



Congress party General Secretary Rahul Gandhi (C) arrives with his mother and Congress President Sonia Gandhi (R) to file his nomination papers for the Amethi parliamentary constituency in Sultanpur yesterday.

Nato soldier, 20 insurgents killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A soldier in a Nato-led force fighting an extremist insurgency in Afghanistan died in a bomb blast Saturday while the US military announced it had killed 20 Taliban-linked insurgents.

The fresh violence came as Nato leaders opened talks Saturday on a new strategy for Afghanistan, where the alliance leads 62,000 soldiers helping the fragile government tackle a tide of violence.

An International Security Assistance Force soldier died of wounds after a bombing in southern Afghanistan Saturday, Isaf said in a statement.

Isaf, which draws its troops from 42 nations, does not release the nationalities of its casualties, leaving it to their home country.

Nearly 80 international soldiers have died in Afghanistan this year, most of them in attacks, according to icasualties.org, which tracks the conflict

here.

Also Saturday, a remote-controlled roadside bomb killed two policemen and wounded four when it blew up their vehicle in southern Zabul province, deputy provincial police chief Ghulam Jilani Khan told AFP.

The US-led coalition, which works alongside Isaf and the Afghan forces, said meanwhile that Afghan and international troops killed 20 insurgents in the southern province of Helmand province on Friday.

The battle in the strategic Kajaki district erupted after a patrol was ambushed by numerous men in a "known Taliban stronghold", it said in a statement.

"The combined forces returned fire with small-arms fire and called for close air support destroying six enemy fighting positions and killing 20 insurgents," it said.

Militants in Kajaki are known to be heavily involved in bomb-making and weapons smuggling, attacks on troops

and narcotics, the statement said.

Afghanistan produces more than 90 percent of the world's opium, most of it in the desert province of Helmand which shares a largely open border with Pakistan where militants cross to join the insurgency.

Friday's battle was one of a series in the past week that the military says has inflicted heavy insurgent casualties, with 20 reported killed in Helmand on Wednesday and 30 in the Helmand-Uruzgan area on Monday.

Responding to calls from military commanders for more troops, US President Barack Obama in February announced he would send 17,000 extra US soldiers to Afghanistan, most of them headed to the south.

Nato leaders meeting in France Saturday are expected to focus on Afghanistan, where the organisation is undertaking its biggest and most ambitious mission ever.

Indian parties turn to 'climate politics'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

For the first time in history, main Indian political parties turned to 'climate of politics or the politics of climate.'

Manifestos of three key parties -- Congress, BJP and CPI-M -- for coming parliamentary elections have included a promise to deal with the climate-related issues, taking the note of challenges posed by global warming.

The manifestos promised transition of the country's economy from fossil fuel to renewable energy sources.

"India too has begun to feel the impact of climate change in different ways as global warming emerges as a serious challenge for the world community," ruling Congress has said in its manifesto.

Taking credit for framing the National Action Plan for Climate Change unveiled last year by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the polls document says the plan aims to meet the development aspirations of the people for a higher standard of living

and economic growth.

"Mitigating the threat by building a low carbon economy is the biggest economic opportunity of the 21st century," the BJP has said in its polls manifesto.

Recognising that containing global warming is essential to protecting life and security of people and environment, the BJP manifesto says if it comes to power "it will actively pursue the transfer of critical technologies that can have a significant impact on reducing carbon emissions."

Under sub-heading "One Earth, Green Earth" the BJP has talked in details how it will pursue national growth objectives through an ecologically sustainable pathway that leads to mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming.

In its manifesto, the CPI-M has promised "to take steps to control emission of greenhouse gases through energy-efficient technologies and effective regulation" apart from "promoting solar and non-conventional energy sources".

Zardari pledges to stop fundamentalists

AFP, Garhi Khuda Bakhsh

Pakistan's president pledged yesterday to protect the country from rising fundamentalism as he addressed a crowd at the tomb of his slain wife and father-in-law.

