

# Obama moves quickly to fill cabinet positions

Geithner could be picked as treasury secretary

AP, Washington

President-elect Barack Obama has moved with unusual speed to select officials for his administration, and senior Democratic officials say he intends to name Timothy Geithner as his treasury secretary as soon as Monday.

It was not clear when Obama intended to formally unveil any of his other picks for the administration that takes office at the stroke of noon on Jan. 20. One Democrat said John Podesta, a leader of Obama's transition team, had told Senate aides on Friday that Obama hoped for speedy confirmation so the new administration could get to work quickly thereafter.

Word of Geithner's likely selection emerged as New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in line to become secretary of state, said through a spokesman that discussions were on track for her appointment but no final arrangement had been made.

Obama's choice for attorney general, a third critical post as the president-elect rounds out his top Cabinet echelon, is Eric Holder. He held the No. 2 slot in the Justice Department in President Bill Clinton's administration.

The president-elect plans to announce

Geithner's appointment in Chicago on Monday, barring an unforeseen snag in a background check that is nearly complete, said one of the senior officials, both of whom were familiar with the deliberations. He's the president of the New York Federal Reserve.

If nominated and confirmed by the Senate, Geithner, 47, would assume chief responsibility for tackling an economic slowdown and credit crunch that threaten to create the deepest recession in more than a generation. In his current post in New York, he has played a key role in the government's response to the financial crisis and has worked closely with Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve.

As a Treasury Department official during the Clinton administration, Geithner (pronounced GITE-ner) dealt with international financial crises and played a major part in negotiating assistance packages for South Korea and Brazil.

Lawrence Summers, a former treasury secretary and one-time Harvard University president, was being considered as an economic adviser. Economic posts also seemed likely for Obama's top

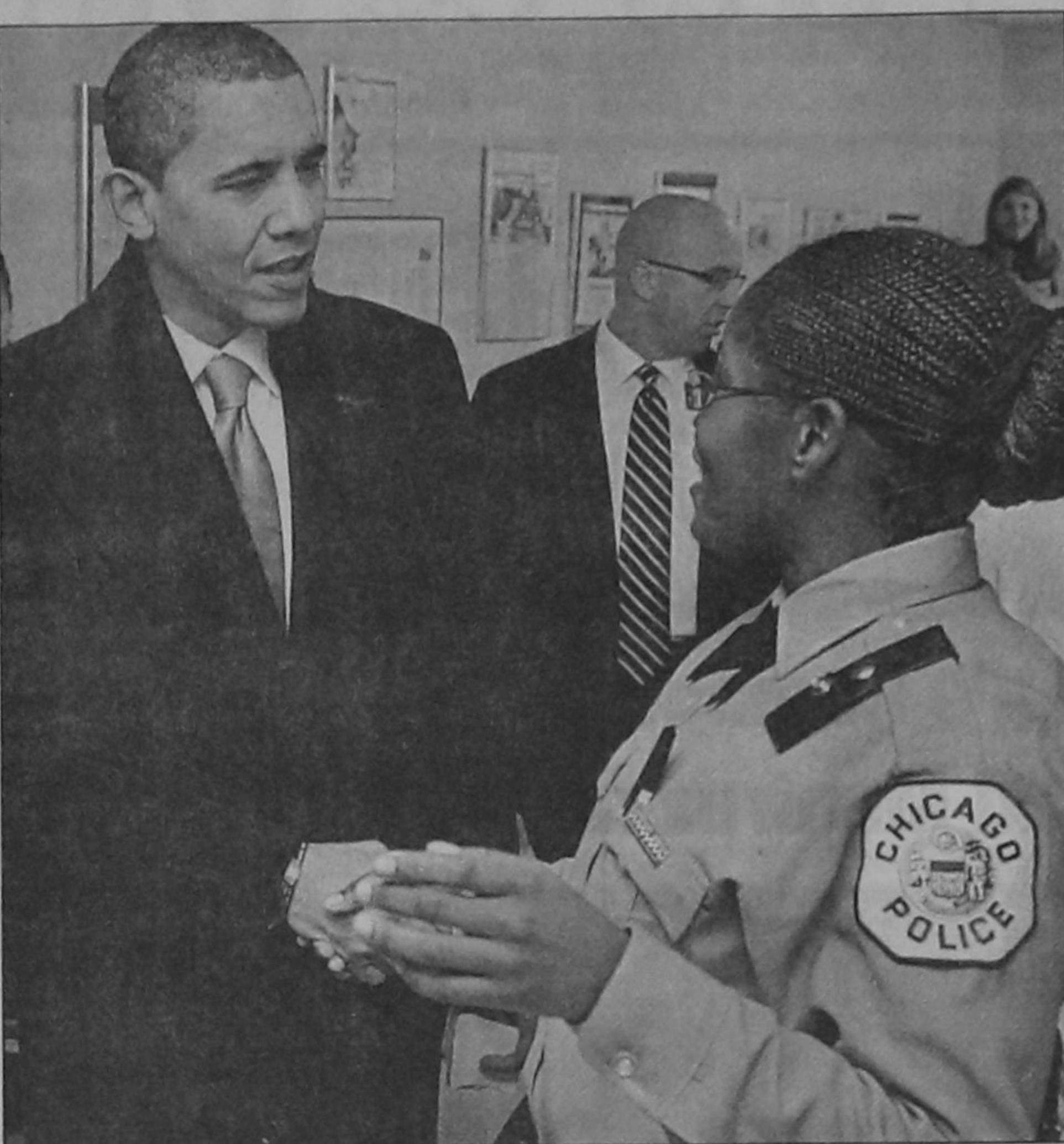
two economic advisers during his campaign, Austan Goolsbee and Jason Furman.

