

Mandela a 'hero for the world'

Says Obama

AFP, Dakar

US President Barack Obama yesterday said that Nelson Mandela was a "hero for the world" whose legacy will live on throughout the ages, as the anti-apartheid hero lay critically ill in hospital.

"He is a personal hero. I think he is a hero for the world, and if and when he passes from this place, one thing I think we all know is that his legacy is one that will linger on throughout the ages," Obama said in Senegal.

Mandela was on life support in a Pretoria hospital yesterday and his condition was casting doubt over Obama's visit to South Africa, due to begin today.

But Obama, who said Mandela had inspired him to become involved in politics, said he still planned to travel to South Africa, and said the prayers of the American people were with the South African ex-president's family.

Obama, using Mandela's clan name "Madiba", said Mandela had given him a "sense of what is possible in the world, when righteous people of goodwill work together".

UN leader Ban Ki-moon said the whole world was praying for "one of the giants of the 20th century".

Ban called Mandela "one of the giants of the 20th century" at a New York reception for the 50th anniversary of the Organization of African Unity which played a leading international role in fighting apartheid in South Africa.

"I know our thoughts and prayers are with Nelson Mandela, his family and loved ones, all South Africans and people across the world who have been inspired by his remarkable life and example," Ban said.

In only her fifth ever tweet, Hillary Clinton offered "love and prayers to our great friend, Madiba, his family and his nation during this difficult time."

Mandela -- whose 95th birthday is on July 18 -- has been hospitalised four times since December, mostly for a stubborn lung infection dating back to his time in jail for sabotage against the apartheid government.

The man once branded a terrorist by the United States and Britain walked free from prison near Cape Town in 1990.

He went on to negotiate an end to white minority rule and won South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994.

He forged a path of racial reconciliation during his single term as president, before taking up a new role as a roving elder statesman and leading AIDS campaigner.

He stepped back from public life in 2004 and has not been seen in public since the football World Cup finals in South Africa in 2010.



Children pray for Mandela in front of the Medi Clinic Heart hospital in Pretoria yesterday. South African President Jacob Zuma yesterday said that the condition of ailing anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela had improved overnight and was now critical but stable.

PHOTO: AFP

Mandela is "one of the giants of the 20th century," says UN chief.

Obama in Senegal, South Africa visit in doubt

AFP, Dakar

US President Barack Obama yesterday met with Senegal President Macky Sall, but the rest of his Africa tour was shrouded in doubt with Nelson Mandela apparently slipping ever closer to death.

Obama was due to travel on to South Africa today, but his plans could change should the country be plunged into mourning before he arrives on the second leg of a tour of a continent where he has deep ancestral roots.

White House officials have declined to comment on contingency plans for the trip, which is also scheduled to include a visit to Tanzania, but behind the scenes they were working to respond to various possible scenarios.

Obama and his wife Michelle arrived at Senegal's presidential palace, where the

presidents will hold a press conference, before the US leader heads to the Supreme Court in Dakar to discuss the rule of law.

Washington is keen to highlight Muslim-majority Senegal as an example of democracy and good governance in a corner of Africa plagued by instability and the threat of Islamic extremism in neighbouring Mali.

Then, in a moment of high symbolism, Obama, America's first black president, will take a ferry to Goree Island off the Senegal coast, a memorial to the hundreds of thousands of Africans claimed by the slave trade.

In a "full circle" moment of history, Obama, the son of a Kenyan father, and his wife Michelle, the descendent of slaves, will acknowledge a dark period of American and African history which still resonates today.



Mandela helped to end 'silence' on AIDS: UN

AFP, Geneva

The head of the UN's AIDS prevention agency hailed Nelson Mandela yesterday, who was fighting for his life in hospital, for his role in breaking the silence and shame surrounding the deadly disease.

"He was the one who really helped us break the conspiracy of silence," Michel Sidibe, the executive director of UNAIDS, told AFP in a telephone interview.

"His legacy is that of non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and making sure that we will continue to fight for the rights of people without rights... That is what he brought to the fight against HIV/AIDS," he added.

In a country where some 5.5 million people, or more than 10 percent of the population, are living with the HIV virus that causes AIDS, Mandela contributed to "giving a voice to the voiceless" suffering from the disease, which claimed his own son in 2005, Sidibe said.

Mandela among other things led the push for HIV sufferers to be given anti-retroviral drugs in South Africa, and launched a campaign for all governments to declare a global AIDS emergency, insisting that fighting the deadly illness was an issue of human rights.

Whites hope for enduring legacy of 'Tata'

AFP, Johannesburg

As South Africa prepares for life without the father of the Rainbow Nation, some members of the once-ruling white minority fear Nelson Mandela's spirit of reconciliation may fade after his death.

When apartheid ended nearly two decades ago, many whites braced for the worst. Conditioned for years to be wary of the "swart gevaar" -- black threat -- they feared being thrown into the sea.

That prophecy never materialised.

When he became South Africa's first black president in 1994, Nelson Mandela closed a dark chapter of his life in prison and reached out to his former oppressors to the point of having tea with the widow of the architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd.

With the father of democratic South Africa now fighting for his life in hospital, wild rumours have been flying around the Internet about what life will be like without Mandela for the white population.

"The death of Mandela could mark a turning point toward disaster," according to one article posted on the Facebook page of a group calling itself "Save the white people in South Africa".

But their investigations find these warnings to be baseless.

The ruling African National Congress has also sought to calm any jitters, noting that Mandela left public office more than a decade ago and the country has not fallen into disarray.

