

No decision yet where to try 9/11 plotters

AFP, Washington

The Obama administration is still mulling where to hold the trials of the alleged co-plotters behind the September 11 attacks, US attorney general Eric Holder said yesterday.

"We are still in the process of considering that," Holder said in an interview with CBS "Face The Nation," adding "No decision's been made yet as to exactly where the trial is going to occur."

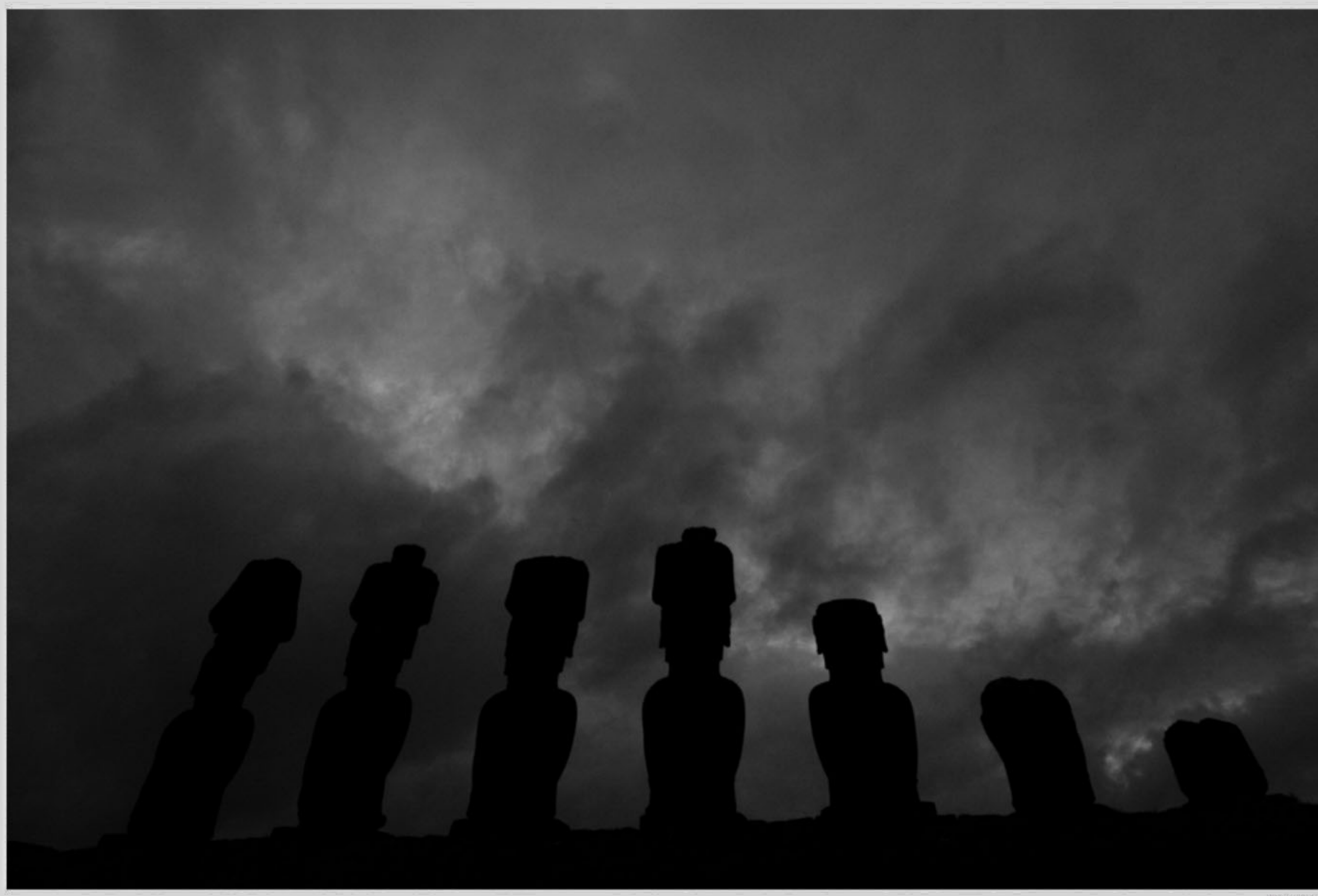
Holder, who has vowed to push for the death penalty for the self-confessed mastermind of the 2001 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, recalled he had recommended the trial should be held in civilian court.

