

Pakistan president sees success in militant war

Six Taliban killed in Pak airstrikes

AP, AFP, Islamabad/Khar

Pakistan is succeeding in its fight against Islamic extremists close to the border with Afghanistan, even though the campaign is being hampered by US missile strikes in the region, the country's president said yesterday.

Asif Ali Zardari told The Associated Press in an interview he expects US President-elect Barack Obama to take a "new look" at Pakistan's objections to the missile attacks on suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban targets, but that did not know if Obama would halt them.

The United States is pressing Pakistan to take more action against militants in its rugged and lawless northwest border area, which many consider the global front line in the fight against al-Qaeda.

Pakistan has pursued a military campaign in a tribal region in the northwest since August that officials say has killed 1,500 suspected insurgents.

US officials say it has helped stem the flow of fighters into neighbouring Afghanistan, where they are blamed for rising attacks on American troops.

"I think from where it was when

we took over, we are in a much better place," said Zardari about the military operation in Bajaur tribal region.

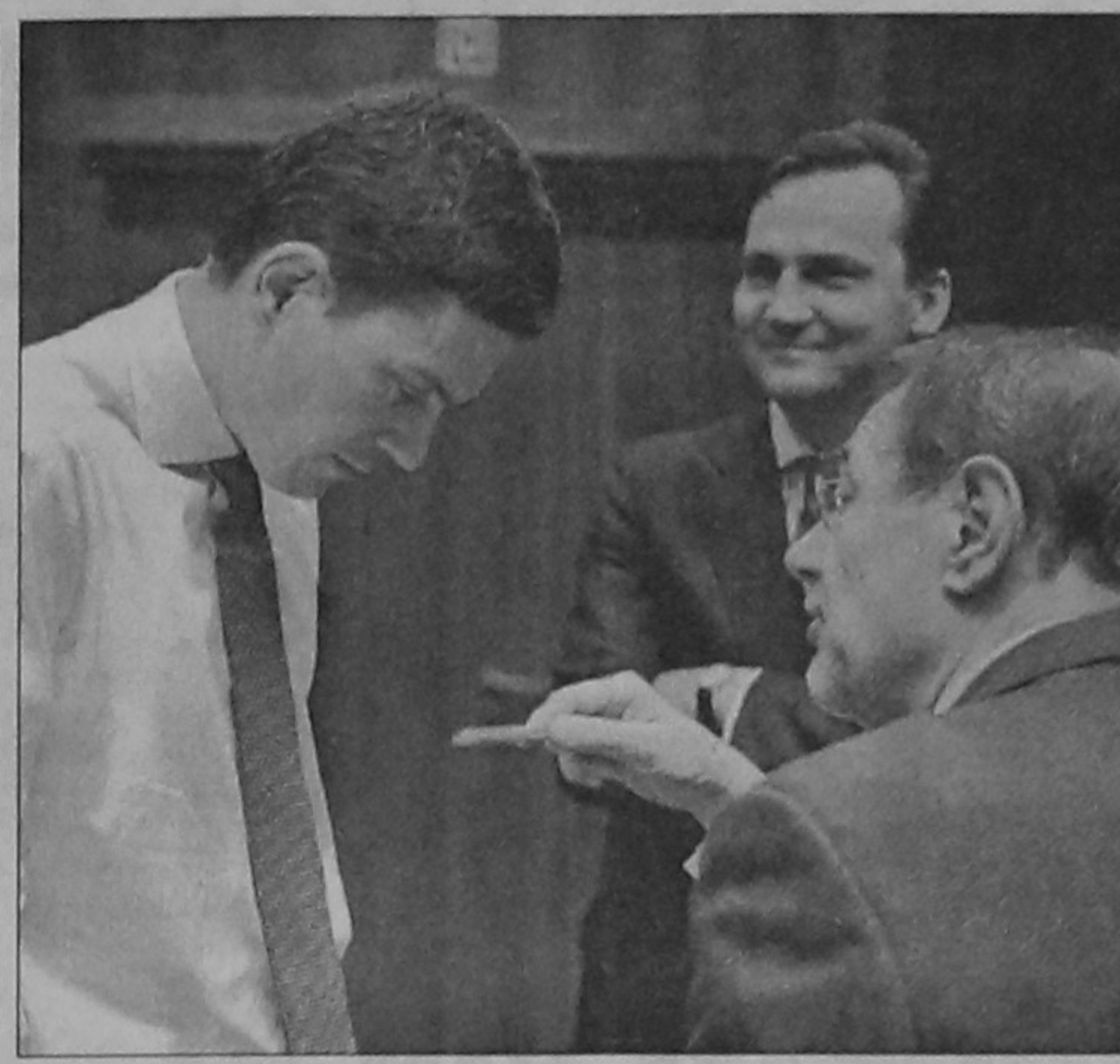
Since August, the United States is believed to have launched at least 18 missile strikes on militant targets from unmanned drones believed launched from neighbouring Afghanistan.

