

# BOMBS FOUND IN US-BOUND CARGOS US hunts for more explosive packages

THE NEW YORK TIMES, Washington

Two packages containing explosives, shipped from Yemen and addressed to synagogues in Chicago, were intercepted in Britain and Dubai, setting off a broad terrorism scare on Friday that included the scrambling of fighter jets to accompany a passenger flight as it landed safely in New York.

The discovery of the explosives packed in toner cartridges for computer printers, based on a tip from Saudi intelligence officials, began an urgent hunt for other suspicious packages in the United States and other countries.

Cargo planes were moved to secure areas of airports in Philadelphia and Newark for searches, and a United Parcel Service truck in Brooklyn was stopped and inspected. No additional explosives had been discovered by late Friday.

Representative Jane Harman, a California Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, said Friday that the packages seized in Britain and Dubai contained PETN, the same chemical explosive contained in the bomb sewn into the underwear of the Nigerian man who tried to blow up an airliner over Detroit last Dec 25. That plot, too, was hatched in Yemen, a country that is regarded as one of the most significant fronts in the

battle with extremists.

Ms. Harman, who was briefed by John S Pistole, administrator of the Transportation Security Administration, said that both packages contained computer printer cartridges filled with the explosive, but that one carried a cell phone as a detonator and the other had a timer.

In a brief statement to reporters at the White House on Friday afternoon, President Obama, who had been briefed on developments starting at 10:35 pm on Thursday, said the explosives represented a "credible terrorist threat" to the United States.

"The events of the past 24 hours underscore the necessity of remaining vigilant against terrorism," Obama said. He praised the work of intelligence and counterterrorism officials in foiling the plot. "The American people should be confident that we will not waver in our resolve to defeat al-Qaeda and its affiliates and to root out violent extremism in all its forms," the president said.

News of the terrorist plot came as Obama was barreling into the last four days of campaigning before midterm elections on Tuesday, and White House officials appeared determined to project the appearance of a commander in chief who was on top of the developments.



A selection of UK national front pages yesterday feature headlines and images of the alleged attempted bomb plot that grounded a number of cargo planes and sparked security alerts in the UK and US. Police in Dubai have confirmed that a US-bound parcel intercepted in Dubai contained explosives and bore al-Qaeda hallmarks.

## White House misspells Michelle Obama's name

PTI, Washington

In an embarrassment to the US presidency, the White House press office has reportedly spelled First Lady Michelle Obama's name wrong.

In a media release sent out on Tuesday evening, Michelle's name was spelled with just the one 'L'—the error was committed by an aide in the White House press office, the 'Daily Mail' online reported.

"Michele and I are deeply saddened by the loss of life, injuries, and damage that have occurred as a result of the recent earthquake and tsunami in West Sumatra," the release was quoted as saying.

However, on Thursday, the White House sent out a corrected version.

As the release was being sent out Tuesday night, the First Lady was giving a speech at a campaign fundraiser for California Senator Barbara Boxer.

## Taliban attack on Afghan post repelled, 80 dead

AFP, Khost

An Afghan official said yesterday that 80 Taliban insurgents were killed during a failed attack on a Nato combat outpost near the border with Pakistan.

"Fresh information that we received from intelligence sources shows that 80 Taliban have been killed. The bodies of the militants were left on the battlefield," said Mukhlis Afghan, spokesman for the governor of eastern Paktika province.

Nato said earlier that 30 Taliban had been killed as international troops repelled an attack on the outpost in Barmal district, which sits on the border of Pakistan's lawless North Waziristan tribal area.

A statement from Nato's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said the insurgents launched the attack at 1:30 am Saturday (2200 GMT Friday) "from all directions" using rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and small arms fire.

Five Isaf soldiers were injured, it said, adding that they kept fighting.

"The coalition forces called for air weapons team and close-air support during the engagement. A coalition aircraft engaged an insurgent firing position with three precision-guided munitions," it said.

"The air weapons team also engaged a large

number of insurgents near the outpost," it said, adding: "Initial operational reporting indicates more than 30 insurgents were killed in the failed attack on the outpost."

The proximity of the combat post to the border hints at the possibility the insurgents had crossed from Pakistan, where the Taliban's leadership council is believed to be based.

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Nato said Saturday that two of its soldiers died in separate attacks in the volatile south of Afghanistan, where the insurgency is concentrated.

One died in an insurgent attack on Friday, the other in a similar incident on Saturday.

The nationalities of the soldiers were not revealed, according to policy.

An AFP tally based on that kept by icasualties.org puts the total number of foreign soldiers to die in the war this year at 609, compared to 521 for 2009.

## Iraqi coffee shop suicide blast kills 30

AFP, Baquba

The death toll from a suicide bombing at a coffee house in central Iraq's restive Diyala province has risen to 30, a medical official said yesterday, making the deadliest attack in October.

Friday night's bombing in the town of Balad Ruz also wounded 68 people, according to Ahmed Alwan, a doctor at the general hospital of Baquba, the provincial capital of Diyala.

"The final toll from Friday's bombing is 30 dead and 68 wounded. All the dead are men, but the wounded include three women and two children," Alwan said.

Balad Ruz police chief Major Ahmed al-Tamimi had given on Friday a toll of 25 dead and 70 wounded "when a suicide bomber detonated a belt filled with explosives at a coffee house in the centre of the city."

## US terms India one of its best counter terrorism partners

PTI, Washington

Ahead of the visit of US President Barack Obama to India next week, the White House has identified New Delhi as one of its best counterterrorism partners.

