



Young children from the village of Chaung Lin receive food thrown from a boat by locals Friday in the isolated area of Kanzeik in the Irrawaddy Delta region -- an area only accessible by boat which has received neither government nor foreign aid.

Aid agencies call on Myanmar to act on pledge

UN opens air base to help relief work

AP, AFP, Yangon/Bangkok

Foreign aid agencies yesterday called on Myanmar's junta to urgently clarify the rules for operating in the country's cyclone-devastated areas, expressing hope tinged with scepticism after the regime promised to open its doors to the international community.

Myanmar's ruling generals offered no elaboration after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced Friday that the junta had agreed to allow "all aid workers" into the country. The concession came after three weeks of blocking relief for cyclone survivors and on the eve of an international donors conference Sunday in Myanmar.

"I want to be optimistic, but I'm

sceptical," Lionel Rosenblatt, president emeritus of US-based Refugees International said, voicing comments echoed by relief agencies worldwide. "My overall impression is scepticism and what this actually means. The devil is going to be in the implementation."

The United Nations opened a relief staging post at an airport in the Thai capital on Saturday to help speed up the cyclone aid effort in neighbouring Myanmar.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was on hand to open the hub just a day after talks with Myanmar's junta leader Than Shwe, which he said led to an agreement to let foreign aid workers into the country.

The possible breakthrough distracted attention from the junta's

widely criticised decision to push ahead Saturday with a constitutional referendum in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and hard-hit delta areas.

Critics say the proposed charter is designed to strengthen the military's grip on power and they had urged the government to focus on relief efforts.

Saturday's voting was a pointless exercise. The rest of the country voted May 10, and state radio has said the delayed balloting could not reverse the constitution's reported approval by 92.4 percent of the 22 million eligible voters.

Determined democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi cast her ballot on Friday evening when referendum officials visited her Yangon home with a ballot card, an official said on

condition of anonymity. Suu Kyi's opposition party called for a "No" vote on the proposed charter, which effectively bars her from holding elected office.

Suu Kyi's home was damaged during the May 2-3 cyclone, which decimated the Irrawaddy delta, Myanmar's key rice-producing region in the southwest.

The xenophobic junta has kept the delta virtually off-limits to foreign aid workers, who have been barred from leaving Yangon.

The push to get aid workers into the delta is increasingly urgent because an estimated 2.5 million people remain in severe need, threatened by disease, hunger and exposure because of the loss of their homes.

Myanmar cyclone victims vote on eve of aid conference

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar opened polls for hundreds of thousands of cyclone victims, many hungry, homeless and still waiting for aid, in a much-criticised constitutional referendum Saturday ahead of a key donors' conference.

Voters who have been struggling to stave off starvation and disease since the May 2-3 disaster, which left 133,000 dead or missing, left ramshackle shelters and patched-up homes to cast ballots on the military-backed constitution.

The outcome of the balloting has already been decided, after the junta declared an overwhelming victory in the first round of voting on May 10, held in parts of the country spared by the cyclone.

The vote comes on weekend of intense diplomatic activity in one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries, which is still reeling from the storm three weeks ago.

Growth of al-Qaeda safe havens in Pak tribal areas is 'troubling'

Says Pentagon

AFP, Washington

A Pentagon report said Friday that the growth of al-Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas is "troubling" and warned it may take Pakistan several years to turn around the situation.

The report to Congress by the US Department of Defence said Pakistan increased its troop levels in the border areas by 30,000 last year, and made "significant and costly" efforts to eliminate safe havens.

"It is troubling that despite these efforts, safe havens in the Fata have grown in recent years," the report said.

The report made no reference to an apparent change in strategy by

the new Pakistani government favouring negotiations with militants in the federally administered tribal areas.

Under a peace agreement reached this week with pro-Taliban militants in the Swat Valley, the government agreed to gradually pull out its troops in return for a halt in attacks.

The Pentagon report noted that 700 Pakistanis have been killed in suicide attacks since July 2007.

It said "al-Qaeda and other violent extremists continue to hide out in the Fata, where they are able to recruit, train, and target US and western interests, including plots against Europe and the US homeland."

UN chief pledges world's support for quake victims

AFP, Yingxiu

China warned Saturday that the death toll from its worst earthquake in a generation could climb past 80,000, as visiting UN chief Ban Ki-moon pledged the world's support.

The UN secretary general came to Yingxiu, the epicentre of the 8.0-magnitude earthquake, which turned this former town of 10,000 people in southwestern Sichuan province into rubble.

As workers in protective suits sprayed disinfectant to curb disease and the stench of corpses, Premier Wen Jiabao told Ban that the death toll from the tragedy had crossed 60,000, a jump of more than 4,000 from a day earlier.

Fatalities "may further climb to a level of 70,000, 80,000 or more,"

the premier said.

Nearly 30,000 people were missing and up to 300,000 others injured in the May 12 tragedy, he added.

Ban came as international efforts to support China picked up steam, with UN agencies rushing aid and experts and contributing eight million dollars from its emergency fund.

"If we work hard we can overcome this. The whole world stands behind you and supports you," Ban said.

Ban was on a brief stop in between trips to neighbouring Myanmar, where one day earlier he persuaded the ruling military leaders to accept an international relief effort for survivors of the cyclone which struck there three weeks ago.

