

LIBYA'S LAST CHEMICAL WEAPONS STOCKS SHIPPED OUT

TRIPOLI: Libya has shipped the last of its chemical weapons stocks out of the country, officials said yesterday, under a UN-backed plan to ensure the arsenal could not fall into the wrong hands. The move will ease fears that extremists like the Islamic State group could gain access to the weapons in Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi. A senior security official told AFP the stocks, including 23 tanks of chemicals, were shipped out on a Danish vessel on Saturday from the port of Misrata, under the supervision of the United Nations, and were destined for Germany.

The stocks had been stored in the central Jafa area, about 200 kilometers south of Sirte where Libyan pro-government forces are battling IS jihadists, he said. "We as Libyans did not want these weapons, especially during the current security situation and with the presence of IS in the region," the security official said. The deputy prime minister of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), Mussa El-Koni, confirmed the operation. "All of Libya's chemical arsenal has been shipped out of the country," he said. "This is good news for Libya, and for the peace of Libya, and we thank all the countries that participated and the UN."

The Danish government had earlier this month offered to send a container vessel, support ship and 200 staff to handle the operation, coordinated by the UN-backed Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). In an emailed statement to AFP, the OPCW said: "We are not in a position to disclose operational details of an ongoing effort." It specified however that the stocks in question "are industrial chemicals in wide use as well as precursor chemicals that are several stages away from being actual chemical weapons."



TRIPOLI: A team of Libyan experts and military engineers monitor a dump tank, under the supervision of the United Nations, in Tripoli. Experts were assigned to dump the toxic chemicals found in the air defense missiles and ammunition that was left over from the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's regime. — AFP

500 tons of toxic chemicals

A German defense ministry spokesman said the shipment would arrive in Germany "in the coming weeks" and contained "about 500 tons of toxic chemical products" that would be destroyed by

GEKA, Germany's state-owned company for disposing of chemical weapons. "These chemical products can be used to produce toxic gases or warfare agents, but are not toxic gases or warfare agents," the spokesman said. A Danish foreign ministry

spokesman said the government "can neither confirm nor deny" reports of its involvement.

The UN Security Council on July 22 endorsed plans to remove Libya's remaining chemical weapons from the country and prevent them from falling into the hands of extremists like IS. Libya joined the UN convention on eliminating chemical weapons in 2004 as part of Gaddafi's ultimately abortive efforts to shake off the country's pariah status and mend relations with the West. The convention uses a broad definition of "chemical weapons" to include not only those already prepared for delivery but also toxic chemicals intended for use in weapons and the precursors used to create them.

At the time Libya joined the convention, it declared 24.7 tons of sulphur mustard, 1,390 tons of precursor chemicals and more than 3,500 aerial bombs containing chemical weapons. It had eliminated all the aerial bombs, 51 percent of the sulphur mustard and 40 percent of the precursor chemicals by 2011, when operations to destroy the arsenal were interrupted by the uprising against Gaddafi, according to the OPCW.

Of three chemical weapons production facilities also declared in 2004, two were destroyed and one converted for civilian use, it said. Fears over Libya's remaining stockpiles grew with the rise of the local branch of IS, which took advantage of the country's turmoil last year to seize control of the coastal city of Sirte. Forces loyal to the internationally backed GNA, a unity government that was declared earlier this year but has struggled to assert its authority, have made significant gains against IS in Sirte. After capturing most of the city including IS's central headquarters earlier this month, loyalist forces have cornered the jihadists in one last district. — AFP

WORLD VISION URGES ISRAEL TO TRY 'HAMAS AID' CASE IN PUBLIC

ISRAEL DESTROYS HOME OF PALESTINIAN LINKED TO DEADLY ATTACK

JERUSALEM: World Vision's global president has questioned Israeli accusations that the NGO's Gaza head diverted millions of dollars in aid to Hamas and said his trial should be open to the public. A pre-trial hearing for World Vision's Mohammed Al-Halabi was held in secret yesterday morning in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba. "A trial is legitimate if it is transparent," World Vision International's president Kevin Jenkins said in one of his first interviews since Halabi was charged on August 4. "Obviously with such serious allegations against a staff member, we are calling for him to have a fair hearing."

