



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani army soldiers patrol near the suicide attack site near the main town Miranshah of North Waziristan Saturday. At least 62 Pakistani people were killed in three suicide attacks in the last two days following a bloody raid on Red Mosque.

Karzai slams Pak madrasas for teaching violent extremism

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai criticised some madrasas in Pakistan for teaching violent extremism yesterday, as he forgave a teenager who said he was sent across the border to carry out a suicide attack.

"Today we're facing a very regretful, painful fact," Karzai told a media conference, joined by 14-year-old Rafiq-Ullah and his father Mati-Ullah, from Pakistan's troubled Taliban-dominated South Waziristan tribal region.

"A child of Islam that his father had sent to a madrasa for education was tempted by the enemies of Islam to carry out a suicide attack," he said.

"I forgive you," Karzai told the boy -- who was detained in May in eastern Khost province, where the boy said he was sent to carry out a suicide attack on the governor -- giving him 100,000 Afghanis (2,000 dollars) to travel back home.

Asked whether he had a message for Pakistan, the Afghan president said Kabul wanted good ties with Islamabad, a key US ally in its 'war on terror.'

"The message of the Afghan people is one of kindness, the message of mercy," he said. "It's the message of having good relations, brotherly relations."

"It's the message for trade and exchange," he added, "not to deceive the children of people and encourage them to carry out suicide attacks, destroying themselves, their families and other Muslims."

Kashmir could become symbol of Indo-Pak peace: Manmohan

AFP, Jammu

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said the disputed Kashmir region could become a symbol of cooperation with arch-rival Pakistan as he promised to continue peace talks with Islamabad.

Singh, on a day-long visit to Kashmir's Jammu region, repeated a pledge he first made in 2005 that "borders (between India and Pakistan in Kashmir) cannot be changed, but they can be made irrelevant."

The neighbours, who have fought two of their three wars since 1947 over Kashmir, both claim the region in full but administer it in part.

"I hope and believe that Kashmir can, one day, become a symbol of India-Pakistan cooperation rather than of conflict."

"There can no be question of divisions or fresh partitions, but the line of control can become a line of peace," he said, referring to the de facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Singh also added that New Delhi would deal firmly with an Islamic insurgency against Indian rule in its zone of Kashmir that began in 1989 and has so far claimed more than 42,000 lives, according to official figures.

"We are firm in our resolve to fight terrorism and to end the black-mail of terror in this peace-loving state," he said.

India accuses Pakistan of aiding separatists who are battling Indian troops, a charge Islamabad denies.

On the slow-moving peace talks with Pakistan on Kashmir and other disputes, started in January 2004, Singh said New Delhi would "continue our dialogue with Pakistan, despite difficulties ... because I genuinely believe that there is no alternative but to work for building peace."

"I reiterate that I am for ending a 60-year old legacy of bitterness with Pakistan," he added.

Typhoon misses Tokyo, loses strength

AP, Tokyo

A typhoon expected to hit Tokyo missed the capital and moved toward northeastern Japan yesterday after leaving five people dead and forcing tens of thousands to evacuate.

Authorities said Typhoon Man-Yi was losing strength as it passed southwest of Tokyo, with sustained winds of 56 miles an hour.

As of midday Sunday, more than 40,000 people had been evacuated. Forecasters warned of continued heavy rains, high waves and strong winds, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Earlier in the day, rescuers found the body of a 79-year-old farmer who was swept into a river after going to check on his rice field in Tokushima, on the western island of Shikoku, according to agency spokesman Yukihide Nakashima.

Australia not extraditing Indian doctor

AP, Brisbane

An Indian doctor accused of supporting the foiled car bomb attacks in London and Glasgow will not be extradited to Britain while he faces charges in Australia, the attorney general said yesterday.

Muhammad Haneef, 27, was charged Saturday with providing support to a terrorist organisation by giving his mobile phone SIM card to British suspects Sabeel and Kafeel Ahmed when he moved to Australia in July 2006. He faces a maximum of 15 years in prison if convicted.

Attorney General Philip Ruddock said the case would most likely be tried in Australia.

"In relation to extradition, Australia would not normally surrender a person for extradition where there were outstanding matters that had to be dealt with here," Ruddock told Network Ten.

Haneef was ordered to remain in custody in the eastern city of Brisbane until at least Monday while a magistrate decides whether to release him on bail.

Under Australian laws, bail can only granted to those charged with terror-related offences in "exceptional circumstances."

Haneef's wife maintained her husband was innocent and pleaded with authorities to help free him, Indian media reported Sunday.

Britain urged to legalise illegal immigrants

AFP, London

Half a million illegal immigrants should be given the right to stay in Britain, a leading centre-left think-tank said yesterday, arguing that to do so would benefit the country's economy.

