

Pirate ransoms drive prices up in Somalia

BOSSASO, Somalia (AP) — A parcel of land here that sold for \$12,000 two years ago now costs more than \$20,000. The price of a nice pair of men's shoes has gone up from \$20 to \$50.

The reason: pirates.

The influx of millions of dollars in ransoms has changed life in this coastal Muslim community, driving prices up and creating a schism between the pirate haves and have-nots. As piracy ramps up again with the end of the monsoon season, the lifestyle of the pirates — big houses, fast cars and easy drugs — is decried by both religious leaders and ordinary villagers.

"The use of drugs such as cannabis and the drinking of alcohol, are now becoming common within the pirates, causing social problems," said Sheikh Ahmed, a mosque leader in the town of Galkayo. "That is what is worrying us, a lot more than the risk they pose to the foreign ships and crew."

Just last month, pirates were paid a reported \$3.3 million to release 36 crew members from a Spanish vessel held hostage for more than six weeks. Pirates stand to make tens of thousands from the payment, money that will pulse through the community in gifts, loans and payments to family, friends and businessmen.

The European Union Naval Force says pirates now hold 11 ships and 264 crew members hostage off the coast of Somalia. There is little doubt that more ransom money is coming.

"There is mad money circulating here, and it affects everybody — directly or indirectly," said Haji Said, a hotel owner.

A lone paved road passes through the middle of Bossaso, and hotels, businesses and new construction line its sides. SUVs and luxury vehicles from Asia ply the road with American, Somali and Indian music blasting from within.

The price of clothes, shoes and cosmetics is climbing, said Anshur Kamil, a businessman. Pirates don't even have to pay upfront. Those holding ships hostage that haven't yet received ransom can buy goods on credit — at elevated prices — and settle up their debts when the ransom money comes in, villagers say.

The pirates pay in dollars and don't bother to haggle, said Khadra Abdullahi, a shop owner in Bossaso, a coastal town on the northern edge of Somalia across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen. "Sometimes they leave change behind, which shows that money is nothing to them."

When villagers think the price of a cosmetic is too high, their reply is "we are not pirates," said Abdullahi.

The closer to the pirate dens one gets, the higher the prices go. In the nearby town of Eyl, a cup of tea costs three times as much as in Bossaso. In Eyl, pirates pay \$5 for a shoeshine, compared with 50 cents in Bossaso, said Hashim Salad, a store owner.

Two years ago, a teen named Adani lived on the streets of Bossaso. Now, at only 19 years old, he is a pirate and owns a big house and large truck. He says he has taken part in two hijackings that earned him \$75,000 and plans to take part in one more high-seas heist.

"When you have nothing people despise you and if they see that you have money you will be respected," said Adani, who gave only one name for fear of reprisals. "This next job will be my last in the piracy trade. I know it's a big risk but I believe in gambling. If I win, I will get married and give up piracy."

No firm plans for a U.S. exit in Afghanistan

By Mark Mazzetti

WASHINGTON (New York Times) — The Obama administration sent a forceful public message Sunday that American military forces could remain in Afghanistan for a long time, seeking to blunt criticism that President Obama had sent the wrong signal in his war-strategy speech last week by projecting July 2011 as the start of a withdrawal.

In a flurry of coordinated television interviews, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other top administration officials said that any troop pullout beginning in July 2011 would be slow and that the Americans would only then be starting to transfer security responsibilities to Afghan forces under Mr. Obama's new plan.

The television appearances by the senior members of Mr. Obama's war council seemed to be part of a focused and determined effort to ease concerns about the president's emphasis on setting a date for reducing America's presence in Afghanistan after more than eight years of war.

"We have strategic interests in South Asia that should not be measured in terms of finite times," said Gen. James L. Jones, the president's national security adviser, speaking on CNN's "State of the Un-

ion." "We're going to be in the region for a long time."

Echoing General Jones, Mr. Gates played down the significance of the July 2011 target date.

"There isn't a deadline," Mr. Gates said on CBS's "Face the Nation." "What we have is a specific date on which we will begin transferring responsibility for security district by district, province by province in Afghanistan, to the Afghans."

On NBC's "Meet the Press," Mr. Gates said that under the plan, 100,000 American troops would be in Afghanistan in July 2011, and "some handful, or some small number, or whatever the conditions permit, will begin to withdraw at that time."

In his prime-time address at West Point on Tuesday, Mr. Obama said that even as he planned to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, his administration would "begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011."

The president's speech set off alarms inside Afghanistan and Pakistan, as some officials worried about an American pullout before Afghan troops were ready to fight the Taliban on their own. It also set off a barrage of criticism from Republicans that the president was setting an arbitrary withdrawal date that would embolden Taliban insurgents to wait the Americans out.