He said the allegations against Halabi were so serious that the NGO was hoping for an open trial to learn as many lessons as possible if they were proved correct. "As much as our donors want the truth to come out, we want the truth to come out," he said. "Our whole reputation is based on integrity." All media and even World Vision staff were prevented from attending yesterday's hearing, Halabi's lawyer said. The accusations against him were read out while Halabi, wearing a brown prisoner's uniform, stood motionless, lawyer Lea Tsemel said. Halabi has not yet spoken in the court but intends to plead not guilty, she said.

The case will reconvene in early October. On August 4, Israel alleged that Halabi had diverted more than \$7.2 million each year since 2010 to Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip. This allegedly equated to 60 percent of the NGO's budget for Gaza, with much of the money being syphoned off to Hamas's military wing to fight the Jewish state, according to the charges. He initially confessed, Israel said, though Amnesty International said Monday there were allegations he had been mistreated in custody and "may have been forced into 'confessing' under duress." The rights group also called for the trial to be opened to the media.

"Difficult to reconcile" Halabi's arrest was followed by similar allegations against a Save the Children employee and the arrest of a United Nations worker for allegedly funneling rubble to Hamas to build a military jetty. The UN has disputed the allegations. Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza have fought three wars since 2008 and Hamas is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. Israeli ambassador to the

UN Danny Danon said the allegations showed a "troubling trend of the systematic exploitation (of aid) by Hamas terrorists." But Jenkins called the scale of the allegations against Halabi "very difficult to reconcile" with reality.

The NGO has said its Gaza budget for the past 10 years was only \$22.5 million, making the numbers alleged all but impossible. Charities working in Gaza have some of the tightest controls on funds in the world, partly due to tough counter-terrorism legislation. The impoverished Palestinian enclave has one of the world's highest unemployment rates. More than two-thirds of the population rely on some form of foreign aid, according to the United Nations. "We are not a naive organization. We have world-class systems to prevent the sort of things that are being alleged here," Jenkins said.

Israel destroys home

In another development, Israel's military overnight destroyed the home of a Palestinian accused of involvement in a shooting attack in the occupied West Bank that led to the death of

a rabbi, it said yesterday. The army said it destroyed the home of Mohammed Abed Almajid Mohammed El-Amaira, 38, in Dura, southwest of the West Bank city of Hebron. Amaira, a member of the Palestinian Authority security services, was arrested several weeks ago, accused of having helped plan and carry out the attack on July 1, when gunmen opened fire on a car near Hebron.

The car crashed, killing rabbi Michael Mark, who led a religious school in the Israeli settlement of Otniel, and wounding two family members, according to the army. Amaira is accused of having acted as the driver in the attack. Another Palestinian accused over the attack, Mohamed Fakhri, 29, was killed during a raid in July that saw Israeli forces fire anti-tank missiles at a house in the West Bank village of Surif. Israel regularly destroys the homes of Palestinians accused of attacks as part of efforts to deter future violence. Palestinians and human rights activists say the policy amounts to collective punishment, forcing families to suffer for the acts of others. — Agencies



BEIT HANUN: Palestinians walk near buildings which were destroyed during the 50-day war between Israel and Hamas militants in the summer of 2014 in Beit Hanun. — AFP



MOGADISHU: A member of Somalia's security services patrols the scene of a suicide car bomb blast yesterday in Mogadishu. — AFP

CAR BOMB OUTSIDE SOMALI PRESIDENT'S PALACE KILLS 10

MOGADISHU: At least 10 people, including soldiers and civilians, were killed in Somalia's capital Mogadishu yesterday when a car bomb exploded outside the Presidential Palace and also damaged two nearby hotels, an official said. Information Minister Mohamed Abdi Hayir told state radio that a meeting of security officials was under way inside one of the hotels, the SYL, at the time of blast and that one minister and some state radio journalists were injured in the attack.