The Institute for Public Policy Research, favoured by former prime minister Tony Blair, said that regularisation could swell Britain's coffers by about one billion pounds (1.47 billion euros, two billion dollars) per year.

Forcible deportation, on the other hand, would cost the country 4.7 billion pounds and was not feasible, it added, citing government estimates that it could take up to 30 years to complete at current rates of removal.

The IPPR's head of migration and equalities, Danny Sriskandarajah accepted that illegal immigration was a thorny political issue but such a plan had been backed by two senior government ministers.

"The simple truth is that we are not going to deport hundreds of thousands of people from the UK," he said in a statement.

"Our economy would shrink and we would notice it straightaway in uncleaned offices, dirty streets and understaffed pubs and clubs."

Tribal militants scrap peace accord with Pakistan govt

AFP, Miranshah

Pro-Taliban militants in a Pakistan tribal border region with Afghanistan said yesterday they had scrapped a controversial peace accord reached with the government last year.

"We are ending the agreement today," the Taliban Shoorra (Taliban Council) said in pamphlets distributed in Miranshah, the capital of North Waziristan, where a suicide attack on a military convoy killed 24 troops the previous day.

The government in September signed a peace agreement with tribal leaders in the region -- a deal heavily criticised by Western allies and Afghanistan -- following assurances that the tribesmen would

hunt down foreign militants.

Council leaders released the statement Sunday to protest new troop movements, amid sharply heightened tensions after last week's army attack on Islamabad's pro-Taliban Red Mosque, which killed 86 people, mostly militants.

After the raid, Musharraf vowed to crack down on extremists and deployed extra troops to areas including the Swat district of North West Frontier Province and North Waziristan's Dera Ismail Khan area.

Suicide attacks using explosives-packed cars against military convoys in both regions killed more than 40 people and wounded scores more at the weekend.

North Waziristan militant commander Abdullah Farhad had on Saturday threatened "guerrilla war" if government troops did not abandon checkpoints by Sunday in a dispute that has been brewing for weeks.

Sunday's pamphlets said tribal elders would refuse dialogue with authorities who had failed to pull back troops from up to 25 checkpoints.

"We had signed the agreement for the safety and protection of the life and property of our people," the statement said. "But the government forces continued to launch attacks on the Taliban and have killed a number of people."

"The decision we are taking today is in the interest of the people."

INDO-AMERICAN NUKE PACT

US 'ready' to resolve issues

AFP, Washington

Washington said Saturday it is "ready to resolve" the outstanding issues in the US-India nuclear cooperation agreement in talks next week with top Indian officials.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in a statement that India's National Security Advisor MK Narayanan, Department of Atomic Energy Chairman Anil Kakodkar, and Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon will be in Washington on July

16-19 for talks on the two countries' Nuclear Cooperation Initiative, which includes a pact for bilateral peaceful nuclear cooperation known as the 123 agreement.

They will meet Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and other top US officials in hopes crafting a final agreement.

India and the United States have been discussing the fine print of the accord for two years after Washington agreed in principle to

reverse three decades of US sanctions on nuclear trade with India.

"The United States stands ready to resolve the remaining outstanding issues on the 123 agreement," McCormack said.

"The United States understands the importance of the agreement to our relationship and the benefits it will bring to both nations. We are confident that with continued hard work, flexibility, and good spirit, we will reach a final agreement."



PHOTO: AFP

Prominent Pakistani human rights activist Asma Jahangir (C) dances with lawyers during the arrival of suspended Pakistani chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry at the Lahore Bar Association in Lahore yesterday. Chaudhry, who is challenging his suspension in the Supreme Court, has also taken his battle to cities across the country, drawing mass crowds who have showered him with flower petals and chanted anti-Musharraf slogans.

'16 Lankan troops killed in heavy fighting'

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels killed at least 16 government soldiers for the loss of three of their own fighters in heavy clashes in northern Sri Lanka Saturday, the guerrillas said.

The two sides claimed to have inflicted heavy casualties in the weekend fighting with the military saying at least 16 government soldiers and three rebels were killed.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they resisted a two-pronged military assault and captured several bodies of Sri Lankan soldiers killed in the pre-dawn fighting.

"More than 16 Sri Lanka army troops were killed and around 45 others were injured in the clashes," the Tigers said in a statement.

The defence ministry admitted heavy fighting and placed its own losses at least 10 soldiers killed and 34 wounded. The ministry said "a large number" of Tigers were also killed.

Meanwhile, four civilians were bound and shot dead execution-style in northern Sri Lanka near the scene of heavy battles between troops and Tamil rebels, a police official said Sunday.

The bodies of the four were found shot in the head Sunday with their hands tied behind their backs in Vavuniya district.