"The Indian government is one of our best CT (counter terrorism) partners," said John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counter-Terrorism.

Brennan, who was responding to reporters' questions at a hurriedly convened press conference after the latest round of terror plot was unearthed, said the US has been sharing information with Indian government on a regular basis.

"We share on a regular basis with the Indian government," Brennan said.

In fact counterterrorism cooperation between India and the US would be on top of Obama's agenda during his India visit and in his talks with Indian leaders, another top White House official had said early this week.

"We want to underscore the closeness of our counterterrorism cooperation and the resilience of India in the face of terrorism, just as the US has experienced it," Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Adviser, told a group of Indian reporters early this week.

"We share an interest in counterterrorism. We share an interest in a stable Afghanistan that doesn't provide safe haven for terrorist groups," Rhodes said.

"We see India as a constructive partner in those efforts and we want to make sure that India is a part of our dialogue about the future of the region. And so this comes at a good time to continue those discussions," he said.

## New US threat unlikely to help Democrats in polls

REUTERS, Washington

The rapid response by US President Barack Obama to explosive materials being sent from Yemen to the United States probably will not help his fellow Democrats in the upcoming congressional elections.

Obama came out quickly in an televised briefing to address concerns about the threat, confirming that the packages came from Yemen, a hotbed of anti-American militancy, and contained explosive material. He said the US government would beef up cargo screening, but so far there was little impact on passenger air travel.

Because the packages originated in Yemen, investigators are examining possible connections to al-Qaeda militants in the Arabian Peninsula who were behind the failed Christmas Day attempt to blow up a US airliner flying from Amsterdam to Detroit. They will also have to determine if it was a hoax.

## Berlusconi amid scandal: 'I love women'

AP, Rome

Premier Silvio Berlusconi issued an unapologetic defense of his lifestyle Friday amid the latest scandal involving his personal life, admitting that he intervened to secure the release from police custody of a 17-year-old Moroccan girl who had previously been in his villa.

Berlusconi, 74, denied that he had done anything inappropriate in securing the release of the Moroccan runaway nicknamed Ruby, and scoffed at press reports that portrayed their interaction as improper.

The disclosure comes at a difficult time for Berlusconi, who is grappling with street protests in Naples over his failure to stop a trash crisis there, a weakened government coalition and his declining popularity in the polls.

Saying "I love life, I love women," the Italian leader insisted he was proud of his lifestyle, which has come under scrutiny for his purported dalliances with young women and an encounter with a prostitute unveiled last year.

## Karzai warned about private security firms

CNN ONLINE, Washington

A top-ranking American diplomat said Friday that the international community, including the United States, did not pay enough attention to the Afghan government's repeated statements that it was serious about cracking down on private security contractors on Afghan soil.

Speaking to reporters at a press briefing, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said he supports Afghan President Hamid Karzai's decision to rein in private security companies.

"He was correct on this issue, and we didn't -- the international community did not take it seriously enough, and we should have," Holbrooke said. "And now we're here."

Karzai has said he believes that the private security companies are creating a parallel security system that challenges the Afghan security forces. He formally announced their disbandment August 17.



South Korean Kim Rae-Jung (L), 96, meets her North Korean Wu Jong-Hye (R), 71, during a separated family reunion meeting at a resort on the North's southeastern coast yesterday. Hundreds of South Koreans held tearful reunions with their relatives living in the North as the two Koreas resumed the humanitarian project despite tensions after an exchange of fire.

PHOTO: AFP

## Manmohan announces visa on arrival for 4 Asean countries

IANS, Hanoi

Nationals from Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Laos would be given visa on arrival from Jan 1, 2011, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced here yesterday.

Addressing the 8th India-Asean summit, the prime minister looked forward to the conclusion of services and investment agreement between the two sides.

"We hope that all formalities for implementing the India-Asean Trade in Goods Agreement by all Asean states are completed at an early date.

"The conclusion of a Services and Investment Agreement will be an important step in our goal of comprehensive economic cooperation," he told the gathering and stressed that India hoped to "sustain a growth rate of 9-10 percent per year which will offer many opportunities for trade and investment".

## Geelani to intensify stir ahead of Obama's India visit

### Chidambaram to visit Kashmir

IANS, ANI, Srinagar/new Delhi

No curfew was imposed in Srinagar even though the separatists called for a shutdown and hardline Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Geelani asked people to intensify protests ahead of US President Barack Obama's India visit.

"Our freedom struggle has entered a crucial phase and the next 10 days are very important...when the US president visits India, the attention of the world is going to remain focused on South Asia.

"Our resistance programme has not only created awareness about Kashmir and the sufferings of its people internationally, but has also given sleepless nights to India," Geelani said in a statement here Friday evening.

Union Home Minister P Chidambaram will undertake a two-day visit of Jammu and Kashmir from Saturday.

According to sources, Chidambaram will first visit the cloudburst-hit region of Leh to review the rehabilitation process.

He will also hold a meeting with local officials.

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COMILLA OFFICE : Khan Mansion (2nd Floor), Rajgonj, Comilla, Cell: 01719226074

SYLHET OFFICE : Rose View Complex (1st Floor), Main Road, Shahjalal Upashahar, Sylhet Tel : 021-2831888, 2832092, Cell: 01719500155

USA OFFICE : 34-27 Stainway Street, Stainway Plaza, Suite:105, Astoria, New York, USA, Call : +1-347-600-4750

UK OFFICE : 26 Osborn Street, London, E1 6TD, Tel : 07863227240, 020-8908840, Fax : 02089812468

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*"Qualified female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply"*