

US lauds Pak army's anti-terror effort

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's army is "fighting bravely" against terrorism, the top-ranking US military officer said after a visit to the country to discuss joint efforts against the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

The statement Thursday from Adm. Mike Mullen came despite concern voiced by US government officials that Pakistan's cease-fire and peace talks with militants in its tribal regions will give hard-liners time and space to plan more attacks.

The outgoing American commander of Nato troops in Afghanistan this week urged Pakistan to confront militants or risk seeing the insurgency spread like a brushfire.

But Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Pakistan army remained committed to combating terrorism.

"Pakistan and the US remain steadfast allies, and Pakistan's military is fighting bravely against terrorism," said Mullen, whose latest trip was his third to Pakistan since February.

Mullen said Pakistani paramilitary

forces -- supposed to take the lead in securing the lawless tribal belt along the Afghan border -- were making "strides."

The US government has offered to train and equip the force to improve its counterinsurgency skills, though the programme has yet to get underway.

"There is much work yet to do, of course, and the United States military stands ready to assist in any way the Pakistani government finds appropriate," said Mullen, who left Pakistan on Wednesday.

Mullen held talks over two days with military officials including Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, who replaced stalwart US ally President Pervez Musharraf as Pakistan army chief last year.

He did not meet Musharraf, whose influence has further waned since his political allies lost February elections.

The new civilian government has sought to distance itself from Musharraf's sometimes forceful tactics against militants and is in peace talks through tribal elders in regions including notorious militant stronghold South Waziristan.

Arab allies seek change from next US president

AFP, Amman

Washington's Sunni Arab allies hope the next US administration will adopt strategies to repair damage done by the Bush team in the troubled Middle East and curb the influence of Shia Iran.

Whether Republican or Democrat, the allies want the new administration to push the stalled Middle East peace process and make good on a pledge by US President George W. Bush to set up an independent Palestinian state.

"The policy of the Bush administration in the Middle East failed on many fronts," said former Jordanian prime minister Taher Masi.

"The new US administration should evaluate the mistakes of the previous one and be courageous enough to recognise the real problems and work toward real solutions on top of which the Palestinian issue.

There is common belief in the region that the Bush policies -- namely the US-led war on Iraq --

have bolstered the role of radicals across the volatile Middle East.

"The Lebanese crisis was the last example where America did not support the moderate camp," said Masi in reference to a crippling 18-month standoff between the Western-backed majority and the Syria- and Iran-backed opposition.

A senior Arab official insisted that US strategy "has been vague since the 2003 toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime. It is time to establish a clear policy in the region and tackle the Iranian influence in Iraq."

According to Arab diplomats, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, have "agreed on this position at recent high-level meetings."

Critics say that the toppling of Saddam's Sunni Muslim regime emboldened non-Arab Iran and its Shia Muslim allies across the region.

"The Iraq war has imposed new realities on the Middle East," an editorial in the pan-Arab Al-Hayat newspaper said.



Loknath Brahmachari Chhatra-Jubo Sebak Sangha Bangladesh takes out a harmony procession in the city yesterday to mark the 118th death anniversary of Loknath Brahmachari, a spiritual leader of Hindus.

Egypt uncovers 'missing' pyramid of a pharaoh

AP, SAQQARA, Egypt

Egyptian archaeologists unveiled on Thursday a 4,000-year-old "missing pyramid" that is believed to have been discovered by an archaeologist almost 200 years ago and never seen again.

Zahi Hawass, Egypt's antiquities chief, said the pyramid appears to have been built by King Menkaure, an obscure pharaoh who ruled for only eight years.

In 1842, German archaeologist Karl Richard Lepsius mentioned it among his finds at Saqqara, referring to it as number 29 and calling it the "Headless Pyramid" because only its base remains. But the desert sands covered the discovery, and no archaeologist since has been able to find Menkaure's resting place.

"We have filled the gap of the missing pyramid," Hawass told reporters on a tour of the discoveries at Saqqara, the necropolis and burial site of the rulers of ancient Memphis, the capital of Egypt's Old Kingdom, about 12 miles south of Cairo.

The team also announced the discovery of part of a ceremonial procession road where high priests, their faces obscured by masks, once carried mummified sacred bulls worshipped in the ancient Egyptian

capital of Memphis.

The pyramid's base -- or the superstructure as archaeologists call it -- was found after a 25-foot-high mound of sand was removed over the past year and a half by Hawass' team.

Hawass said the style of the pyramid indicates it was from the Fifth Dynasty, a period that began in 2,465 B.C. and ended in 2,325 B.C. That would put it about two centuries after the completion of the Great Pyramid of Giza, believed to have been finished in 2,500 B.C.

Another proof of its date, Hawass says, was the discovery inside the pyramid of a gray granite lid of a sarcophagus, of the type used at that time.

The rectangular base, at the bottom of a 15-foot-deep pit dug out by workers, gives little indication of how imposing the pyramid might have once been. Heaps of huge rocks, many still partially covered in sand and dust, mark the pyramid's walls and entrance, and a burial chamber was discovered inside.

Archaeologists have not found a cartouche -- a pharaoh's name in hieroglyphs -- of the pyramid's owner. But Hawass said that based on the estimated date of the pyramid he was convinced it belonged to Menkaure.