But many are still pushing for the trial to be held in a military court, and the process has bogged down with no trial yet underway more than eight years after the attacks.

"Justice has been denied too long," Holder insisted.

"What we want to do is to hold accountable as effectively as we can the people who are responsible for what happened on September the 11th."

US President Barack Obama has vowed to close the notorious Guantanamo Bay US military prison in Cuba where the men are currently being held.



Picture of Moais -- stone statues of the Rapa Nui culture -- in Easter Island, 3700km off the Chilean coast in the Pacific Ocean. Hundreds of scientists, tourists and locals were expecting to see from Easter Island the almost five-minute total eclipse yesterday 1815 GMT [early today], at same time of the World Cup final. PHOTO: AFP

Curfew lifted but strike hits in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A curfew was lifted from most of Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, but a strike called by separatists to protest against recent civilian killings kept shops and offices closed.

Indian security forces have been struggling to control a wave of demonstrations in the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley after being accused of killing 15 civilians -- many of them teenagers -- in a month.

A police officer who declined to be named told AFP the curfew had been lifted except in some restive parts of Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian Kashmir.

The curfew had been imposed in Srinagar last Tuesday to contain protests after three people were killed in firing by police and paramilitary troops.

Much of Kashmir remained shut down on Sunday after hardline separatists urged people to observe a strike to protest against Indian rule of the region and the civilian deaths.

Thousands of security personnel patrolled the deserted streets of Srinagar.

Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan each hold Kashmir in part but claim it in full.

The nuclear-armed nations have fought two of their three wars over the Himalayan region since the subcontinent's partition in 1947.

Hizbullah says it has list of targets in Israel

AP, Beirut

A senior official with the militant Hizbullah group said they have a list of military targets inside Israel to hit in any future war.

Hizbullah commander in south Lebanon, Sheikh Nabil Kaouk, made his comments yesterday in response to this week's release by Israel's military of maps and aerial photographs of what it described as a network of Hizbullah weapons depots and command centres in south Lebanon.

Kaouk told the state news agency that the Israeli release comes at the anniversary of "Israel's defeat" in the 2006 war in which Hizbullah battled Israel to a stalemate.

Israel and Hizbullah have exchanged threats in recent months. The summer 2006 war left some 1,200 Lebanese and 160 Israelis dead.

Nepal crisis deepens, parties fail to name new premier

IANS, Kathmandu

The crisis gripping Nepal since the fall of its first Maoist government in 2009 deepened yesterday with the parties continuing to trade charges and failing to name a new prime minister.

The 25 parliamentary parties need to come up with a new consensus government by Monday to replace the caretaker government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who resigned July 30.

The new premier should have been named by July 6. However, as the bickering parties failed to reach an agreement, President Ram Baran Yadav agreed to extend the deadline to Monday.

Now Nepal seems doomed to go round in circles with the major parties frittering

away precious time without addressing national interests.

The Maoists, who want to return to power, angered the parties instead of seeking reconciliation as they unveiled their plan to take the halted peace process ahead.

The former guerrillas said they were ready to dismantle their youth wing, the Young Communist League, regarded as being their paramilitary organisation, as well as their guerrilla army with over 19,000 combatants.

The Maoists were advocating that their People's Liberation Army (PLA) be put under a special committee, which would decide how many fighters would join the national army.

They were seeking that each discharged guerrilla be given NRS 1 million to start a new life. Those who want to join

the army should be inducted as per international recruitment norms.

In case the army was unwilling to accept the guerrillas, in their midst, the Maoists have proposed the creation of separate units comprising solely of Maoist combatants.

