

Obama for fighting off Pak resistance if needed



AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama ordered that the team sent to raid Osama bin Laden's compound be large enough to fight off Pakistani forces should they intervene, the New York Times reported.

Citing unnamed officials, the paper said Obama raised the prospect of a clash 10 days before the May 1 raid, resulting in an extra two fighter helicopters being sent to protect the commandos raiding the compound.

"Some people may have assumed we could talk our way out of a jam, but given our difficult relationship with Pakistan right now, the president did not want to leave anything to chance," it quoted a senior official as saying.

"He wanted extra forces if they were necessary."

The Times also reported that two teams of specialists were on standby for the mission: one to bury the al-Qaeda leader if he were killed, and another made up of lawyers, interrogators and translators in case he was captured.

It said the latter team was likely aboard the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson in the North Arabian Sea.

Bin Laden was buried at sea after he was shot dead in the raid, officials have said.

The latest revelations come at a time of heightened tensions between the two military allies, with Pakistan slamming the US operation and denying what it called "absurd" allegations that it was sheltering the world's most wanted man.

No plan to pull CIA spy from Pakistan

US drone kills four militants

AFP, Washington

The CIA has no plans to withdraw its top spy from Islamabad after his identity was allegedly divulged in a Pakistani newspaper, a US official said on Monday.

A US drone strike targeting a vehicle killed four militants in Pakistan's tribal belt yesterday, local officials said, the second such operation since the killing of Osama bin Laden.

A security official said US drones fired two missiles into South Waziristan, one of seven districts in Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt on the Afghan border that Washington has called an al-Qaeda headquarters.

"Two missiles were fired on a vehicle at about 4:15pm and four militants were killed," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The identity of the militants was not immediately known.

The publication of the name came amid severe tensions between the two countries, with Islamabad complaining of "unilateralism" after the US raid last week

that killed Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil.

"There are currently no plans to pull the CIA's chief of station out of Pakistan," a US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

Pakistani daily The Nation published the supposed name. The New York Times reported that it may have spelled it incorrectly, citing unnamed officials.

US officials told the Times that the move appeared aimed at disrupting the work of Washington's spy agency in the aftermath of the bin Laden raid.

In December, the CIA had to withdraw its top spy in Islamabad after a newspaper published the name of the officer.

The White House said Monday it would not "apologise" for launching the operation on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, north of Islamabad.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani criticised the US raid and also insisted the country reserves the right to "retaliate with full force".

Pakistan PM heads to China

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani is to visit China next week as Islamabad sinks deeper into a domestic and international crisis over the US killing of Osama bin Laden on its territory.

Gilani will begin the four-day visit on May 17 and hold talks with Chinese leaders on "important bilateral and region issues", a Pakistani government official told AFP.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu confirmed Gilani will meet President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.

"Leaders of the two countries will exchange views on bilateral relations and promote practical cooperation across the border as well as other issues of common interest," she said.

LADEN KILLING AFTERMATH

Gitmo plans won't change: US

AFP, Paris

The success of the operation to kill Osama bin Laden has not changed US President Barack Obama's plan to eventually close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, Attorney General Eric Holder said Monday.

Some opposition figures in the United States have argued that last week's commando strike was only possible thanks to clues gleaned by interrogating suspected al-Qaeda members at the US detention centre on Cuba.

But, speaking to reporters in Paris, Holder said: "It is still the intention of the president, it is still my intention."

Al-Qaeda in Iraq claims

Hilla attack

AFP, Baghdad

Al-Qaeda's offshoot in Iraq on Monday claimed a suicide car bombing that killed 24 policemen south of Baghdad last week and vowed revenge attacks.

The group's statements on a jihadist Internet forum came shortly after Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said al-Qaeda was "likely" to seek revenge for bin Laden's killing by striking Iraq.

The Hilla attack, where a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-packed car at a police station and killed 24 policemen and wounded 72 others, came just three days after al-Qaeda founder bin Laden was killed in a covert

Obama, Singh discuss bin Laden killing

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama spoke Monday with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India, whose neighbour and arch-rival Pakistan is smarting from a US commando raid that killed Osama bin Laden a week ago.

The pair spoke discussed the "successful American action" against the al-Qaeda leader and reviewed progress on initiatives launched when Obama visited India in November, the White House said.

