

Obama assassination ad lands paper in trouble

ANI, Washington

The attention of law enforcement officials was drawn to Times Observer newspaper advertisement that erroneously suggested that President Barack Obama could be assassinated just as four of his predecessors had been. The ad representative didn't make the connection among the four other presidents mentioned and mistakenly allowed the ad to run. Upon realising the mistake early Thursday morning, the ad was immediately discontinued and the identity of the person who placed the ad was turned over to Warren City Police as per newspaper policy. Politico reports. The local police department forwarded the information to federal authorities, as per department policy.

Tough sanctions against N Korea needed: Gates

AP, Singapore

The US defence chief urged Asian allies yesterday to consider tougher sanctions against North Korea, noting that past efforts to cajole the reclusive regime into scrapping its nuclear weapons program have only emboldened it. North Korea's years long use of scare tactics as a bargaining chip to secure aid and other concessions only to later renege on promises has worn thin the patience of five nations negotiating with Pyongyang, said US Defence Secretary Robert Gates. "They create a crisis and the rest of us pay the price to return to the status quo ante," Gates told the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual meeting of defence and security officials. "As the expression goes in the US, I'm tired of buying the same horse twice." "There are other ways perhaps to get the North Koreans to change their approach," Gates said. "I think this notion that we buy our way back to the status quo

ante is an approach that I personally at least think we ought to think very hard about." The sharp statements were echoed by the South Korean defence minister and even China, North Korea's strongest ally. Taken together, they reflect fears throughout the region that last week's nuclear and missile tests by Pyongyang could spiral out of control and lead to fighting. The North said it would no longer honour a 1953 armistice truce with South Korea after Seoul joined a 90-plus nation security alliance that seeks to curb nuclear trafficking on the seas. Additionally, the UN Security Council is drafting financial and military sanctions against North Korea as punishment for the weapons testing. Similar sanctions approved after Pyongyang's 2006 atomic test have been only sporadically enforced, and largely ignored by China and Russia. Gates warned North Korea against secretly selling its weapons technology to other rogue nations, saying the US "will

not stand idly by." Later, at what officials called the first-ever meeting among defence chiefs from the US, Japan and South Korea, Gates asked his counterparts to begin considering other steps against Pyongyang should the regime continue to escalate its nuclear program. The three military leaders did not discuss specific potential actions but US officials who attended the half-hour meeting said any steps would be taken in self-defence. South Korean Defence Minister Lee Sang-hee said the talks "could not have come at a better time." "North Korea perhaps to this point may have mistakenly believed that it could be perhaps rewarded for its wrong behaviours," Lee told reporters. "But that is no longer the case." Gates does not plan to build up American troops in the region, and said Saturday he currently does not consider North Korea to pose a direct military threat to the United States.



US Defence Secretary Robert Gates (L) chats with Bangladesh Foreign minister Dipu Moni and Pakistani Secretary of Defence Athar Ali Syed (R) during a ministerial lunch at the 8th International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue security conference in Singapore yesterday.



Holding pictures and flowers and calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, Japanese supporters and Myanmar citizens living in Japan stage a demonstration in front of the Myanmar embassy in Tokyo yesterday.

US presses Myanmar to free Suu Kyi

AFP, Singapore

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates pressed Myanmar's military rulers yesterday to free pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and reopen dialogue with the opposition. "We need to see real change in Burma -- the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the institution of meaningful dialogue between the junta and the opposition," Gates told a high-level security forum in Singapore. Burma is Myanmar's former name. He described military-ruled Myanmar as "one of the isolated, desolate exceptions to the growing prosperity and freedom for the region."

Aung San Suu Kyi is being detained in a notorious Yangon prison while facing trial on new charges, which have drawn international condemnation, including from Europe and Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbours. She faces up to five years in jail on charges of breaching her house arrest after an eccentric American man swam to her lakeside house in Yangon. Her political party on Friday said it was "very concerned" about the health of the 63-year-old Nobel Laureate. Myanmar's military junta has kept Aung San Suu Kyi in detention for 13 of the past 19 years, most of them in virtual isolation at her tightly guarded home by Yangon's Inya Lake.

