

Nato forces will stay with Afghans after 2014 handover

AFP, Lisbon

President Barack Obama pledged yesterday that US forces would stand by Afghanistan even after Nato-led troops hand control of the fight against Taliban insurgents to Afghan forces in 2014.

Far from the dusty battlefields of Afghanistan, where more than 2,200 Allied troops have fallen in a vicious nine-year-old war, Obama and Nato leaders flew in to Lisbon for a two-day summit to set a handover date.

"We'll announce that the transition to Afghan responsibility is about to start, in 2011. We hope this process will be completed by 2014," Nato Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told reporters as the leaders arrived.

It was Afghan President Hamid Karzai who asked his Western allies to allow Afghanistan's fledgling forces to take charge of the campaign by 2014, allowing the bulk of the 150,000-strong US-led force to return home.

Even as presidents, prime ministers and generals gathered in the white steel conference centre on the banks of the Tagus, the force in Afghanistan said another of its soldiers had been killed by a roadside bomb.

And, in a sign that even fiercer fighting still lies ahead, the Washington Post

reported that the US Marine Corps is preparing to deploy the powerful M1 Abrams main battle tank to the Afghan front for the first time.

"We finally have the strategy and resources to break the Taliban's momentum, deprive insurgents of their strongholds, train more Afghan security forces, and assist the Afghan people," Obama wrote in a widely published op-ed.

"Even as America's transition and troop reductions will begin this July, Nato can forge a lasting partnership with Afghanistan to make it clear that, as Afghans stand up and take the lead, they will not stand alone," Obama wrote.

"We cannot turn our backs on the Afghan people as before," he added, in a separate interview with Spain's El Pais daily.

The Alliance's summit has been billed as one of the most important in its history, with meetings planned with the beleaguered Afghan leader Karzai and former Cold War foe Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev.

Karzai is in open disagreement with his Nato sponsors over combat tactics, and Medvedev's Russia has in the recent past been fiercely critical of US missile plans, but the leaders hope both can be won over.

Alongside this, they hope to unveil the 28-nation alliance's new "strategic concept", a planning framework to govern

how it orders security priorities in a world of multiple new threats and ever tighter defence budgets.

They will unveil plans for a network of radars and interceptors to form an anti-ballistic missile shield in the skies of Europe to protect Nato members, and overcoming Russian concerns by inviting them to take part.

Before leaving Moscow, Medvedev's top foreign policy aide Sergei Prikhodko said Russia is keen to share ideas about missile defence, but played down the chances of a major decision realigning the continent's security.

Moscow, however, does not expect too much too early. "We are realists, we will not ask for the impossible," Prikhodko said.

Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel dubbed Medvedev's participation in a Nato-Russia Council meeting at the summit "a milestone in Nato's development and in its relations with Russia" and "a good sign".

Nato leaders will also agree to reform the alliance by slashing the number of command headquarters and making them easily deployable to foreign conflicts.

Alliance officials insist the transition to Afghan control is not a rush to the exit, but the war is deeply unpopular in Europe and cash-strapped governments are under pressure from voters to bring soldiers home.



US President Barack Obama (R) shakes hands with Portugal's Prime Minister Jose Socrates Carvalho Pinto de Sousa in Lisbon yesterday prior a meeting.

Suspected bomb in Namibia was 'security test'

AFP, Berlin

A suspected bomb intercepted in Namibia that was to be put on a Munich-bound charter plane was only a US-made dummy used to test security checks, Germany's interior minister said yesterday.

Thomas de Maiziere said it was not immediately clear who had carried out the test, which sparked a major security alert Wednesday.

"Experts from the (German) federal police force examined the luggage on site," De Maiziere told reporters after a security conference with interior ministers from Germany's 16 states.

"The outcome is that the luggage turned out to be a so-called real test suitcase made by a company in the United States. This company is a manufacturer of alarm and detection systems and these real test suitcases are built to test security measures."