"All the policy positions of the ANC speak to this progressive thinking of the ANC, there is nothing that says whites will be thrown into the sea," ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu told The New Age daily.

China resettles two million Tibetans: HRW

BBC ONLINE

More than two million Tibetans have been resettled by the Chinese government over the last seven years, a new report by Human Rights Watch says.

Many, including hundreds of thousands of nomads, were forced into so-called "socialist villages", the group says.

The goal of the relocation is to exert tighter political control over ethnic Tibetans, according to researchers.

China denies forced evictions. It comes amid reports that worship of the Dalai Lama may have been eased in some areas.

But the BBC was unable to confirm claims that Buddhists in China's Tibetan areas were able to openly worship their exiled spiritual leader and that some temples were displaying portraits of him.

Images from Google Earth published by Human Rights Watch appear to show the mass destruction of existing housing and the construction of villages with uniform rows of new buildings.

The Chinese government has consistently maintained that it is pouring billions of dollars into Tibet in order to bolster its economy and improve the Tibetans' way of life.

However, tensions remain. In the past four years, at least 117 Tibetans have set themselves on fire to protest at Chinese government rule, resulting in 90 deaths.

Many Tibetans resent the influx of Han Chinese into Tibet and the Communist Party's restrictions on their religious freedoms.



Celebrations ensue in San Francisco, California, on Wednesday, after the US Supreme Court struck down The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and declared that same-sex couples who are legally married deserve equal rights to the benefits under federal law that go to all other married couples.

PHOTO: AFP

Boston blast suspect indicted

BBC ONLINE

Boston Marathon bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev has been indicted on charges of killing four people and using a weapon of mass destruction.

The 19-year-old faces 30 charges linked to the 15 April blasts, which killed three people and injured more than 260 others.

A fourth victim, a policeman, was shot dead by him and his brother during the hunt for them, say federal prosecutors.

The accused could face life in prison or even the death penalty.

His brother, 26-year-old Tamerlan, was killed in a shoot-out with police days after the twin blasts.

Rudd sworn in as Australia PM

AFP, Sydney

Newly reinstated Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday urged a "kinder, gentler" approach to politics as he strove to claw back ground ahead of September elections after deposing predecessor Julia Gillard in a dramatic party coup.

The 55-year-old returned to power in a snap leadership ballot on Wednesday, three years since he was himself ruthlessly ousted by Gillard, the country's first female premier who will now retire from politics.

He asked MPs to "be a little kinder and a gentler with each other in the further deliberations of this parliament" while praising Gillard, who he had earlier vowed never to challenge.

"Through the difficult years of minority government the former prime minister has achieved major reforms for our nation that will shape our country's future," he said.

"On top of all that, I acknowledge her great work as a standard-bearer for women in our country."

Seven key ministers resigned in the aftermath of Gillard's dumping, including her most loyal supporter, Treasurer and deputy leader Wayne Swan, and Defence Minister Stephen Smith.



Australia's first female PM a victim of gender war

AFP, Sydney

Julia Gillard's ascension was hailed as an historic moment for women, but Australia's first female prime minister failed to survive a first term marred by sexist attacks and slights on her gender.

Gillard, a flame-haired, unmarried, atheist lawyer, was marked as a "backstabber" from the outset, snatching the premiership from Kevin Rudd in a 2010 coup drafted by Labor party heavies unnerved by his poor polling ahead of elections.

She enjoyed an immediate bounce in the polls as Australians celebrated the appointment of their first woman leader but, like all honeymoons, the giddiness soon came to an end.

Voters disgruntled at her knifing of the popularly-elected Rudd returned Gillard's Labor by the slenderest of margins in the subsequent elections and she slipped to record

lows in the polls amid mounting criticism on trivialities from her hair colour to the tone of her voice.

"Gillard has been the victim of appalling levels of sexism not seen before in Australian public life," said Marian Sawyer, politics professor from the Australian National University.

"(She has) been subjected to an unrelenting campaign of vilification by a loose coalition of shock jocks, bloggers and newspaper columnists (that has been) rhetorically violent in nature at times."

One media commentator dubbed her Julia, famously said she should be thrown into the ocean in a hessian sack and had to apologise for remarking that her late father "died of shame"; another was sacked for suggesting her partner Tim Mathieson was gay.

Gillard's parting address reflected that mood. "It will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that. And I'm proud of that," she said after losing the vote.

ODDLY enough

Too many foreign words

Japan man sues national broadcaster

AFP, Tokyo

A pensioner is suing Japan's national broadcaster for emotional distress, claiming the overuse of foreign loanwords has rendered many of its programmes unintelligible, his lawyer said yesterday.

Hoji Takahashi, 71, is demanding 1.41 million yen (\$14,000) in damages for the broadcaster's reliance on words borrowed from English, instead of their traditional Japanese counterparts.

"The basis of his concern is that Japan is being too Americanised," lawyer Mutsuo Miyata told AFP. "There is a sense of crisis that this country is becoming just a province of America."

Japanese has a rich native vocabulary, but has a tradition of borrowing words from other languages, often quite inventively and sometimes changing their meaning in the process.

Most Japanese speakers do not think twice about using words including "trouble", "risk", "drive" or "parking", among many others.

Although English provides the bulk of loanwords -- an inheritance of the post World War II US occupation and subsequent fascination with American culture -- words borrowed from many other languages are also in use.

Traditionalists in France and French-speaking Canada also worry about the erosion of their native tongue as the influence of Hollywood spreads.

In 1994, French parliamentarians passed the "Toubon Law", which stipulates that the language of education in France must be French, bar some exceptions.



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