fuzes, 10 kilos of pentolite, 70 improvised explosive devices, three guns, 14 magazines, four communication radios, huge quantity of military equipment and 800 kilos of food, were found.

On the other hand, in countryside of the municipality of Dolores, troops of the Mobile Brigade No.21, found a hidden depot that belonged to the squad 25 of the FARC, where eight improvised explosive devices, 25 meters of detonating cord, three kilos of shrapnel, two electric fuzes and kilograms of pentolite were hidden.

With these important seizures, the National Army could neutralize a terrorist act that guerrillas of the FARC were trying to carry out in this region of the country.

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