He said investigators were still examining who placed the suitcase with baggage to be loaded on to an Air Berlin plane at the international airport of the Namibian capital Windhoek, including whether German security forces could have been involved in the test.

Indonesia to probe maid torture case in S Arabia

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said yesterday that an inquiry will be launched into a female migrant's suspicious death in Saudi Arabia, a second case of alleged maid abuse in the country.

"We will launch an investigation this week... for the two cases. It's not only to seek justice but to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future," Yudhoyono told reporters at presidential palace in Jakarta capital.

Manpower Minister Muhaimin Iskandar said that Kikim Komalasari, who had worked in Abha city in Saudi Arabia since June 2009, had died from abuse. She was from Cianjur in west Java province.

Komalasari's case came after another Indonesian, Sumiati Binti Salan Mustapa, 23, was treated in hospital in Medina for wounds including scissor gashes to her lips and face.

The minister said Indonesia will review sending migrants workers to Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Sumiati was allegedly cut with scissors and burned with an iron by her employers, in the latest in a string of abuse cases against Indonesian workers in the Middle East and neighbouring Malaysia.

Amnesty International appealed to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states on Wednesday to do more to protect migrant domestic workers.

Crackers

FROM PAGE 1

investigation. Other police sources said they were conducting raids to arrest the accused.

DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed declined to make any comment on the filing of the case against the five BNP affiliated men, and also on the possible motive of the attack.

"We have taken the matter seriously, and investigating it. Let us complete the investigation," he said.

Perpetrators hurled the two Molotov cocktails into the residential compound around 8:30pm on Thursday and fled the scene, while the chief justice was in the house. The explosions created panic among the residents. None however was injured in the attack.

Police said the cocktails exploded about 20 yards off the western side of the building, and they suspect that those were hurled from a running car.

Soon after the explosions, Home Minister Sahara Khatun, State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam, Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker, DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed, a number of other senior government officials, and lawyers rushed to the chief justice's residence and visited the explosion site.

During the visit, Sahara Khatun told journalists that the government will exert full efforts to find and capture the perpetrators.

Anti-UN cholera riots spread to Haiti capital

AFP, Port-au-prince

Rioting has spread to the Haitian capital where hundreds of people clashed with UN troops they blamed for a worsening cholera epidemic.

Stone-throwing youths raced Thursday through the rubble-strewn streets of fetid camps built for earthquake survivors as UN peacekeepers in armored trucks fired tear gas on the crowds in running clashes that lasted several hours.

Sporadic gunfire echoed through the quake-ravaged streets of the capital as demonstrators blocked roads with burning tires and dumpsters overflowing with rotting garbage.

"The UN came here to kill us, to poison us," shouted Alexis Clerius, a 40-year-old farmer, as he erected a barricade in the main Champ de Mars square.

Organizers had urged people to vent their anger at the United Nations and Haitian authorities over the cholera outbreak, which has killed more than 1,100 people since it began in late October.

The powder keg situation stems from claims the cholera emanated from septic tanks at a base for Nepalese UN peacekeepers in central Haiti, leaking into the Artibonite River, where locals drink, wash clothes and bathe.

The UN says it tested some of the Nepalese and found no trace of cholera, while health officials say it is impossible to know and the focus must be on containing the epidemic and not divining its source.

President Rene Preval has pleaded for calm and denounced unnamed groups for taking advantage of the cholera to stir tension ahead of November 28 national elections to choose his successor.

But anger, fueled by rumor, was running high in Port-au-Prince and in northern Haiti, the epicenter of the cholera outbreak and where deadly riots first broke out earlier this week, leaving three people dead.

"It's all [the United Nation's] fault. We know the Nepalese were sloppy and that's why we're sick, and now they are being bullies," said Seraphine Macout, 36, a teacher whose daughter was a cholera patient at a medical center in northwest Haiti.