But the proposal was opposed fiercely by the ruling parties yesterday, who said it was unilateral and against the peace accord signed in 2006.

The prime minister was also accusing the Maoists of being responsible for the murder of a party cadre, Chhabi Karki, who was stabbed to death in eastern Okhaldhunga district Thursday.

'The Maoists are a criminal party,' the prime minister said at a public programme in the capital Saturday to offer last respects to the slain local leader.

Obama sets campaign mode to attack

AFP, Las Vegas

President Barack Obama has decided that fiery self defense and withering mockery of Republicans are the best modes of attack, as he tries to save Democrats from a drubbing in November's elections.

Obama road-tested his pitch to grassroots Democrats and wavering independent voters during a two-day western campaign swing last week, flinging partisan rhetoric at foes of his 17-month presidency.

His swipes at Republicans and calls for change were a reminder of stump skills that few US politicians can match, recalling his 2008 campaign.

Obama adopted a sarcastic tone, rarely seen back then, likely distilled from months of frustrating political combat in Washington.

He branded Republicans as extreme and incompetent, mocking, for instance, an apology to BP by Republican lawmaker Joe Barton who described a compensation fund set up by the company for victims as a "shakedown."

Al-Qaeda claims south Yemen security HQ attack

REUTERS, Sanaa

Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility yesterday for a gun and mortar attack on the southern headquarters of a Yemeni intelligence agency, saying it was revenge for a government assault on an al-Qaeda stronghold.

Firing automatic weapons and mortars, gunmen attacked the security building in Aden on June 19, killing at least 11 people. The attack was the bloodiest in Yemen since the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000 that killed 17 US sailors.

"This attack comes as a response to the tyrannical aggression that reached our people in Maarib province and deliberately humiliates the tribes with the pretext of fighting terrorism," a statement from al-Qaeda's Yemen-based regional wing said in a statement posted on an Islamist website.

"Then they falsely claim that they struck the fighters with painful blows, but we didn't see anything except the killing of women and destruction of mosques and the striking of homes."

Yemen, next to top oil exporter Saudi Arabia, leapt to the forefront of Western security concerns after the Yemen-based al-Qaeda wing claimed responsibility for a failed attempt to bomb a US-bound airliner in December.

The June attack in Aden came a day after al-Qaeda threatened to respond to a state crackdown against it in the remote Maarib province, home to a militant stronghold in Wadi Obeida, calling on local tribesmen to take up arms against the government.

Al-Qaeda put the death toll in the attack at 24, higher than that given by the government, and accused those killed of involvement in what it described as oppression designed to please Washington.

Yemen's Western and Saudi allies want Sanaa, also trying to cement a northern truce and quell southern separatism, to resolve domestic conflicts and consolidate power so that it can focus on fighting al-Qaeda.

32 militants killed in Pakistan

IANS, Islamabad

Pakistani forces have killed 32 militants in separate gun battles in South Waziristan region, while six security personnel also died in the fighting, officials said.

Militants attacked a check-post in Dwa Toi area Saturday morning, injuring 18 security men. Security personnel, backed by helicopter gunships, returned the fire and killed 14 militants, Dawn News reported yesterday.

In another clash between militants and security forces in Karwan Manza area, 12 militants were killed. The counter-offensive also left three security personnel dead and 17 injured.

Thousands evacuated in China as dam threatens to burst

REUTERS, Qinghai

Flooding, landslides and torrents of mud have killed 50 people in southern China and the government has evacuated thousands of people from homes near an overfilled, leaking reservoir, officials and state media said.

The Wenquan reservoir in northwestern Qinghai province is holding more than three times its safe capacity, over 230 million cubic metres of water, when it was designed for a maximum of 70 million the Xinhua news agency said.

If it bursts, the city of Golmud, around 130 km (80 miles) away and home to more than 200,000 people, could be flooded with water up to 4 metres (yards) deep in some areas. More than 9,000 people in immediate danger have already been evacuated.

