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# Libya protests: Gaddafi embattled by opposition gains



*Opposition supporters in Benghazi have celebrated after taking control of the area*

*The area controlled by Libya's embattled leader Col Muammar Gaddafi is shrinking, reports say, as the opposition consolidates its gains.*

*Witnesses say the capital, Tripoli, is heavily guarded by pro-Gaddafi forces, with tanks deployed in the suburbs.*

*Videos on the internet suggest a town 50km (30 miles) west of Tripoli has fallen to anti-government forces.*

*Thousands of foreigners are meanwhile still trying to flee Libya through ports, airports and overland.*

*The US, China and many European countries have sent in planes, ships and ferries to help people flee.*

## **'Mayhem'**

*Thousands of people, many of them African migrants, have also poured across Libya's land borders, in vans piled high with furniture and luggage.*

*British oil worker Bryan Richards was evacuated to Warsaw on what he was told was the Polish presidential plane.*

*He described Tripoli airport as "mayhem. No sanitation. Nothing to eat. People have been there for days".*

*He told the BBC: "We've come in on Tuesday from the desert. And we walked in to the terminal and couldn't believe what we could see. We couldn't see the end of the terminal for people."*

*The BBC's Jim Muir, at Libya's western border with Tunisia, says most of the 3,000 to 4,000 people who crossed out of Libya on Wednesday were Tunisian or Egyptian migrant workers, not Libyans.*

*He says that Libyan border guards have been seizing cameras and mobile phones to prevent images getting out of the country.*

Col Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, went on television on Wednesday evening to say that everything was "normal".

In the eastern city of Benghazi, residents have been queuing to be issued with guns looted from the army and police in order to join what they are calling the battle for Tripoli.

A number of military units in the east say they have unified their command in support of the protesters.

The BBC's Jon Leyne, in eastern Libya, says Col Gaddafi appears to be in control of an ever smaller area, possibly readying himself for a last stand at his home in Tripoli.

Reports indicate the area is heavily guarded by loyalists, including armed militiamen in vehicles, our correspondent says.

## **Oil prices soar**

The overall death toll has been impossible to determine. Human Rights Watch says it has confirmed nearly 300 deaths, but the International Federation for Human Rights says at least 700 people have been killed.

A French doctor working in Benghazi, Gerard Buffet, told the BBC the death toll there was at least 2,000.

He said Col Gaddafi's forces used jet fighters, mortars and rockets to fire on the opposition.

US President Barack Obama has denounced the Libyan government's actions as "outrageous and unacceptable".

He said he had ordered his administration team to prepare the "full range of options" for dealing with the crisis, but gave no details.

In other developments:

- Oil prices have jumped in reaction to the Libyan crisis, with Brent crude hitting \$119 a barrel
- Several provincial governors are reported to have defected to the opposition
- Pro-Gaddafi forces have reportedly clashed with the opposition in the western cities of Zawiyah, Sarathra and Ajdabiya, on the road to Col Gaddafi's hometown of Surt
- Opposition supporters have celebrated in the eastern cities of Benghazi and Tobruk, waving flags and setting off fireworks to mark their control over the area
- US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will join a meeting of foreign ministers at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday
- The UN has stripped Col Gaddafi's daughter Aisha of her role as a goodwill ambassador