The attacks have killed some militants, but many of the dead have been civilians, Pakistani officials say. US military Gen David Petraeus said last week that the missile strikes had killed three top extremists leaders.

Pakistani leaders have condemned the strikes.

Meanwhile, at least six suspected militants were killed Monday when Pakistani jets bombed Taliban hideouts in a restive tribal region near the Afghan border, officials said.

The air strikes targeted the towns of Sewai and Damadola in Bajaur district where Pakistani forces have clashed with Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants for the past three months, local administration official Jamil Khan told AFP.



EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana (R) speaks with British Foreign Minister David Miliband (L) and his Polish counterpart Radoslaw Sikorski (C) before a General Affairs and Defence Council meeting yesterday at EU headquarters in Brussels.

EU FMs review future relations with Russia

AFP, Brussels

European Union foreign ministers moved Monday towards reopening frozen talks with Russia, seeking to overcome resistance from Lithuania and Poland by promising not to go soft on Moscow.

Four days ahead of an EU-Russia summit in Nice, southern France, the European foreign ministers were hoping to reach a unified position on relaunching the wide-ranging partnership talks which were suspended after Russia's military action in Georgia in August.

Britain and Sweden, formerly reticent to reopen the talks, issued a joint statement in support of the negotiations, while promising to maintain a tough line with Moscow.

"We believe that the EU should be clear about the basis on which it is resuming the negotiations," British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and his Swedish counter-

part Carl Bildt said in the statement.

"We are not returning to business as usual, nor are we turning the page on the conflict in Georgia.

"The EU will stick to the tough mandate that has been agreed for the negotiations," added the statement released at the start of talks in Brussels.

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said he hoped the key talks with Moscow could soon resume, but echoed that it would not be "business as usual".

"I think there is a possibility," that the talks could resume soon, said Solana, adding: "I hope very much that will be the case."

Most EU nations would like to see the wide-ranging partnership talks, suspended after Russia's military campaign in Georgia in August, to be reopened before the end of the year, with hopes that an announcement can be made in Nice on Friday.



The scene of a twin bombing, a car bomb and a suicide bombing, along the Kassra Street lined with restaurants and coffee shops in the Sunni district of Adhamiyah in Baghdad yesterday. At least 28 people were killed, including women and children, and dozens wounded in the double bombing in a Baghdad yesterday, the deadliest attack to rock the Iraqi capital in months.

Obama to reassess strategy on Pakistan, Afghanistan

THE DAWN, Washington

One of the first priorities of the Obama administration will be to reassess US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, his aides say.

And as a first step, he has appointed Bruce Riedel, a former CIA official and adviser to three US presidents on South Asia and the Middle East as his adviser on Pakistan.

His aides say that Obama is impressed with Mr Riedel's views and it was on his advice that Obama spoke of the need to resolve the Kashmir dispute in an interview with a US television network last weekend.

According to these aides, one of Riedel's long-time themes is that resolving the Kashmir dispute is essential for fighting terrorism.

But in doing so, Riedel does not emphasise the need to restoring the right of self-determination to the people of Kashmir. Instead, he advocates finding a solution that

satisfies India and ends Pakistan's excuse for lingering the dispute.