US urges Europe, China to step up Afghan help

AP, Singapore

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates urged Europe and China to step up their involvement in rebuilding Afghanistan, saying Saturday that America alone cannot put the conflict-ridden nation back on its feet while mired in a fight against the Taliban. Gates said he has been tougher on the Europeans than countries in Asia in demanding bigger contributions because three successive Nato summits have declared Afghanistan to be their "highest priority." But he said he is concerned by "the difference between the rhetorical emphasis ... and the capabilities that our allies are prepared to put forward." "The need is greater than the commitment that has been made," Gates told an Asia-Pacific conference of defence ministers, officials and analysts. Afghanistan is seen as a crucial test of the power and relevance of Nato, but the escalating war in the Central Asian nation has raised doubts in

Europe about the ability of the alliance's 32,000 troops to stem the Taliban insurgency. Worries about casualties and costs have contributed to opposition to the conflict that many Europeans see as an unnecessary distraction during economic crisis. The US has 38,000 troops, and President Barack Obama has ordered 21,000 more be sent there. "A lot of our allies are there in very large numbers ... so it's not like people have been sitting with their hands in their pockets," Gates said, answering questions from delegates after his speech. But to establish a sustainable and effective government in Afghanistan, the country needs additional aid and expertise to build infrastructure and more funding to expand and maintain the Afghan army, Gates said in the speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue. The annual conference is organized by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies think-tank.

Gates also said the United States would "welcome China's help in Afghanistan, whether it is for the security fund or a number of these civilian areas of expertise." "This is one of the places in the world where all contributions are welcome," he said. Hundreds of US experts and diplomats will be flying into Afghanistan in the months to come but that's "still far short of what the need is," he said. "It's one thing for the US to be able to surge a significant number of military forces, but our civilian capabilities are limited," he said. The ultimate solution to Afghanistan's security is a strong national military and police force, for which the US will pour billions of dollars over the next several years. "Afghanistan for a considerable period of time will never be able to afford the size army and police that is required to take on the security challenges in the country," Gates said.

Iran hangs 3 over mosque bombing

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday hanged three men in public accused of involvement in the bombing of a Shia mosque that killed 25 people, an official said, branding them "terrorists" and "enemies of God." The early morning executions took place near the mosque in southeastern Iran devastated by the bombing, official IRNA news agency quoted Hojatoleslam Ebrahim Hamidi, justice chief of Sistan-Baluchestan province, as saying. At least 125 people were also wounded in the powerful blast, which rocked the Amir al-Momenin mosque in the Sistan-Baluchestan provincial capital Zahedan during evening prayers on Thursday. "The terrorists Haji Noti Zehi, Gholam Rasoul Shahi Zehi and Zabihollah Naroui were hanged at 6:00 am (0130 GMT) near the Amir al-

Momenin mosque in public," Hamidi told IRNA. "They confessed to illegally bringing explosives into Iran and giving them to the main person behind the bombing," he added. "They were convicted of being 'mohareb' (enemies of God) and 'corrupt on the earth' and acting against national security," Hamidi said. "They were arrested before the Thursday's bombing but they confessed that they had provided the explosives for the bombing. They were tried and they had court-appointed legal representation." He said the trio had also been charged with "direct involvement in the bombing of a Sepah (Revolutionary Guards) bus in 2007, the Al-Ghadir mosque and some other bombings." Thirteen Revolutionary Guards were killed in an attack on their bus in Zahedan in February 2007.

India army chief voices concern at Pakistani nuke expansion

AFP, New Delhi

India's army chief said on Friday arch-rival Pakistan's apparent expansion of its nuclear programme was a "matter of concern" for the entire world that only global pressure could halt. General Deepak Kapoor was speaking after satellite photos released on Tuesday showed Pakistan had expanded two sites crucial to its nuclear programme, according to a US arms control institute. The Institute for Science and International Security said the enlargement was part of an effort to bolster the destructive power of Pakistan's atomic arsenal. "Even if Pakistan is looking at deterrence, they require a minimum amount. But when you keep increasing it, it is a matter of concern," Kapoor told reporters in New Delhi.

