

Oil spill probe raps White House

BBC ONLINE

A commission investigating the response to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has strongly criticised the White House in a number of areas.

The Obama administration blocked government scientists' efforts to inform the public of worst case scenarios, a draft report said.

Officials were said to have been too optimistic about handling the disaster, one of the worst in US history.

The White House disputes this, saying officials "were clear with the public".

But the BBC's Steve Kingstone, in Washington, says the accusations will embarrass the White House, coming as they do from a commission appointed by President Barack Obama.

The report by the National Oil Spill Commission says the White House was directly involved in controlling information from the spill that began after an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig on 20 April.

The report says that during the crucial first 10 days of the oil spill the government's response "seemed to lag" - and that coastguard officials were "overly-optimistic" in believing BP could handle the incident.

Government scientists are accused of first underestimating the amount of oil pouring into the Gulf and then overestimating the quantity which had evaporated or otherwise been removed from the sea.



Farmers hold a street protest in Manila yesterday to mark President Benigno Aquino's 100th day in office. The protesters called on Aquino to implement genuine land reform to improve the lives of millions of Filipino farmers.

'Obama upset over US intelligence leaks'

REUTERS, Washington

President Barack Obama is upset over a rash of intelligence leaks in Washington, the US intelligence chief said on Wednesday, excoriating officials who "get their jollies" from talking to reporters.

The comments by James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, follow days of non-stop coverage about US intelligence on a European terrorism threat, even though much of the details of the threat are still secret.

The State Department issued an alert on Sunday acknowledging an increased risk of terrorist attack in Europe.

"I was at a meeting yesterday with the president and I was ashamed to have to sit there to have to listen to the president express his great angst about the leaking that's going on here in this town," Clapper told a conference on intelligence matters in Washington.

"And particularly when it's widely quoted, amorphous, anonymous senior intelligence officials, who for whatever reason get their jollies from blabbing to the media."

Clapper, who took the top US intelligence post in August, did not say which leaks the president complained about.

"I'm not criticising the media at all -- you're doing your jobs," Clapper said, addressing a conference by the Washington-based Bipartisan Policy



Center. "But I am criticising people who are allegedly government officials in responsible positions who have supposedly taken an oath to protect this country."

Speaking later at the same event, the head of the National Counterterrorism Center, Michael Leiter, also criticized leaks. He did not comment on the Obama meeting, but said that any disclosures on the European terrorism threat going beyond the State Department's alert made his job more complicated.

US officials have warned that public revelations about intelligence information can have unpredictable consequences, potentially undermining efforts to monitor and disrupt militants plotting attacks. "And as the president remarked, the irony here is people engaged in intelligence who turn around talk about it publicly," Clappers said.

WIKILEAKS

Leaks of classified information extend well beyond traditional media. Clapper separately pointed to the fallout from website WikiLeaks' release of more than 70,000 secret military files on the Afghan war in July, one of the biggest security breaches in US history.

Leaking classified information is a felony in the United States. The US Justice Department has filed charges against two people this year in cases involving information passed to reporters. It has won one conviction against an FBI linguist who gave information to hosts of an Internet blog.

WikiLeaks has threatened to publish thousands more documents, and Clapper predicted that the group's actions would have a "chilling effect" on intelligence sharing within the US intelligence community.

"I would observe that the WikiLeaks episode of course represents what I would consider a big yellow flag. I think it's going to have a very chilling effect on the need to share," Clapper said.

Clapper is spearheading efforts to promote greater sharing of information within the US intelligence community, a task given greater urgency after a failed car bombing in New York's Times Square in May and a botched attempt to blow up a Detroit-bound US airliner on Christmas Day last year.

Mario Vargas

FROM PAGE 16
Vargas Llosa has written more than 30 novels, plays and essays, including "Conversation in the Cathedral" and "The Green House." In 1995, he was awarded the Cervantes Prize, the Spanish-speaking world's most distinguished literary honour.

The academy's permanent secretary, Peter Englund, said Vargas Llosa "is a divinely gifted story-teller," whose writing touches the reader. "He is one of the big authors in the Spanish-speaking world," Englund said.

His international breakthrough came with the 1960s novel "The Time of The Hero," which builds on his experiences from the Peruvian military academy Leoncio Prado. The book was considered controversial in his homeland and a thousand copies were burnt publicly by officers from the academy.

Vargas Llosa is the first South American winner of the prestigious \$1.5 million Nobel Prize in literature since it was awarded to Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez in 1982.

Born in Arequipa, Peru, Vargas Llosa grew up with his grandparents in Bolivia after his parents divorced, the academy said. The family moved back to Peru in 1946 and he later went to military school before studying literature and law in Lima and Madrid.

In the previous six years, the academy rewarded five Europeans and one Turk, sparking criticism that it was too euro-centric. Last year's award went to German writer Herta and Paul Mueller.