A major part of Riedel's theory for ending conflicts in South Asia deals with persuading Pakistan to accept India's influence in the region and stop its efforts to counter India by promoting its own interests in places like Afghanistan.

By persuading India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute, Riedel also hopes to refocus the Pakistani military on fighting militants within its border, a point Obama also stressed in his interview to CNN last week. But this over-emphasis on the military option is already worrying experts on the Afghan conflict.

Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist who is now an adviser to the Commander US Central Command Gen David Petraeus, said in an interview that instead of over-emphasising the military option, the Obama administration should develop "a regional approach" to ending the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Thailand to push for Thaksin extradition wherever he goes

Manila will not give him refuge

AFP, Bangkok

Thai authorities vowed yesterday to press for the extradition of Thaksin Shinawatra no matter where he lives, as the ousted prime minister searched for a refuge after Britain revoked his visa.

Thaksin, toppled in a military coup in September 2006, was last month sentenced in absentia to two years in jail for conflict of interest after helping his wife Pojaman buy state-owned land when he was premier.

Local media reported that the multi-millionaire is in China, with some saying he is set to fly to the Philippines, which Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat -- Thaksin's brother-in-law -- visited Monday.

"No matter China or the Philippines, we have an extradition treaty with both countries," Srisak Tiyan, director general for international affairs of the Office of the Attorney General, told AFP.

Philippines' President Gloria

Arroyo's spokesman said Monday that Thaksin would be turned away if he applied for asylum, although the country said it had not received any request.

"He will be courteously informed that he will not be received here," spokesman Jesus Dureza told local television.

Srisak said that even if Thaksin decides to live in a country with which Thailand has no extradition treaty, authorities could ask for him to be handed over on reciprocal basis.

The Bahamas, Bermuda and several countries in Africa that are not believed to have extradition agreements with Thailand have reportedly offered to take in Thaksin and his wife.

Aides said however that Thaksin may head for the United Arab Emirates.

"If he can't go anywhere, he plans to stay long in Dubai," one Thaksin aide said on condition of anonymity.

Thaksin has spent most of his time since the 2006 coup in self-imposed exile in Britain, where he bought and subsequently sold Manchester City football club to a United Arab Emirates-based investment group.

He returned to Thailand in February this year, but swiftly fled again in August after his wife was sentenced to three years in jail for tax evasion.

Srisak said Thaksin has until the end of next week to appeal against his conviction, but the ex-premier's legal advisor said he would not challenge the decision.

"We will not appeal," said the advisor, Wichit Plangrisskul.

"However we have not received any contact from Thaksin. It is possible that Thaksin and Pojaman will return to Thailand to fight the charges when the justice process is back to normal," Wichit said.

Baby dates with destiny

FROM PAGE 16

Doctors at DMCH say Ahnaf has received 20 percent burn injuries including to his eyes and head. They see little hope of his survival.

Ahnaf's mother received 30 percent burn injuries and her legs broke when she jumped out through the window of the bus to save herself and her baby.

Project Director of the burn unit Dr Samantlal Sen said, "Just because the law is not being implemented, eleven people are dead today. This little boy, whose life is yet to begin, is also struggling for his life."

Every year a significant number of people including children and women become the victims of acid burns. Though two laws have been enacted in 2002 to control the sale and distribution of acid to curb acid crime, acid violence and related incidents continue, he added.

Executive Director of Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) Monira Rahman said, "The law talks about handling acid through utmost security. But it does not specify the cautionary measures needed while transporting the toxic chemical."

"At the same time, the government has little or no monitoring mechanism for this though there is a district committee at every district under the National Acid Control Council," she said.

"The district acid control committees are not active and even the deputy commissioners often don't know how many people in his district are involved in the use, sale and transport of acid," Monira said.

Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Mohammad Zillar Rahman said, "Though people

seem to be careful about their work when they apply for a licence and commit to maintain utmost security, they don't do the same once they get their licence."

"And since we don't have a strong monitoring system, we don't know who is violating the law," he confessed.

Experts say that cautionary messages should be clearly written on the vehicles carrying acid and at the same time these vehicles should have special traffic clearance to transport acid.

