



PROPHETIC TIMES

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS UPDATE

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CHILE'S LEADER ON LANDMARK CUBA TRIP

February 11, 2009 AFP reported: "Chile's President Michelle Bachelet met her Cuban counterpart Raul Casto during the first visit by a Chilean leader to the communist nation in more than three decades.

Bachelet was greeted at the Palace of the Revolution where she signed a series of bilateral accords Wednesday boosting economic and cultural ties. Her three-day visit is the first since Chile's socialist leader Salvador Allende -- a close friend of revolutionary icon Fidel Castro -- visited in 1972. She is accompanied by around 100 aides, parliamentarians, business leaders and artists.



"This is a great opportunity for Chile," Bachelet said before the meeting, citing Cuba's advances in healthcare and biotechnology. She earlier expressed hope that the trip would help "deepen regional integration (and) political dialogue."

On a visit to Honduras before arriving in Cuba, Bachelet told reporters there was no issue whatsoever she would avoid in talking with Cuba's leaders. But the Chilean president has drawn fire from conservatives at home, who are angry that she has failed to schedule meetings with Cuban dissidents. So were Cuban dissidents.

"It will be a sad paradox indeed that someone representing a country that has been through a dictatorship comes to a country where there is a dictatorship and fails to show a sign of respect for diversity," said Oswaldo Paya, a dissident Christian Democrat who has won the EU's Sakharov Prize.

Vladimiro Roca, a dissident who more than a month ago sought a meeting with her in writing, said "Bachelet's visit is frustrating, because we expect solidarity from her given the dictatorship her own country has been through. "Her rejection only gives a green light to Cuban authorities that means more repression," fumed Roca.

Bachelet's agenda Friday was clear, fueling speculation she might meet with Fidel Castro, 82, who led Cuba for five decades until a health crisis."..."

U.S. MAY NEED A LARGER AFGHAN TROOP INCREASE: EXPERTS

February 12, 2009 Reuters reported: "The United States may need a military buildup in Afghanistan larger than the one President Barack Obama is considering, experts said on Thursday. The analysts, in testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives, said a larger U.S. force could be necessary to turn the tide against the Taliban so long as reluctant NATO allies and a nascent Afghan army are unable to field major reinforcements.

"We must provide most of the additional troops, advisers and resources to reverse the situation," Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies told the House Armed Services Committee in written testimony. "It may well be that the current proposals for 30,000 more U.S. troops are the bare minimum necessary," he said.

Obama, who has made Afghanistan the U.S. military's top priority, is expected to decide soon how many extra forces to send to a combat zone where commanders face an intensifying insurgency from the Taliban and other militant groups.

The Pentagon has proposed increasing the current U.S. presence of 37,000 troops to about 60,000 in coming months in a bid to improve security and facilitate long-term development. There are also about 30,000 troops from other NATO countries in Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has warned that a larger military presence could backfire if Afghans view Western troops as an occupying force. But he told reporters on Tuesday there was no cap on the number of troops that could be sent.

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US LAWMAKERS VOICE CONCERNS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN, LOST WEAPONS

February 12, 2009 Voice of America News reported: "U.S. lawmakers are describing as "disturbing" a report from the Government Accountability Office that says the Defense Department has been unable to account for tens of thousands of weapons supplied to Afghanistan's security forces. There are also concerns voiced in congressional hearings about the situation in Afghanistan and future U.S. strategy.

The GAO report says the Defense Department failed to maintain adequate inventory controls for 36 percent, or about 87,000 of 242,000 weapons supplied during a four-year period ending in June 2008. The weapons include assault rifles, machine guns, pistols, mortars and

rocket-propelled grenade launchers supplied to Afghanistan's army and police.

The Defense Department could not provide serial numbers for about 46,000 of these weapons, and kept no reliable records for about 135,000 weapons obtained for Afghan forces by 21 countries or donors.

Charles Johnson of the non-partisan Government Accountability Office was the first witness before the House National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. "Lapses in accountability occurred at all phases of the supply chain, including when the weapons were obtained, transported to Afghanistan and stored at two central storage depots in Kabul," he said."...

