



Indian President Pratibha Patil (3-L) poses with Prime Minister of Myanmar General Thein Sein (L), Prime Minister of Bhutan Lyonchen Jigmi Y. Thinley (2-L), Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" (C), Bangladesh Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed (3-R), President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapaksa (2-R) and Prime Minister of Thailand Somchai Wangsat (R) during a meeting at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday. Heads of state and ministers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Thailand are in India to take part in the two-day summit, which is being held in the Indian capital.

BJP MP from Rajasthan quits alleging sale of polls tickets

PTI, New Delhi

After the Congress, the cash-for-vote allegation rocked the BJP on Thursday with a close advisor of Rajasthan Chief Minister, Vishwendra Singh resigning from the party alleging influence of "money power" in the selection of candidates in the state for the Assembly polls.

"I have been active member of BJP and political advisor to Rajasthan Chief Minister (Vasundhara Raje). I have seen things from very close quarters. I am dismayed by the sale of tickets for the Rajasthan assembly polls and have decided to leave the party," the BJP MP from Bharatpur said in a statement.

US missile strikes violate int'l law, says Pakistan

AFP, AP, Islamabad/United Nations

Pakistan said yesterday the United States was violating international law by launching missile attacks on its northwestern tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

A series of recent strikes against suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban hideouts in Pakistan's tribal areas - all blamed on unmanned CIA drones - have raised tensions between Washington and Islamabad.

"The attacks are in violation of international law and in violation of all understandings between the two sides," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Sadiq told

a press briefing in Islamabad.

"Statements made by Pakistani leadership as well as rules of engagement are very clear," he said, adding that the discussions the two countries had on rules of engagement were also "very clear."

"The government of Pakistan is committed to do whatever is possible to stop these attacks. We are working on several levels to address the issue."

In New York Pakistan's president pressed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Wednesday to halt cross-border US missile strikes targeting militants in his country's volatile tribal regions, the Pakistani foreign minister said.

"These drone attacks are unpro-

ductive, and they are contributing to alienation as opposed to winning people over," Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said in an interview after briefing reporters on the 20-minute meeting between Rice and President Asif Ali Zardari.

The US military is believed to have carried out at least 18 missile attacks on suspected militant targets close to the border in Pakistan since August. The missiles are believed to be fired from unmanned planes launched in Afghanistan, where some 32,000 US troops are fighting a resurgent Taliban insurgency.

The strikes also should be

halted to avoid the inadvertent deaths of civilians, Qureshi said. "In fact, what is required is more sharing of intelligence information. What is required is building Pakistan's capacity to deal with insurgency," he said.

State Department officials declined to comment on the meeting.

President-elect Barack Obama's incoming administration presents a fresh opportunity for Pakistan to emphasize more dialogue and development, Qureshi said.

"We'll be discussing with them a more comprehensive strategy. Because Pakistan is of the view that military means is not the be-all and the end-all," he said.

Lankan troops take rebel villages Indian aid to reach Lanka this weekend

AFP, PTI, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops yesterday wrested control of two coastal villages from Tamil Tiger rebels after a series of pitched battles, the military said.

The fishing settlements of Devil's Point and Vallaipadu on the island's northwestern shore were used by the rebels to smuggle arms from south India and launch attacks on troops, the military said in a statement.

Troops would now be able to advance on the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) stronghold of Poonerny, it said.

Government forces say they have

recently taken control of the nearby towns of Kiranchi and Palavi following weeks of heavy fighting.

Clashes continued elsewhere in the north on Wednesday, with the defence ministry reporting artillery exchanges across the districts of Mullaitivu, Jaffna and Kilinochchi.

The ministry did not give out casualty details, but said the LTTE suffered major losses.

On Wednesday at least nine Tamil Tiger rebels were killed as Sri Lankan troops fought pitched battles in the island's north, the defence ministry said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) endured a "heavy beating" as troops advanced

towards Kilinochchi, the rebels' political capital, the ministry said, adding the bodies of nine were found after separate clashes.

Meanwhile, a consignment of 1,680 tonnes of food and relief material from India is expected to reach the Sri Lanka this weekend as part of humanitarian aid for thousands of civilian Tamils caught in the war between the LTTE and the island nation's Army.