While Myanmar's junta has come under fierce criticism for its response to the disaster, Ban praised the response of the Chinese.

"The Chinese government at an early stage of the natural disaster made search and rescue efforts, demonstrated extraordinary leadership to overcome this natural disaster," Ban said.

China has accepted international rescue teams and doctors, although it faced some criticism for waiting several days to make the decision.

China has been eager since the quake to ease tensions with other countries. Protests targeting the upcoming Beijing Olympics flared earlier this year due to criticism of China's handling of demonstrations in Tibet.



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (L) walks past a collapsed school during his visit to the earthquake-hit town of Yingxiu in Wenchuan county, in China's Sichuan Province yesterday. Ban met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Yingxiu, the epicentre of the earthquake that left more than 80,000 people dead or missing, and pledged support to China's earthquake survivors.



Pakistani anti-Musharraf lawyers escort sacked Pakistani Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry (C) as he leaves his residence in Islamabad yesterday to address a lawyer's convention in Faisalabad. Pakistani lawyers have decided to step up their campaign for the reinstatement of judges deposed by President Pervez Musharraf last year.

Pressure mounts on Brown after polls rout

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown faced a grim holiday weekend as speculation mounted yesterday over whether he might face a leadership challenge.

Only one Labour deputy broke ranks and publicly called for Brown to go after Friday's devastating by-election defeat. But according to newspaper reports, even senior figures in Brown's governing Labour Party were wondering how much more they could tolerate.

The main opposition Conservatives won the previously

safe Labour seat of Crewe and Nantwich in north-west England with a mammoth swing of nearly 18 percent, stunning commentators and politicians alike.

Britain is supposed to be enjoying a long weekend off given Monday's spring public holiday.

But that will not stop fevered gossip in political circles as Labour lawmakers -- many now fearing for their seats -- consider their next moves, eyeing the general election which must come within two years.

Labour deputy Graham Stringer told the BBC it was time for a senior figure in the party to challenge Brown.

Jihad in Afghanistan to continue

AFP, Peshawar

Top Pakistani Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud on Saturday said jihad, or holy war, would continue in Afghanistan, despite peace negotiations between the militants and Islamabad.

"Islam does not recognise boundaries and jihad in Afghanistan will continue," he told a group of reporters invited to his stronghold of South Waziristan tribal district near the Afghan border.

The Taliban, driven from power in Afghanistan by a US-led invasion in 2001, are active on the border tribal

zone, where the Pakistani army has fought the Islamists since 2003.

The new government in Islamabad launched talks with local Taliban soon after winning elections in February, amid concerns that Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's military approach was spawning more violence.

Washington has been concerned by the change in policy since the coalition government was formed six weeks ago and began talks with the Taliban, whom US and Nato troops suspect are sending men to fight in Afghanistan.

Roadside bombs kill 3 in Pakistan

AP, Peshawar

Separate roadside bomb attacks in Pakistan's volatile northwest yesterday killed three people, including a local police chief, a senior police official said.

The first attack happened in Bara, a town 10 miles east of Peshawar, when a roadside bomb exploded near a civilian vehicle, killing one person and wounding three others, the official Ata Ullah said.

About two hours later, another bomb struck a vehicle in Peshawar that was carrying local police chief Khaisa Khan, killing him and his driver. Two policemen were wounded in the attack, he said.

Lanka jets bomb restive north

AFP, AP, Colombo

Sri Lanka warplanes bombed a suspected rebel boat yard and provided cover for ground troops pushing into rebel territory, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Scattered battles killed seven Tamil Tiger separatist rebels and one government soldier along Sri Lanka's northern front lines, the military said Saturday.

However, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) accused the airforce of dropping bombs over a group of civilians fleeing fighting in the restive north, killing an infant and a 17-year-old girl.

The conflicting accounts came a

day after the LTTE said government commandos set off a fragmentation mine against a minibus packed with civilians near the rebels' main base of Kilinochchi, killing 16 people.

Army troops launched two separate attacks along the front lines in the Jaffna peninsula and destroyed 13 rebel bunkers Friday, a defence ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of government policy. He did not give casualty figures.

Other fighting in the Vavuniya and Mannar regions bordering the rebels' de facto state in the north killed seven rebels and one soldier Friday, he said.

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The Board of Directors of Dhaka Stock Exchange Ltd. has decided to Sale three (03) Membership through open bidding system.

Applications from Corporate Entities are, therefore, invited as per terms and conditions given in the tender schedule, available from the above address on payment of non-refundable Pay Order of Tk. 20,000/= (Twenty Thousand Taka) only during the DSE office hours from May 26, 2008.

The application in two separate envelope (one containing information and documents required as per schedule and a refundable earnest money of Tk. 10,000,000/= (Taka Ten Million) only in the form of Pay Order/ D.D. addressed to Dhaka Stock Exchange Ltd. and the 2nd sealed envelope (containing price offer) must reach DSE Office at the above address on or before June 12, 2008. Any bid below Tk. 80,000,000.00 (Taka Eighty Million) will not be entertained. The membership will be offered through opening the price quote in presence among the valid applicants on June 19, 2008 at 3:00 PM at DSE Board Room. The Board of Directors reserves the right of accepting or rejecting any application or offer without showing any reasons thereto.

By order of the Board
 (Salahuddin Ahmed Khan)
 Chief Executive Officer