Work continues at the site,

where Hawass said he expected to unearth "subsidiary" pyramids around Menkaure's main one, and hoped to find inscriptions there to back up his claim.

The partial ceremonial procession road unveiled Thursday dates back to the Ptolemaic period, which ran for about 300 years before 30 B.C.

It runs alongside Menkaure's pyramid, leading from a mummification chamber toward the Saqqara Serapium, a network of underground tombs where sacred bulls were interred, discovered by French archaeologist August Mariette in 1850.

A high priest would carry the mummified bulls' remains down the procession road -- the only human allegedly allowed to walk on it -- to the chambers where the bulls would be placed in sarcophagi, Hawass said.

Ancient Egyptians considered Apis Bulls to be incarnations of the city god of Memphis and connected with fertility and the sun cult. A bull would be chosen for its deep black coloring and would be required to have a single white mark between the horns. Selected by priests and honored until death, it was then later mummified and buried in the underground galleries of the Serapium.

Africa's deserts could supply solar electricity to continent: Experts

AFP, Nairobi

Solar power from Africa's deserts could supply all 600 million citizens currently without electricity and even export power to Europe, a green energy conference in Nairobi heard on Thursday.

The ferocious desert sun could provide the energy equivalent of 1.5 barrels of oil per square kilometre, said Gerhard Knies, project manager for Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy Cooperation (TREC), at a meeting of nine African states.

"The largest source of energy is the solar radiation (and) the best place to receive solar radiation is the desert," he told reporters at the start of meeting of 20 parliamentarians in Kenya.

"Deserts get 700 times more energy per year than all human kind is using," he explained.

"It is as if a layer of 25 centimetres (10 inches) of oil is falling down in the deserts year after year."

The legislators from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and the Seychelles are at the conference to discuss energy access for the poor.

"There is great need to provide the poorest people in east Africa with electricity," said Nicholas Dunlop, founder of the "e-parliament" conference.

"But at the same time there is an urgent need to combat climate change."

Dunlop explained that the technology needed to provide solar thermal energy was simple and clean compared to extracting and processing fossil fuels.

"A combination of mirrors and pipes to concentrate the sun's heat to boil water and drive an old-fashioned steam turbine."

"One you have built your mirrors and pipes ... your costs are finished. The good Lord does the rest," he said.

He added that solar energy costs were steadily coming down as the industry expanded, notably in Europe, while "oil is famously going through the roof."

"Now renewable energy is considered as a supplement to fossil fuels. We have to look at fossil fuels as supplements for renewable (energy)," said Knies.

Stephen Karekezi of the Environment and Development Network for Africa said high oil prices were fueling the drive for alternative and cleaner energy sources.

"We are quite excited by this opportunity... that the high oil prices begin to turn our policy makers to actually contribute and push for renewable (energy)."

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Japan recognises Ainu as indigenous people

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday for the first time recognised the Ainu as an indigenous people, pledging to support the traditionally nature-worshipping community that has endured centuries of discrimination.

It is a landmark step for Japan, which has prided itself on being ethnically homogeneous but where the Ainu have sharply lower incomes and educational levels.

Parliament unanimously approved a resolution recognising the Ainu and calling for "immediate" support to the community. The move is primarily symbolic, although it will likely open the way for economic aid.

"We have turned a significant new page in Ainu history which we have never seen before," senior Ainu activist Tokubei Akibe told a

news conference next to the parliament building.

"This is wonderful, but still just a first step forward," said Akibe, wearing a traditional embroidered Ainu gown. "We bear a serious responsibility to make this meaningful."

The resolution comes ahead of next month's summit of the Group of Eight rich nations on the northern island of Hokkaido, home to most of Japan's estimated 70,000 Ainu.

The resolution recognises for the first time that the Ainu "are an indigenous people with a distinct language, religion and culture."

"If our country wants to lead the international community, it is crucial for us that all indigenous people retain their honour and dignity and hand down their culture and pride to later generations," the resolution said.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said the

government would respect the parliamentary resolution, but stopped short of declaring concrete support for the Ainu.

"Our government solemnly accepts the historical fact that the Ainu people were discriminated against and suffered poverty in the process of our country's modernisation," the government's chief spokesman told parliament.

Fairer-skinned and more hirsute than most Japanese, the Ainu traditionally observed an animist faith with a belief that God exists in every creation, respecting trees, hills, lakes, rivers and animals -- particularly bears.

The Ainu, who lived by hunting and fishing, formed their society around the 13th century mainly in Hokkaido but also the Kuril and Sakhalin islands, which are now ruled by Russia, and parts of Japan's main island of Honshu.



The newly elected office-bearers of Zonta Club IV, Dhaka pose for photograph at its annual general meeting in the city recently.

Zonta Club-IV executives

Sabera Hussain has been elected president of Zonta Club IV, Dhaka, says a press release.

The election to the executive committee of the club for biennium 2008-2010 was held at its annual general meeting recently.

Other office-bearers are president-elect -- Munira Afza Naim, vice-president -- Shaheen Haider, treasurer -- Jahanara Rashid, recording secretary -- Najmi Moyeen, corresponding secretary -- Imrana Shahidullah, IT web master -- Salma Masud, and directors -- Nargis Bar Chowdhury, Zareen Zaman, Najma Chisti, Shabana Omar, Kashfia Chowdhury, Tasneem Kapadia, Peroza Mahtab and Tahmina Ahmed.



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