

Kerry sworn in amid turmoil

AFP, Washington

John Kerry was sworn in Friday as America's secretary of state, less than two hours after Hillary Clinton swept out of office on a day marred by yet another attack on a US diplomatic post.

Supreme Court judge Elena Kagan administered the oath of office to Kerry during a private ceremony on Capitol Hill. He was joined by his wife Teresa, daughter Vanessa, brother Cameron and his Senate staff.

But a pall was cast over the historic events by an attack on the US embassy in Ankara that killed a local Turkish security guard.

It came less than five months after the September attack on the US outpost in Benghazi, Libya, in which ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans died, and two weeks after the militant hostage crisis in Algeria.

US officials said they were probing the Ankara attack, when a bomber wearing a suicide vest blew himself up at the first checkpoint on the perimeter of the embassy compound.

Three people were hurt, including one seriously. The bombing once again exposes the vulnerability of the army of 70,000 US diplomats -- many of whom operate in the world's hotspots.

Kerry told The Boston Globe he would begin working on diplomatic protection when he starts at 9:00am Monday.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shakes hands with Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Tomas Nides after delivering her farewell address to the staff in the State Department in Washington, DC on Friday. Inset, John Kerry, left, is being sworn in in the Foreign Relations Committee Room in the Capitol.
PHOTO: AFP

'World is safer now'

BBC ONLINE

Hillary Clinton said the world is a safer place, in her farewell address to state department staff on her last day as America's top diplomat.

Hillary, 65, leaves the post after four years, visits to 112 countries and nearly a million air miles. She has been replaced by John Kerry, a Massachusetts senator, who was sworn in at a private ceremony on Friday.

She steps down with record popularity ratings of around 65 percent, and amid intense speculation that she could launch a second bid to be the nation's first woman president in the 2016 elections.

Hillary said leading the agency as the 67th US Secretary of State had been a "unique and singular, exciting and challenging" experience.

She acknowledged the attack on the US embassy in Turkey - a sobering reminder of the everyday global threats that will face her successor.

But she said she was "more optimistic" now than when she took up her post in 2009.

"I am so grateful that we've had a chance to contribute in each of our ways to making our country and our world stronger, safer, fairer and better," she told staff.

Earlier in the day, Hillary officially tendered her resignation to President Barack Obama, her former bitter rival in the 2008 race for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In her letter, she said she was more convinced than ever of America's strength as a global leader and its potential to be a force for good.

She has been coy about a possible White House run in four years' time. She has said she has no specific plans for the future, but that she "absolutely" still plans to make a difference on issues she cares about.

"I am going to be secretary of state until the very last minute when I walk out the door," she told the Associated Press on Thursday.

Attack on Pak army checkpoint kills 35

REUTERS, Dera Ismail Khan

Militants yesterday attacked an isolated army checkpoint in Pakistan's restive northwest, with at least 35 people killed in the initial assault, subsequent crossfire and a rocket attack on a house, officials said.

The Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility, saying the attack was in response to a US drone strike in neighbouring North Waziristan last month in which two commanders were killed.

The Pakistani military and pro-government militias have since 2009 regained territory from the Pakistan Taliban, who once controlled land a few hours' drive from the capital of Islamabad.

The militants attacked the post at Lakki Marwat early yesterday. A security official said 12 militants and 13 soldiers were killed in the clash. Two bodies had suicide bomb belts on them.

The militants also targeted a house next to the camp with rockets, killing 10 members of one family, including three children, the official said.

"Pakistan has been co-operating with the US in its drone strikes that killed our two senior commanders, Faisal Khan and Toofani, and the attack on military camp was the revenge of their killing," the Taliban spokesman said.

Uneasy calm in Egypt after palace clashes

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian riot police were deployed near the presidential palace yesterday after a night of clashes between security forces and petrol-bomb throwing protesters that killed one man and injured nearly 100.

There was no sign of any protesters yesterday, and streets in the area around the presidential palace reopened to traffic, though they were littered with debris.

In Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square, the situation was also calm after clashes on Friday.

The 23-year-old died of a gunshot wound as police used birdshot and tear gas on demonstrators who targeted the palace in rallies against Islamist President Mohamed Morsi late on Friday, a senior medical official said.

