

Nato airstrike kills 30 Afghan civilians

AFP, AP, Kabul

Foreign military air strikes killed 30 villagers in southern Afghanistan, a mayor said yesterday, as the US-led coalition said some were found dead in trenches with rebel fighters.

The new claims of civilian casualties in the battle against Taliban insurgents came with the coalition and separate Nato-led force already under pressure for the number of ordinary people being killed in their operations.

The air strikes were called into Girishk district of Helmand province after intense fighting Friday in which troops trying to clear the banks of the Helmand River of rebels had come under heavy attack, the coalition said.

"Our initial investigations show that 30 civilians including women, children and men have killed," said the mayor of the district, Dur Alisha.

"I cannot say anything about Taliban casualties. The number of civilians killed is 30, plus or minus one," he said.

An AFP photographer saw some of the wounded admitted to a clinic in the town of Girishk, about 15 kilometres (nine miles) south of the bombed area, and in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital.

Helmand province police chief Mohammad Hussain Andiwal told AFP earlier that 39 "armed Taliban" were killed.

A delegation was sent to the remote area to investigate after locals had claimed scores of civilians were killed and wounded, he said.

"Six houses have been

bombed, three of them have been reduced to rubble," a local named Feda Mohammad said, claiming about 100 were dead and wounded.

"People are still busy bringing out the dead from under the rubble, there are funerals at various places," he said.

The area, near the village of Haidar Abad, has seen intense fighting with police saying foreign strikes killed 25 civilians, including nine women and three young children, in the vicinity on June 22.

7 civilians killed in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Suspected rebels in Sri Lanka shot dead seven civilians and security forces discovered a truck packed with powerful explosives, the country's defence ministry said yesterday.

Tamil Tiger rebels gunned down four farmers in the eastern town of Seruruwara late on Friday, the military said.

Two Tamil civilians were shot dead by the guerrillas in the northern town of Jaffna late on Friday, the ministry added.

The rebels also shot dead a former child soldier in the eastern Batticaloa district as he attended a Hindu service late on Thursday, the ministry said.



US top court to review Guantanamo cases

AP, Washington

The Supreme Court agreed Friday to review whether Guantanamo Bay detainees can use federal courts to challenge their confinement, reversing an April decision not to hear arguments on the issue.

The unusual turnabout was announced without comment from justices who had twice before issued rulings critical of the way the Bush administration was handling detainees. Arguments are expected in the fall.

There was no indication why the justices changed course from three months ago, but lawyers for the prisoners pointed to intervening events as having changed the complexion of the long-running controversy.

A week ago, lawyers for the detainees filed a statement with the Supreme Court from a military officer who alleged US military panels that classified detainees as enemy combatants for the past four years relied on vague and incomplete intelligence.

Under a law the Bush administration pushed through Congress last year, designating detainees as an enemy combatants strips them of any right to use the federal courts to challenge the legality of their detention.

Detainees challenged the law, and their appeal reached the Supreme Court earlier this year. On April 2, the court turned down the detainees' request to be heard.

Iran unfazed by threat of new sanctions

AFP, Tehran

Iran has no fear of fresh sanctions over its nuclear programme because the international community cannot cause it any harm, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in comments published yesterday.

"Iran has become a nuclear country and atomic Iran will not back down," Ahmadinejad said.

"They cannot hurt us, not that they don't want to but because they

are incapable of doing do as they are in a difficult situation."

Ahmadinejad said "the global arrogance cannot stop the Iranian nation", in an allusion to the United States which has never ruled out military action to stop Iran's nuclear drive.

The UN Security Council has already imposed two sets of sanctions against Iran after it failed to heed ultimatums to suspend uranium enrichment, the process that

makes nuclear fuel but in highly extended form can also produce the fissile core of an atomic bomb.

The West fears that Iran's nuclear programme is cover for a push to develop the bomb, although Iran has said repeatedly that it is for civilian purposes only.

The Iranian president said that a petrol rationing plan introduced by the world's fourth largest oil producer on Wednesday gave it even greater immunity from international pressure.

London mayor defends Muslims

AFP, London

London Mayor Ken Livingstone called on Britons yesterday not to demonise Muslims after a double car bomb plot was foiled in the capital, amid fears of a Islamist terror threat.

At the same time he criticised Britain over its ties with Saudi Arabia, which he said had fuelled intolerance in the past through its Wahhabist form of Islam, creating a "major problem."

"In this city, Muslims are more likely to be law-abiding than non-Muslims and less likely to support the use of violence to achieve political ends than non-Muslims," he told BBC Radio.

"They have played a good and active and growing role in creating a multi-cultural society," he added.

He noted that terrorist acts had been carried out in London over the years by various groups including for example far-right groups. For years the British capital was wracked by violence by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Musharraf warned as Taliban spreading

AFP, Washington

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has been warned by that without "swift and decisive action" the militant Islamic movement the Taliban will soon spread across all of Pakistan, The New York Times reported yesterday. The newspaper said the warning came in an interior ministry document made available to it, which said Pakistani security forces in North West Frontier Province were outgunned and outnumbered and had forfeited authority to the Taliban and their allies.

"The ongoing spell of active Taliban resistance has brought about serious repercussions for Pakistan," The Times quotes the 15-page document as saying. "There is a general policy of appeasement towards the Taliban, which has further emboldened them."

The document was discussed by the Pakistani National Security Council in the presence of General Musharraf.

A diplomat, who was not authorised to speak for attribution,

called the document "an accurate description of the dagger pointed at the country's heart," the report said.

The United States has poured about one billion dollars a year into Pakistan in the last five years for what are described as reimbursements for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts along the border with Afghanistan.

The prime purpose of that financial support has been to stop the area from becoming a haven for the Taliban and al-Qaeda as they wage their insurgency in Afghanistan.

Interior Minister Aftab Khan Sherpao, the prime mover behind the document, narrowly escaped a suicide bomb attack in April by extremists in his home area of Charsadda, northeast of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan, the paper said.

The attack on Sherpao shook his confidence in General Musharraf's policy toward the militants, which has included a series of peace deals, The Times said.



Mumbai residents wade through waterlogged street in Parel, Mumbai after heavy rain yesterday.

PHOTO: PPI