

Don't think N Korea has nuke missiles

Says Obama

CNN ONLINE

President Barack Obama has said he doesn't believe North Korea can fit a nuclear warhead on a missile, casting strong doubt on an alarming assessment disclosed last week by the Pentagon's intelligence arm.

And he warned the young North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that weeks of threats against the United States and South Korea had only served to isolate the regime further.

Asked in an NBC News interview whether North Korea could put a nuclear weapon on a ballistic missile, Obama said, "Based on our current intelligence assessments, we do not think that they have that capacity."

According to a snippet of a document read out by a congressman at a House Armed Services Committee hearing last week, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency believes "with moderate confidence" that the North has developed nuclear weapons it could deliver on a ballistic missile, although with low reliability.

U.S. defense and intelligence officials sought to qualify the DIA's words soon after they were made public, saying North Korea hadn't "fully" demonstrated the capabilities mentioned. But Obama's comments in the NBC interview, which was recorded Monday and broadcast Tuesday, appear to be the strongest dismissal of the assessment yet.

Pyeongyang intensified its threatening language last month when the UN Security voted to approve tougher sanctions on the North Korean regime following its latest underground nuclear test. Joint military exercises under way in South Korea by US and South Korean troops, which take place each year, have also fed the North's angry rhetoric.

As well as its torrent of fiery words, which have included the threat of a nuclear attack on the United States and South Korea, the North has made a number of moves that have added to tensions on the Korean Peninsula.



US practiced torture after 9/11: Panel

DPA, Washington

A nonpartisan panel has concluded that it was "in-disputable" that terrorist suspects were tortured by the United States in the years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, with the knowledge of the U.S. president, according to the study released on Tuesday.

The report looked at US practices in Iraq, Afghanistan and at the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.

The report said the US rendition programme, in which suspects were captured in one country and transferred to another for questioning under the radar of international legal norms, was unjustified and counterproductive and damaged the country's reputation.

The report aimed to end the debate over whether these practices constitute torture. During the George W Bush administration, a top government lawyer defined torture as physical pain equivalent to the pain of "organ failure" or "even death." Anything short of that was not considered torture during the Bush administration.



A Boston police officer stands guard at a memorial site on Tuesday, a few blocks from where two explosions struck near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on Monday. Inset, people hug and cry during a vigil for victims of the blasts.

PHOTO: AFP

Boston blast suspect held

AFP, Boston

US investigators yesterday arrested a suspect in connection with the Boston marathon bombings that killed three people and wounded 180 others, CNN television reported.

The suspect was identified from surveillance video taken by a department store camera and another camera near the marathon finish line where two bombs sprayed metal fragments into crowds on Monday, CNN and other media reported.

At least one of the video cameras captured the suspect appearing to place one of the pressure cooker bombs, the reports said.

The two blasts went off in a 13-second period about 100 meters apart as stragglers among the 23,000

runners entered in the prestige event were completing the race.

The breakthrough came ahead of a visit to Boston today by President Barack Obama to honor the dead and injured.

With no claim of responsibility made for the attack, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said it has launched a "worldwide" hunt for those responsible.

It released photographs of the mangled metal remnants of a pressure cooker believed to have been used for one of the bombs which sprayed nails, ball bearings and metal pellets into the huge crowds.

The lid of one pressure cooker was found on the roof of a hotel near the bombs, the hotel's owner told AFP.

Shreds of black nylon bags

believed to have been used to carry the bombs have also been found.

Doctors at hospitals where the critically injured were taken say ball bearings and nails taken from patients were being used in the investigation.

Similar, easy-to-make devices are used as roadside bombs in Afghanistan and Iraq, but have also been used by domestic extremists in the United States.

US authorities have thrown virtually every investigation agency into the hunt with more than 1,000 officers working in Boston alone, said Rick DesLauriers, head of the FBI's Boston office.

Obama has condemned the attack as "an act of terror" and vowed that the attackers "will feel the full weight of justice."

'Iron Lady' laid to rest

AP, London

Margaret Thatcher, Britain's Iron Lady, was laid to rest yesterday with a level of pomp and protest reflecting her status as a commanding, polarizing political figure.

Bishop of London Richard Chartres referred to the strong feelings the former prime minister still evokes 23 years after leaving office in his address to the 2,300 mourners at St. Paul's Cathedral.

"The storm of conflicting opinions centers on the Mrs. Thatcher who became a symbolic figure, even an -ism," he said. "Today the remains of the real Margaret Hilda Thatcher are here at her funeral service."

"There is an important place for debating policies and legacy ... but here and today is neither the time nor the place."

More than 700 soldiers, sailors and air force personnel lined the route to the cathedral and around 4,000 police officers were on duty.

Spectators lining the route broke into applause, and scattered boos, as the carriage passed by, escorted by young soldiers, sailors and airmen.

Inside the cathedral, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip were among the invited mourners, who included political colleagues and rivals, dignitaries from around the world, 11 prime ministers and former US Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Schultz.

The woman nicknamed the Iron Lady transformed Britain during her 11-year tenure from 1979 to 1990, privatizing state industries, deregulating the economy, and causing upheaval whose impact is still felt. She died on April 8 at age 87.

Thatcher was given a ceremonial funeral with military honors, not officially a state funeral, which requires a vote in Parliament, but proceedings that featured the same level of pomp and honor afforded Princess Diana in 1997 and the Queen Mother Elizabeth in 2002.



FUNERAL OF MARGARET THATCHER



1. The Union flag-draped coffin bearing the body of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher is carried on a gun carriage drawn by the King's Troop Royal Artillery ahead of her funeral service. 2. The carriage reaches St Paul's Cathedral. 3. The coffin of Thatcher is being carried out of the Cathedral at the end of her ceremonial funeral. 4. Queen Elizabeth II speaks with the bereaved Thatcher family.

PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar Muslims must be made to feel secure

Says Suu Kyi in Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

Myanmar's charismatic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday said that the estrangement of minority Muslims in her country was "a very sad state of affairs" and the community must be made to feel secure.

Sectarian violence in Buddhist-majority Myanmar killed 43 people last month. Thousands, mostly Muslims, were driven from their homes and businesses as bloodshed spread across the central region of one of Asia's most diverse countries.

Suu Kyi, a devout Buddhist, has been mostly reserved in her comments on the violence and the failure of the Nobel Peace Prize-winner to defuse the tension appears to have undermined her image as a unifying moral force.

But in a news conference on a visit to Japan, she said: "I've met some Muslim leaders very recently. It is very sad, because none of them has been to any other country apart from Burma (Myanmar). They did not feel that they belonged anywhere and it was sad for them that they were made to feel that they didn't belong in our country either."

"This is a very sad state of affairs. We must learn to accommodate those with different views from ours."

She also said the government should review Myanmar's citizenship laws, although she again failed to directly answer a question on whether she considered the Rohingyas to be citizens.

"Every country has the responsibility to consider the possibility that the (citizenship) laws are not in keeping with international standards. And this is what the Burmese government should have the courage to do. To face the issue of citizenship fairly," Suu Kyi told reporters.

Earlier, addressing students at Tokyo University, Suu Kyi said she was "not a magician" and will not be able to solve long-running ethnic disputes.

"I've said that the most important thing is to establish the rule of law... (it) is not just about the judiciary, it's about the administration, it's about the government, it's about our police force, it's about the training that we give to security forces," said Suu Kyi.



Rockets hit southern Israeli resort of Eilat

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Two rockets fired from Egypt's Sinai peninsula struck Israel's Red Sea resort of Eilat yesterday, causing no casualties or damage, the Israeli military said, in an attack claimed by Islamist militants.

The incident was likely to fuel Israeli concerns about lawlessness in neighbouring Sinai, where militant groups have stepped up their activities since Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's downfall in 2011.

An Israeli military spokeswoman said two rockets were launched from Sinai and that both hit open areas.

In a statement posted on its website, the Islamist militant group Magles Shoura al-Mujahddin said it had targeted Eilat with two Grad missiles and then withdrew safely.

Egyptian security sources said the rockets had probably been fired from Sinai.

The group shares the same ideology as al-Qaeda and its recruits include Egyptians and Palestinians.

US senators unveil immigration reform

Plan to scrap DV, aim at skilled labour

AFP, Washington

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers laid out an immigration reform proposal Tuesday that would provide a path to citizenship for millions of people who are in America illegally.

The most ambitious immigration reform in a quarter century has been a key focus of President Barack Obama's second term, while Republicans smarting from last year's election defeat have sought to broaden their outreach to minorities, particularly the large Hispanic community.

The new bipartisan proposal would help bring out of the shadows around 11.5 million people -- a majority of whom are Mexican -- who live and work in the United States without legal documentation.

They would get a legal temporary status and could work, travel and drive without fear of deportation.

After 10 years, the immigrants could file

for a green card, or permanent residency. Three years after that, they could request citizenship. Those who crossed the border as children could get residency after just five years.

The lawmakers also aim to create a new three-year "W" visa, for unskilled workers in sectors like construction that are experiencing shortages.

But the famed annual diversity lottery, which offers 55,000 green cards a year, would go away, falling victim to Republican opposition which prefers to give priority to highly-skilled immigrants.

The number of "H-1B" visas, for instance, would rise from 65,000 to 110,000 a year, and could go as high as 180,000 if the demand continues to grow.

There would be no limits to the number of green cards issued to high-level researchers or professors or to those with extraordinary ability in science, art, education, business or athletics.

Pink diamond sells for \$40m

AFP, New York

A 34.64-carat pink diamond has sold at auction in New York for nearly \$40 million, setting a new record for Christie's auction house.

Dubbed the "Princie Diamond," the gem is "one of the largest and finest pink diamonds in the world," with a "fabulous provenance," Christie's jewelry chief Francois Curriel said ahead of the sale.

An anonymous telephone bidder paid \$39,323,750, or more than \$1 million per carat, for the stone from ancient diamond mines in southern India, the auction house said in a statement Tuesday.

The pink gem was once owned by the royal family of Hyderabad.

Venezuela opposition calls off rally after deadly protests

REUTERS, Caracas

Venezuelan opposition leader Henrique Capriles distanced himself from post-election street violence after seven fatalities threatened to turn the South American OPEC nation's vote dispute into a full-blown crisis.

Capriles had planned to lead a march on the National Electoral Council (CNE) on Wednesday to demand a recount after official results gave a narrow win to Nicolas Maduro, the chosen successor of late socialist leader Hugo Chavez.

But the opposition leader cancelled the rally on Tuesday, saying the government had plotted to "infiltrate" it, start trouble and blame it on him.

"To all my followers ... this is a peaceful quarrel. Whoever is involved in violence is not part of this project, is not with me," Capriles told reporters. "It is doing me harm."

The government earlier said seven people were killed on Monday and accused Capriles' supporters of attacking ruling Socialist Party offices and people celebrating Maduro's victory.



Maduro earlier accused the opposition of trying to trigger a coup d'etat and said he would not allow the planned march to go ahead. His government is threatening legal action against Capriles.

About 135 people were arrested and more than 60 hurt during Monday's violent clashes, including one woman whom a mob tried to burn alive, officials said.

In one well-off Caracas neighbourhood, police fired teargas and rubber bullets to disperse masked youths who chanted "fraud" as they blocked streets, burnt tires and threw stones.