



Afghan refugees eat their food offered to them from a nearby restaurant in Karachi on Saturday. Some 100,000 Afghan refugees are living in this Pakistani coastal city and are part of some two million refugees in Pakistan and Iran.

Relief pours into Pakistan for Afghan refugees

AFP, Quetta

As money and relief materials pour into Pakistan, aid workers are still struggling to find sites to shelter the huge influx of refugees expected to flee Afghanistan in the event of US attacks.

More than half of the 584 million dollar appeal launched by the United Nations to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan has been earmarked for agencies handling the refugee situation.

But given the estimates that up to one million Afghans may try to cross into Pakistan, relief workers are desperately searching for suitable sites to locate them in the border provinces of Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Province.

"Right now, we're up against a monumental challenge," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Peter Kessler.

"The simple fact of the matter is that there is no water. If the country is hit with a massive influx of refugees, it would be a logistical nightmare providing water," Kessler told AFP.

"The money may be there, but we're not even sure if there are enough water tankers in the whole of Pakistan to deliver the necessary supply."

Baluchistan has suffered four years of consecutive

drought, forcing up to 15,000 families to abandon their villages and take up a nomadic life in search of water.

The provincial capital of Quetta does not even have enough water for its own population and a recent government report went so far as to suggest the city would have to be abandoned by 2020 if the situation remained unchanged.

"There is virtually no rainfall and underground water supplies have dried up. We are already in crisis," said Mohammad Younis Khalid, spokesman for the Baluchistan NGO Federation, which represents some 300 domestic non-governmental organisations.

Nearly all the 100 refugee camp sites proposed by the Pakistani authorities are right on the border with Afghanistan, where the water shortages are the most acute and where water tables have dropped to up to 1,000 feet (303 metres) below the surface.

"Hygiene will be a major problem," Khalid said.

"Many of these refugees are illiterate and have no knowledge of basic water conservation techniques."

So far, only two sites -- abandoned refugee camps dating back to the era of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan -- have been identified as suitable by aid agencies here.



The fifteen members of the UN Security Council vote unanimously late Friday for a US-sponsored resolution obliging member states to crack down on financial assets of suspected terrorists. The resolution also expands information-sharing among UN members to combat international terrorism.

Vajpayee in hot water for allowing US plane to refuel

AFP, New Delhi

Leftist parties in India Saturday criticised the government for allowing a United States Air Force Hercules transport plan to land and refuel at an airport in New Delhi.

"Strong doubts have arisen in the minds of the people that such provision of landing facilities will gradually involve our country in the intended American war against Afghanistan," the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) said in a statement.

The party said the government had recently given an assurance to opposition parties that India's involvement in the war against terrorism would not go beyond an exchange of information with the US.

"It looks like the government is trying to hide certain moves," the statement said.

Atul Kumar Anjan, the national secretary of the Communist Party of India, said: "It is strange that this has happened. Why were the United States planes allowed to refuel here?"

Government officials had denied that the landing of the US plane was in any way linked to possible attacks on Afghanistan, whose ruling Taliban has refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, the top suspect behind the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

Officials said the plane was escorting senior US government officials.

12 killed in Kashmir hotel fire 11 militants shot dead

AFP, Srinagar

At least 12 people were killed Saturday and 16 others injured in a blaze that ravaged a popular hotel complex in the Indian-administered zone of Kashmir, police officials said.

Some of the victims were traders from the eastern Indian cities of Calcutta and Patna who were staying in the New Light Hotel in the town of Sopore when the privately-owned complex went up in flames late Friday, district police chief Abdul Qayyum Manhas said.

Sopore is a thriving apple-growing region, some 50 kilometres (31 miles) north of the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar.

Manhas said a total of 12 bodies had been brought out from the smouldering debris of the three-storey hotel.

Also among the dead were four waiters and a chef, officials said.

Senior police official Mohammad Amin Shah said more than a dozen others injured in the fire were rushed to hospital, nine of them in critical condition.

He said the death toll could further rise as more people were still feared missing in the debris.

Firefighters took seven hours to put out the blaze, which destroyed the hotel and several adjoining houses.

Officials said the fire appeared to be accidental but said a full investigation would be carried out.

Witnesses said the fire started in the hotel's kitchen.

"Several cooking-gas cylinders present inside the kitchen exploded with a bang, sending flames in all

directions," firefighter Abdul Rashid told reporters at the site.

During the early 1990s parts of Sopore were twice destroyed by fires sparked by gunbattles between Muslim militants and Indian security forces.

Meanwhile, Indian security forces Saturday shot dead 11 separatist Muslim militants in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.