Lawmakers say the findings raise disturbing questions about weapons that may have fallen into the hands of Taliban or al-Qaida forces, who staged attacks in Kabul this week."..."

RUSSIA SETS NEW ARMS EXPORT RECORD

February 11, 2009 The Middle East Newsline reported: "Russia, amid an increase in sales to the Middle East, has reported another record in defense exports. Russia said it exported \$8.35 billion in defense equipment and weapons in 2008. The figure, second only to the United States, represented a 10 percent increase from Moscow's previous record in 2007. "The overall revenue was over \$8,350 million, which is \$800 million more than last year," President Dmitry Medvedev said.



NATIONS RUSH TO ESTABLISH NEW BARRIERS TO TRADE

February 6, 2009 The Wall Street Journal reported: "Countries grappling with global recession have enacted a wave of barriers to world commerce since early last month, scrambling to safeguard their key industries -- often by damaging those of their neighbors.

The World Trade Organization is gathering nations in a special meeting Monday to try to stem the rising tide, just two weeks after saying protectionism was largely under control. On Thursday, 10 European Union commissioners headed to Moscow for talks Friday with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials, where they plan to air complaints over the pace of new Russian trade barriers.

Russian tariffs on cars, aimed at propping up domestic car makers, have helped spark demonstrations around the country over economic hardships. In December, protesters in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk held up flares.

"Putin visits a combine harvester factory and decides on the spot he'll raise tariffs," said one EU trade official. "That's how it goes these days." Russia has introduced 28 measures to raise tariffs on other countries' imports and subsidize its own exports since November, and plans six more.

It's not alone. The European Union has warned the U.S. that proposed "Buy American" provisions in planned stimulus spending could break trade rules. Meanwhile, EU nations have reversed direction and tightened their own trade rules, for instance by resuming subsidies to dairy farmers' exports and effectively barring Chinese screws and bolts from their market, while accusing China of dumping them below cost.

The U.S. is planning retaliatory tariffs on Italian water and French cheese to punish the EU for restricting imports of U.S. chicken and beef. India is proposing to increase tariffs on foreign steel at the request of its steel industry.

The landscape is moving so fast that officials at the WTO, the world's top trade-law enforcer, say they're relying on news reports to keep up with the changes, as governments are often slow to report them. They are reconsidering their Jan. 23 report that concluded protectionist pressures were largely being kept at bay."...

The WTO's figures show that antidumping cases overall, in which nations contend others are disrupting markets by unloading goods below cost, are up 40% since a year ago. In October, as the extent of the global recession became more certain, WTO director Pascal Lamy ordered his staff to start tracking protective actions, say WTO officials."...

Economists and trade analysts say the current rash of trade constraints could make it harder for global economic growth to recover from the current downturn. Global trade is expected to shrink by more than 2.1% this year after growing by 6.2% in 2008"..."

NORTH KOREA ASSEMBLING LONGEST-RANGE MISSILE: REPORT

February 12, 2009 Reuters reported: "North Korea has been assembling its longest-range missile at an east coast launch base and could test-fire the rocket by the end of this month at the earliest, a leading South Korean daily reported on Friday.

South Korean and U.S. officials have warned prickly North Korea not to launch its Taepodong-2 missile, which is supposed to eventually be able to hit Alaska but has never successfully flown. It blew apart seconds after it was last tested in 2006.

North Korea recently transported the first and second stage of the Taepodong-2 to its missile base on a special train and has been assembling the pieces at an indoor facility to prevent spy satellites from watching, the Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported intelligence sources as saying.

"We assume that they are currently assembling the first and second-stage rockets," the paper, which is South Korea's largest, reported a South Korean government official as saying. The missile, thought to be about 36 meters (118 ft) tall, needs to be positioned vertically, sent to a launch pad and fueled. These operations can be viewed by U.S. spy satellites..."..."

*Compiled by L. Jim Tuck, Pastor
UCGIA Oakland, San Jose, and Santa Rosa
ljt5053@sbcglobal.net*