On Sunday, the administration's top civilian and military officials marched in lockstep in insisting that July 2011 was just the beginning, not the end, of a lengthy process. That date, General Jones said, is a "ramp" rather than a "cliff."

As they seek to explain the new war strategy, administration officials face the task of calibrating the message about America's commitments in Afghanistan to different audiences, foreign and domestic, each of whom wants to hear different things.

During weeks of wrenching internal debate, administration officials decided on the July 2011 benchmark in part to send a signal to Afghanistan's government that the clock was ticking for Afghan troops to take a greater role against the Taliban. The message was intended equally for domestic consumption: assuring skeptical Democratic lawmakers and many Americans that the United States military presence in Afghanistan was not open-ended.

But the White House has also faced sharp criticism from Republicans, who said it made little military sense to set a withdrawal date 18 months in the future because it handed the American strategy to the enemy.

The announcement of the July 2011 benchmark was also greeted with concern during private conver-

sations among American officials and their counterparts in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and administration officials in recent days have acknowledged that they were surprised by the intensity of the anxiety among Afghan and Pakistani officials that the United States would beat a hasty retreat from the region.

Since the White House strategy was announced, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan has publicly pledged to work with the United States to bolster Afghan forces. But he asked for patience and indicated that his country's military might not be ready in 18 months to take responsibility from American troops.

During his recent inaugural address, Mr. Karzai said that Afghan forces would be able to take charge of securing Afghan cities within three years, and could take responsibility for the rest of the country within five years.

So officials try a balancing act as they sell the Afghan strategy. Gen. David H. Petraeus, the commander of United States Central Command, said Sunday that there was a natural "tension" between a message of resolve and the message of impatience after eight years of war. But he said the twin messages were not mutually exclusive.

Appearing on "Fox News Sunday," General Petraeus said that the

Obama administration was not planning a "rush to the exits" in Afghanistan, and that depending on the security conditions there could be tens of thousands of American troops in Afghanistan for several years.

Both Mr. Gates and General Petraeus also have the job of easing concerns among military commanders about rigid withdrawal timetables. Mr. Gates has said in public that he opposed firm timelines, and during the administration's Afghanistan strategy review he insisted that any decisions about troop withdrawals be based on security conditions inside the country.

Administration officials on Sunday were also asked about the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, the leader of the Qaeda network and the reason that the United States entered the war in Afghanistan in 2001.

Mr. Gates said it had been "years" since the United States had had reliable intelligence about Mr. bin Laden, but he said it was still the assumption of American intelligence agencies that he was hiding in North Waziristan, in Pakistan. General Jones said that Mr. bin Laden was believed to cross the border into Afghanistan occasionally, but he gave no further details about American assessments of his location.

Could Zuma be what South Africa needs?

By Alex Perry

If even some of the more modest predictions about Jacob Zuma's rise to power had been correct, South Africa would be an empty, corrupt dictatorship by now. Back in 2006, South African memoirist Rian Malan ended his dismal assessment of the nation's prospects ("Not civil war, but sad decay") in British magazine the Spectator by asking: "Anyone want a house here?" A year ago, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said he was "deeply saddened" when Zuma staged a party coup against his predecessor Thabo Mbeki, "deeply disturbed" that both had used institutions of state in their struggle and warned that path "leads to a banana republic." This February, Afrikaner author André Brink published a memoir in which he described the "disillusionment, resentment, and rage tinged with despair" over the "rotteness" in South Africa.

Political dialogue tends to the maximalist in a country that until recently saw things in black and white. But at the heart of the hysteria about Zuma was genuine concern about whether a man who had faced trial for both rape (he was acquitted) and corruption (the charges were dropped) was fit for office. So many African liberation movements have gone from triumph to tyranny, hope to corruption. Even with the saintly figure of former leader Nelson Mandela in the wings, would Zuma and his party, the African National Congress (ANC), do the same?

But since his election in April, President Zuma has surprised. Seven months is not long enough to fix South Africa's problems — and Zuma hasn't. Violent crime, a yawning inequality which juxtaposes black millionaires with millions scraping by on less than \$2 a day and the world's largest HIV/AIDS population continue to drag on the country. But whereas Mbeki stoked a national mood of frustration by denying such crises existed, Zuma concedes they are real and even accepts blame. "These challenges are based in reality," the 67-year-old told TIME in a rare interview. "And it's only when you admit there have been deficiencies and weaknesses that you make sense to the people, who can see them for themselves. After 15 years (in power), people are saying: Where is the delivery?"

Zuma agrees too that the ANC is in crisis, alienated from its people by power and riches. "The success of liberation ... tests the clarity" of even the best African revolutionaries, he says. "Many liberation movements have turned into something else and abandoned what they were. The ANC came to that point ... where we might have fallen." The fix, he says, is in "renewal ... paying attention to (the ANC's) principles (but) talking about ... how we have to do things differently." A presidential adviser underlines the new tone. "The big difference today is that now we have a leadership that says, 'Guys - we've got big problems,'" he says. "Because the truth is, we can't afford another 15 years like this."

