

'Obama replaces global war on terror'

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama is replacing the "global war on terror" with a new US strategy more narrowly focused on al-Qaeda and relying more on a broader effort to engage the Muslim world, a top aide said Thursday.

John Brennan, Obama's chief counter-terrorism advisor, said al-Qaeda remains a "persistent and evolving threat" to the United States and is being aggressively targeted by the new administration.

"But describing our efforts as a 'global war' only plays into the warped narrative that al-Qaeda propagates," Brennan said in comments to a think tank here.

"It plays into the misleading and dangerous notion that the US is somehow in conflict with the rest of the world," he said.

In a question and answer session, Brennan suggested that the new administration was prepared to reach out to groups like the Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah that move away from their "terrorist core."

"We the United States are willing to engage in a dialogue with any organisations or groups that are dedicated to realising peaceful solutions to existing problems," he said.

66 feared dead in Tonga ferry disaster

AFP, Nuku'alofa

At least 66 people were feared dead yesterday after a ferry disaster in Tonga which the prime minister described as "devastating" for the tiny Pacific kingdom.

As grieving relatives gathered at the wharf in the capital Nuku'alofa, singing hymns for comfort and expressing anger the ageing vessel was allowed to sail, Prime Minister Feleti Sevele said hope was fading for the missing.

"The hopes for the rest are not promising, unfortunately," Sevele told journalists at a meeting of Pacific leaders in Australia.

Officials said only 53 survivors had been found from the 119 believed to have been on board the 34-year-old Princess Ashika, which

turned over and sank at speed overnight on Wednesday.

Most on board were Tongans but the incomplete passenger list also included British, German, French and Japanese nationals. Police said the lack of accurate records meant the number of missing could be higher.

The missing included 21 women and seven children who were sleeping below decks when the ferry sank. Two bodies have been found, including one of a British man.

Dive teams from the New Zealand and Australian navies were to fly in late Friday to help recover bodies from the sunken ferry, which is lying in 35 metres (115 feet) of water.

Ferries are an essential mode of transport in Tonga, a sprawling island nation, and elsewhere in the Pacific. A ferry sinking last month in Kiribati left 33 people dead.



A group of male survivors arrive at Fua'amotu Airport on Tongapatu island, some 30km from Nuku'alofa yesterday after their rescue from the ferry, Princess Ashika, which sank just before midnight on August 5 while en route from the tiny Pacific nation of Tonga's capital Nuku'alofa to Ha'afeva in the Nomuka Islands group.



Filipino coast guard and army rescuers battle to help a resident caught in floodwaters in the Botolan district of Zambales province of the Philippines yesterday, where 10 villages have been flooded after heavy rains caused a dike to burst. Two French tourists and nine Filipinos were killed from flooding and landslides triggered by heavy rain north of the Philippine capital.

MUMBAI TERROR TRIAL Kasab pleads guilty, then backtracks

CNN-IBN, Mumbai

In a dramatic development yesterday, the lone captured gunman in 26/11 Mumbai attack case, Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, told the special court that he wanted to plead guilty to all charges.

However, an hour later after the court reconvened Kasab, after consulting his lawyer Abbas Kazmi, went back on his words informing Judge ML Tahalyani that he did not wish to plead guilty.

The lone terrorist captured alive during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks had

before the lunch on Friday told the special court that he wanted to plead guilty and accept all charges against him.

"Main sab kabool karna chahta hoon (I want to plead guilty to all charges)," Kasab told Judge Tahalyani as soon as the court was adjourned for the lunch break.

But his lawyer Abbas Kazmi intervened asking the court to continue with the trial.

Kasab made the plea when the court was examining a ballistic expert as witness in the case.

3 Nato troops, 5 Afghan soldiers killed in attacks

AP, AFP, Kabul

Three Nato troops and five Afghan soldiers were killed in Taliban attacks on their patrol in southern Afghanistan, the alliance said Friday, raising the number of international forces slain in the first week of August to 18.

Nato said the troops' vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb before insurgents opened fire. The Nato forces fired back, but the three were killed.

Attacks killed at least 75 troops from the US and other international military forces in July, the highest death toll for a single month since 2001, according to military reports.

Afghan officials said roadside bombs had killed five policemen and an Afghan guard in the south, the centre of the Taliban-led insurgency, where thousands of new US and British forces are trying to secure roads and population cen-

tres ahead of the Aug. 20 presidential election.

On Thursday a roadside bomb killed 21 Afghans heading to a wedding, the latest in a wave of violent attacks ahead of key elections, as the Nato chief Thursday assessed efforts to quell the insurgency.

