

NOVEMBER POLLS

Obama seeks magic of 2008 campaign

REUTERS, Columbus

President Barack Obama sought to recapture the magic of his 2008 campaign, holding a large open-air rally in Ohio to help struggling Democratic candidates in the Midwestern state.

Amid voter anger over the sluggish economy and 9.6 percent unemployment, Obama's Democrats are fighting to avoid steep losses in the Congress and in state governors' races in the November 2 elections.

"Everybody said 'No, you can't' and in 2008 you showed them, 'Yes, we can,'" Obama told a cheering crowd of 35,000 people at Ohio State University in Columbus.

In a hoarse voice, he accused Republicans of siding with "special interests" like insurance companies and Wall Street banks.

But he acknowledged Democrats faced a tough fight.

"Let's be honest: This is a difficult election," he said.

Nationally, Democrats are at risk of losing one or both houses of the U.S. Congress, which would make it much harder for Obama to pursue priorities such as passing legislation to fight climate change and boost infrastructure spending.

In Ohio, Democratic Senate candidate Lee Fisher is trailing Republican hopeful Rob Portman by double digits. Incumbent Governor Ted Strickland is facing a difficult re-election bid against Republican John Kasich, who holds a lead of about 6 points over Strickland.

In addition to being important for Democrats in congressional races and the campaign for governor this year, Ohio will be a crucial swing state for Obama when he runs for re-election in 2012. He carried the state in 2008 against Republican John McCain.

Joining Obama on the campaign trail for the first time since his presidential race two years ago was his wife, Michelle.

Obama told the Ohio rally that voters faced a choice in the upcoming election between moving forward or returning to Republican policies that he said caused the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Obama did not mention his predecessor, President George W. Bush by name, but he reminded voters of the dire economy he inherited when he took office in January 2009.

Obama said the Republicans didn't decide to go off "into the desert" to meditate and rethink their ideas.



Supporters listen as US President Barack Obama speaks during a rally for the Democratic National Committee at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, on Sunday.

Super typhoon lashes Philippines

AP, Cauayan

The strongest cyclone in years to buffet the Philippines knocked out communications and power as residents took shelter yesterday, while flooding in Vietnam swept away a bus and 20 of its passengers, including a boy taken from his mother's grasp by the raging waters.

Super Typhoon Megi, crossing the northern Philippines, was expected to add to the already heavy rains that have fallen on much of Asia. In China, authorities evacuated 140,000 people from a coastal province ahead of the typhoon.

Megi could later hit Vietnam, where flooding has caused 30 deaths in recent days, in addition to those missing and feared dead after a bus was snatched off a road by surging currents Monday.

With more than 3,600 Filipinos riding out the typhoon in sturdy school buildings, town halls, churches and relatives' homes, roads in and out of coastal Isabela province, about 320 kilometers (200 miles) northeast of Manila, were deserted and blocked by collapsed trees and power lines.

Bin Laden living comfortably in Pakistan, reports CNN

AFP, Kabul

Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden is living comfortably in a house in northwest Pakistan close to his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, CNN yesterday quoted a Nato official as saying.

The Saudi-born militant wanted for the September 11 attacks on the United States nine years ago is being protected by local people and "some members of the Pakistani intelligence services," the television network said.

It also said that the al-Qaeda number two, the Egyptian-born Zawahiri, was living close to him.

"Nobody in al-Qaeda is living in a cave," the unnamed senior Nato official is quoted as saying in a report datelined Kabul.

Bin Laden is likely to have moved around an area ranging from the mountains of Chitral near the Chinese border to the Kurram valley near Afghanistan's Tora Bora in recent years, CNN reported the official as saying.

Pakistan's tribal belt of Kurram and six other districts spanning 27,220 square kilometers (10,510 square miles) lies outside government control, and has long been suspected by Western intelligence to be bin Laden's hiding place.

"The official also confirmed the US assessment that Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, has moved between the cities of Quetta and Karachi in Pakistan over the last several months," said the report on CNN's website.

Pakistani authorities deny they are providing protection for the terror mastermind bin Laden, who has a 25-million-dollar US bounty on his head.