Five militants were killed at the Razdan pass along the Line of Control (LoC) - the de facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan - in the northern Kashmir district of Baramulla, a police spokesman said.

"The encounter erupted after militants infiltrated into our side from across the LoC," the spokesman said.

Pakistan denies US forces operating from its territory

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan on Saturday denied reports that US ground forces were operating from its territory against the Taliban militia and alleged terrorists in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Foreign ministry spokesman Riaz Mohammad Khan also dismissed rumours that Pakistani police had arrested several Arabs on suspicion of having links with "terrorist" organisations.

"There is no basis to either of the two reports," he told a press conference here. "There are no foreign troops in Pakistan at present."

Quoting senior US and Pakistani officials, the daily USA Today reported Friday that American and

British special forces had entered Afghan territory on scouting missions.

Pentagon officials were later quoted by CNN as confirming the report, British officials refused to comment.

Elite troops from the America's counter-terrorist unit, Delta Force, its airborne Rangers and Navy SEALs, along with the British Special Air Service (SAS), are reported to be operating out of bases in Pakistan and Central Asia.

Earlier Saturday, Qatar's Al-Jazeera television reported that five armed members of US special forces, two of Afghan origin, had been captured by the Taliban in western Afghanistan.

The Taliban later rejected the

report, saying no such arrests had been made.

US forces have been deployed to undisclosed locations in preparation for possible attack against Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia and its ally, Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

Bin Laden is wanted by the United States for his alleged role in a string of attacks against US interests, most recently the September 11 suicide hijackings against targets in New York and Washington.

Pakistan, the only country to maintain diplomatic ties with the Taliban, has offered its "full cooperation" with the US-led war on terrorism, but so far it insists Washington has only sought the use of airspace, logistics and intelligence.

Detained aid workers meet lawyers

AFP, Kabul

Eight Western aid workers held in Afghanistan on charges of preaching Christianity met defence lawyers here Saturday as their trial neared its final phase, despite US demands for their immediate release.

The two Pakistani lawyers met the prisoners for the first time since the trial began behind closed doors last month, and reported they were being well treated in Taliban custody.

"They were in good health and good spirits. They were very happy to see us," said lawyer Atif Ali.

The other lawyer, Besmillah Jan, said medicine and clothing had been delivered to the detainees from diplomats and family members waiting in neighbouring Pakistan.

Diplomats said the trial process had continued despite the September 11 terrorist attacks in the

United States and subsequent US demands to Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to hand over Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

Washington has also asked for the release of the aid workers -- two Americans, two Australians and four Germans who were arrested along with 16 Afghan colleagues in early August.

So far the fundamentalist Taliban regime has refused to bend to either demand, responding instead with calls for holy war if the United States makes good on its threats of military action.

Other than a handful of aid workers and journalists in territory controlled by the anti-Taliban opposition forces, the prisoners are the only Westerners remaining in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of UN and other foreign relief staff in the wake of the October strikes in the United States.

Terror plot hatched in Germany?

AFP, Washington

A global manhunt for those behind the US terror blitz Saturday homed in on a hard core of suspects and reportedly focused on indications the plot was hatched in Germany.

German intelligence agents provided key information in the probe, after eavesdropping on conversations between followers of chief suspect Osama bin Laden, the New York Times reported Saturday.

"It looks like it was organised in Germany," the Times quoted an unnamed official as saying.

German authorities overheard the terrorists refer to "the 30 people travelling for the operation," the daily said.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) already knew that 19 suspected hijackers had died on four planes, but now have started scouring flight manifests and other clues for 11 more people who might have been part of the plot, according to the Times. The official

quoted by the Times said some of the hijackers held planning sessions in Hamburg and enrolled in flight training elsewhere in Europe.

In London, Algerian pilot Lofti Raissi was remanded in custody after prosecutors claimed he was an instructor for four of the hijackers.

Raissi, 27, who denies any involvement in the strikes, was remanded in custody until October 5 on an international arrest warrant originating in the United States.

If confirmed, the allegation would be the first direct link between the attacks and a suspect held in Europe.

Raissi is one of at least 20 suspects arrested across Europe as part of a co-ordinated effort to crack down on cells of what may be a network of terror stretching across the continent and beyond.

ABC news reported Friday that Raissi came into investigators sights when his name was found in a car left by hijackers at Washington's Dulles airport before they hijacked a

Yellow sand carrying toxic gases into Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Yellow sand blown into Japan from deserts in China and Mongolia carries toxic gases equivalent to emissions from 700,000 cars a year, Kyodo News agency said Saturday, quoting researchers.

