

U.S. drone strike 'kills 13' in Pakistan

MIRANSHAH, Pakistan (AFP) — A US missile attack that demolished a compound in Pakistan's tribal belt used by militants crossing into Afghanistan killed 13 fighters, Pakistani security officials said Sunday.

A U.S. drone slammed two missiles into the building on Saturday in Saidgi village, seven kilometres (four miles) north of Miranshah, the main town of North Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

"Taliban have recovered more dead bodies from the debris. We have reports that a total of 13 militants were killed and three injured," an intelligence official in Miranshah told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"One of the local commanders, Abdur Rehman, was also killed," he added.

The compound was used by local militants attached to the Haqqani network, which has attacked U.S. troops in Afghanistan, said a senior security official.

Other security officials confirmed 13 were killed in the strike, including a local commander, but it was unclear if any foreigners were among the dead.

Mosques in Miranshah announced that Rehman was "martyred" in the strike and that his funeral prayers would be held in Saidgi, an AFP reporter said.

The U.S. military does not as a rule confirm drone attacks, which U.S. officials say have killed a number of top-level militants.

UN sanctions on Eritrea may bring relief to East Africa: PM of Ethiopia

Addis Ababa (Ezega.com) — Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said the UN Security Council sanctions show Eritrea's unlawful act in the region has caught international attention, and it is the beginning of the international community's response to its destructive activities on peace and security in the horn of Africa.

During the press conference the Prime Minister held in his office with domestic journalists, he said these sanctions are just the beginning, as the measures are open and can be increased if Eritrea doesn't comply with UN requirements. He also believes that the sanctions are reasonable and appropriate.

Meles said the sanctions includes arms embargo and travel ban on Eritrean high military and political officials (the very people who are involved in the breach of the arms embargo imposed on Somalia). It also includes asset freeze in banks of UN member states, as well as remittance payments sent to Eritrea from foreign countries.

The Security Council passed the sanctions to defend Somalia and Djibouti (against breach of its border by Eritrea). It has nothing to do with the border problems with Ethiopia. Meles responded to this issue as it is in the interest of Ethiopia that these issues led to the sanctions. However, if Eritrea wants to destabilize Ethiopia, he said Ethiopia will take the appropriate measures and there is no need to pressure on this aspect.

Japan PM says moving U.S. base to Guam 'unreasonable'

TOKYO (AFP) — Relocating a contentious U.S. airbase from southern Japan to Guam is "unreasonable" from the standpoint of national security, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama told a radio program.

Hatoyama said it would not be practical to shift the whole base, which has been the subject of friction between Tokyo and Washington, from Okinawa to the U.S.-controlled Pacific Ocean territory.

"Thinking realistically, it would be unreasonable to relocate all its functions to Guam from the standpoint of deterrence," Hatoyama told a Nippon Radio program Saturday.

The U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station currently sits in a crowded urban area of tropical Okinawa island. Tokyo and Washington agreed in 2006 to move it out to a coastal region, away from the population, many of whom resent its presence.

The agreement was part of a broader realignment of U.S. forces in Japan and includes the redeployment of around 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to the U.S. territory of Guam.

Soon after coming to power, Hatoyama's centre-left government announced a review



People stage a rally opposing the U.S. military base Futenma on Japan's Okinawa island in early November. Relocating the contentious military facility in its entirety from southern Japan to Guam is "unreasonable" Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has told a radio program.

(AFP/File/Kazuhiro Nogi)

of the agreement, provoking irritation in Washington.

However, Hatoyama appeared to soften the review in his weekend comments to the broadcaster.

"It's been decided that 8,000 Marines and their families are to be moved to Guam. I expressed my idea that moving more than

(8,000) is very difficult from the viewpoint of deterrence," Hatoyama said Sunday before leaving for India, when asked by reporters about his Saturday comments.

Since its defeat in World War II, officially pacifist Japan has relied on a massive U.S. military presence to guarantee its security, initially as an occupier and later as an ally.