At least 27 missing after NZ Zealand mine explosion

AFP, Wellington

Desperate efforts to reach at least 27 coal miners missing after an explosion tore through an underground mine in New Zealand stalled yesterday as fears of another blast frustrated rescue attempts.

Police said the explosion at the coal mine on the South Island's west coast appeared to have crippled the mine's ventilation system but locals said they were drawing hope from the rescue of 33 miners in Chile last month.

Two miners survived the blast at the Pike River coal mine but there had been no contact with any others, the mining company's chief executive said.

Police said a specialist mine rescue team was at the scene but could not go underground because the blast knocked out power to the mine's ventilation pumps, meaning there was a danger they could ignite trapped gases.

"There's been an explosion, they don't know what's caused it, they can't just go charging in there and put other people at risk," police spokeswoman Barbara Dunn told Radio New Zealand. The ventilation system would also normally

supply air to any surviving miners, and police said they were concerned that it had been compromised by the power outage.

Reports said families of the miners were gathered at the site, at the heart of New Zealand's coal industry about 50 kilometres (30 miles) northeast of Greymouth, as rescuers prepared to work through the night.

Grey District mayor Tony Kokshoorn said the rescue was difficult and could take days.

Pike River Coal chief executive Peter Whittall said the miners were about 120 metres (400 feet) beneath the surface. They had started the afternoon shift about an hour before the blast.

He said there had been no confirmed fatalities. "I've not had any reports of that at all," he told TV3. "We've had two miners who've walked out of the mine... we've had no communication with anyone else underground at this stage."

Police said the two survivors, who received hospital treatment for moderate injuries, told rescuers three more miners were making their way to the surface, although there was no immediate confirmation they had emerged.



Indira Gandhi's birth anniversary observed

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Rich tributes were paid yesterday to former Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi on her 93rd birth anniversary across the country.

President Pratibha Patil and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh among prominent personalities offered floral tributes at her memorial Shakti Sthal on the banks of Yamuna here.

Besides Patil and Singh, Vice President Md Hamid Ansari, UPA Chairperson Indira's daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi and Parliament Speaker Meira Kumar were among those who visited the memorial.

Indira Gandhi, born on November 19, 1917 in the politically influential Nehru family, was the first woman Prime Minister of India. Her father Jawaharlal Nehru was a key figure in Indian independence movement and the first prime minister of independent India.

After Nehru's death in 1964, she became a Rajya Sabha member.

She became the prime minister in 1966 and had remained in that post till 1977. She again became the PM in 1980 and occupied that post till October 31, 1984.

One of the biggest achievements of her life was the successful campaign she had led worldwide for liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.



Tibetan Spiritual leader the Dalai Lama gestures to nuns from the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata - the late Mother Teresa's order - upon receiving the Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for Social Justice in New Delhi on Thursday. The Tibetan spiritual leader received the award in honour of his commitments to human values, fostering inter-religious dialogue, and the welfare of the Tibetan people.

Road crashes kill 44

FROM PAGE 1

and passengers Zafar Biswas, 60, and his wife Rabeya Khatun, 50, died on the spot, reports our Magura correspondent.

Zafar along with Rabeya was travelling to Parnaduali to attend the funeral of his brother-in-law.

Our Narsingdi correspondent reports: Three people were killed when a truck hit an auto-rickshaw at Purandia in Shibpur upazila of Narsingdi around 11:00am Wednesday.

The deceased were identified as auto-rickshaw driver Abul Kashem, 35, his brother Shafiqul Islam, 22, and nephew Bijoy, 4.

In another incident, Hossain Ali, 65, died on the spot when a motorcycle hit him at Shaheprotap on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway around 9:00am.

On Wednesday evening, three more died and 20 others injured when a bus heading for Dhaka hit a three-wheeler at Sri Phoolia of Shibpur.

Two of the deceased were identified as Mujibur Rahman, 23, and Akhtar Hossain, 28. The name of the three-wheeler driver could not be known.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports: At least three motorcyclists were killed and another one was wounded critically in Kaharol upazila of Dinajpur on Eid day.

