



Pakistanis displaced by floods queue for water at an army-run makeshift tent camp in Sehwan, Sindh province, yesterday.

Key Obama economy adviser to quit

BBC ONLINE

President Barack Obama's top economics adviser, Larry Summers, is to leave the administration at the end of the year.

Under Mr Summers, the council has been at the heart of the government's economic policy making.

The president praised him for "brilliance, experience and judgement" at "a time of great peril" for the US.

But the departure of Mr Summers, who is returning to a post at Harvard University, is the latest from the White House economy team.

In July budget director Peter Orszag stepped down and chairwoman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Christina Romer left earlier this month.

Earlier on Tuesday, the US Federal Reserve issued a downbeat assessment of the US economy and said that its main interest rate was likely to be kept at current levels close to zero for a long time.

In a statement issued after a regular policy meeting the Fed also said it was prepared to take additional measures to support the economy if needed.

He's the third member of the economic team to depart and by far the most important and difficult to replace.

The White House said Mr Summers had been an architect of the 2009 Recovery act - aimed at jump-starting the US economy, and had also, among other roles, led an overhaul of the automobile industry.

Meanwhile, Mr Summers said he would "miss working with the president and his team on the daily challenges of economic policy making".

Obama groped for Afghan exit strategy, reports say

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama groped for an exit strategy from the Afghan war last year amid fierce divisions among top advisors and powerplays by the military for more troops, reports said yesterday.

Excerpts from a blockbuster new book by legendary reporter Bob Woodward suggest that Obama, frustrated with the Pentagon as he sought to stop the war, contemplated his own six-year presidency, dictated his own new exit strategy.

Woodward reports that the administration was besieged by warnings of possible terrorist attacks on US soil and reveals the CIA established a covert army in Afghanistan to hunt and kill Taliban fighters.

The revelations about the president's agonizing search for a new war approach to Afghanistan last year, blow the lid on the hardball Washington infighting that led up to his decision to send in 30,000 more troops.

Woodward, half of the reporting team that brought down president Richard Nixon over Watergate, is renowned for in-depth reporting on successive administrations, which can set media and public perceptions of a new president.

His account is based on a lifetime of contacts in Washington's political and national security establishment and includes interviews with administration heavy hitters, including Obama.

The Washington Post and New York

Times obtained copies of the new book "Obama's Wars," which is due to be published Monday just six weeks before crucial mid-term elections in which Democrats fear heavy losses.

There was no immediate White House comment on the revelations.

Woodward reports Obama flatly rejected any prolonged US nation building effort, and was determined to send a signal to the American people along those lines.

"I'm not doing 10 years," he told Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a late October 2009 meeting, Woodward writes, according to the Post.

"I'm not doing long-term nation-building. I am not spending a trillion dollars."

When Obama announced his troop surge in December, he also made clear that American soldiers would begin coming home in July 2011, a timeline that has caused intense public debate ever since.

The book appears to reveal internal fissures, distrust and infighting among the White House national security team as it debated every aspect of the Afghanistan war, a conflict which may define Obama's entire presidency.

"Everything we're doing has to be focused on how we're going to get to the point where we can reduce our footprint," Obama is quoted as saying in the book, according to the Post, where Woodward worked for decades.

"It's in our national security interest. There cannot be any wiggle room," Obama is reported to have said.

"This needs to be a plan about how we're going to hand it off and get out of Afghanistan," Obama said.

The president rejected a Pentagon request for 40,000 troops, Woodward said, chronicling Obama's meetings with Gates and Clinton in the months leading up to his December announcement.

The New York Times reported that the famously cool-headed Obama at times lost his composure as pressure built to make a decision.

"I'm done doing this!" he exploded at one point, the Times reported.

The book describes the sometimes pointed and personal tone of the debate among the sparring factions within the administration.

National security adviser James Jones privately referred to Obama's political aides as "the water bugs," the "Politburo," the "Mafia," or the "campaign set," Woodward wrote.

Woodward's book also details how the White House was battered by warnings about the threat of fresh attacks on US soil, even as the president insisted that the less of September 11, 2001 was that the country would be able to rebound from any such attack.

"We can absorb a terrorist attack," the president said during an interview with Woodward in July.

PM for effective

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His account is based on a lifetime of contacts in Washington's political and national security establishment and includes interviews with administration heavy hitters, including Obama.

From PAGE 16 No criminal or civil or departmental proceedings can be initiated against a reporting interest related information to the authorities, and his or her identity will not be disclosed without his or her consent.

A provision of the bill says if a whistleblower is a government official, no action can be taken to punish them by sending them on forced retirement, or demoting them or taking any departmental step to harass, which may damage their social dignity or cause torment.

