

'Widening gap' between Afghanistan, Pakistan

Says Karzai after talks with Shaukat Aziz

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan and Pakistan remained at odds about the laying of mines on their shared border after top-level talks yesterday, with President Hamid Karzai noting a "widening gap" between the neighbours.

Karzai also told reporters after meeting with Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz he was "not satisfied" with Pakistan's efforts to organise an agreed tribal council to discuss the worsening Taliban insurgency.

Karzai called Aziz to Kabul for talks amid a new row between the Muslim neighbours about

Pakistan's plans to mine and fence part of the boundary to stem the crossborder movement of militants carrying out attacks in Afghanistan.

The countries are at loggerheads about the growing violence in Afghanistan, which accuses Pakistan of not doing enough against factions in its territory alleged to be training and funding the Islamist insurgents.

"The gap between Afghanistan and Pakistan unfortunately is widening," Karzai said at a media briefing after the talks, which ran overtime.

He repeated his strong objections to mining and fencing the rugged 2,500-kilometre (1,500-

mile) frontier, saying it was "very clear" this "cannot prevent terrorism but it will divide the two nations".

Afghanistan, one of the most mined countries in the world, also opposed the plan because of the "deadly human consequences" of mines, he said, echoing concerns raised by the United Nations.

Aziz said however Pakistan believed selective mining and fencing could stop the crossing of "people who are not welcome on the other side".

But Karzai said Afghanistan was "asking for other measures".

He added: "We have said, 'Let

us work against places where training for terrorism is taking place, where funding for terrorism is taking place, where supplies are given.'

Aziz meanwhile announced the establishment of a commission to look at plans to call a tribal council, called a jirga, in the ethnic Pashtun areas along the border where Taliban militants are rooted.

Karzai mooted the idea at talks late last year with US President George W Bush and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, who agreed to the plan, which will see a similar meeting on the Afghan side of the border.



Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz (L) and Afghan President Hamid Karzai listen to journalists questions during their joint press conference at the Presidential Palace in Kabul yesterday after formal talks.

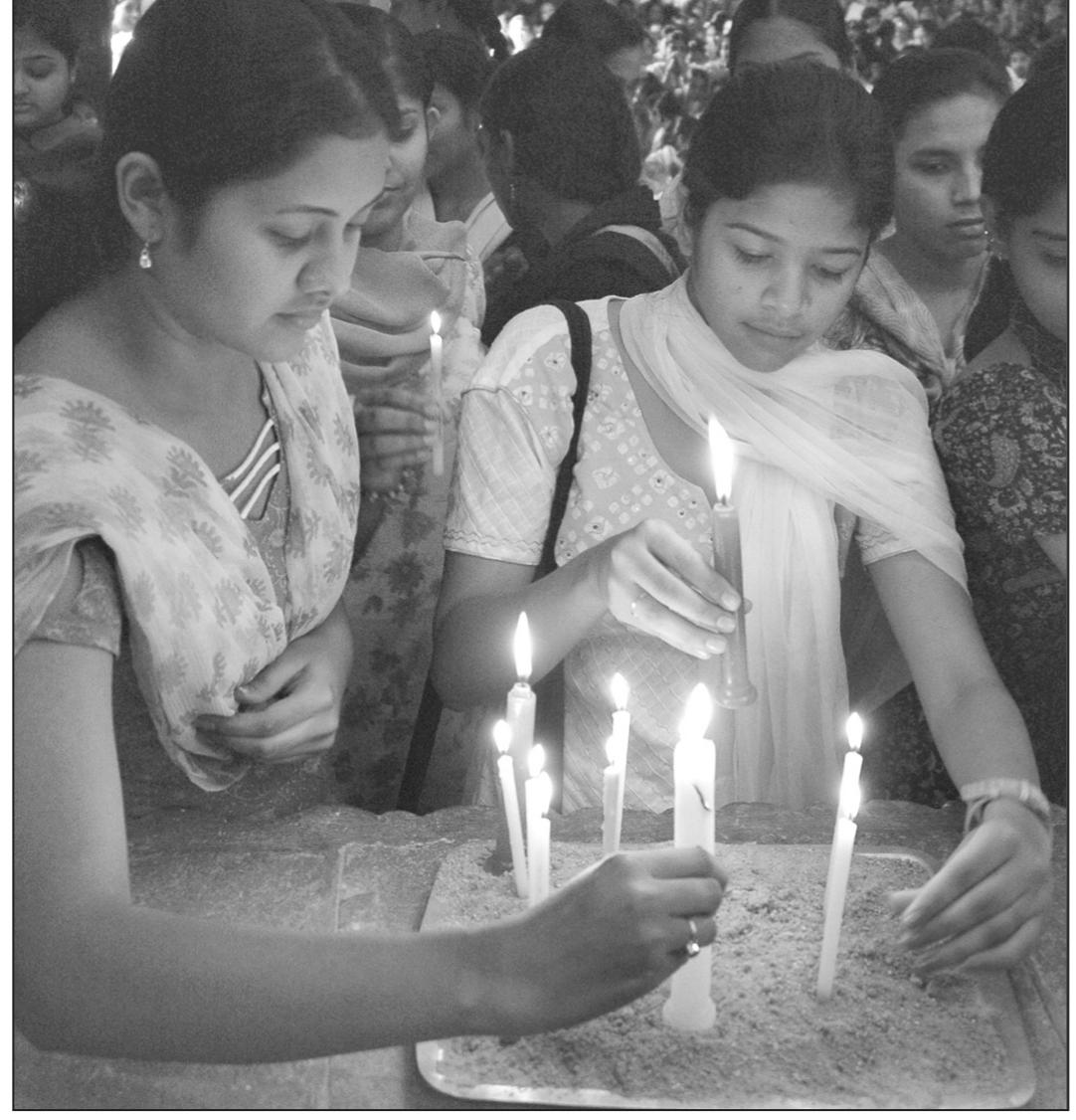
'Nato killed too many Afghan civilians'