New US command to focus on cyber battlefield

AFP, Washington

The US military is moving ahead with plans to create its first "cyber command" designed to bolster America's potential to wage digital warfare as well as defend against mounting cyber threats, officials said on Friday. After President Barack Obama announced Friday his plans to overhaul cyber security policy, Defence Secretary Robert Gates was expected to soon formally propose the new cyber command that will be overseen by a four-star officer, Pentagon officials told AFP. The move reflects a shift in military strategy with "cyber dominance" now part of US war doctrine and growing alarm over the perceived threat posed by digital espionage coming from China, Russia and elsewhere. US officials say China has built up a sophisticated cyber

warfare programme and that a spate of intrusions in the United States and elsewhere can be traced back to Chinese sources. Defence officials say the cyber command would focus on security efforts for US networks along with offensive capabilities to ensure "freedom of action in cyberspace" to protect America's interests. The precise details of US cyber military power remain secret, but it includes technology capable of penetrating and jamming networks, including the classified Suter airborne system, analysts say. The technology has been reportedly added to unmanned aircraft and allows for users to take over enemy sensors to "see what enemy sensors see, and even take over as systems administrator so sensors can be manipulated into positions so that approaching aircraft can't be seen," according to AviationWeek.

Leaf-rolled bidi

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Violating the ordinance, the bidi factories are manufacturing such 'patar bidi' rampantly in various parts of the country, including Gazipur, Chittagong, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar. Though the bidi factories have been operating without trade licence, the authorities are seemingly reluctant to take any step against the illegal business. But the factories are selling their bidi packets with photos of proprietors keeping cautions like 'Nakol Haite Sabdhan' (be aware of duplication) or 'Photo Dekhia Loiben' (buy after seeing the photo) on the packets to earn smokers' trust. While visiting Phulbaria area in Kaliakoir upazila of Gazipur district, The Daily Star correspondent found some unauthorised bidi factories named Hossain Bidi, Mannan Bidi, Alim Bidi, Lucky Bidi and Dewan Bidi. Asked about the bidi factories operating illegally, Superintendent of Police (SP) of Gazipur Abdul Baten told this correspondent over phone that he was not aware of such factories rather he said "It is the duty of journalists to inform police about the illegal business after collect-

ing information properly." Tajul Islam, owner of Hossain Bidi factory at Nabir Bahar village in Kaliakoir upazila, left the factory to avoid this correspondent. Wishing anonymity a worker of this factory said such 'patar bidi' can be produced investing a small amount of money using 'Gazila' leaves collected from forests without any cost. A bidi distributor of this area said Hossain Bidi produces 25 lakh sticks of 'patar bidi' every month while Alim Bidi 15 lakh sticks, Lucky 15 lakh sticks and Dewan 10 lakh sticks. He said Hossain Bidi are evading tax of Tk 1.27 lakh every month as they do not use band rolls on its 100,000 packets (25 lakh sticks). A band roll worth Tk 1.272 is mandatory on each bidi packet of a legal bidi factory, he said. Gautam Mandal, a shop owner of Phulbaria Bazar, said, "Every day I sell 20 packets of 'patar bidi' and the sale is increasing day by day as it is popular among farmers and day labourers for its cheaper price." Talking to The Daily Star Majibur Rahman, administrator of Kaliakoir Pourashava of the district, said no trade

licence was issued against such bidi factories in the Pourashava so far. Operation of such factories without trade licence is illegal, he added. Unauthorised factory 'Master Bidi' produces around 35 lakh sticks of patar bidi while 'Siraj Bidi' 25 lakh a month. The brands are available in Banskhal area in Chittagong. When contacted, 'Master Bidi' owner Abul Hossain and 'Siraj Bidi' owner Fazle Qader denied manufacturing such bidi. 'Nasir Bidi', allegedly being smuggled from India, is available in various upazilas of Sylhet district. Dr M Mostafa Zaman of National Tobacco Control Cell of World Health Organisation, Dhaka said, "Smoking causes many chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) including lung, vocal cord and larynx cancers, tuberculosis and upper respiratory tract infection." "As the ingredients of patar bidi are almost raw and unprocessed, the risk factors of such bidi smoking are more harmful for health," he added.

US sets conditions for Cuba's return to Americas bloc

AFP, Washington

The United States said on Friday it would not back Cuba's full participation in the Organisation of American States until the communist island nation makes democratic reforms. "It's really up to Cuba whether or not they join the OAS," said State Department spokesman Ian Kelly, as the 35-nation body revisits a ban on Cuba participating in its meetings. Although Cuba is still a member of the organisation, the US has effectively vetoed Havana's active role since 1962. "They have to take certain concrete steps, in order to meet democratic principles that define OAS membership," said Kelly. Various Latin American countries have backed a resolution to re-admit Cuba ahead of the OAS' general assembly in Honduras next week. But the move is running up against strong US opposition. "We would welcome the day when Cuba is able to join the OAS. But our position is very clear on that," Kelly said.

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