Some of that talk is being matched by action. In his new government, Zuma began by promoting the good and sacking the bad. The well-regarded former tax commissioner, Pravin Gordhan, became Finance Minister. Barbara Hogan — who as



health minister ended years of South Africa's attachment to what the U.N. called the "lunatic fringe" of the AIDS world — took Public Enterprise. Zuma fired Hogan's predecessor at health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, who recommended beetroot, garlic, lemon juice and potatoes to treat HIV and AIDS, and former police chief Jackie Selebi, who is charged with corruption.

The President has also expanded accountability. That's necessary, he says, because with the ANC consistently winning around 65% at the polls, elections are not much of a check on the party. "We are too strong. Such support and power can intoxicate the party and lead you into believing that you know it all. You take things for granted. (The party) ends up un-

wieldy and in a mess." So Zuma appointed a close adviser, Collins Chabane, to a new ministry inside the presidency to monitor performance. He set up a planning commission, also inside the presidency, to enforce a consistent long-term vision across government departments, with Trevor Manuel, South Africa's respected finance minister since 1996, at its head. Efforts are also being made to reach out to ordinary South Africans. New Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale has spent nights in poor townships across the country to hear residents' concerns. Zuma himself has established a hotline to the presidency and in August gathered hundreds of school principals in Durban to answer their questions on reform. The same month, in the first of what he promises will be a series of surprise presidential inspections, he caught the mayor of the northern town of Balfour playing hooky.

Zuma's most public test will come next June, when South Africa stages the football World Cup — whose expected 500,000 fans will deliver an unprecedented challenge to his government's ability to deliver on security, transport and infrastructure upgrades. Zuma has also set himself other ambitious targets against which the South African public can judge him. In his state of the nation address in June, the new president promised half a million public-works jobs by the end of this year and 4 million by 2014; universal primary education and 95% enrolment in secondary schools by 2014; a 50% cut in new HIV infections and 80% coverage of antiretroviral treatment drugs by 2011; and a 7% to 10% annual cut in serious and violent crime. In September, in what was widely interpreted as the inauguration of a shoot-to-kill policy for police, Zuma said: "Once a criminal takes out their gun ... police must then act. We must apply extraordinary measures." His aim, he says, is to create "a system that keeps you on your toes ... to monitor (yourself) vigorously. If there are nonperformers, we'll take them out." Zuma's biographer, Jeremy Gordin, says no one expected Zuma to "hit the ground running, and so hard. He seems to be completely sincere. He wants to deliver."

So will he? Could Zuma be the leader South Africa has been waiting for?

(Source: Time.com)

West Africa bloc calls for civilian rule in Guinea

CONAKRY, Guinea (AP) —

A regional African bloc on Sunday called for Guinea to return to civilian rule as the junta's No. 2 assumed control of the country following an assassination attempt on its leader.

Gen. Sekouba Konate, the vice president of the military junta, rushed back to Guinea's capital from overseas to take charge following a Thursday assassination attempt on the junta's president.

Guinea's military leader Capt. Moussa "Dadis" Camara was airlifted Friday to Morocco where he received surgery for trauma to the cranium, Morocco's chief military doctor Brig. Gen. Ali Abrouq said Sunday.

Abrouq said in the statement carried Sunday by the official MAP news agency that "the follow-up (to the surgery) is favorable" and Camara is doing fine.

But a diplomat who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter told the AP that the bullet had caused a splinter of bone to pierce Camara's brain and that doctors still did not know if he would make a full recovery.

Traffic returned to normal in the Guinean capital, but many remained tense and late Sunday a volley of shots rang out from an area of the Guinean capital flanking the barracks of the country's presidential guard. The sound of gunfire started a few hours after state TV announced a toll-free number where citizens could call if they had information about the wanted head of the presidential guard, who opened fire on the country's leader.

Konate's return to Guinea was met with a call from ECOWAS, a regional bloc of West African states, to immediately hand over power to civilians.

The statement issued by ECOWAS on Sunday called on the junta to put in place a transitional authority and to organize elections, in which no members of the junta will be allowed to run.

The junta seized power in a coup last December and the coup leaders promised to organize elections and hand over power to civilians within one year. But Camara quickly reversed course. In September, his presidential guard opened fire on unarmed demonstrators who had gathered to demand that Camara step aside.



In this file photo taken Friday, Oct. 2, 2009, Guinea military leader Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara, right, salutes next to his aide Abubakar 'Toumba' Diakite during independence day celebrations in Conakry, Guinea.