

Hillary loans \$5m to her campaign

AFP, Washington

Democratic White House hopeful Hillary Clinton said on Wednesday she loaned her campaign five million dollars of her own money in January to keep up with rival Barack Obama's record cash windfall.

"I loaned the campaign five million from my money," Clinton said a day after more than 20 state nominating contests resulted in no clear front-runner for the Democratic party ticket.

"I loaned it because I believe very strongly in this campaign. We had a great month fund-raising in January, broke all records. But my opponent was able to raise more money," Clinton said.

"And we intended to be competitive, and we were. And I think the results last night proved the wisdom of my investment."

The New York senator, who won large states such as New York, New Jersey and California on Super Tuesday, also launched an Internet drive to raise three million dollars in three days.

Meanwhile, the Obama campaign shot back with a statement saying it had raised three million dollars in the past 24 hours, and appealed for supporters to send in more cash.

Imran Khan barred from entering Karachi

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani authorities barred opposition politician Imran Khan from entering the southern city of Karachi yesterday because he has called for a boycott of upcoming elections, officials said.

Former cricket legend Khan was put back on a plane to Islamabad after officials prevented him from entering the southern province of Sindh, of which Karachi is the capital, Sindh home minister Akhtar Zamin said.

"We do not want anything to disrupt the elections that is why have sent him back," Zamin told AFP.

"If he does not want to contest elections, it is fine, but he should not incite other people to do so. He will be welcome to visit Sindh after elections."

Khan, a former member of parliament and the chief of the small Movement for Justice party, has called for the boycott of general elections on February 18, saying fair and free polls were not possible under President Pervez Musharraf.

Gun violence jumps in Japan: Police

AFP, Tokyo

Japan saw a 25 percent rise in gun violence last year with a resurgence in gangland conflicts, despite the country's tight control on firearms, police said yesterday.

Japan prides itself on having one of the world's lowest crime rates but saw a series of high-profile shootings last year including the assassination of a mayor.

The number of shooting incidents in 2007 rose to 66 with those involving underworld syndicates rising to 42, the National Police Agency said in a statement.

It represented a rebound from five straight annual declines in gun violence from a 2001 peak of 215 incidents.

The number of casualties in last year's incidents doubled from 19 in 2006 to 40 last year with the number of deaths jumping to 22 from two, the agency said. Of the dead, 12 were members of gangster groups.

The agency said there were 12 gangland conflicts last year compared with none in 2006.



A resident of Atkins in Arkansas searches through debris after a tornado ripped through the area on Wednesday. Tornadoes tore through Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama and Mississippi on February 5, leaving at least 55 dead.

Afghan crisis dominates Nato ministers' talks

US asks allies to deploy more troops

AFP, Vilnius

Arguments over Afghanistan dominated talks among 26 Nato ministers yesterday, with the United States pressing hard for allies to deploy more troops to tackle the Taliban in the restive south.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates fired a warning shot ahead of the two-day conference in Vilnius, saying failure in Afghanistan threatened the very future of the Nato military alliance.

The message was also reinforced by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband on a surprise visit to Afghanistan.

"I worry a great deal about the alliance evolving into a two-tiered alliance, in which you have some allies willing to fight and die to protect peoples' security, and others who are not," Gates said.

"And I think that it puts a cloud over the future of the alliance, if this is to endure and perhaps even get worse," he said.

"In several cases I've made specific requests of specific kinds of units, and in some named units, and where they needed to go ... I haven't gotten any responses yet. I'm sure I will in Vilnius."

"Frankly, I hope that there will

be more troop contributions and there need to be more Afghan contributions," Rice told reporters in the former Taliban capital of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

As Rice and Miliband began their tour, a car bomb struck a Nato military vehicle in the eastern province of Khost wounding three soldiers, the alliance's International Security Assistance Force said.

ISAF did not give the nationalities of the wounded but most foreign troops in the east are US nationals. Police said the attack, similar to scores carried out by the Taliban, was a suicide blast and the bomber was the only victim.

Commanders in Afghanistan have been calling for around 7,500 extra troops to ISAF, which comprises 42,000 troops from 39 countries -- some of them in their most fierce fighting for decades.

