

23 killed in Afghan clashes, Kabul suicide attack

AFP, Kabul

A suicide attack near a German diplomatic convoy in Afghanistan's capital Kabul left three Afghan civilians dead yesterday as 20 other people, most of them insurgents, were reported killed in other unrest.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the suicide bomb, the second in Kabul in three days, but similar ones have been claimed by Taliban-led extremists waging an insurgency.

A German foreign ministry spokesman in Berlin said a vehicle belonging to its embassy in Kabul had been targeted.

"The sole occupant of the vehicle, an Afghan employee of the embassy, was injured," the spokesman said.

President Hamid Karzai's office said in a statement three civilians were killed and six wounded in the blast, which it described as a "barbaric terrorist action".

The attacker was on foot when he blew himself up in front of a boys' high school

and about 200 metres (660 feet) from parliament, police said.

At least one of the dead was a municipal worker who had been cleaning the road, another worker named Waheedullah told AFP.

"I was standing here at the corner when I heard a big explosion," he said. "I went to the main road and saw one of our friends lying on roadside, covered in blood, near his wheelbarrow. His belly was badly wounded and was open."

"I saw another civilian dead nearby and I saw two civilians wounded."

It was the second suicide attack in Kabul since Thursday, when a car bomb outside the heavily barricaded US embassy killed four Afghan civilians and wounded nearly 20. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the Thursday blast.

Also Sunday, a remotely detonated bomb killed an Afghan guard for the USPI security company in the southern province of Kandahar, provincial government spokesman Zalmai Ayoubi told AFP.

Meanwhile, the US-led coalition announced it killed 17 militants on Saturday as part of its operations helping the Afghan government fight an insurgency led by the extremist Islamic Taliban, who were in government between 1996 and 2001.

Sixteen were killed in an operation against a "terrorist network" in Sarobi, about 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of Kabul in an area where 10 French soldiers were killed in an ambush in August.

The operation was against a commander of the Hizb-e-Islami faction, led by former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, said to be involved in kidnappings and bomb attacks.

"As coalition forces approached the targeted buildings, 16 armed militants exited the buildings and began manoeuvring on the force."

"The militants engaged the force with small-arms fire. The force responded with small-arms fire and precision munitions and killed the militants," it said.

Iran proposes N-plants with Arab countries

AP, Tehran

Iran's official news agency says Tehran has proposed building joint light-water nuclear power plants with neighbouring Arab countries.

Sunday's IRNA report quotes the head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, Gholam Reza Aghazadeh. He says Iran is ready to offer a proposal to Arab countries if they are interested.

Iran's Arab neighbours have been suspicious of the Persian country's controversial nuclear programme, and several Arab countries have announced plans to develop their own nuclear programmes.

The US and some of its allies claim Iran is secretly seeking to develop nuclear weapons a charge Tehran denies.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani firefighters attempt to extinguish a fire after rioters set ablaze several shops at a timber market in Karachi yesterday. At least 13 people were killed and more than 70 injured after activists from rival political parties clashed across Pakistan's largest city Karachi.



PHOTO: AFP

Anti-government protesters evacuate an injured woman after the bomb exploded at Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Explosions at sites occupied by anti-government protesters injured at least 51 people, further raising tensions as police struggle to end a paralysing blockade of Bangkok's airports.

Foreign govts race to pull nationals from Thailand

AFP, Bangkok

Foreign governments were racing yesterday to evacuate tens of thousands of visitors stranded in Thailand after anti-government protesters occupied Bangkok's airports, throwing travel plans into chaos.

About 30,000 travellers have missed their flights each day since demonstrations forced the closure of the Thai capital's main Suvarnabhumi airport on Tuesday and the domestic hub Don Mueang two days later.

With protesters vowing to stay at Suvarnabhumi until Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat resigns, airlines and charter jets have begun picking up travellers from the one-runway U-Tapao naval base 190 kilometres

(118 miles) from Bangkok.

China had arranged for seven charter flights to retrieve its stranded nationals, believed to number 2,000-3,000 people, by Saturday and had further flights planned for Sunday, Xinhua news agency said.

The first of the flights bringing home Chinese citizens arrived in Shanghai early on Sunday, to the relief of worried families.

"My family were deeply concerned about my daughter's safety after learning the Thailand airport was closed," Xinhua quoted one man, named as Zhou, whose daughter had been stranded in Bangkok as saying.

"We felt a great relief that she could take the charter flight and finally got back safe."

New Gaza clashes as Israel keeps borders sealed

AFP, Gaza City

Pre-dawn clashes erupted in Gaza yesterday, leaving three militants wounded according to the Palestinians, as Israel said it was keeping all border crossings with impoverished territory sealed.

"Following mortar and rocket fire, the border crossings we had expected to open will remain closed," defence ministry spokesman Shlomo Dror said.