The deceased were identified as Masum, 26, Asad, 25, and Jonny Arif, 24, was admitted to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

Police quoting witnesses said the two

speeding motorbikes collided at Shundarpur on Dinajpur-Thakurgaon Highway in the evening killing the three on the spot.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Three people were killed and 20 others were injured in two separate accidents in Rangpur on Tuesday and yesterday.

Two people were killed when a motorcycle collided head-on with a bus at CO Bazar on the outskirts of Rangpur town Tuesday afternoon. Rider Golzar Hossain and an unidentified person died on the spot, said Rangpur police.

Meanwhile, a head-on collision between two buses at Rathbari, on the outskirts of Rangpur town, left one bus driver dead.

Nazrul Islam succumbed to his injuries when he was being rushed to Rangpur Medical College Hospital around 8:00am yesterday. At least 20 passengers of the two buses were also injured.

Two people died when a car and a three-wheeler collided head-on at Tebunia of Pabna around 5:00pm yesterday.

Two passengers of the three-wheeler, Md Anwar Hossain, 35, and another unidentified, died on their way to Pabna General Hospital.

Ten more were injured in the accident. Our Patuakhali correspondent reports: Two people died and four others were seriously injured in separate road accidents during the Eid holidays.

A bus hit a three-wheeler on

Patuakhali-Galachipa Road around 4:00pm Wednesday killing Niamot Ali, 52. Three others were also injured in the accident.

Alo Nur Begum, 55, died when she was trying to cross the Patuakhali-Kuakata Highway and got hit by a truck Thursday. Another person who was trying to save Alo was injured.

In Bagerhat, two people were killed in separate accidents, reports a correspondent.

An elderly woman Borujan Bibi, 75, was killed after a motorbike ran her over on Morelganj-Signboard Road around Friday noon.

Meanwhile, a car crushed pedestrian Obaidul Sikdar, 21, at Hariagop of Chitalmari on Wednesday killing him.

In Narail, schoolgirl Nirufa Khatun, 15, died under the wheels of a bus from Lohagara near Nakosi Bazar around 2:00pm Thursday.

In Netrakona, Tarif Mia, a field official of a non-government organisation, was killed on Netrakona-Mymensingh Highway at Rajendrapur Thursday night when his motorbike was rear-ended by a bus.

A bus ran over a motorbike killing the unidentified rider on the spot at Jagir Police Camp area on Dhaka-Aricha Highway early yesterday. After the accident the bus and the bike caught fire.

In Narayanganj, a bus crushed pedestrian Yasin, 48, near Shashangaon in Fatullah yesterday.

WikiLeaks founder appeals Swedish arrest warrant

AFP, Stockholm

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange appealed yesterday against a Swedish court order for a warrant for his detention for questioning on allegations of rape, his lawyer said.

"I have just filed an appeal," his Swedish lawyer Bjoern Hurtig told AFP.

The Stockholm district court ordered Thursday an arrest warrant for Assange for questioning on "probable cause suspected of rape, sexual molestation and unlawful coercion" in Sweden in August.

The court order allowed prosecutor Marianne Ny, who had requested Assange's detention, to prepare an international arrest warrant for the 39-year-old Australian, who is believed to be in Britain.

Swedish police were expected to issue the warrant late yesterday.

Ny insisted Thursday that arresting Assange was the only way she could be sure of questioning him about the allegations, which he has denied.

Hurtig's appeal does not automatically suspend the Swedish order or delay the international warrant.

However, Swedish media reported the petition would likely be treated quickly by the appeals court, which could rule on the warrant's legitimacy in days.

Assange has been accused of raping one woman in Sweden and sexually molesting another.

He has strongly denied the charges and hinted that they could be part of a "smear campaign" against his whistleblower website for publishing classified US documents on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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