Power and water plants are at risk, and

the high-altitude railway to Tibet, some 40 km (25 miles) away, also could be affected, Xinhua said, citing the local government.

The reservoir had been badly maintained because the area is usually prone to drought. Water levels were still rising because of snowmelt in nearby mountains, and heavy rains were forecasted for yesterday night and today, Xinhua added.

In south China, more than 17 million people spread across nine provinces have been affected by downpours since the start of July, with 50 people dead and 15 missing, the ministry said in a statement on the website.

Some 42,000 homes have collapsed, and another 121,000 damaged and hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops have been destroyed. Early estimates put the cost of the rains as high as 8.9 billion yuan (\$1.3 billion).

Taiwan president for closer China ties

AP, Taipei, Taiwan

Taiwan's president urged his Chinese counterpart to work toward improving historically testy ties following the signing of a landmark trade deal.

Ma Ying-jeou -- who has sought to build better relations with the mainland since taking office in May 2008 -- said this was an opportunity for the two sides to end decades of mistrust and search for common ground.

Taiwan and China signed a broad trade pact last month.

The deal, commonly known as Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, will end tariffs on hundreds of products traded across the Taiwan Strait. It should boost bilateral trade already totaling about \$110 billion a year: some \$80 billion in goods flowing to China, and \$30 billion to Taiwan.

Ma told reporters Sunday he had asked the honorary chairman of his ruling Nationalist Party, Wu Poh-hsiung, to tell Chinese President Hu Jintao during a planned meeting in Beijing on Monday that the two should work together to "build mutual trust, set aside our differences and look for common grounds."

Doing so, he said, would lead to a "win-win situation." China and Taiwan split amid civil war in 1949, but Beijing continues to claim the island as part of its territory.

Korea bloodbath probe ends; US escapes much blame

AP, Seoul, South Korea

In a political about-face, a South Korean commission investigating a century of human rights abuses has ruled that the US military's large-scale killing of refugees during the Korean War, in case after case, arose out of military necessity.

Shutting down the inquiry into South Korea's hidden history, the commission also will leave unexplored scores of suspected mass graves believed to hold remains of tens of thousands of South Korean political detainees summarily executed by their own government early in the 1950-53 war, sometimes as US officers watched.

The four-year-old Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea probed more deeply than any previous inquiry into the country's bloody past. But a shift to conservative national leadership changed the panel's political makeup this year and dampened its investigative zeal.

The families of 1950's victims wanted the work continued.

"The truth about all these past incidents must be revealed, so this national tragedy won't be repeated," said Yang Won-jin, 82, whose father was believed shot and dumped into a mass grave 60 years ago.

But the commission's new president said its work must end.

"Even if we investigated more, there's not much more to be revealed," said Lee Young-jo, a political science professor who took charge last December.

The commission was established in December 2005 under the late liberal President Roh Moo-hyun to "reconcile the past for the sake of national unity." It had a broad mandate to expose human rights abuses from Korea's pre-1945 Japanese colonial period through South Korea's military dictatorships into the 1980s.

The most shocking disclosures emerged from the war that began when communist North Korea invaded the south on June 25, 1950, to try to reunify the peninsula, divided into US- and Soviet-occupied zones in 1945.

The commission was the first gov-

ernment authority to publicly confirm what long had only been whispered: The US-allied South Korean military and police carried out a vast secretive slaughter of political detainees in mid-1950, to keep southern sympathizers from supporting the northerners. Up to 200,000 were killed, historians believe.

Hundreds of petitions to the commission told another story as well, of more than 200 incidents in which the US military, warned about potential North Korean infiltrators in refugee groups, was said to have indiscriminately killed large numbers of innocent South Korean civilians in 1950-51.

Declassified US documents uncovered over the past decade do, indeed, show commanders issuing blanket orders to shoot civilians during that period. In 2007-2009 the commission verified several such US attacks, including the napalm-bombing of a cave jammed with refugees in eastern South Korea, which survivors said killed 360 people, and an air attack that killed 197 refugees gathered in a field in the far south.

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