Obama to name Hillary secy of state today

Deal on donors paves way for her post

AP, Washington

President-elect Barack Obama planned to nominate Sen Hillary Rodham Clinton as his secretary of state today, transforming a once-bitter political rivalry into a high-level strategic and diplomatic partnership.

Obama will name the New York senator to his national security team at a news conference in Chicago, Democratic officials said Saturday. They requested anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly for the transition team.

To clear the way for his wife to take the job, former President Bill Clinton agreed to disclose the names of every contributor to his foundation since its inception in 1997. He'll also refuse donations from foreign governments to the Clinton Global Initiative, his annual charitable conference, and will cease holding CGI meetings overseas.

Thanks to India

Mumbai mayhem boosts Pak peace move with militants



Thanks to India. Rising tension between the two nuclear powers of South Asia have forced Pakistani establishment to accelerate its efforts for making peace with the Islamic militants in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan on emergency basis.

Different militant groups from South Waziristan to Bajour and from Mohmand to Khyber Agency have contacted government through different sources after Mumbai tragedy and assured that they are ready for a ceasefire if Pakistan Army stops its operation in tribal areas.

Pakistan Army has also responded back positively by declaring some notorious militant commanders Baitullah Mehsud and Maulvi Fazalullah as "patriotic" Pakistanis in front of media. These two militant commanders are fighting against Pakistan Army from last four years. Army have accused them of terrorism against Pakistan by name not once but many times in last couple of years but the aftermath of Mumbai carnage turned these terrorists into patriots overnight.

A top ISI official told a group of senior journalists on Saturday that "we have no big issues with militants in FATA; we have only some misunderstandings with Baitullah Mehsud and Fazalullah, these misunderstandings could be removed through dialogue". Thanks to Indian government and Indian media. Their allegations against Pakistan's premier intelligence agency forced top ISI officials to finally accept that they are not fighting an American war in tribal areas of Pakistan. Parliamentary leader of 12 tribal members in the National Assembly, Munir Orakzai also said that "I see a bright ray of peace in tribal areas and if we come out of the American pressure I can guarantee that there will be peace in tribal areas in few days and we will be ready to fight against India on the eastern border along with Pakistan Army".

Thanks to India that the same ISI official praised the role of Pakistani media in recent days and said that "you proved that you are patriotic Pakistanis". Last year this same intelligence agency was also part of a decision to impose ban on many Pakistani TV channels because of their alleged "anti-state behaviour".

Army Chief Ashfaq Pervez Kiani have made it clear to President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani that if India will increase some more escalation then Pakistan have to move its troops from tribal areas to the eastern borders and it would not be possible to continue the war against terror. Top military

officials conveyed the same thing to media representatives on Saturday. It is learnt that Washington and London were very much concerned on the rise of tension between the two nuclear powers. Pakistan Army officials said on Saturday that next 48 hours are very important. These sources claimed on Monday that now situation is stabilising. A very responsible government official in Islamabad told this scribe on Sunday that nothing bad will happen in next 24 hours. Some late night telephone calls made from Washington and London helped to cool down the temperature between Delhi and Islamabad.

Thanks to India that some ministers in Islamabad got an opportunity to criticise their Prime Minister in his face. Cabinet also advised PM that no ISI official should be sent to India in near future. Cabinet discussed the Mumbai carnage and Indian allegations in detail.

It was discussed that why the militants made an unachievable demand of liberating Hyderabad Deccan (Andhra Pradesh)? This issue was never raised by any hardliner Muslims militants of India and Pakistan in the past. Why they never demanded the liberation of Kashmir, which was the prime objective of banned

Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan? Indian government claimed that these militants reached to Gujarat from Karachi by boat through a 500 km sea route. Why the Indian Navy failed to stop this boat? Cabinet unanimously agreed that Pakistan will not come under any Indian pressure but efforts will also be made to decrease the tension without annoying the public opinion.

One minister was of the view that Indian media war against Pakistan helped Islamabad in a way that the local media ignored all the domestic political issues and was involved in fighting against India.

The first ever women speaker of the National Assembly Dr Fehmida Mirza was the most disturbed human sole in Islamabad on the "media war between India and Pakistan". She think that another attack like Mumbai will definitely create a war like situation between the two neighbors. She is planning to call Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and Indian woman President Pratibha Patil to bridge the gaps between the two nations. She told me "as a mother I am thinking to make a mothers alliance of India and Pakistan, let the mothers come out and stop their sons to fight with each other".

Lanka resumes advance on rebel HQ

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan security forces have resumed their offensive to capture the political capital of Tamil Tiger rebels after heavy monsoon rains began subsiding, the defence ministry said Sunday.

"The air sorties were made in support of the advancing 57th division infantry battalions," the ministry said.

Flooding had stalled the military push on Kilinochchi

and also left nearly half a million people homeless in the island's north.

Tiger rebels have admitted that their mini-state has shrunk under the ongoing military onslaught but their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has vowed to fight on.

The guerrillas, who took up arms in 1972, are facing the Sri Lankan army's biggest ever offensive.

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