The hotel is frequented by government officials and police said it believed the facility was the likely target. The SYL and another hospitality facility, both located near the Presidential Palace, were partially destroyed by the blast, Major Mohamed Ali, a police officer said. "The blast killed 10 (people) including soldiers and civilians and 30 others were wounded," Ali said. Gunfire could be heard after the blast and a huge cloud of smoke rose above the palace, outside which were the remnants of the car and splattered blood, according to a Reuters witness.

Al Shabaab's Radio Andaluz said the Islamist group was behind the attack and their military operations spokesman,

Sheikh Abdiasis Abu Musab, said the attack had killed 15 soldiers and "injured many others including a lawmaker". Seeking to impose its own harsh form of Islam, Al Shabaab, wants to topple the Western backed government in Mogadishu and also push out the 22,000-strong African Union mandated AMISOM peace keeping force backing it. The group was pushed out of Mogadishu by AMISOM in 2011 but have remained a serious threat, launching frequent attacks aimed at overthrowing the government.

The militants have claimed responsibility for several explosions in Mogadishu, including a car bomb and gun attack last week at a popular beach restaurant in the capital that killed 10 people. In a separate incident, Al Shabaab fighters attacked military bases housing government and African Union troops south west of the capital Mogadishu late on Monday, police and the group said yesterday. Military officer Major Bile Farah said a soldier and two Al Shabaab fighters were killed in the attack in K-50 and Muri in Lower Shabelle region. Abu Musab told Reuters the group's fighters had killed 10 soldiers and commandeered a vehicle from the Somali government soldiers in the Monday attack. — Reuters

3 HURT IN SUICIDE BLAST AT CHINA'S KYRGYZSTAN EMBASSY

BISHKEK: A van driven by a suicide bomber exploded after ramming through a gate at the Chinese embassy in Kyrgyzstan yesterday, injuring three people, authorities said. "As a result of the explosion, only the suicide bomber terrorist died. Security guards were injured," Kyrgyzstan's deputy Prime Minister Jenish Razakov told journalists at the scene.

Razakov said the three wounded were all Kyrgyz employees of the embassy and that they have been hospitalized. Local medics said their injuries were not serious. Impoverished majority-Muslim Kyrgyzstan—which borders western China—has a history of political instability and battling Islamist extremism. Authorities say the country faces the threat of attacks from Islamic State group jihadists after some 500 Kyrgyz left to fight for the group in Iraq and Syria. Chinese officials have previously been targeted in attacks linked to radicals from China's Uighur minority, which lives just across the border in the restive Xinjiang province.

Law enforcement sources said that a Mitsubishi Delica van smashed through a gate at the embassy yesterday morning before exploding in the centre of the compound close to the ambassador's residence. A police source confirmed to AFP that the vehicle was driven by a suicide bomber and described the incident as a "terrorist attack". China's foreign ministry condemned the attack as an "extreme and violent act" but refused to classify it as terrorism. "We asked the Kyrgyz side to get to the bottom of this incident and hold whoever is behind this accountable," spokeswoman Hua Chunying told journalists.

Kyrgyz officials have not yet pointed the finger of blame at any specific group, and President Almazbek Atambayev ordered a "thorough investigation". Kyrgyz police sources

put the strength of the blast at an equivalent of up to 10 kilos (22 pounds) of TNT, and one said body parts thought to be from the attacker were found several hundred meters (yards) from the blast site.

Local residents told AFP that the blast had blown in their windows and caused their houses to shake. Pictures posted on social media purporting to be from the embassy showed a gate smashed open and debris inside the compound. An AFP journalist close to the scene said that damage could be seen on the embassy buildings and that police had cordoned off the area as emergency services worked. Law enforcement officials also blocked traffic on one of the city's main highways and were checking vehicles. Employees from the Chinese and nearby American embassy on the edge of the city were evacuated, the Kyrgyz emergency service said. An economically troubled ally of Russia, Kyrgyzstan has seen two governments overthrown and ethnic violence claim hundreds of lives since it gained independence in 1991. The authorities regularly announce that they have foiled attacks planned by IS in the country. Security forces last year said they had engaged in several deadly shootouts with suspected "terrorists" in the capital Bishkek. One of the three suicide bombers who carried out a deadly attack blamed on IS at the international airport in the Turkish city Istanbul in June was reported to be from Kyrgyzstan.