"Four people were found shot dead at Tavasakulam in Vavuniya," said a police official in Vavuniya, 260km north of Colombo.

"An investigation is under way," he said adding that it was unclear who was behind the killings.

The four were killed in the same region where security forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fought pitched battles on Saturday, officials said.

Sri Lankan troops used war planes and long-range weapons to attack suspected Tamil Tiger positions as fresh fighting broke out early Saturday, the ministry said.

Fighter jets pounded suspected



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan government soldiers pose with national (L) and Tamil Tiger (R) flags atop the Thoppigala Rock, some 270km northeast of Colombo Saturday. Security forces captured Thoppigala, the last bastion of LTTE guerrillas in eastern Sri Lanka, following months of heavy fighting.

8 dead in attacks in eastern Afghanistan

AFP, Khost

Eight people including five construction workers were killed in a series of weekend attacks in eastern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

The five construction workers were killed when a bomb exploded underneath their vehicle in Paktika province, local police chief Sardar Mohammad Zazi said, adding that the device was detonated by remote control.

Two others were wounded in the attack, which the police chief blamed on fighters with links to the Taliban, which has waged a violent insurgency in Afghanistan since being toppled from power in a US-led invasion in late 2001.

Also in Paktika, an Afghan man was killed and three people hurt when a rocket fired from Pakistani territory at a Nato base landed instead on a group of homes in Barmal district, said provincial

governor Mohammad Akran Ikhpolwak.

To the north in neighbouring Paktia province, unknown assailants opened fire on the chief of Showak district late Saturday, gunning down two of his bodyguards, deputy provincial police chief Ghulam Dastgir told AFP.

In volatile southern Helmand province, where insurgent attacks occur almost daily, three "very important" Taliban figures were killed on Saturday in clashes with security forces, the defence ministry said in a statement.

And a suspected suicide bomber died late Saturday in eastern Khost province when the explosives he was carrying apparently blew up prematurely, a local spokesman said.

More than 50,000 Western troops, the bulk of them under a Nato-led International Security Assistance Force, are deployed in Afghanistan.

India set to elect first female president amid mudslinging

AFP, New Delhi

India is set to elect its first female head of state in a two-way election this week, the run-up to which has been the most vitriolic in recent memory, analysts say.

Pratibha Patil, 72, nominated by the Congress-led government, is seen as a shoo-in thanks to support from the ruling coalition and its supporters in the secret ballot to be held on Thursday by an electoral college made up of state and federal lawmakers.

But accusations that Patil shielded members of her family over accusations of murder and abetting suicide have led to charges by the media that her term could be undermined by scandal.

Patil's candidature for the largely ceremonial post was announced as opinion polls showed most Indians favoured a second term for the incumbent president Abdul Kalam, who was the previous Hindu nationalist government's choice.

But Kalam pulled out of the presidential race after the Congress and the opposition Hindu nationalist-dominated alliance could not agree on fielding him for another term.

Though the Congress defended its selection, saying it was giving a woman the chance to occupy the top post in a country where women face heavy discrimination, the opposition said Patil was named due to her loyalty to India's Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Los Angeles archdiocese to pay \$660m for abuse

AP, Los Angeles

The nation's largest Catholic archdiocese has settled its abuse cases for \$660 million, by far the largest payout in the church's sexual abuse scandal, The Associated Press has learned.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the plaintiffs reached the deal Saturday, said Ray Boucher, the lead plaintiff's attorney. The archdiocese and the plaintiffs will release a statement Sunday morning and hold a news conference Monday, he said.

An anonymous source with knowledge of the deal placed its value at \$660 million, by far the largest payout in the church's sexual abuse scandal. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because the settlement had not been officially announced.

'US will remain Britain's closest ally'

AFP, London

Foreign Secretary David Miliband insisted yesterday that the United States would remain Britain's most important ally under new Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

After signals that London would distance itself Washington under Brown's premiership, Miliband sought to quash such notions, calling Britain's relationship with the United States "vital."

"With a new Brown government some people are looking for evidence that our alliance is breaking up," Miliband wrote in the News of the World, Britain's biggest-selling newspaper.

Most foreign insurgents in Iraq are Saudis

AFP, Washington

Most foreign fighters and suicide bombers in Iraq come from Saudi Arabia, despite attempts by US officials to portray Syria and Iran as the main culprits of violence, The Los Angeles Times reported yesterday.

Citing an unnamed senior US military officer and Iraqi lawmakers, the newspaper said about 45 per cent of all foreign militants targeting US troops and Iraqi security forces were from Saudi Arabia, 15 per cent from Syria and Lebanon, and 10 per cent from North Africa.

Official US military figures made available to The Times also show that nearly half of the 135 foreigners in US detention facilities in Iraq are Saudis, the report said.