They also stressed that such corrosive chemicals are always carried in covered vans and, if needed, the vehicles carrying such items halted during busy hours or heavy traffic.

Eight other people burnt on that day in Comilla in the accident are being treated at the burn unit of DMCH.

Among them, Faysal, 26, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), is now not certain if he will recover in time to appear for his final examinations starting on November 24.

On the fateful day, Faysal was travelling to Chittagong from Dhaka to be able to accompany his younger sister who is sitting for her medical college admission test.

A visibly worried and upset Faysal said that he had only informed his father that he was not well and had not told him about the acid burn.

"My father won't be able to tolerate it if he gets to know," Faysal said as he burst into tears.

Meanwhile the three-member investigation committee formed last Thursday under Additional District Magistrate, Comilla,

Nazmul Haque has begun its investigation.

The committee is supposed to submit its report to the deputy commissioner within a week.

A case was also filed under five sections of Penal Code, though not under the Acid Control Act, as it was an accident.

The drivers of the bus and truck are the accused in the cases filed but it is not known whether they were hurt or killed in the accident on the day, Monjurur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner of Comilla said.

New schedule

FROM PAGE 1

schedule may be changed again. But we hope the government and the Election Commission will not in any way defer the election date, now scheduled for December 18."

"If the elections are not held in December, it will be disastrous for Bangladesh," he said.

Asked to clarify what he meant by disastrous, he explained that if the elections are not held in December there will be political uncertainty. He said the caretaker government's mandate comes to an end in December and after that what government will take over?

The Indian high commissioner told reporters that he and Hasina did not discuss politics and he only enquired about Hasina's health and the treatment she had undergone.

Pinak said, "We hear that the polls will be held on December 18 and it should be held."

When his attention was drawn to the political parties' demand for not holding the elections under the state of emergency, the envoy said, "That is the decision the parties in discussion with the government and Election Commission have to make." He said, "Discussions are going on so, I hope for the best."

Ashraf said during her meeting with envoys of different countries Hasina said the polls must be held on December 18 because without an elected government normalcy will not return to the economic, social and political arenas.

"A constitutional government, which will come through elections, can only attract foreign investment, control commodity prices and create employment," Ashraf quoted Hasina as saying.

He said the Indian envoy said they want to see elections are held here like in other democratic nations and they are ready to extend their help in this regard.