Giant moon collision 'might have formed Saturn's rings'

BBC ONLINE

Saturn's rings might have formed when a large moon with an icy mantle and rocky core spiralled into the nascent planet.

A US scientist has suggested that the tidal forces ripped off some of the moon's mantle before the actual impact.

The theory could shed light on the rings' mainly water-ice composition that has puzzled researchers for decades.

The scientist announced her idea at a conference in Pasadena, US.

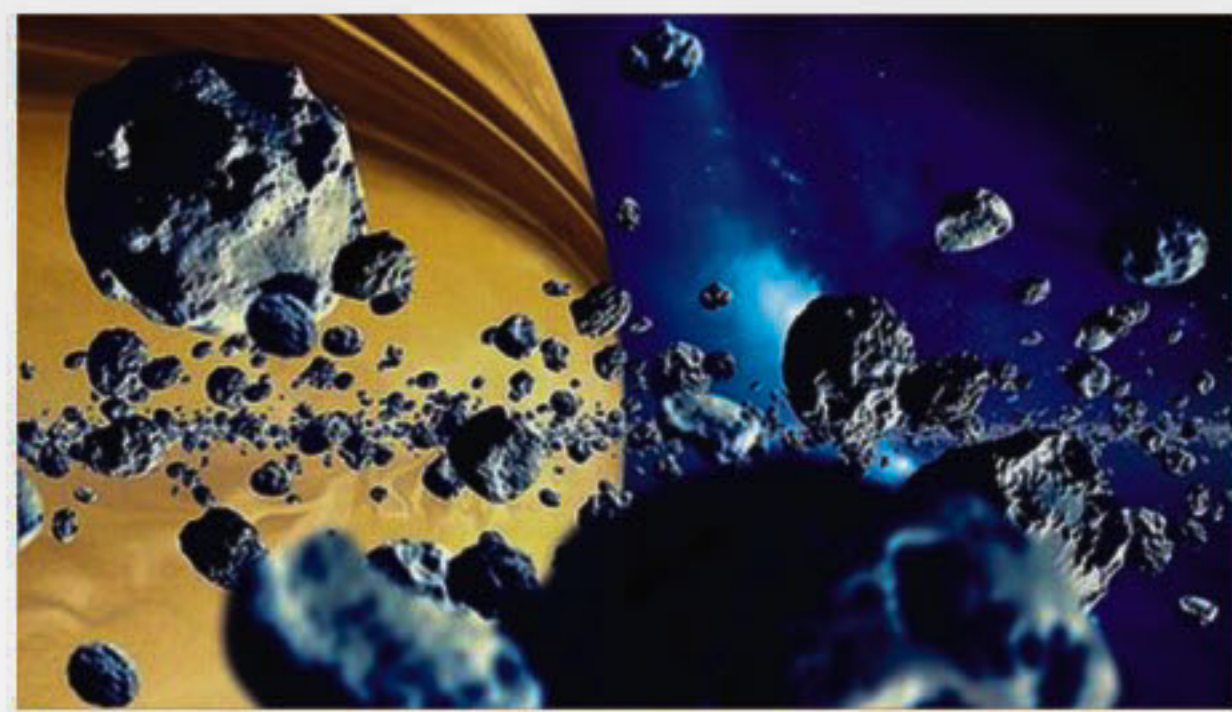
Though the rings are now thought to consist of 90-95 percent water-ice, Robin Canup of the Southwest Research Institute in Boulder said the slight rock content is due to the interplanetary dust and constant "bombardment ... by micrometeoroids".

"[The rings] must have formed as essentially pure ice," she said at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society's Division for Planetary Science.

Just how these icy rings came about has always been a mystery.

"You would've expected that if an object, let's say an asteroid or even a satellite had broken up, there would be a large rock component," Carl Murray from Queen Mary, University of London, one of the astronomers on the Cassini mission, told BBC News.

He explained that up until now, there were two main theo-



Saturn's rings are largely made up of icy chunks

ries for the origin of the rings. One of them involved an icy comet breaking up in the Saturn's vicinity, and the other suggested that a small moon was pulled in by the planet's gravitational field.

"But you'd have to have a giant comet, several hundred kilometres across, and you'd have to have such comets passing Saturn frequently enough for [the planet] to disrupt one and form a ring system," said Professor Murray.

In the case of a satellite breaking up, "you'd probably expect the rings to be composed of rock and ice, so what happened to the rock?" he added.

Dr Canup said she disagreed with both theories.

"There explore a new alternative," she said. "As a large, Titan-sized satellite approached Saturn, it would likely be differentiated due to the combination of the energy of its formation and strong tidal heating."

Titan is the planet's largest satellite, and it is also the second largest moon in the Solar System after Jupiter's Ganymede.