Ninety-one people were also injured, said the official, while the interior ministry reported 15 of its men wounded by birdshot.

Police said they made 20 arrests, and were filmed on television beating and

dragging a naked man to an armoured vehicle, outraging Morsi's critics who compared the incident to practices under deposed leader Hosni Mubarak.

The opposition National Salvation Front is to meet later yesterday to review its strategy after the clashes that erupted following its call for people to take to the streets.

The presidency said security forces would deal with violent protests with "utmost decisiveness" and that it would hold opposition groups found to have incited the clashes "politically accountable."

The opposition, which accuses Morsi of betraying the revolution that toppled Mubarak two years ago, distanced itself from the violence and urged demonstrators to exercise "utmost restraint."

The clashes were less intense than in the past week. Nearly 60 people have died in the clashes, mostly in Port Said, where violence erupted over a court verdict related to football match violence last year.

'Zero Dark Thirty' a 'good movie'

AFP, Washington

The man who oversaw the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, ex-CIA director Leon Panetta, vouched Friday for "Zero Dark Thirty," calling it a "good movie" even though the tale of the biggest manhunt in history had to be simplified for the big screen.



Leon Panetta

"It's a movie," Panetta said, laughing. "And it's a good movie. But I lived the real story," he told AFP in an interview.

Panetta, who is due to step down as US defense secretary this month, said the film should not be seen as a historical account of a secret operation that he was intimately involved with as the head of the CIA from 2009 to 2011.

Panetta indicated that the Oscar-nominated film did convey some sense of the years of legwork it took the CIA to track down the al-Qaeda mastermind to a hideout in Pakistan.

"I think people ought to make their own judgments. There are parts of it that give you a good sense of how the intelligence operations do work. But I also think people in the end have to under-

stand that it isn't a documentary, it's a movie."

The film, starring Jessica Chastain as a relentless CIA officer, suggests that torture and abuse of some suspects helped generate information that led to the May 2011 raid that ultimately took out bin Laden.

The portrayal has sparked criticism from some senators, rights advocates and even the acting head of the CIA, Michael Morrell. But Panetta said harsh interrogation methods, including water boarding or simulated drowning, did play a role in locating bin Laden, though not a decisive one.

The CIA and the Pentagon heavily cooperated with the filmmakers, who were given access to officials and even a Navy SEAL commando familiar with the raid.

Separately, asked if the CIA "targeted killings" should be curtailed in coming years, Panetta told AFP in an interview Friday that there was still a need to continue the drone strikes more than a decade since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

DELHI GANG-RAPE All 5 accused plead not guilty

AFP, New Delhi

Five men accused of the gang-rape and murder of an Indian student pleaded not guilty yesterday in a case that has sparked huge protests and led ministers to back tougher penalties, including death, for rapists.

The trial of the five men on charges that include murder, rape and kidnapping is being held in a fast-track court in Delhi set up to deliver speedy justice following public anger over the case.

A sixth suspect faces trial in a juvenile court.

The appearance in court of the men -- aged between 19 and 35 -- came a day after India's cabinet backed harsher punishments for rapists, including the death penalty.

Hollande in Mali to push handover

AFP, Timbuktu

President Francois Hollande yesterday received a rapturous welcome as he visited Mali to push for African troops to take over a French-led offensive that drove back Islamist rebels from the country's desert north.



The French leader's whirlwind tour came as troops worked to secure Kidal, the last bastion of radicals who seized control last year after a coup, raising fears that an area larger than France could become a safe haven for al-Qaeda-linked fighters.

Welcoming Hollande, thousands of people gathered in the central square of the fabled city of Timbuktu, dancing to the beat of drums -- a forbidden activity during the extremists' 10-month occupation.

Hollande told the crowd France's mission was not finished yet but that African countries would soon have to take over.

"We have no intention to stay. Our African friends will be able to do the job we've been doing until now," he told the crowd.

Hollande, whose surprise decision to intervene in Mali three weeks ago made him a hero in the former French colony, was greeted with cheers of "Long live France! Long live Hollande!"

With the rebels ousted from all major towns but Kidal, France is keen to hand over to nearly 8,000 African troops slowly being deployed and which the United Nations is considering turning into a formal UN peacekeeping force.