A US soldier, five Afghan policemen and two truck drivers were also killed in a series of extremist strikes, which have raised fears that violence will mar voting in Afghanistan and damage the credibility of the August 20 polls.

A trailer packed with guests invited to a wedding and towed by a farm tractor -- a common mode of transport in rural Afghanistan -- was hit Wednesday in the southern province of Helmand, government officials said.

The insurgents have pledged to disrupt the vote and have dramatically increased their use of roadside bombs against foreign and Afghan forces.

US boosts Somali arms, Hillary warns Eritrea

AFP, AP, Nairobi

The United States plans to double its arms flow to Somalia, an official said Thursday, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton threw support behind the war-torn country's embattled president and warned neighbouring Eritrea to halt backing insurgents.

Hillary on Thursday threatened sanctions against Eritrea for aiding a Somali extremist group she says is trying to launch worldwide terrorist attacks from Somalia.

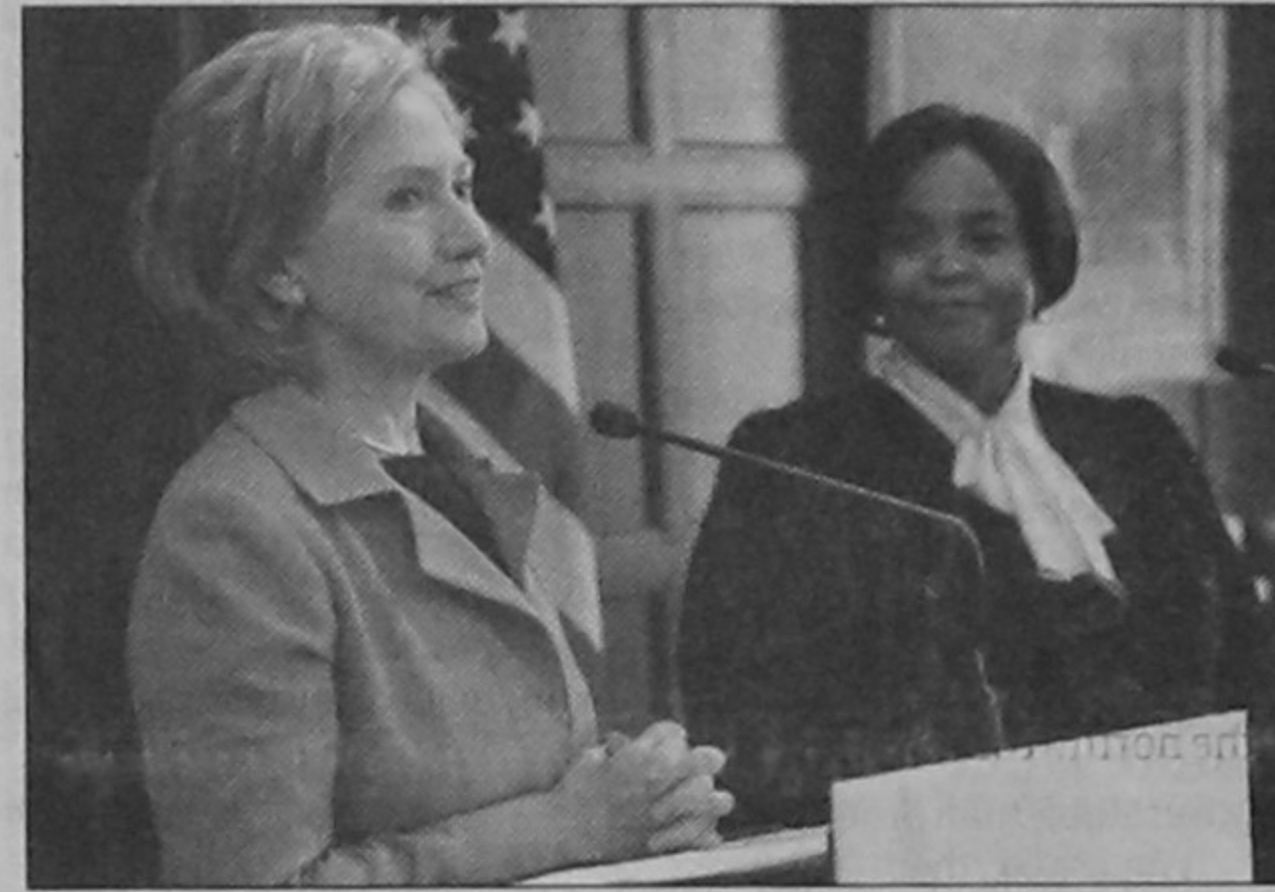
Hillary held the highest-level US meeting yet with Somali President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, whom she described as the best hope of preventing the Horn of Africa nation from becoming

ing a new global hub for Islamic extremism.