Officials said New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson had emerged as a likely pick as commerce secretary, although he had hoped to be secretary of state. Like Clinton, he was a rival of Obama's for the Democratic presidential nomination last winter. He dropped out after the early contests, though, and soon threw his support behind the eventual winner.

The officials spoke only on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the anticipated appointments.

The president-elect has largely stayed out of public view since his election on Nov. 4, preferring to work quietly with aides and Vice President-elect Joe Biden in a suite of offices in downtown Chicago.

Obama faces unusual challenges and has moved quickly in assembling his team. Former President George H.W. Bush made his first Cabinet pick the day after his election in 1988, but former President Clinton did not name any members until after Thanksgiving. President George W. Bush's transition was delayed by the contested result in Florida.



US President-elect Barack Obama greets a member of the Chicago Police Department during a surprise lunch time visit at Manny's Coffee Shop and Deli in Chicago on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

## British FM urges Obama to embrace 'new multilateralism'

AFP, London

vention we must learn the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. We must work differently," he added.

Under Blair, Britain was US President George W. Bush's main ally in the so-called "war on terror" which followed the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington.

Blair's successor Gordon Brown is seeking to reposition London as Obama prepares to take office on January 20, following his defeat of Republican rival John McCain in the November 4 presidential election.

Miliband noted a new report by the US National Intelligence Council which says that "by 2025, the US will find itself as one of a number of important actors on the world, albeit still the most powerful one."



Nepalese youth Ram Bahadur Bomjam sits under a tree before an audience gathered to listen to his sermon in the village of Ratanpuri in Bara district, some 100km south of Kathmandu on Friday.

## Nepal 'Buddha Boy' returns to jungle

AFP, Kathmandu

A young man believed by followers to be a reincarnation of Buddha has returned to Nepal's jungles to meditate alone, police said yesterday, as scholars cast doubt on his supporters' claims.

Known as the "Buddha Boy," Ram Bahadur Bomjam, 18, became famous in 2005 after supporters said he could meditate motionless for months without water, food or sleep.

"Bomjam went back into the jungle late Friday and all the devotees have left," police officer Gobinda Kushwaha told AFP from Neejgad, a town in Bara District, 60 kilometres (37.5 miles) south of Kathmandu.

