

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Al Jazeera

No let-up in Gaddafi offensive

3/17/2011

Air strikes were reported from the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, and fierce clashes elsewhere, as forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi continued their offensive against opposition forces.

A defiant Gaddafi has promised a "decisive battle" to recapture the rebel-held town of Misurata, undaunted by growing international pressure for a UN-sponsored no-fly zone over Libya to rein him in, on Thursday.

"The battle continues at Misurata on Thursday, that will be the decisive battle," state television quoted Gaddafi as saying.

"You are going to be called to take up arms and on Thursday you will take part in the battle," he added, addressing a group of young people from Misurata.

Gaddafi urged his audience "not to leave Misurata hostage in the hands of a handful of madmen".

On Tuesday, Libyan state television said the army would soon move against the rebel-stronghold of Benghazi, while a day before Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam had predicted that everything would be over within 48 hours.

Mussa Ibrahim, a government spokesman, said on Thursday that Misurata was "almost entirely under control. This is the final stage. It should be over by [Friday] morning".

Meanwhile, fresh air strikes hit Benghazi on Thursday, Tony Birtley, Al Jazeera's correspondent there reported. One of the strikes targeted the city's airport at Benina. An opposition spokesman said the other strikes hit Buatani (to the east of Benghazi), an area to the northwest and the town of Qaminis, about 50km south of the city.

Al Jazeera's Birtley said the Libyan people hope a no-fly zone will be enforced, however, "they are feeling more and more that basically everything lies in their own hands".

"What they are calling for now is weapons and money to bolster and train their forces and to make a credible defence.

"They are still holding out, so fears that Benghazi is just going to fall are unfounded at the moment," he said.

Essam Gheirani, an opposition spokesman, claimed that fighters in Benghazi had shot down two government warplanes, but when investigating the supposed site of one of the crashes, Birtley reported that he was unable to find any sign of a crashed aircraft.

Meanwhile, opposition fighters in the western city of Zintan, about 120km southwest of the capital Tripoli, said they were bracing for an attack by forces loyal to Gaddafi.

"According to the fighters, forces loyal to Gaddafi are trying to encircle Zintan. There are troop movements around the north and southwest. They expect a big attack on the city. I heard no gunfire this morning. They say they blocked the main column [of tanks] during the night," a witness told the AFP news agency.

Fighting in Ajdabiya

Stung by an uprising against his more than 41-year-old rule, Gaddafi has unleashed his forces to wrest control of territories seized by the rebels.

Though his well-trained and heavily armed forces have registered significant successes in recent days, a rebel spokesman in Misurata, which lies 150km from the capital Tripoli, said on Wednesday they had beaten back an attack by loyalist forces on the city, killing 80 of Gaddafi's men.

Meanwhile, fighting is raging for the control of Ajdabiya, the gateway to Benghazi.

A doctor told the AFP news agency that fighting was still going on in and around the town, which also guards the road to Tobruk and the Egyptian border in the rebel-held east.

"We received four bodies today, all rebel fighters," Abdelkarim Mohammed said, adding that 22 bodies, mainly civilians killed by artillery or air strikes, had been brought in on Tuesday.

In Tobruk, Al Jazeera's James Bays reported that there was concern on the part of pro-democracy fighters that Gaddafi's forces were attempting to encircle the opposition-held areas.

UN vote

The battles raged as the United Nations Security Council planned to vote on Thursday on a draft resolution that would not only introduce a no-fly zone over Libya but may also authorise the use of air strikes to stop the advance of forces loyal to Gaddafi.

Gerard Araud, the French ambassador to the UN, said that his country would be pushing for an agreement to be reached by 2200GMT on Thursday. Guido Westerwelle, the German foreign minister, said his country will be pushing for a strengthening of economic sanctions on Libya.

Martin Nesirky, a spokesman of Ban Ki-moon, said the secretary-general was "gravely concerned" about signs that Gaddafi was preparing to attack Benghazi.

"A campaign to bombard such an urban centre would massively place civilian lives at risk," he said.

"The secretary-general is urging all parties in this conflict to accept an immediate ceasefire and to abide by Security Council resolution 1970."

UN passed a resolution on February 26 which called for an end to Gaddafi's onslaught against his opponents and imposed sanctions against his regime.

Ibrahim Dabbashi, the deputy Libyan UN ambassador, warned that, "in the coming hours we will see a real genocide if the international community does not act quickly."

Dabbashi, who defected early on from the Gaddafi regime, said "about five" Arab states were ready to help police the no-fly zone if it was adopted.

In Cairo on Wednesday, Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, said: "We want to do what we can to protect innocent Libyans against the marauders let loose by the Gaddafi regime.

"And yes, time is fast upon us. There is an urgency to it," she said.

Clinton stopped short of explicitly backing a no-fly zone, saying only that it was one of several options under consideration.

Washington joined Britain and France in pressing for a Security Council vote Thursday on a no-fly zone to halt Gaddafi's attacks.

Britain, France and Lebanon, on behalf of the Arab League, have been seeking to overcome resistance to a no-fly zone.

Al Jazeera's Bays in Tobruk said that people in the city said they were confident of winning against Gaddafi, but still needed international help.

"I can tell you that when you speak to the people here, they say they're winning, they say they're beating back Gaddafi. Then you ask them the question should the international community do more, and they say 'Yes, we're all going to die if they don't help'. So very contradictory answers to those questions," Bays reported on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Libyan military on Thursday warned that any foreign military intervention in the country would endanger air and sea traffic in the Mediterranean.

"Any military operation against Libya will expose all air and maritime traffic in the Mediterranean to danger," the state Jana news agency quoted Libya's defence ministry spokesman as saying.

"And any civilian or military moving traffic will be the target of a Libyan counter-offensive," he said. "The Mediterranean basin will be exposed to grave danger, not just in the short term but also in the long term."