"The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to building a global, strategic partnership, including defence cooperation," it added in a statement.



PHOTO: AFP

A tribesman in traditional garb carrying his rifle as he rides into town with comrades to declare allegiance to the rebels at the revolution square in the Libyan eastern city Benghazi.

Nato strikes rock Tripoli

Rebels make gain in Misrata; UN seeks ceasefire

AGENCIES

A Nato bombing blitz rocked Tripoli yesterday while rebels in besieged Misrata said they are pushing back Muammar Gaddafi's forces and the UN warned Libya is being paralysed by widespread shortages.

Jets screamed in low over the Libyan capital in the early hours of the morning, carrying out an unusually heavy bombardment over roughly three hours, an AFP correspondent said.

UN aid chief Valerie Amos has called for a pause in hostilities in Libya to help ease the humanitarian crisis.

Baroness Amos told the UN Security Council that Misrata, the only rebel-held city in western Libya, was in a dire state and short of food and water.

Three-quarters of a million people have fled Libya since an uprising began against Muammar Gaddafi's rule.

Nato has carried out raids on the capital Tripoli, the heaviest bombardment there for weeks.

Reports say four buildings were targeted, including Gaddafi's family complex, the military intelligence agency and state TV headquarters.

The government said the country's high commission for children had been hit, and four children were injured by flying glass. It is impossible to verify the reports.

Nato clarified that its bombing campaign was not specifically targeting Gaddafi.

"We do not target individuals," Nato's deputy spokeswoman Carmen Romero told AFP in Brussels.

In Misrata, rebels say they have pushed government troops back from its outskirts.

The city has been under siege from forces loyal to Gaddafi for two months.

Baroness Amos said the disruption caused by a combination of the conflict and sanctions was paralysing the country.

She called on the Security Council to ensure that all parties respected international law and she said the use of cluster bombs, sea and land mines, as well as aerial bombing showed a callous disregard for civilians.

NEWS IN brief

Japan's PM declines pay over nuclear crisis

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Naoto Kan said yesterday he would not accept his premier's wage until a crisis at the tsunami-hit Fukushima nuclear plant is over and pledged a full review of the country's energy policy.

Kan was speaking hours after about 100 villagers who fled their homes near the stricken plant made brief but emotional return journeys into the rural no-man's land in radiation suits and masks to pick up

Mubarak detention extended 15 days

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's state prosecutor yesterday renewed the detention of ousted president Hosni Mubarak for another 15 days amid a probe into the killing of protesters and corruption, his office said in a statement.

Abdel Maguid Mahmud "has ordered the preventative detention of former president Hosni Mubarak for 15 days that will begin when his current detention ends," on May 12, according to the statement.

Schwarzenegger, wife Shriver announce split

AFP, Los Angeles

Movie megastar turned politician Arnold Schwarzenegger and his wife Maria Shriver announced their separation Monday, after 25 years of a high-profile personal as well as political marriage.

The Republican former California governor and Shriver - a member of the Democrat-leading Kennedy dynasty - have been living apart for a number of weeks, while they "work on the future" of their relationship, they said.

Mexico detains 183 illegal migrants

AFP, Puebla

Mexican authorities have detained 183 illegal migrants from Central America, Egypt, China and India in the central state of Puebla, according to police.

The migrants were walking along a set of railroad tracks leading north to the United States and scattered in different directions when the police moved in, a local police commander told AFP late Monday on condition of anonymity.

Iran agrees to resume nuclear talks

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday said it has formally agreed to resume talks on its controversial nuclear programme with six major powers which have been stalled since January.

Iran's official confirmation came in a letter delivered to the EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton who spearheads the talks on behalf of the so-called P5+1 powers.

"We welcome your return to the negotiations based on cooperation on the common points," Iran's top negotiator Saeed Jalili was quoted as saying in the letter, according to a report by Iran's Arabic-language Al-Alam television.

He added that "respecting the nation's rights and refraining from pressure are the two main pillars of cooperation."

Japan 'to review energy policy'

BBC ONLINE

Japan is to reconsider plans to increase its reliance on nuclear power in the wake of the crisis at the Fukushima plant.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan yesterday said Japan had to start from scratch with its energy plans following the disaster.

The plant has been leaking radiation since the 11 March earthquake and subsequent tsunami damaged cooling systems to the reactors.