Thousands mourn Pakistan's Bhutto, two years on

GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH, Pakistan (AFP) — Pakistan government officials on Sunday led thousands of loyalists in mourning the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, two years after her killing.

Several thousand faithful gathered outside the mausoleum in southern Garhi Khuda Bakhsh village but complained that security officials prevented them from entering the compound.

Bhutto, the first woman to become prime minister of a Muslim country, was killed on December 27, 2007 in a gun and suicide attack after addressing an election rally in Rawalpindi, a garrison city near the capital Islamabad.

Hundreds of police and paramilitary troops stood guard, shutting the gates to the mausoleum, restricting entry to all but government officials and influential people, said an AFP correspondent.

"We have intensified our security to protect people from any law and order situation," said senior police official Zulfiqar Tunio.

He said strict security measures were in place to protect President Asif Ali Zardari, Bhutto's widower, and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who showered rose petals on the grave and prayed over her tomb with cabinet ministers.

But there were complaints from ordinary mourners who took swipe at Zardari's government, whose approval ratings have plummeted.



Supporters gather at the grave of former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto. More than 5,000 loyalists flocked to the tomb of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Sunday, mourning the second anniversary of her assassination and demanding her killers be brought to justice.

(AFP/Rizwan Tabassum)

Zardari and his three children visited the grave in private late Saturday.

Sunday's turnout was in stark contrast to the hundreds of thousands who flocked to the grave on the first anniversary.

The government called for a UN inquiry into Bhutto's killing after her party won a general election in February 2008 with supporters angered by conflicting accounts of how she died and who was responsible.

They cast doubt on a Pakistani probe into her death, criticized authorities for hosing down the scene of the attack within minutes -- allegedly destroying evidence -- and questioning whether she was killed by a gunshot or the blast.

A UN commission, which says its mandate is limited to fact-finding and does not include a criminal investigation, is to submit a report that will be shared with the Pakistani government and the UN Security Council.

Libya accuses Swiss of abusing Gadhafi son

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — Libya accused Swiss authorities of using excessive force during the arrest of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's son in Switzerland last year, deepening a diplomatic standoff between the two countries.

The Libyan Foreign Ministry issued a list of 27 grievances connected to the arrest of Hannibal Gadhafi, who was apprehended with his wife in July 2008 for allegedly beating up their servants in a Geneva hotel. Gadhafi and his wife were released on bail three days later and returned to Libya.

In a document posted on the ministry's Web site, Libya accused Swiss authorities of breaking down a door dur-

ing the arrest, pointing a gun at him and using 20 armed men to take him away.

It said he was improperly locked in a cell with another inmate, suffered unspecified bodily harm and claimed Switzerland denied hurting him.

There was no immediate reaction from Switzerland.

The complaint against the younger Gadhafi was eventually dropped after the two servants received compensation from an undisclosed source. But tensions remain high, in part because of the continued detention of two Swiss businessmen in Libya.

The men, Max Goeldi and Rachid Hamdani, were detained in July 2008

on alleged visa violations days after Gadhafi was arrested. Earlier this month, they were convicted of violating residency and labor laws and sentenced to 16 months in jail and a \$1,500 fine.

They are currently being protected in the Swiss Embassy in Tripoli, but soon face another Libyan trial for illegal commercial activity.

Earlier this week, Hannibal Gadhafi filed a civil complaint against a Swiss newspaper that published a mug shot from his arrest. The photo was published by Tribune de Geneve in September, more than a year after the arrest.

Calmer Philippine volcano a threat: govt expert

LEGASPI, Philippines (AFP) — The Philippines' Mayon volcano may be showing less visible signs of unrest but this could be a deceptive calm before a deadly eruption, the chief government volcanologist said on Sunday.

"Do not become complacent. The people only see what is coming out of the crater and that is often cloud covered. It is not just the observed phenomenon that matters. We also look at the quakes, the gas emitted and the swelling of the volcano," said chief volcanologist Renato Solidum.

"We are telling the people, 'do not just count the number of quakes or what you see from the crater.' It may look calm but it



Mount Mayon spews ash into the air, as seen from the city of Legaspi on December 27. The Philippine volcano may be showing less visible signs of unrest but this could be a deceptive calm before a deadly eruption, the chief government volcanologist has said.