The "Buddha Boy" reappeared earlier this month after supporters said in March 2007 that he was going to meditate for three years in an underground bunker, although he was spotted on two occasions.



Former US president Jimmy Carter (L) speaks as former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan (C) and Nelson Mandela's wife Mrs Graca Machel of Mozambique look on after they were refused visa and cancelled their planned trip to Zimbabwe.

## Carter, Annan refused entry to Zimbabwe

AP, Johannesburg

Former US president Jimmy Carter said yesterday that he and others planning a humanitarian mission in Zimbabwe had been refused entry to the impoverished African country.

Carter and two other members of The Elders group, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and rights advocate Graca Machel, who is married to Nelson Mandela, had planned to assess the country's humanitarian needs as Zimbabweans are stalked by disease and hunger while political crisis occupies its politicians.

But they were told Friday night by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who is mediating the political crisis, that efforts to secure travel visas for the group had failed, Carter told reporters at a news conference in Johannesburg.

"We are very disappointed that the government of Zimbabwe would not permit us to come in, would not cooperate," Carter said.

It was the first time the 2002 Nobel Peace laureate has been denied permission to carry out a mission in any country, he said.

Annan, also at the news conference, said no official reason had been given for the refusal. He said they read about it in Zimbabwe's state-run Herald newspaper, which reported Thursday that the group had been asked to "come at a later date" to accommodate the crop planting season. The article also said, however, that the group was seen as antagonistic toward Zimbabwe's government.

## Congo rebels to hold rally in seized territory

AP, Goma

Congo's rebel leader is expected to hold his first public rally yesterday in the territory his fighters seized during a lightning advance last month in the eastern part of the country.

Rebel spokesman Bertrand Bisimwa said leader Laurent Nkunda's rally will take place at a stadium in Rutshuru, the biggest town under the rebels' control. Rutshuru is about 45 miles north of the provincial capital, Goma.

Fighting between government forces and Nkunda's men surged in August, creating a humanitarian crisis that has uprooted more than 250,000 people from their homes and prompted the UN to approve more than 3,000 more peacekeepers for the troubled Central African nation.

## Malaysian Islamic body bans yoga for Muslims

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's top Islamic body yesterday ruled against Muslims practicing yoga, saying it has elements of other religions that could corrupt Muslims.

The National Fatwa Council's non-binding edict said yoga involves not just physical exercise but also includes Hindu spiritual elements, chanting and worship.

"It is inappropriate. It can destroy the faith of a Muslim," Council chairman Abdul Shukor Husin told reporters.

He noted that clerics in Egypt issued a similar edict in 2004 that called the practice of yoga "an aberration."

Though the council's decisions are not legally binding on Malaysia's Muslim population, many abide by the edicts out of deference, and the council does have the authority to ostracise an offending Muslim from society.

## Five civilians, 14 rebels killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Khost

A bomb blast in an Afghan market yesterday killed two people, authorities said, also reporting other unrest-linked violence that left three more civilians and 14 militants dead.

The bomb, attached to a vehicle, exploded in a vegetable market in the eastern city of Khost, provincial intelligence chief Colonel Mohammed Yaqob told AFP.

A 15-year-old boy and a man were killed and 15 other people wounded, Yaqob said. There was no claim of responsibility.

Khost, which borders Pakistan, sees regular attacks most often linked to an insurgency led by the hardline Taliban, who were driven from the capital, Goma.

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A Bulgarian archaeologist unearths a Thracian bronze chariot near the village of Karanovo yesterday. The bronze chariot dating back to the second century AD has been discovered in a Thracian burial mound in southeastern Bulgaria.

## Archaeologists unearth ancient chariot

AP, Sofia

Archaeologists have unearthed an elaborately decorated 1,800-year-old chariot sheathed in bronze at an ancient Thracian tomb in southeastern Bulgaria, the head of the excavation said Friday.

"The lavishly ornamented four-wheel chariot dates back to the end of the second century AD," Veselin Ignatov told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from the site, near the southeastern village of Karanovo.