Operator Tepco has asked for government help to compensate those affected.

More than 80,000 local residents living within a 20km (12 mile) radius of the plant have been evacuated from their homes. Agriculture and businesses have been hit and there is no timescale yet for allowing residents to return, although a small group were allowed inside the no-go zone briefly yesterday to gather belongings.

Total compensation claims are not yet known, but analysts say they may be more than \$100bn (£61bn).

Nuclear plants currently supply about 30% of Japan's electricity.

Addressing a news conference, Mr Kan said that while nuclear power would continue to play a significant role, other forms of energy would also be key.

"The current basic energy policy envisages that over 50% of total electricity supply will come from nuclear power while more than 20% will come from renewable power in 2030," he said.

More than 80 killed in south Sudan violence

REUTERS, Juba

More than 80 people have been killed in clashes between rebels, civilians and police in southern Sudan in the latest violence in the oil-producing region that will become independent in July, the army said yesterday.

Southerners overwhelmingly voted to secede in a January referendum, promised in a 2005 peace deal that ended decades of civil war with the north fought over religion, ethnicity, ideology and oil.

Analysts warn that the underdeveloped south, roughly the size of France, could become a failed state and destabilize the whole region if security deteriorates further.

A rebel militia raided a cattle camp in Warrap state, leading to the death of 82 people including 34 civilians on Sunday, southern army (SPLA) spokesman Philip Aguer told Reuters.

"We (SPLA) forced this militia out of Unity state on the 6th and 7th (of May). They crossed into Warrap state and attacked a cattle camp and killed 34 civilians and wounded 45. Later, civilians and police chased the militia into an ambush and killed 48 of them," Aguer said.

The casualty figures could not be independently confirmed but a spokesman for a rebel militia said fighting had been going on in the region. He said he could give no casualty figure because a different rebel group had been involved.

Clashes between the army and rebels or tribes have broken out in all but one of the south's ten states this year, killing more than 1,000 people, according to the United Nations and official figures.

Tropical storm kills 15 in Philippines

AFP, Manila

Fifteen people were killed and nearly 70,000 people were forced from their homes as tropical storm Aere pummelled the Philippines, the government said yesterday.

The death toll from Aere, which hit on Sunday, was raised from nine, with six more people reported killed in floods, landslides and road accidents, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre said.

However, after two days of heavy rains across the main island of Luzon, the storm had weakened and was exiting the northern Philippines yesterday morning, according to the national weather bureau.

The disaster agency said that nearly 70,000 people had been evacuated.

Samoa to climb up time ladder

AFP, Wellington

Samoa has announced it will switch timezones so it falls to the west of the international dateline, bringing the Pacific country's clocks closer to major trading partners in Australasia.

Samoa currently sits to the east of the dateline -- which runs through the middle of the Pacific -- meaning that it is 11 hours behind GMT and is one of the last places on Earth to see out the day.

Under the change, to be introduced on December 29 this year, it will be among the

first of the world's countries to greet the dawn, with timezones closely aligned to Australia and New Zealand.

Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi said the reform would make it easier to do business with Samoa's biggest trading partners, both of which are also home to large expatriate Samoan communities.

At the moment, the time difference puts Samoa 21 hours behind eastern Australia and 23 behind New Zealand. After December 29, it would be one hour ahead of Wellington and three ahead of Sydney.

Royal honeymoon begins for duke and duchess

BBC ONLINE

Prince William and his new wife Catherine have gone on honeymoon, Clarence House has said yesterday.

It did not reveal the couple's destination, saying it was private.

The Duke of Cambridge returned to his job as an RAF rescue helicopter pilot following a long weekend break after the 29 April wedding, and has now taken a fortnight's leave.

Speculation about possible honeymoon destinations has included Africa, Jordan, the Caribbean and Australia.

An exclusive Indian Ocean island has also been touted as a possible location.



Although the prince has taken two weeks' leave, Clarence House did not say how long would be spent on his honeymoon.

"We are not confirming, and we are not commenting, on speculation on where they may be going on their private honeymoon, we are just confirming that they have gone," a spokesman said.

"The couple have asked that their privacy be respected during their honeymoon."

The couple spent their first weekend of married life at an undisclosed UK location, before William returned to work at Anglesey.



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