More than 6,000 people, including nearly 220 international soldiers, were killed last year -- the worst since the start of the insurgency.

The United States wants Germany, France, Spain and Italy not only to boost troop numbers but also to aid US, British, Dutch, and Canadian forces fighting a Taliban insurgency in south Afghanistan.

However, European allies who argue their forces are already stretched by engagements elsewhere, including in Iraq, Lebanon, the Balkans and Africa.

Germany said this week it would provide some 200 troops to replace a Norwegian contingent acting as a reserve rapid reaction force in northern Afghanistan.

But Berlin is unlikely to go any further in beefing up its existing 3,100-strong mission or of deploying more in the south, despite calls also made by Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

With 1,600 troops stationed mainly in Kabul, so far France has offered little more than several dozen military instructors to train Afghan national army forces in south Afghanistan where it carries out bombing missions against Taliban positions.

Paris did however hint that President Nicolas Sarkozy might announce further contributions at a NATO summit in Bucharest on April 2-4.

Meanwhile Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper has repeatedly warned that Ottawa will pull its 2,500 soldiers out of restive southern Afghanistan if it does not get reinforcements from other Nato nations.



People gather to watch and play with fireworks near Beijing's ancient Drum and Bell Tower moments before midnight on Wednesday to celebrate the first day of the Lunar New Year yesterday.

UN presses Kenyan rivals for end to crisis

Fresh violence claims 10 more lives

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya's political rivals pushed ahead with crisis talks yesterday amid new deaths and increased UN Security Council pressure to end weeks of bloodshed.

As violence claimed 10 more lives in western Kenya, the opposition accused the government of arming militias to sow terror following disputed presidential elections in December.

Negotiators for President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga resumed talks led by Kofi Annan after the UN Security Council issued strong backing for the former UN secretary general's mediation.

In its first formal statement on the crisis, the UN body expressed "deep concern that, despite the commitments made ... civilians continue to be killed, subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and displaced from their homes."

Britain's UN ambassador said the Security Council statement

underscored "the importance of Kenya's leaders putting national interest above partisan advantage."

"That's what we in the Security Council are looking to Kenya's leaders to do," said John Sawers.

Annan has set a deadline of seven to 15 days to resolve the crisis sparked by the December 27 vote, which the opposition claims was rigged. International observers have also cited serious flaws during vote-counting.

The opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) charged the government had ordered firearms from a Chinese company to arm militias linked to Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU).

"The Kibaki administration continues to use tax-payers' money to purchase firearms for PNU militia," ODM secretary general Anyang Nyong'o told a news conference.

He accused Kibaki's party of "raiding official armouries" to equip the militias "who are then unleashed to kill innocent Kenyans protesting

the flawed presidential elections."

The government dismissed the accusations a "preposterous", with spokesman Alfred Mutua saying "these accusations are not helping the talks, they are undermining dialogue."

Ten people were killed in tribal clashes in the northwestern region of Trans Nzoia Wednesday and overnight, a police commander told AFP.

Another 34 people have died in violence in the area since the start of the week, including at least nine who were shot by police cracking down on gangs who have torched houses and other property, police sources said.

The Red Cross has put the death toll since the elections at over 1,000 and says 300,000 people have fled their homes, with some 50 tent camps set up throughout the country.

EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel was in Nairobi for meetings with key players after saying he believed "a decisive political breakthrough" could come in the next few days.

Israeli raids on Gaza kill seven

AFP, Gaza City

Six Palestinian fighters and a teacher were killed in Israeli raids on Gaza yesterday, the latest deadly strikes on the Hamas-run territory since a suicide bombing on Israeli soil this week.

Escalating violence in and around Gaza has already seen nine Hamas militants killed in air strikes on the Gaza Strip this week and several Israelis, including two young children, injured by militant rocket attacks.

In the first air strike yesterday Thursday, four militants were killed near Jabaliya in the north of the territory by a missile fired from a drone, medics said.

Three of the gunmen belonged to the armed wing of Hamas, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, the group said, and the fourth was from Islamic Jihad.

The second air raid saw two militants killed near Tuffah north of Gaza City, while four others were wounded, two of them seriously, medics said.