(AFP/Ted Aljibe)

Manila, increased its activity earlier this month, prompting the government to put it under alert level four -- meaning that an explosive eruption could happen any day now.

But the dispute over Futenma has raised fears among some Japanese that this alliance might cool, at a time when a rising China is making its presence felt across Asia.

Hatoyama's comments drew the ire of the Socialists in his ruling coalition, who favor shifting the base out of the country and have threatened to leave the coalition over the base row.

"The Socialist Party regards the relocation to Guam as the best plan. We will pursue this possibility with our utmost efforts," said Mizuho Fukushima, head of the Socialists.

Hatoyama's Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) needs votes from Socialists and another junior coalition partner for a majority in the upper house of parliament.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Hirano is due today to chair a meeting with coalition partners on the base issue.

Referring to today meeting, Hatoyama said "finding a new location for the Futenma base is important, but naturally, discussing deterrence is inevitable."

Hatoyama's government took power in Japan in August after half a century of almost continuous conservative rule, pledging to review past agreements on the U.S. military presence and to deal with Washington on a more "equal" basis.

The United States, which defeated Japan in World War II and then occupied the country, now has 47,000 troops stationed there, more than half of them on Okinawa, the site of one of the bloodiest battles of the war.



Troops deaths in Afghan war seen rising with surge

KABUL (AFP) — The arrival in Afghanistan of tens of thousands of reinforcements to fight the Taliban will lead to a higher death rate among foreign troops, adding pressure on Western leaders to get out altogether, officials say.

Militants fighting for the overthrow of the Kabul government promised to turn Afghanistan into a "flaming tandoor oven", escalating attacks and deploying more fighters to match the Western surge.

Western military chiefs warn more troops will inevitably lead to more deaths as they try to help Afghan security forces take on the fight alone.

The Taliban leadership, believed to be based in Pakistan, has matched the fighting words by promising a surge of its own.

"With the coming of new forces the fight will be further extended and increased," said Zabihullah Mujahid, a purported Taliban spokesman, who spoke to AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Militant forces would "attack the foreign forces as well as their Afghan allies through suicide attacks, roadside bombs and face-to-face clashes", he said.

"They will transform Afghanistan into a flaming tandoor oven for the foreign forces."

America's economic woes could limit resources for forces fighting a Taliban with access to funds from the three-billion-dollar-a-year Afghan opium industry and fighters from Pakistan, said political analyst Ahmed Sayedi.

"The Taliban have huge support networks, while the 30,000 U.S. soldiers coming to Afghanistan will be victims of the challenge to get funding through the Senate," he said.

The number of foreign troop deaths in 2009 is nearly double last year's figure, at more than 500 so far compared to 295 for 2008.

Almost 40,000 troops are set to arrive in Afghanistan in coming months, boosting the 113,000 foreign soldiers fighting under U.S. and NATO command.

Washington's Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Mike Mullen warned during a visit to Kabul this month the violence will get worse before getting better as the Taliban dominate at least a third of the country.

"I told our troops heading here to steel themselves for more combat and more casualties," he said.

The influx -- expected to be complete by August next year, military officials in Kabul said -- is part of a new strategy for the war in Afghanistan that has intensified this year as the Taliban have evolved their tactics.

Most foreign troops deaths are now caused by IEDs, or improvised explosive devices which are homemade bombs, cheap and easy to make, planted on roads and detonated by remote control as military vehicles pass by.

NATO sources have said that for every IED death, there can be up to eight casualties, many with horrendous injuries including loss of limbs and eyes.

The death toll hit a peak of 77 in August, coinciding with a presidential election riddled with fraud, leading to questions among the Western public about why their troops are dying for the world's second-most corrupt country.

President Hamid Karzai won the election, and has pledged to clean up the endemic graft in return for the now-conditional support of the West.

Anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International rates Afghanistan behind only lawless Somalia on its table of the world's most corrupt countries.