"I categorically deny the report about the presence of Osama bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri or even Mullah Omar in Pakistan," Interior Minister Rehman Malik told reporters on Monday.

"Bin Laden... and all other terrorists are anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan and hired assassins. If we have any information we will take action against them," he said.



'Facebook apps provide users' info to advertisers'

AFP, Washington

Many popular applications on Facebook are violating the social network's rules and transmitting identifying information about users to advertising and Internet tracking companies, The Wall Street Journal reported.

The newspaper said it conducted an investigation and found that the issue affects tens of millions of Facebook application users, including people who set their profiles to be completely private.

It said the practice breaks Facebook's rules and renews questions about its ability to keep secure identifiable information about the activities of its members.

The Journal said applications were providing access to Facebook members' names and, in some cases, their friends' names, to companies that build detailed databases on people in order to track them online.

All of the 10 most popular applications on Facebook were transmitting unique user ID numbers to outside companies, it said. They include Zynga's FarmVille, with 59 million users, Texas HoldEm Poker and FrontierVille.

Pentagon braces for massive Wikileaks dump on Iraq war

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon said on Sunday it had a 120-member team prepared to review a massive leak of as many as 500,000 Iraq war documents, which are expected to be released by the WikiLeaks website sometime this month.

Pentagon spokesman Col Dave Lapan told Reuters the timing of the leak remained unclear but the Defense Department was ready for a document dump as early as Monday or Tuesday, a possibility raised in previous WikiLeaks statements.

Still, people familiar with the upcoming leak told Reuters they do not expect WikiLeaks to release the classified files for at least another week.

If confirmed, the leak would be much larger than the record-breaking release of more than 70,000 Afghan war documents in July, which stoked debate about the 9-year-old conflict but did not contain major revelations.

It was the largest security breach of its kind in US military history.

"It's the same team we put together after the publication of the (Afghan war documents)," Lapan said, adding it was unclear how many of the 120 personnel would be needed to contribute to the Iraq leak analysis.

Although the Iraq conflict has faded from public debate in the United States in recent years, the document dump threatens to revive memories of some of the most trying times in the

war, including the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal.

It could also renew debate about foreign and domestic actors influencing Iraq, which has been wrestling with a political vacuum since an inconclusive election in March.

One source familiar with the Iraq documents said they are likely to contain revelations about civilian casualties, but expected them to cause less of a stir than the Afghan leak.

Lapan said the Pentagon team believed it knew which documents WikiLeaks may be releasing since it had already reviewed the Iraq war file. That could speed up its assessment about potential fallout.

NO INTEL SOURCES COMPROMISED
At the time of the Afghan war leak, the top US military officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, warned that WikiLeaks may have the blood of US soldiers and Afghan civilians on its hands because it had leaked documents naming US collaborators.

Still, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said in a letter to the head of the Senate Armed Services Committee, viewed by Reuters, that the leak had not revealed any "sensitive intelligence sources or methods."

Gates said disclosing the names of cooperating Afghans, who could become targets for the Taliban, could cause "significant harm or damage to national security interests of the United States." The letter was dated Aug. 16.



China vice-president given key military job

BBC ONLINE

China's Vice-President Xi Jinping has been named vice-chair of the powerful Central Military Commission, in a move widely seen as a boost to his likely succession of President Hu Jintao.

It comes on the last day of the ruling Communist Party's annual meeting.

Hu Jintao must retire as head of the party in 2012 and as president in 2013.

Mr Xi is following in the footsteps of Mr Hu, who was also promoted to the commission - which controls China's army - before becoming president.

Mr Xi was promoted by the Communist Party's Central Committee, a council of about 200 senior officials.

The 57-year-old will serve under Mr Hu, who is the current head of the commission, which oversees the 2.3m soldiers of the People's Liberation Army.

Appointment to the military commission and a parallel government role are seen as necessary preparations for the top post.

The BBC's Martin Patience in Beijing says the Communist Party tends to work out succession in advance to prevent power struggles among senior officials.

Mr Xi became a member of the Politburo Standing Committee - the ruling inner circle - in 2007 and was named China's vice-president the following year.