It's same old story

FROM PAGE 20

collect those from there. The school authorities, having no funds for this, are forced to ask the children to do the job. Most of the schools are up to four km away from the spots where the cartons are dropped.

Earlier on May 12, 2010, The Daily Star published a photo showing the same scene -- how children were made to carry the boxes of biscuits on their heads in Nilganj of Kalapara upazila. But no step has been taken as yet to stop this practice.

Recently, some students of Chandupara Government Primary School were found carrying cartons of biscuits on their heads at Muktiyoddha Bazar in Lalua union under the upazila. Jahangir Alam, a teacher at the school, lifted and put the cartons on the heads of the students. The spot was about

three km from the school.

In Anantapara bridge area, some students of Boulitali Primary School were carrying similar cartons to their school two km away. Abul Kalam, a guardian, expressed displeasure, and accused the teachers of inhuman behaviour with children.

"Carrying such a load for long distances makes the children sick," Abul Kalam said. "Many children skip schools when they learn that they would have to do such a tedious job."

Salauddin, headmaster of Chandupara Government Primary School, said they are facing shortage of day labourers in the area. "We cannot even hire rickshaws or vans because the bridges are broken, but this present practice must come to an end," he said.

team leader of Muslim Aid in Kalapara upazila, said they try to reach as close to the target schools as possible. Sometimes they have to drop the cartons of biscuits a little away because there are no roads or vehicles for going to the schools concerned.

Hafiza Khanom, Barisal Divisional Chief of WFP, told The Daily Star that involvement of child labour in doing the job is totally unacceptable to the WFP. Moreover, it is a breach of agreement between WFP and Muslim Aid that clearly provides that the biscuits must be delivered at the doorstep of each school.

Syed F Arefeen, head of WFP southern operations, said it is a matter of great concern to the WFP. "The WFP school feeding programme is covering 1.1 million children throughout the country,

and in no way we shall entertain such a practice," said Arefeen at the WFP Dhaka office. "We shall immediately investigate the matter and ensure that this practice of child labour does not recur," Arefeen added.

Contacted, Md Ruhul Amin, upazila education officer, said the school authorities should not engage students to carry such loads. "We will take proper action against teachers who initiated such a practice," he added.

Md Ataur Rahman, district primary education officer, said there are 653 primary schools under Galachipa, Kalapara, Rangabali and Dashmina upazilas, where the SFP started in early 2008, just after the cyclone Sidr. "We will conduct an investigation and inform the WFP," he added.

NEWS IN brief

US Secret Service chief to retire

AFP, Washington

The head of the Secret Service -- the police agency that protects US President Barack Obama -- is retiring, a spokesman said Friday, less than a year after the elite squad was hit by a sex scandal.

Mark Sullivan is "retiring as of the 22nd of February," Secret Service spokesman Brian Leary told AFP, noting he had overseen 23 national security events, including Obama's inaugura-

60 suspended in Harvard scam

AFP, New York

Around 60 students at Harvard University have been suspended and others disciplined in a mass cheating scandal at the elite college, the administration said Friday.

Harvard, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is one of the most exclusive universities in the world, with students paying about \$63,000 a year to attend after winning a place in a highly competitive admissions process.

Aussie PM reshuffles cabinet

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard yesterday denied that her government was in chaos, after the resignation of two of her most senior ministers prompted a cabinet reshuffle ahead of a national election.

The announcement that the two ministers had quit came only three days after the Labor leader said elections would be held in September, an unusual step in Australia where polls are usually

Yemen troops kill 12 'Qaeda men'

AFP, Aden

Yemen's armed forces killed 12 suspected al-Qaeda militants in an assault on their mountain hideout in the country's restive south, an official in the region said yesterday.

The military used artillery and aircraft to target the hideout near Shaqra, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from the Abyan capital of Zinjibar, in the operation late on Friday, the official said on condition of

Russia revives Stalingrad

AFP, Volgograd

The city of Volgograd was renamed yesterday as Stalingrad for a day as Russia marked the 70th anniversary of a brutal battle in which the Red Army defeated Nazi forces and changed the course of World War II.

The half-year battle in 1943 in the city on the Volga River claimed the lives of two million people on both sides and eventually led to the German troops' surrender.

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