An estimated one to three million tonnes of the sand reaches Japan every year bringing with it acid gases such as nitrogen oxide, said the National Institute for Environmental Studies, according to Kyodo.

The annual volume of sand-borne acid gas hitting Japan is equivalent to nitrogen oxide in the exhausts from 700,000 passenger cars, said researchers at the institute's Environmental Chemistry Division.

Bomb found in Colombo

AFP, Colombo

A bomb packed into a jacket usually worn by Tamil Tiger suicide bombers was found in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo Saturday, police said.

The bomb, weighing about three kilos (6.6 pounds), was packed in the jacket and hidden along a main road, where it was found by street cleaners, police said.

Police said they believed that separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas may have left the "suicide jacket" to be picked up by a bomber who would then have targeted a political leader or a security force commander.

Elite police Special Task Force commandos were called in to defuse the explosives.

The discovery came three days after the LTTE accused government forces of killing one of their senior leaders in a bomb attack deep inside an area held by the guerrillas

in the island's north.

The Tigers said they were treating the killing of Colonel Shankar with the "utmost gravity."

The LTTE said Shankar was killed by a Claymore mine attack carried out by government forces Wednesday in the rebel-held area of Oddusudan.

But defence ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said the government was not responsible for the killing.

"They are giving us a lot of credit, but it could be a small piece in a bigger jigsaw puzzle," he said.

Karunaratne said the guerrillas may be trying to stage more attacks and use the purported killing as a justification for "retaliatory" strikes.

The LTTE has been blamed for a spate of suicide bombings, including the May 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi and the May 1993 assassination of Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa.

Maoists set free all captives in Nepal

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebel group, fighting to end the country's constitutional monarchy, said it would free police and civilians held captive by its guerrillas.

"Our party announces that it will release all government, police and other people held by it," Maoist party chief Prachanda (Eds: one name) said in a statement late on Friday.

The statement did not give details of how many captives the rebels were holding or when they would be freed.

The Nepali government has said the rebels were holding 71 policemen and 117 civilians since the Maoists began an armed rebellion in early 1996 to topple the constitutional monarchy.

Both sides had exchanged dozens of prisoners since they began a peace process in August this year.

Maoist rebels, who model themselves after Peru's Shining Path guerrillas, and a government team have already held two rounds of peace talks aimed at ending the insurgency in the Himalayan kingdom.

The guerrillas are demanding an interim government to rewrite the constitution and an end to the monarchy in the poverty-stricken nation as a condition to end the conflict that has claimed over 1,800 lives.

Both sides have pledged to meet a third time but a date has not been fixed.



Palestinian protesters run for cover during clashes with Israeli soldiers in Khan Yunis on Friday in the Gaza Strip. Bloodshed swept the West Bank and Gaza Strip as four Palestinians died and more than 70 were injured on the first anniversary of the Palestinian uprising or Intifada against Israel.

Violence threatens ME truce

AFP, Gaza City

A shaky Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire looked even more unstable Saturday after a Palestinian was killed and scores more wounded during demonstrations in the Gaza Strip and mortar fire hit a West Bank Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

In a heated confrontation, 18-year-old Palestinian Khalil Yusef Fayad was shot in the head and killed, and another 55 people injured, at Deir al-Balah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Separately, a Palestinian, Ahmed al-Awajah, 25, died of gunshot wounds received Thursday ago. He had been shot in Rafah, on the Gaza Strip's border with Egypt, al-Shifa hospital said.

Saturday's deaths bring the toll for Palestinian uprising to 836,

including 644 Palestinians and 169 Israelis.

Ninety-six Palestinian youths were injured in Saturday protests commemorating the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, Palestinian medical sources said.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers shot 25 youths in clashes at the central Gaza Strip's Karni border crossing into Israel and 16 more at Beit Hanun in the north, al-Shifa hospital said.

Late in the morning, Palestinian police in Beit Hanun started to move youth away and set up checkpoints in order to restore calm to the area, along the Eretz border crossing into Israel, Palestinian sources said.

Protestors had also started to gather late morning in Gaza City.

The Israeli army told AFP its soldiers had been besieged in the Gaza Strip "by hundreds of young protestors with stones and molotov cocktails."

The troops returned fire with tear-gas and live ammunition, the army said.

One border patrol officer was lightly wounded in Beit Hanun, it added.

Witnesses said the protests had started with slogans before turning violent. They said young Palestinians shouted: "The intifada will continue until we are free from occupation."

The National and Islamic Forces, a coalition of 13 Palestinian political and Islamic groups, had called this week for protests to commemorate the anniversary of the intifada, which fell on Friday.