The Indian humanitarian assistance would be the first of its kind in nearly two decades, though New Delhi provided medical and other assistance to Sri Lanka after the 2004 devastating tsunami that killed thousands of people.

Tripartite meet agrees to continue talks with Taliban militants

PTI, AFP, New York/London

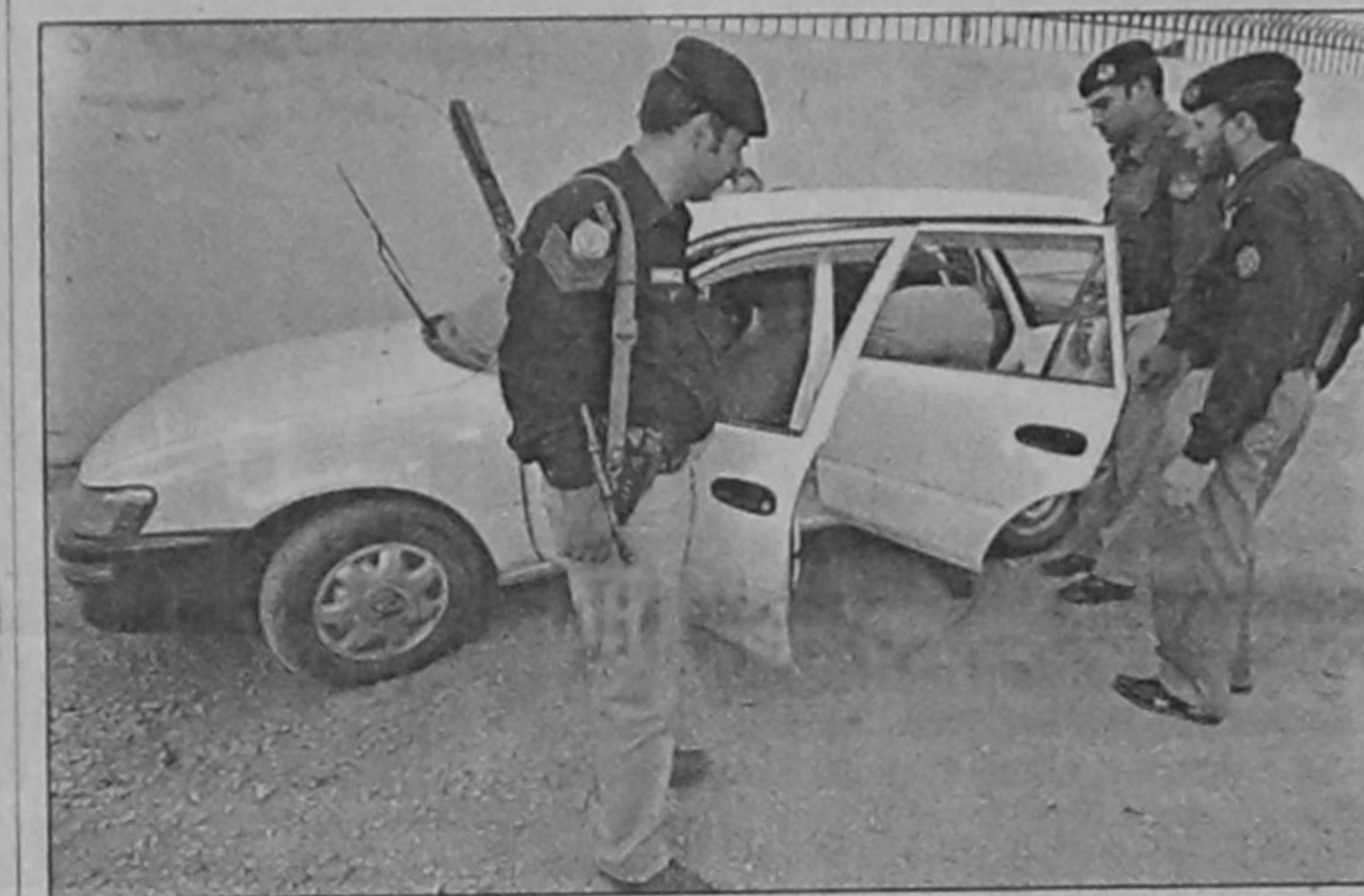
After a top-level tripartite closed door meeting between the heads of states of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, the three nations agreed to continue to pursue talks with the Taliban.