Seven of the nine current members of the committee are expected to stand down in 2012 because they will by then have served two terms.

Germany to act on immigrant integration after Merkel salvo

AFP, Berlin

The German government said yesterday it would adopt new plans to better integrate immigrants, two days after Chancellor Angela Merkel declared multiculturalism a total failure.

"For a while multiculturalism in Germany was about immigrants living as they wished and not putting integration too much in the forefront... This is what the chancellor wanted to stress," spokesman Steffen Seibert said.

"In everybody's interest, this society has to act, and the government will act," he told a regular government briefing.

Next Wednesday, Merkel's centre-right cabinet would adopt "concrete" new regulations governing immigration policy and residency permits, addressing

German language courses and combatting forced marriages, he said.

He added that the government aimed in December to sign off on a bill that would see more foreign diplomas formally recognised, something which would help employers in Europe's biggest economy find badly needed qualified workers.

"This country is extremely glad to have hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of people with foreign roots who are well integrated," Seibert said.

"But we also recognise, and perhaps we are stressing it more now than in years gone by, that with some foreigners integration is not happening as it should. In some cases it is quite openly being rejected."

Merkel's comments on Saturday came after weeks of debate sparked by central banker Thilo Sarrazin saying that

Germany's 16 million people with an immigration background were making the country "more stupid."

"We feel tied to Christian values. Those who don't accept them don't have a place here," the chancellor, 56, whose faces a tough series of state elections next year, told a gathering of young members of her party.

Merkel spokesman stressed however with President Christian Wulff's comments earlier this month that Islam was now "part of Germany," remarks that drew criticism from within Merkel and Wulff's party.

A week later Horst Seehofer, premier of Bavaria and head of the sister party to Merkel's Christian Democrats, told a magazine did not need any more Turkish or Arab immigrants because they "find it harder" to integrate.



Virginie Labrosse, who admitted to provoking the death of three of her newborn babies, wait for the opening of her trial at the Chambery courthouse, yesterday. Labrosse admitted placing in a deep-freeze her babies -- dead in 2001, 2003 and 2006 -- before transporting them in plastic bags to her new house.



Iranian asylum seeker Mandana Daneshnia, right, whose mouth is sewn shut, sits with her daughter prior to a press conference in Athens yesterday. A group of around 30 Iranian asylum seekers have been on hunger strike in Athens for weeks, and some have sewn their mouths shut to underscore their plight.

Burning cars, tear gas in France pensions protests

AFP, Paris

French youths battled riot police, truckers blocked roads and filling stations ran dry as protests escalated Monday against President Nicolas Sarkozy's plan to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62.

Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at youths who set a car on fire, smashed bus stops and hurled rocks outside a school in Nanterre, near Paris, blocked by students protesting President Nicolas Sarkozy's pensions reform.

Youths threw petrol bombs at police outside a school in another Paris suburb, Combes-la-Ville, police said. In Lyon, hooded youngsters burned at least three cars they had overturned during clashes with riot police.

The interior ministry said police arrested 196 rioters in the suburbs, and that four police officers had been injured in scuffles.

Nearly 300 schools were disrupted by protests, officials said, and cities across France saw students take part in fresh street demonstrations, several of which saw police arresting rampaging youths.

Meanwhile, truck drivers also joined the movement that has brought millions onto the streets in recent weeks, and rubbish continued pile up in the streets of Marseille due to a strike by collectors.

"We now need to block the economy to force the government to withdraw its plan," said Vincent Duse, a CGT union leader at an auto factory in Mulhouse.

Chilean leader to present queen rock from mine

AP, London

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera is presenting Britain's Queen Elizabeth II with a rock from the bottom of the collapsed mine where 33 men were trapped for more than two months.

Pinera is in London as part of a European tour, after the dramatic extraction of the men from the San Jose mine. He's seeking to capitalize on the wave of international admiration for the rescue to burnish Chile's image abroad.

Pinera said Monday he was bringing one rock from the bottom of the mine for the queen and another for British Prime Minister David Cameron.

In an unusual, half-hour interview on the BBC, Pinera said the rescue had changed not only the miners, but the Chilean people and their government as well.