Hillary offered "very strong support" to Sharif, a young Islamist cleric who has nonetheless welcomed US aid in bringing stability to a nation that has languished in a state of virtual anarchy for nearly 20 years.

In Washington, a State Department official speaking on condition of anonymity said President Barack Obama's administration planned to double its supply of arms and ammunition to Somalia from 40 to 80 tonnes.

Hillary issued a strong warning to Eritrea, which Washington and its African allies say is funding the Shebab, an al-Qaeda-inspired movement spearheading a three-month-old offensive to topple Sharif.



US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton (L) and South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (R) give a press conference yesterday at the Presidential Guest House in Pretoria, South Africa. Hillary arrived in South Africa on the second leg of her African tour.

Fatah to elect new leadership

AFP, Bethlehem

Fatah members were preparing yesterday to elect a new leadership for the first time in 20 years, hoping to breathe new life into the secular Palestinian party weakened by infighting, mismanagement and its trouncing by the Islamist Hamas movement.

Delegates to the party's congress in the West Bank city of Bethlehem were due to renew the 21-strong Central

Committee and the 120-member Revolutionary Council, Fatah's governing bodies.

Voting was initially scheduled for Friday but was likely to be postponed by a day because of the large number of party members registering as candidates.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas was certain to retain his position as party chief, with Fatah officials describing him as "the consensus candidate."

9 die in fire at Belgian elderly care home

AFP, Brussels

A fire erupted in a care home for the elderly in Belgium as pensioners watched television or slept, killing nine people and injuring three others, officials and witnesses said.

It took two hours for firefighters to bring the blaze under control late Thursday as flames raged out of the windows of the Kanunnik Trierst home in the Flemish town of Melle, one of the country's worst fires of the last 50 years.

Hackers hit Twitter, Facebook, Google

AFP, San Francisco

Cyber attacks hammered Twitter, Facebook, and Google on Thursday, disrupting the hip micro-blogging service and causing stumbles at the hot social-networking site while Google fended off assaults.

Twitter was down for more than an hour early in the morning, before the eponymous California firm got it back online.

"The continuing denial of service attack is being mitigated, although there is still degraded service for some folks while we recover completely," Twitter co-founder Biz Stone said in an official company blog.

"Twitter has been working closely with other companies and services affected by what appears to be a single, massively coordinated attack. As to the motivation behind this event, we prefer not to speculate."

By late afternoon, Twitter said that service was improving but was still sporadic, with some people "unable to post or follow from the website."

Facebook was "degraded" by an early-morning distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attack on the Palo Alto, California-based Internet star's website, said spokeswoman Brandee Barker.

"No user data was at risk and we have restored full access to the site for most users," Barker said. "We're continuing to monitor the situation."

Twitter and Facebook have teamed with US Internet powerhouse Google to investigate the attacks.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC). The text includes the commission's name, its role in regulating energy, and contact information. It also features a signature and date: 'খুরশিদ আলম সচিব ফোনঃ ৯১৪ ০১২৫'.

UK hunts for hundreds of 'bogus' foreign students

PTI, London

The government is trying to locate hundreds of foreign students who are living in Britain after coming to the UK to study at bogus colleges, a news report said yesterday.

Amid stepped up pressure from the opposition Conservative Party, the authorities are trying to hunt for nearly 4,000 foreign students who are living in the country after arriving to study at bogus colleges, whose licences have been revoked by the government. The Independent newspaper reported.

The Tories have flayed the ruling Labour for not taking the problem seriously enough. Despite the government's claims to have tightened up the student visa system, they have failed to crack down on high numbers

of "bogus" students who are already here, Damian Green, the Conservative Party's immigration spokesman, was quoted as saying by the British daily.

The opposition said those students who entered the UK before 1 April 2009 and were enrolled at a bogus college had entered the UK on fraudulent purposes. According to the Home Office, the total number of foreign students who enrolled at colleges which have subsequently been refused a sponsor licence by the UK Border Agency is about 3,940.

Earlier, the British House of Commons was informed that there could be a large number of bogus students enrolled in over 2,000 colleges in Britain amid fears that people recruited into terrorism may have used these institutions as a means to get into the country.

Advertisement for Titas Gas Pipelines and Distribution Company Limited. It lists various services and rates, including gas supply for residential and industrial use. The text is in Bengali and includes contact information and a signature.

Advertisement for the Bangladesh Government regarding the selection of a new leader for the Bangladesh Education Society. It includes details about the selection process, the role of the society, and contact information for the selection committee.