Professor Murray said that the size of the satellite in Dr Canup's hypothesis was the main new idea, and it was a clever way to explain the peculiarly icy nature of the rings.

"Her theory says that yes, there was a satellite, but perhaps a lot bigger than people had thought - a Titan-sized object is of the order of 10 times the size of what people have been proposing before," he said.

"And that's the key difference."



Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela

Desmond Tutu retires from public life

AFP, Cape Town

Desmond Tutu officially began his retirement yesterday, bringing the curtain down on a career that saw him win a Nobel Peace Prize for battling apartheid before emerging as South Africa's conscience.

Tutu announced in July that he would step down from public life on his 79th birthday, which he will celebrate Thursday on board a cruise ship docked in Cape Town, where he served as archbishop for the Anglican Church.

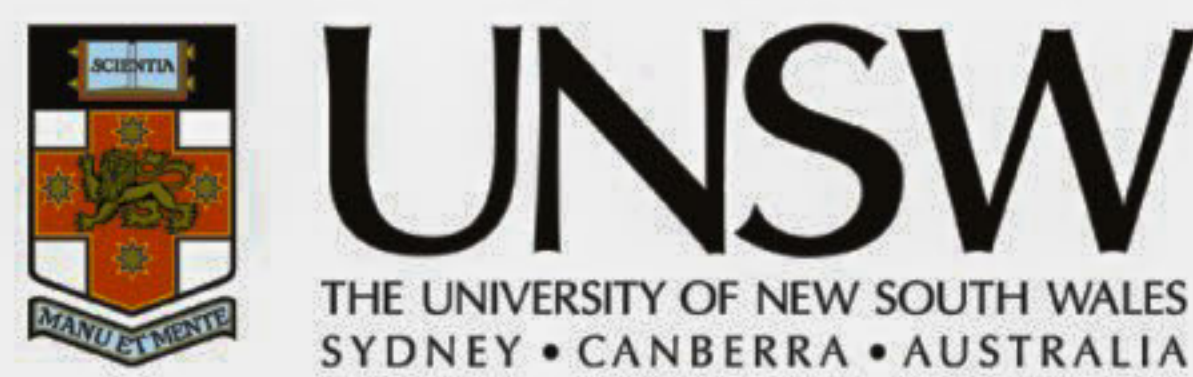
"He's serious about quieting down," Tutu's spokesman Dan Vaughan told AFP. "He will now be refusing most of the interview requests he receives."

Tutu is currently lecturing on board a ship packed with 600 university students on a five-month voyage around the world, which ends in December.

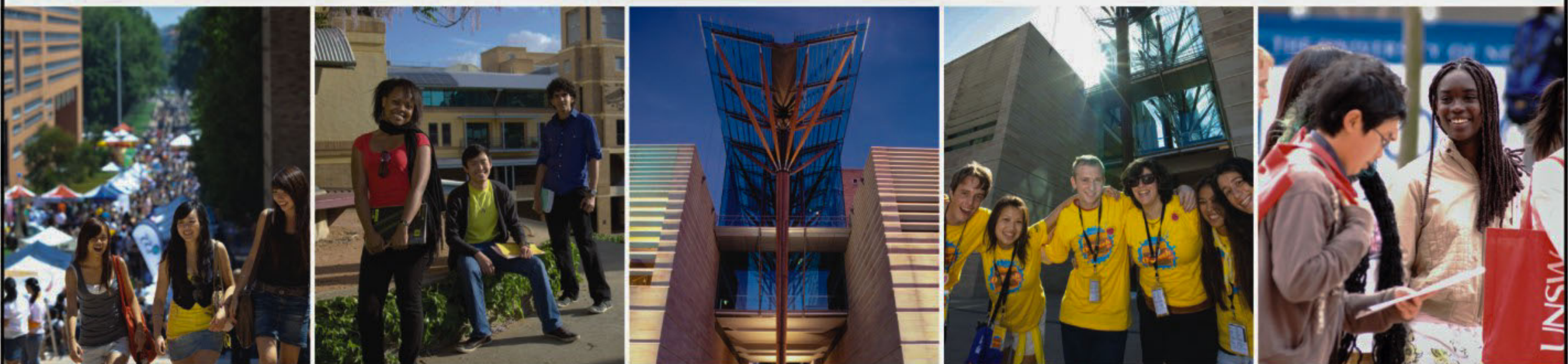
His retirement has been greeted with doubt in South Africa that Tutu will actually step away from public life, with no coverage of his retirement in national media.

Tutu is planning to continue his work with The Elders, a group of leading statesmen that includes South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela, and with a group of fellow Nobel laureates that speaks out against injustices around the world.

Tutu is also still working to develop the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, where the organisation is building a new complex to house his peace projects.



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