US forces conducted secret operations in Pakistan, Syria

AP, Washington

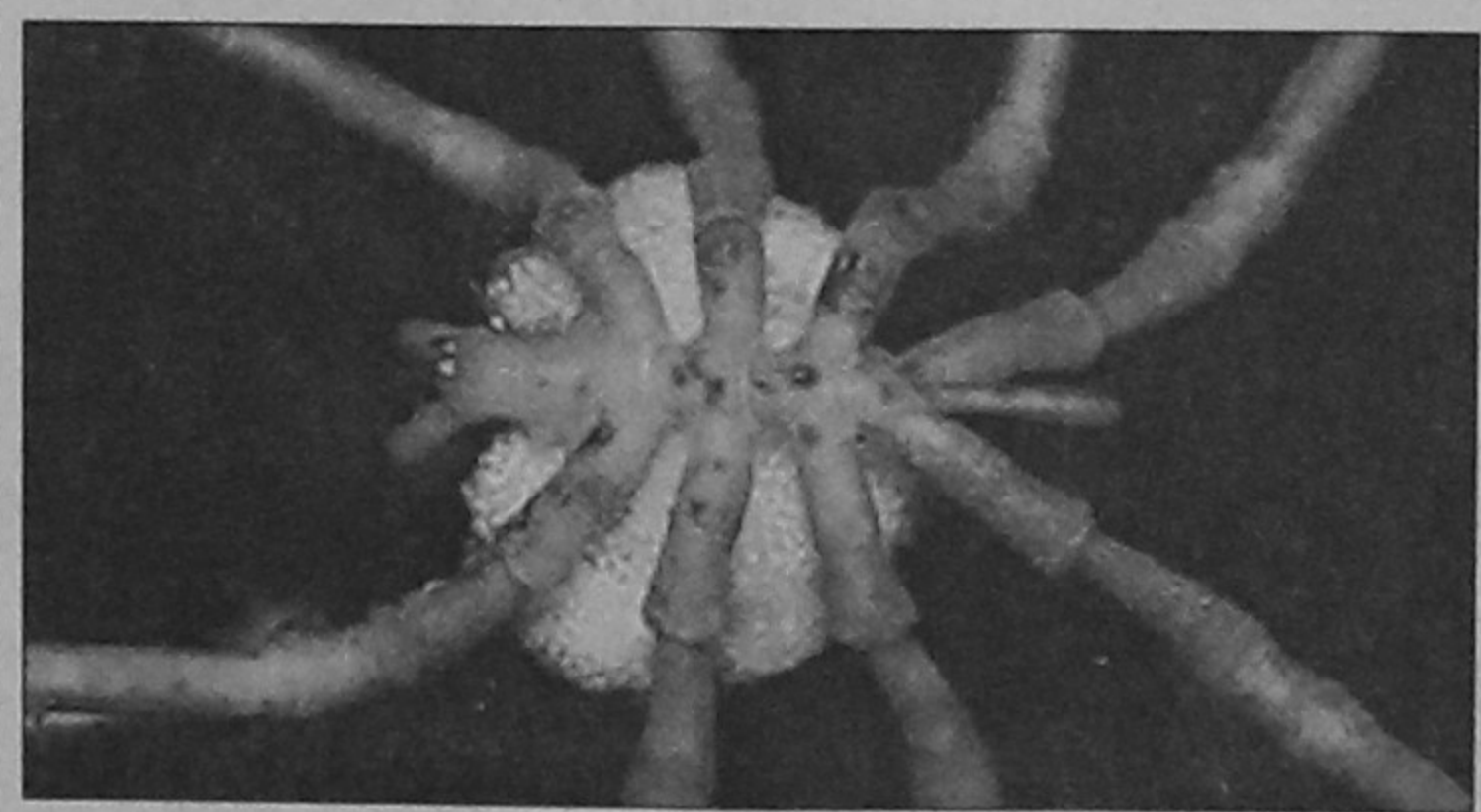
The US military has conducted nearly a dozen secret operations against al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in Syria, Pakistan and other countries since 2004, The New York Times reported Sunday night.

Citing anonymous US officials, the Times story said the operations were authorised by a broad classified order that then-Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld signed and President Bush approved in spring 2004. The order gave the military authority to

attack al-Qaeda anywhere in the world and to conduct operations in countries that were not at war with the US.

One such operation was the Oct. 26 raid inside Syria, the Times reported. Washington hasn't formally acknowledged the raid, but US officials have said the target was a top al-Qaeda in Iraq figure. Syria has asked for proof and said eight civilians were killed in the attack.

In another mission, in 2006, Navy SEALs raided a suspected terrorist compound in Pakistan's tribal areas.



A male sea spider carries its eggs on specially adapted appendages under its body in this undated handout. It is one of many possible new species from the Antarctic. The \$650 million 'Census of Marine Life' is on track for completion in 2010, assessing about 230,000 known marine species, a statement said. It has identified 5,300 likely new species, of everything from fish or corals. So far, 110 have been confirmed as new.

Sea census leads to discoveries of marine wonders

AP, Washington

A city of brittle stars off the coast of New Zealand, an Antarctic expressway where octopuses ride along in a flow of extra salty water and a carpet of tiny crustaceans on the Gulf of Mexico sea floor are among the wonders discovered by researchers compiling a massive census of marine life.

"We are still making discoveries," but researchers also are busy assembling data already collected into the big picture of life in the oceans, senior scientist Ron O'Dor said.

The fourth update of the census was released Sunday ahead of a meeting of hundreds of researchers that begins Tuesday in Valencia, Spain. More than 2,000 scientists from 82 nations are taking part in the project, which is to be completed in 2010.

A discovery that delights O'Dor is that many deep-ocean octopuses share an Antarctic origin. As the Antarctic got colder, ice increased and octopuses were forced into deeper water, he said in a telephone interview.

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