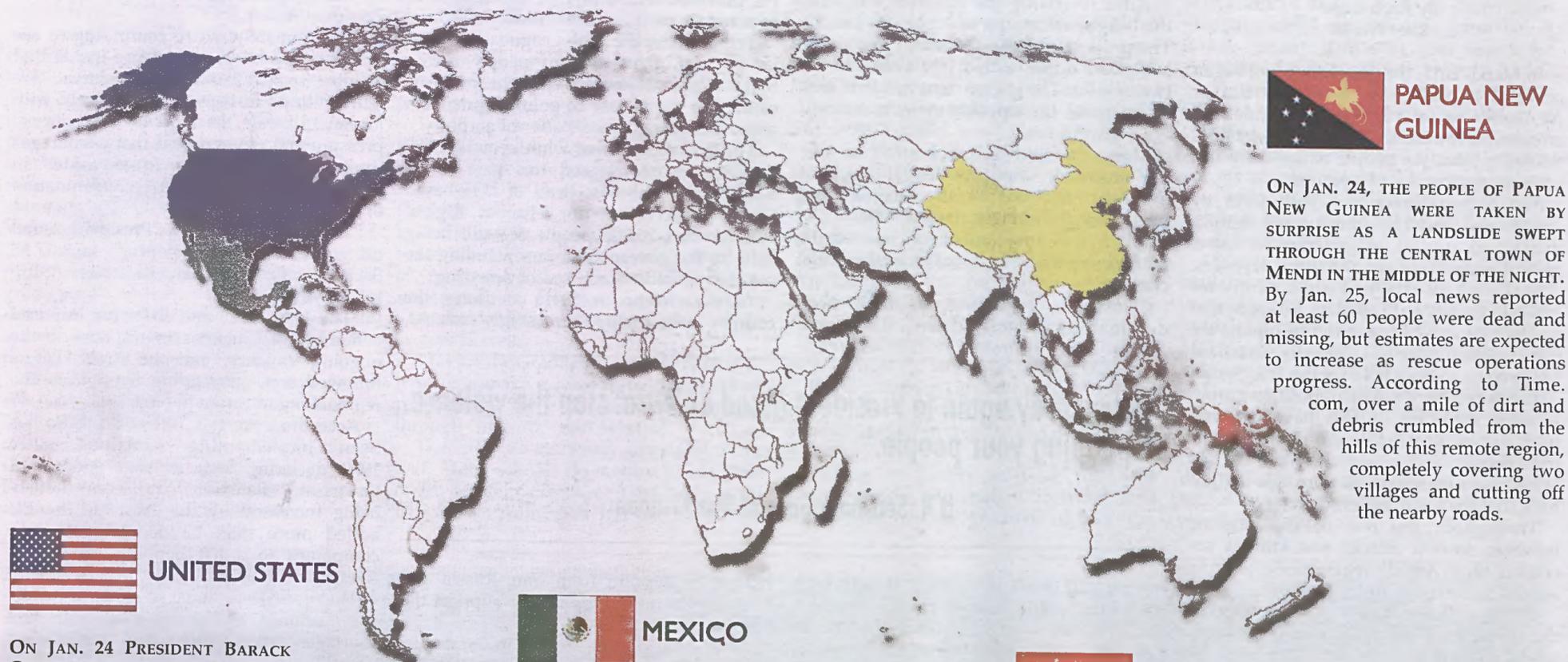


NEWS IN BRIEF

STORIES BY BECCA HELLER

GRAPHIC BY DANIEL VASILES



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

ON JAN. 24, THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA WERE TAKEN BY SURPRISE AS A LANDSLIDE SWEEPED THROUGH THE CENTRAL TOWN OF MENDI IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. By Jan. 25, local news reported at least 60 people were dead and missing, but estimates are expected to increase as rescue operations progress. According to Time.com, over a mile of dirt and debris crumbled from the hills of this remote region, completely covering two villages and cutting off the nearby roads.