Hamas said Israeli ground forces were also operating in the Tuffah sector.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (C), Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (3L), Denmark Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2L), Finland Prime Minister Vanhanen (L), former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Roud FM Lubbers (R) and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg pose for photograph during the inauguration of World Sustainable Development Summit on Climate Change in New Delhi yesterday.

Manmohan calls for 'climate justice' to fight global warming

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday urged rich countries to ensure technology transfers to developing nations to combat climate change under a transparent global regime.

Calling for "climate justice," Singh said developing countries such as India needed environment-friendly technologies in various sectors.

"We in the developing world desperately need access to environment-friendly technologies, especially in energy, transportation, manufacturing and agriculture," Singh told a gathering of

international leaders and scientists in New Delhi.

"By climate justice, we mean a fair, equitable and transparent global regime for technology transfers," Singh said at the opening of the annual Delhi Sustainable Development Summit.

"It is in the interests of people living in developed and developing countries to facilitate such transfers."

India, which contributes around four percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions, is one of the world's top polluters.

But it has resisted international pressure to make commitments to limit emissions.

India, along with China, is not included for targeted emission cuts under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the only global agreement that sets specific targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Singh reiterated the government's stand that India's per capita emissions will not exceed those of industrialised nations.

Singh said the Indian government would come up with a detailed national plan by June to tackle the effects of global warming.

The prime minister had set up a panel last year to prepare a comprehensive roadmap for energy efficiency and sustainable development.

Nepal Maoists dismiss row over 'parallel govt'

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoists yesterday dismissed a row over their formation of a "parallel government", denying they had revived the system they used to control swathes of the country during a bitter insurgency.

"We are not reviving parallel government structures. These are baseless allegations," Maoist spokesman and Communications Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara told AFP.

The state-run Rising Nepal reported Thursday that the Maoists had reactivated their United Revolutionary People's Council to

"solve people's problems and help development work."

Dissolving unofficial courts and parallel local government bodies that the Maoists operated in areas under their control was a part of the November 2006 peace deal between the ultra-leftists and the government.

But the Maoists insist that expanding their local councils is not a violation of the peace deal.

"We are expanding our United Revolutionary People's Council (URPC) to prepare for the holding of the upcoming constituent assembly elections," said Mahara, referring to crucial polls planned for April that will decide Nepal's

political future.

As well as preparing for the elections that will elect a body to rewrite Nepal's constitution, "the local people's councils will help with development activities," Mahara insisted.

The Nepali Congress, the country's largest party which is headed by the prime minister, said it was "deeply concerned" at the planned expansion of the local Maoist councils.

"The one-sided decision by the Maoists to revive the URPC violates the comprehensive peace agreement and other deals reached with the government," the Nepali Congress said in a statement.



A Pakistani paramilitary soldier stands alert in front of slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh yesterday. Thousands of people massed around Benazir's grave in southern Pakistan to mark the end of the 40-day mourning period for the slain opposition leader.

Study in Australia

Spot Assessment

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UK seeks 'political process' to end Lanka bloodshed

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former colonial ruler Britain has called for a "political process" to end Sri Lanka's spiralling violence and condemned the latest wave of bombings against civilians.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband in a statement released here said that the Sri Lankan government's unilateral withdrawal from a ceasefire with separatist rebels did not mean both parties should stop protecting civilians.

Scores of innocent people have been killed since the government pulled out of an already moribund Norwegian-arranged ceasefire with Tamil Tiger guerrillas last month.

"Violence can never provide an answer to Sri Lanka's problems," Miliband said. "A sustainable solu-

tion to Sri Lanka's conflict can only emerge through a just political process involving all communities."

Sri Lanka's government has said it wants to crush Tiger guerrillas by mid-year after making territorial gains in the east of the island last year and confining the rebels to their de facto mini-state in the island's north.

Fourteen bus passengers were killed in a roadside bomb attack on Monday as the country marked its 60th anniversary of independence.

"I call for an immediate end to practices which target civilians or put them in peril," Miliband said.

Sri Lanka blamed the Tigers for a spate of bomb attacks against buses, a train station and villagers, while the Tigers have said government commandos and war planes are killing civilians in their territory.