

Obama announces 2012 re-election bid

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama has announced his intention to stand for a second term in office in 2012.

Obama's team released a video on his official website and sent an e-mail to supporters announcing his plans.

The president has an online network of millions of Americans and his web campaign was widely seen as a key plank of his election success in 2008.

The announcement was widely expected, and his campaign team are set to file election papers this week.

In an e-mail to supporters, quoted in the US media, Obama said the campaign would start small and grow over time, "with people organising block-by-block, talking to neighbours, co-workers, and friends".

"So even though I'm focused on the job you elected me to do, and the race may not reach full speed for a year or more, the work of laying the foundation



for our campaign must start today."

Unveiling a new look for Obama's campaign website, his team told supporters: "The idea is to improve upon what's worked for the past four years, scrap what hasn't, and build a campaign that reflects the thoughts and experiences of the supporters who've powered this movement."

A number of Republican presidential hopefuls are expected to seek the nomination to run against Obama.

However as it stands, Tim Pawlenty, the former governor of Minnesota, is

the only leading candidate to have formally declared his candidacy.

Obama took office in January 2009 with near-record approval ratings, but has seen his support fall during his first two years in office.

In November 2010 Obama's Democratic Party lost control of the House of Representatives and shed several Senate seats in mid-term elections to Congress.

The president called the result a "shellacking" and vowed to listen to the concerns of US voters.

Despite shedding some support, polling by the Pew Research Center suggests Obama is in a stronger position at this stage than either former presidents Bill Clinton or George W Bush.

In polling carried out in March, some 47% of registered voters said they would like to re-elect Obama, with just 37% saying they would vote for an as-yet-unknown Republican candidate.



Tsunami survivors queue for food handouts at a cultural centre hall in Ofunato, Iwate prefecture yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Nato soldiers killed by Afghan 'policeman'

AFP, Mazar-i-sharif

Two American soldiers from the Nato alliance were yesterday shot dead by an Afghan border policeman in the north of the country, military officials said.

Nato confirmed the deaths, the latest attack on international soldiers, and said it was investigating the incident which occurred inside a police compound while US military advisers were holding talks with a local colonel.

Magnitude-6.7 earthquake strikes Indonesia

AFP, Cilacap

Hundreds of residents fled an Indonesian port town for higher ground yesterday when an earthquake struck south of Java with a magnitude estimated by US seismologists at 6.7.

The epicentre in the Indian Ocean was 24 kilometres (15 miles) miles deep, the US Geological Survey said, after initially estimating it at 10 kilometres underground, and 277 kilometres south of

Italy recognises Libyan opposition

AFP, Rome

Italy yesterday recognised Libya's opposition interim national council as its sole interlocutor and promised sweeping economic reconstruction measures for rebel-held eastern Libya.

"Italy has decided to recognise the council," Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said after talks with

Suicide bomber kills 7 at Pakistan bus terminal

AFP, Khar

A teenaged suicide bomber struck a bus terminal in northwest Pakistan yesterday, killing seven people in the sixth bomb attack in as many days to strike the nuclear-armed country, police said.

The bomb, apparently targeting an anti-Taliban militia leader, exploded in the small town of Jandol in the district of Lower Dir, 200 kilometres (125 miles) from the capital Islamabad. Pakistani troops fought a major offensive to expunge the Taliban from the area nearly two years ago.

Than Shwe retires as Myanmar military chief

AFP, Yangon

Than Shwe, the general who ruled Myanmar with an iron fist for 19 years, has retired as head of the military after handing power to a nominally civilian government, officials said yesterday.

The postman-turned-dictator last week disbanded the junta, the State Peace and Development Council, following November polls marred by the absence of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and complaints of cheating and intimidation.

"Senior General Than Shwe and Vice-Senior General Maung Aye retired on March 30 after handing over power to the new government. They are staying at their homes in Naypyidaw. We cannot say their plan for the future. So far they are taking a rest," a Myanmar official told AFP on condition of anonymity.



The army hierarchy retains a firm grip on power in the resource-rich Southeast Asian country, and many analysts believe 78-year-old Than Shwe will play a significant role behind the scenes.

"Although they are retired, they will give some advice when the government asks for it," a second official said.

The SPDC, previously known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council, took power in 1988, but Myanmar has been under military authority since 1962 and the generals continue to dominate the impoverished nation.

Former prime minister Thein Sein, a key Than Shwe ally, was sworn in as president at the parliament in Naypyidaw on Wednesday of last week, but there has been no official public announcement about Than Shwe's role.

LIBYA UNREST

Rebels resume Brega attack amid diplomatic efforts

BBC ONLINE

Libyan rebels are advancing towards the oil town of Brega, reports say, in renewed fighting in eastern Libya.