UNITED STATES

ON JAN. 24 PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA DELIVERED THE ANNUAL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS. In the speech he focused on the progress our country has made in the last year, but he also acknowledged the problems that remain and outlined a number of ways we could confront those issues. Below are some of the key issues he emphasized:

- **Economic equality** – proposing a minimum 30 percent tax rate on millionaires
- **Energy independence** – using government resources to develop clean energy at home
- **Employment** – taxing multinational corporations, opening up energy-related jobs
- **Improving education** – rewarding good teachers, making higher education more accessible

MEXICO

THE ZETAS HAVE RECENTLY EMERGED AS MEXICO'S MOST POWERFUL DRUG CARTEL, ACCORDING TO A NEW REPORT BY US SECURITY FIRM STRATFOR. Currently operating in over half of all Mexican states, the Zetas cartel seems to have overtaken its rival cartel, the Sinaloas, now controlling the majority of eastern Mexico, BBC reports. The Zeta cartel, led by ex-special operations soldiers, is notorious for its use of extreme violence, in contrast to the Sinaloas who rely on corruption and bribery to move their product. Despite Mexican President Felipe Calderon's efforts to fight the cartels, the gangs have remained powerful, and over 47,000 people have died due to drug-related violence since 2007, BBC reports.

CHINA

CHINESE OFFICIALS CONFIRM THAT A TIBETAN PROTESTER WAS SHOT DEAD BY SECURITY FORCES ON JAN. 24. The incident occurred when security forces fired on Tibetan activists who had joined together in protest of religious repression in the Sichuan province, according to BBC. Though the conflict began over 60 years ago, when China first invaded Tibet, the wounds are still fresh and Tibetans refuse to be silenced. Tensions between ethnic Tibetans and Chinese authorities have increased in the last year, and, since March 2011, 16 Tibetans have set themselves on fire in protest of China's ongoing oppression and hegemony, BBC reports.

Taliban leader allegedly killed in U.S. drone attack

RECENTLY INTERCEPTED RADIO CONVERSATIONS CONFIRM DEATH DURING U.S. DRONE STRIKE JAN. 12

By Aaron Hall
STAFF WRITER

Pakistani officials state that intercepted Taliban communications indicate that their leader may have been killed in a U.S. drone strike, on Jan. 12.

Taliban officials have denied the claim. According to the New York Times, Pakistani intelligence officials are reporting that they intercepted at least six radio conversations that discussed the death of Hakimullah Mehsud. At one point in the discussion, his death was confirmed.

Mehsud, formerly the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, was a young and aggressive field commander, known for his effective guerilla tactics. His association with Al Qaeda groups in his region has earned him the designation as an international terrorist by the U.S. state department, and his alleged death would be considered a major victory in the War on Terror.

This is not the first time Pakistani and American officials have declared Mehsud dead, however.

In early 2010, Pakistani and American intelligence thought they had taken him out in a missile strike in the same North Waziristan region, only to have him resurface a few days later.

In response to the latest reports of Mehsud's death, Pakistani Taliban

In early 2010, Pakistani and American intelligence thought they had taken him out in a missile strike in the same North Waziristan region, only to have him resurface a few days later.

spokesman Asimullah Meshud denied his leader's death, stating to the Associated Press that he had not even been in the Waziristan region at the time of the drone strike.

"There is no truth in reports about his death. However, he is a human being and can die anytime. He is a mujahid and we wish him martyrdom," he said to the AP.

The report of Mehsud's death coincides with a bomb attack on a Shiite religious procession that killed at least 14, according to the AP.

In fact, sectarian violence has been on the upswing in Pakistan, with the Taliban and other militant groups carrying out hundreds of bombings over the last five years. Thousands of Pakistani soldiers and civilians have died in recent attacks, as the

militants continue to campaign for a hard-line Islamist government.

The bombings have become so frequent, that the Pakistani interior minister publicly thanked the Taliban when they upheld a requested moratorium for the holy month of Ashura.

The most recent bombing of the Shiite procession occurred as worshippers were

exiting the mosque. The Pakistani Taliban took credit in the past for several anti-Shiite attacks, though no responsibility has been claimed so far for the recent attack. The local law enforcement minister for the Punjab province, where the attack occurred, told Reuters that the bomb area was still being examined for evidence.

While the Pakistani Taliban is notorious for numerous attacks in its own county, the organization has also been tied to several U.S. targets in recent years.

In fact, the Pakistani Taliban trained Mohammad Younis, the Times Square bomber, and has been connected to a suicide bombing in 2009 in which seven C.I.A. agents were killed.

The drone strike against Mehsud, and the recent sectarian attacks, come at a sensitive time for the Pakistani government. The civilian leadership and the military have been increasingly at odds, and rumors of mounting resistance have grown.

The instability of the regime could complicate the planned withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, which requires Pakistani cooperation, and the U.S. government will be watching Pakistan carefully to see how these events unfold.