But he said archaeologists were struggling to keep up with looters, who often ransack ancient sites before the experts can get to them.

The bronze-plated wooden chariot is decorated with scenes from Thracian mythology, including figures of a jumping panther and the carving of a mythological animal with the body of a panther and the tail of a dolphin, Ignatov said.

He said the chariot, with wheels measuring 1.2 meters (four feet) across, was found during excavations in a funerary mound that archaeologists believe was the grave of a wealthy Thracian aristocrat, as he was buried along with his belongings.



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Protesters demonstrate against the arrival of US President George W Bush during a demonstration in Lima on Friday. Bush is in Peru to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

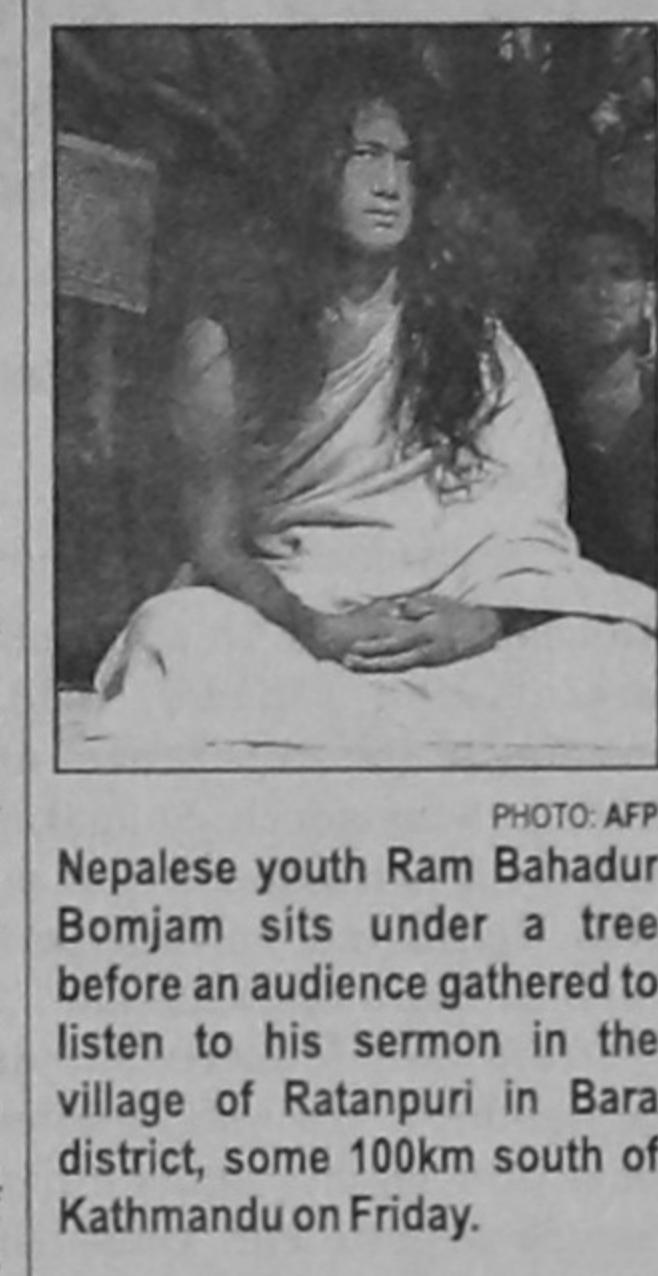
Iraqi PM, president in public quarrel

AP, Baghdad

Iraq's presidential council has taken the unusual step of publicly criticising the Shia prime minister after he berated them for their opposition to councils of loyal tribesmen in several Iraqi provinces.

The quarrel is the latest in a series of political setbacks that underline enduring rivalries between Iraq's political factions as the country struggles to find its footing after years of brutal violence.

Groups opposed to the pact say it enshrines what they see as Iraq's occupation. Proponents, like al-Maliki, say it is the only viable way for Iraq to regain its full sovereignty by 2012.



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