The meeting, one of the series of private meetings held at the UN Wednesday night, attended by Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai and the Saudi King Abdullah agreed to continue the dialogue with Taliban initiated at the media-

tion of the Saudis.

Briefing newsmen after the parleys, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said the dialogue with Taliban was being held on the agreement of the renegade group to accept the constitutions of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The tripartite talks come in the wake of reports that the new Barack Obama-led administrator in the United States was not opposed to talks with reconcilable elements of Taliban.



Pakistani policemen inspect a bullet-riddled car of a kidnapped Iranian diplomat in Peshawar yesterday. Unidentified gunmen kidnapped an Iranian diplomat, killing his Pakistani police guard in the latest of a series of attacks heightening insecurity in the northwestern province bordering Afghanistan, police said.

15 Muslim rebels killed in southern Philippines

AFP, Manila

Fifteen Muslim guerrillas were killed in a series of clashes with government troops in the southern Philippines, a military spokesman said yesterday.

Guerrillas of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) first fired mortar rounds at a military outpost in Pigkawayan town on the southern island of Mindanao before dawn on Wednesday, said Lieutenant Colonel Julieto Ando.

This was followed by a series of gun battles near the town which resulted in the deaths of the 15 rebels.

Government forces suffered no casualties, Ando said.

President Gloria Arroyo has stepped up military operations

against the MILF on Mindanao, after the guerrillas launched a series of raids in August that left dozens of civilians dead, and many homes and businesses ruined.

The government said over 600,000 people have been affected by the fighting, and tens of thousands remain in evacuation camps scattered across Mindanao.

The rebel attacks began in August after the Supreme Court threw out a proposed deal that would have given the rebels control over a Muslim autonomous area.

Meanwhile, Muslim separatist rebels in the Philippines said Thursday they do not trust the government to reopen stalled peace talks and are seeking international intervention to resolve the issue.

Truth Commission

FROM PAGE 1 cannot make any policy decision as per Article 58(D) of the Constitution.

Petitioners' counsel advocate Towfig Newaz told reporters that following the HC verdict Tac should not go on functioning anymore.

An extra-judicial system was set up in the country but there are no rules in the Constitution to substitute the judiciary, he said.

Advocate Asaduzzaman, another lawyer for the petitioners, said the HC judgement did not legitimise the commission's activities done so far and therefore all its functions since its inception are illegal.

He said as per the rules of the Constitution, the people could not be compelled to give statements against themselves, but such a system was introduced.

After announcement of the verdict, Attorney General Salauddin Ahmed told newsmen the government must file an appeal with the Supreme Court against the HC judgement.

He said his office did not make a final decision whether they will file the appeal before getting the certified copy of the verdict.

The top law officer said he could not explain before receiving the certified copy whether Tac can perform further.

He however said the Appellate Division would determine whether the commission can function after filing the appeal.

formed Tac under the ordinance promulgated by the president on June 8. The tenure of the commission was set to end on January 2 next year.

On August 25, SC lawyer Adilur Rahman Khan Shubhro, Ubining Executive Director Farida Akter, Awami League Women Affairs Secretary Dipu Moni and rights group Odhikar's acting director Nasiruddin Elan filed the petition as public interest litigation (PIL) challenging legality of Tac ordinance.

The petitioners said the ordinance which brings the truth commission into being is unconstitutional because no authorities other than the courts have the jurisdiction to try and mete out penalties to criminal offenders.

They said though the ordinance has not declared Tac a court, it provides for the commission to confiscate individuals' property which goes against the basic tenets of the Constitution.

The petitioners argued that the president cannot promulgate such an ordinance other than the ones related to elections or emergencies during the tenure of a caretaker government.

Following the petition, the HC bench of justices Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Mashuque Hossain Ahmed issued a rule to the government to explain why the ordinance should not be declared illegal and unconstitutional.

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