Chinese officials in Kyrgyzstan have previously been targeted, with one shot dead in 2000 in an attack blamed on radicals from the Uighur minority. In 2014 Kyrgyz authorities said they killed 11 people, including Uighur rebels, trying to cross into the country. Violence has plagued China's northwestern region of Xinjiang, in recent years, sometimes spreading beyond it. — AFP

OIL FIRES CAST BLACK CLOUD OVER IRAQ'S RETAKEN TOWN

QAYYARA: It gets darker earlier these days in the northern Iraqi town of Qayyara, which Islamic State militants abandoned about a week ago after setting fire to many of the region's oil wells. Smoke billowing into the sky during a Reuters visit on Monday blotted out the sun in central districts hours before nightfall, producing an apocalyptic scene in this desert settlement which lacks electricity amid 49 degree Celsius temperatures.

The Iraqi military's recapture of Qayyara, along with a nearby airbase in July, is the latest and most significant advance in a US-backed push to Mosul, the largest city under Islamic State control anywhere in its self-proclaimed caliphate. Baghdad wants to retake Mosul before the end of the year, which it says will effectively end the militants' presence in Iraq more than two years after they seized a third of its territory. Some officials from countries in the US-led coalition supporting the Iraqi forces have said that timeline may be too ambitious. Yet the loss of Qayyara certainly dealt a blow to Islamic State, which had extracted oil from some 60 wells and sold it to help finance its activities.

50 tanker truckloads Islamic State used to ship at least

50 tanker truckloads a day from Qayyara and nearby Najma oilfields to neighboring Syria. A sign remains on the main road announcing prices of crude in places like the Syrian city of Aleppo, 550 km west of Qayyara. Rudimentary refineries once used to refine oil for local consumption have been abandoned on the side of the road leading east out of the town. The smell of petrol now overwhelms the area, wind carrying the smoke from well fires into the town centre. More than a few minutes in the area leaves one's throat burning, and children walking the streets have quickly developed coughs. Abdel Aziz Saleh, a 25-year-old Qayyara resident, said he wants Baghdad to put out the fires as soon as possible.

"They are suffocating us," he said. "The birds, the animals are black, the people are black. Gas rains down on us at night. Now the gas has reached the residential areas." He and other residents said oil had spilled into the nearby Tigris River - assertions denied by the oil ministry, which said the oil spills had been contained by trenches. While several bodies were seen floating in the river on Monday, Reuters could not confirm it had been contaminated with oil. Iraq says it has put out fires at four oil wells in the Qayyara

region, but Reuters could not locate any such efforts at the wells closest to residential areas.

Around a dozen separate plumes of smoke were still distinguishable across the horizon as night fell, when a convoy of firetrucks approached the town. It was not immediately clear how long it will take to extinguish the flames. When Iraq's military torched hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells in 1991 ahead of advancing US-led forces, most fires burned for around two months but some wells were not capped for almost a year. The Oil Ministry said it does not expect to resume production from the Qayyara region before Mosul's recapture. The two main fields, Qayyara and Najma, used to produce 30,000 barrels per day of heavy crude before the takeover by Islamic State. Despite the well fires, Qayyara remains full of inhabitants. Whereas civilians in most other areas recaptured from Islamic State fled ahead of or during government offensives the majority of Qayyara's roughly 20,000 residents have stayed put. A counter-terrorism officer said that was partly due to the speed with which the army recaptured Qayyara, surprising the Islamic State fighters before they were able to dig in. Qayyara is also located near a military airfield, so many residents in the area have relatives in the army. — Reuters