AP, Kabul

Nato said Wednesday that it killed too many Afghan civilians during fighting last year against resurgent Taliban militants, but that the Western alliance was working to change that in 2007.

The acknowledgment came one day after President Hamid Karzai's latest plea for foreign forces to use maximum caution following the deaths of two civilians, reportedly involving Nato troops.

"The single thing that we have done wrong and we are striving extremely hard to improve on (in 2007) is killing innocent civilians," Brig Richard E Nugee, the chief spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force, told a news conference.



Indian students from St. Francis College hold a silent protest against Noida killings and atrocities against women and girls in Hyderabad yesterday. Public anger against the police has been growing since the remains of the 17 people, mainly children, who were kidnapped, raped and murdered, were found in the affluent Noida suburb in New Delhi last week.

Blasts kill 5 in Afghanistan

20 insurgents die in fighting

AFP, Kandahar

Five Afghan militiamen were killed and four others were injured when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in volatile southern Afghanistan, a senior military official said Thursday.

The militiamen, hired by the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) to help with security, were killed Wednesday in southern Uruzgan province's Taliban-dominated Charchino district, Afghan general Rahmatullah Raufi said.

Taliban spokesman Yousaf Ahmadi called AFP from an unknown location and said that the landmine was planted by Taliban rebels.

"We had put the mine to target

the foreign and Afghan troops. It was detonated by a remote control device," Ahmadi, who often calls media to claim attacks on behalf of the Islamist Taliban, told AFP.

Taliban loyalists have been waging violence against President Hamid Karzai's US-backed government and tens of thousands of Western troops hunting the militants down.

Afghan officials, including Karzai, have alleged that militants are crossing the border from Pakistan to carry out such attacks.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz arrived Thursday in Kabul to hold talks with the Afghan government amid a new row over the proposed fencing and mining of the two countries' joint border by

Pakistan. Some 4,000 people -- including 1,000 civilians, but mostly rebels -- died last year in insurgency-related unrest.

Meanwhile, Afghan and foreign troops killed 20 rebels, including two commanders, in operations against militants in southern Afghanistan, officials said Wednesday.

Seventeen, including the commanders, were killed in the southern provinces of Helmand in a three-day operation that wrapped up Monday and involved Afghan and Nato-led troops, interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary told AFP.

About 4,500 British troops are in Helmand serving with Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar has added to the mystery over Osama bin Laden, saying he had not seen his ally and fellow fugitive since US-backed forces ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan in late 2001.

"No, I have neither seen him, nor have I made any effort to do so, but I pray for his health and safety," Omar said in an e-mailed response to questions sent by Reuters.

The questions were relayed to Omar through his spokesman Mohammad Hanif, and a reply was received late on Wednesday.

A half-dozen audio tapes of bin Laden were circulated during the first half of 2006, but the al-Qaeda leader last appeared on video tape in late 2004, while tapes of his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahri, have been issued regularly.

A video tape of bin Laden was released late last year, but it was identified as old footage, and the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States passed without any word from the al-Qaeda leader.

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