Rebels pushed towards Brega yesterday in an attempt to win back territory lost to forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

A BBC correspondent near Brega says they appear to be more buoyant and organised than recently.

A senior Libyan envoy is in Europe and is expected to hold talks in Turkey and Malta yesterday.

Libya's Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdul Ati al-Obeidi, has told the Greek prime minister that Col Gaddafi wants the fighting to end.

Obeidi arrived in Athens on Sunday and is reportedly keen to open a dialogue with the international community.

The BBC's Wyre Davies, who is on the road close to Brega, says the sounds of gunfire and weaponry can be heard from the front line a few kilometres away.

Rebel fighters are charging towards the front line, our correspondent says, clearly bolstered by the presence in their ranks of more and more soldiers who have defected from Gaddafi's army.

But the rebels remain poorly trained and

equipped, he adds, and even if they manage to take Brega there still seems no realistic prospect of an advance on Tripoli, the Libyan capital.

One rebel told the AFP news agency Nato planes had been heard over the area during the night, but no air strikes had been carried out.

As their forces advanced on Brega, a rebel spokesman said they would not accept any transition in Libya that saw power transfer to any of Gaddafi's sons.

He said the rebel Transitional National Council (TNC) was resolutely opposed to the possibility, reported by the New York Times, that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi and his brother Saadi Gaddafi could emerge as interim leaders if their father stepped aside. The report could not be verified by the BBC.

"This is completely rejected by the council," TNC spokesman Shamseddin Abdulmelah said in Benghazi, the rebels' eastern stronghold.

"Gaddafi and his sons have to leave before any diplomatic negotiations can take place."

The latest rebel advance came as Obeidi was due to arrive in Turkey on the latest leg of a diplomatic visit to Europe.

On Sunday he told the Greek prime minister that Col Gaddafi wants the fighting to end.

Glacier melt 'fastest for years'

BBC ONLINE

Melting mountain glaciers are making sea levels rise faster now than at any time in the last 35 years, according to new research.

Universities at Aberystwyth, Exeter and Stockholm looked at longer timescales than usual for their study.

They mapped changes in 270 of the largest glaciers between Chile and Argentina since the "Little Ice Age".

Studies showed glaciers have lost volume on average "10 to 100 times faster" in the last 30 years. The rapid melt rate is linked to their contribution to global sea level.

JAPAN NUKE CRISIS

Radioactive water dumped into sea

AFP, Ofunato

Japan yesterday started to dump more than 10,000 tons of low-level radioactive water into the Pacific as part of emergency operations to stabilise its crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

The last-resort measure came after the Bank of Japan said business confidence had plummeted since the earthquake and tsunami hit on March 11, plunging the country into its worst crisis since World War II.

The UN atomic watchdog chief Yukiya Amano, meanwhile, said that the three-week-old Fukushima emergency, which Japan has predicted may last for months, meant an end to a "business as usual" approach to nuclear power.

His comments appeared borne out when Japan signalled it may weaken its ambitious greenhouse gas cut targets, which are based on a continued heavy reliance on low-carbon atomic power, in light of the disaster.

Japan has battled to prevent full reactor meltdowns at the tsunami-hit plant and poured thousands of tons of water onto overheating fuel rods, a stop-gap measure that has created highly radioactive run-off.



PHOTO: AFP

A rebel fighter holds uniforms left by retreating loyalist soldiers on their way to battle against loyalist troops near the university of the key old port of Brega yesterday.

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UN climate chief warns of deadline

AFP, Bangkok

Commitments by most developed countries to cut carbon emissions are likely to expire at the end of next year without a new round of legally binding pledges, the UN's climate chief warned yesterday.

Christiana Figueres said governments needed to start preparing for a gap on the expiry of pledges under the Kyoto Protocol, which has formed the foundation of the world's efforts to cut the emissions that are blamed for global warming. "Governments have to face the fact that a gap in this effort looks increasingly impossible to avoid," Figueres told reporters in Bangkok during the UN's first round of climate talks for the year.

"In 2011 they need to figure out how to address this issue and how to take it forward in a collective and inclusive way. Resolving this will create a firmer foundation for an even greater collective ambition to cut emissions."

Signed in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol saw most developed nations agree to legally binding agreements in curbing their greenhouse gas emissions.

Those commitments are due to expire at the end of 2012. But Japan and Russia have firmly opposed extending the protocol because it excludes the world's two biggest polluters -- China and the United States -- and therefore only covers about 30 percent of global emissions.

China did not have to commit to cutting emissions because of its status as a developing country, while the United States refused to ratify the protocol.