A whistleblower cannot even be made a witness and produced before court in connection with the criminal and civil cases to be filed following the information disclosed. The information cannot be produced before court as evidence to keep the person's identity secret, according to the provisions.

If a person discloses a whistleblower's identity, he might be punished with a maximum five years' or minimum

Whistleblowers to be protected

FROM PAGE 16

two years' imprisonment or with financial penalty. On receiving information from a whistleblower, the authorities concerned will launch investigation or take proper action. Legal actions will be taken under the existing laws if any allegation is proved correct after enquiry.

The proposed legislation also said a person might be punished with a maximum five years' imprisonment or financial penalty if one intentionally provides false information to the authorities.

If the person in question is a government official, that person might face departmental action in addition to jail sentence.

If a person is victimised for disclosing false information by a person, then the latter may have to give compensation to the victim, says a provision of the bill.

The bill also defined competent authorities.

In the case of people holding constitutional posts, the president will be the competent authority, likewise the Speaker

for MPs, the Supreme Court's registrar for members of the judicial service, Anti-Corruption Commission for graft related matters, the Comptroller and Auditor General for public money, officers-in-charge of respective police stations will be considered competent authorities for illegal and immoral activities.

The law minister said the present government is determined and committed to take necessary measures for curbing corruption.

He said Bangladesh has been a party to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, 2007. Being a state party of the convention, it is mandatory for Bangladesh to introduce legislation to ensure protection of whistleblowers.

The Public Interest Related Information Disclosure (Protection) Act, 2010 and Electoral Rolls Act bills were sent to the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry for scrutiny.

Ayodhya crosses its fingers before court verdict

IANS, Ayodhya

With just one day to go for the long awaited verdict on the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmaboomi dispute, a strange quiet has descended over this town with old timers hoping this is not the proverbial lull before a communal storm.

The dispute that dates back to the 19th century is scheduled to come to some kind of fruition with the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court's verdict Sep 24. Eighteen years after the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu radicals who believed that it was built on the site of the birth place of Lord Ram, the security blanket is back.

Gun-wielding Rapid Action Force (RAF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel march down the narrow streets and police around the disputed site are on the alert, disallowing visitors from even carrying combs, pen and paper.

Residents fear that the situation could quickly get as volatile as it did on Dec 6, 1992, when the Babri Masjid was demolished, triggering nationwide riots.

The debate is slowly building up, but the hope is that this time around, the reaction would be more subdued.

"The prevailing silence is very scary; you can see normal life is already disrupted and I would not be surprised at all if mischief mongers are already on the job to incite trouble," said Suphal Chandra

who runs a sweetmeats shop in Ayodhya's main market.

Hindus in the town say they see no reason why the verdict would not go in their favour while Muslims are hoping that the judiciary would entitle them to their claim to the land so that the mosque could be rebuilt.

Mohammed Hashim Ansari, 90, the oldest Muslim litigant in the case, is worried about the politicking in the name of Ayodhya.

Without naming the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies, he said: "I have never collected any funds in the name of the Babri Masjid but it is no secret how many political outfits have minted money by keeping the Ayodhya issue alive for decades. We must guard against the designs of such elements."

Ansari moved the local court in 1961 seeking the right to offer namaz in the mosque, where idols of Lord Ram were introduced in 1949. It was Ansari's plea that led the court to order shutting of the gates to the disputed shrine that were unlocked more than three decades later in 1986.

Though Ansari believes that the Muslim claim was based on far stronger evidence, he is quite emphatic about abiding by the court order.

"What we need to profess and promote is that either party must abide by the order of the court," he stressed.

"And though I see no reason why the

verdict should go against our claim, especially since we have such strong evidence in our favour, we will knock the doors of the Supreme Court if need be."

He recalls the spirit of goodwill between him and rival Hindu litigant Mahant Ram Chandra Paramhans, who spearheaded the Ram temple movement for decades before passing away a few years back. "Paramhans and I would sometimes even travel together to attend the court hearings in Lucknow and my son used to drive his car."

Swami Ram Vilas Vedanti, a former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP and a key member of the Ramjanmaboomi Nyas (Trust) entrusted with the task of building a Ram temple, is confident that the verdict will go in their favour.

"How can we be the judgment go against us? How can we be denied the right to build a grand Ram temple in this Ram nagri, which is his birthplace?"

However, Vedanti, 67, is also categorical about not taking the issue to the streets as in the 1980s and early 1990s.

"In case the verdict goes against our claim, we will make an appeal to the union government to bring about legislation for building a grand Ram temple at the site," Vedanti told IANS.

"Unless that is done, this legal battle will go on endlessly as the matter is bound to be taken to the country's apex court by the losing party."

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Table with columns: Date, Paltan Community Centre, AGB Colony Community Centre, Dhaka, and various bank branches for distribution.

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