"People around the world say that our country will disintegrate," Asif Ali Zardari told thousands of people who gathered to mark the 30th anniversary of the death of his father-in-law, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

"Some say that fundamentalists will rule the country, but we will not let it happen as long as we are alive," he said outside the five-domed mausoleum where his wife, Benazir Bhutto, and father-in-law are buried.

The US has put Pakistan at the heart of the fight against al-Qaeda, declaring its border with Afghanistan the most dangerous place in the world for Americans.

Extremists opposed to Pakistan's decision to side with the US in its "war on terror" have perpetrated bombings and other attacks that have killed more than 1,700 people in less than

two years.

Zardari spoke during overnight rituals to mark the 1979 hanging of his charismatic father-in-law on charges of murder, two years after military ruler Ziaul Haq ousted him from power.

Benazir Bhutto, also a former prime minister, was assassinated while campaigning for the post after returning from exile in 2007.

It was Zardari's first public appearance at the tomb at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, in the southern province of Sindh, since he became head of state last September, voted in on a wave of sympathy following his wife's death in December 2007.

Security fears restrict Zardari's public appearances and the president did not attend the public gathering for the first anniversary of her death.

In contrast to the grassroots popularity of his wife and the huge respect still commanded by his father-in-law -- widely considered the most visionary of Pakistan's prime ministers -- Zardari's popularity ratings are at rock bottom.



Handout photo shows Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (2nd-L), chairman of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) flanked by his father and the Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari (2nd-R), widow of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (R) as he speaks during Central Executive Committee meeting on the 30th death anniversary of the founder of (PPP) Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Naudera near Larkana.



Pakistani women march during a protest in Lahore yesterday against the public flogging of a veiled woman. Pakistan's top judge has ordered a court hearing into the public flogging of the veiled woman, filmed on an amateur video, that has raised alarm about the tightening grip of Islamist hardliners.

Rahul files nomination from Amethi

PTI, Sultanpur

Congress General Secretary Rahul Gandhi on Saturday filed his nomination papers for Amethi parliamentary constituency in Sultanpur in presence of party President Sonia Gandhi.

Rahul, who arrived in Sultanpur on Friday evening, came in a cavalcade and was mobbed by enthusiastic party workers on the way to the district court where the nomination papers were filed.

Raising slogans hailing both Rahul and Sonia Gandhi, party workers showered them with rose petals and waved Congress flags. They were also carrying placards with pictures of Rahul Gandhi.

Both Sonia and Rahul later boarded an open jeep and greeted people on the way to the district court.

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee President Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Congress Legislative Party leader Pramod Tiwari, Captain Satish Sharma and Sultanpur Congress candidate Sanjay Singh were also present during the filing of the nomination papers.

UN chief urges rebels to let Lanka civilians move freely

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Friday urged Tamil rebel leaders to allow trapped civilians to move freely out of the conflict area of northern Sri Lanka.

"The Secretary General calls upon the LTTE (Tamil rebels) leadership to allow civilians to leave the conflict area of their own free will," said a statement issued by UN spokeswoman Michele Montas. "The severe restrictions of the LTTE on their freedom of movement violate international law."

Ban also deplored "the

forced recruitment of civilians, particularly children."

The UN statement said Ban "is deeply distressed by continuing reports from the Vanni region of Sri Lanka that civilians are at extreme risk, with heavy casualties, and that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are keeping civilians in a very small area of active conflict against their will."

The UN boss also reminded the Colombo government "of its responsibility to protect civilians, and to avoid the use of heavy weapons in areas where there are civilians, as promised."

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BJP trying to divide West Bengal Says CPI-M

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kolkata

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) Friday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of trying to divide West Bengal and asserted that it would make BJP's tie-up with the pro-Gorkhaland Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) a poll issue.

"It is astonishing that the BJP has promised in its election manifesto to look into the Gorkhaland issue sympathetically. It is the

reflection of its double standards," CPI-M state secretary Biman Bose told reporters. The CPI-M's reaction came in the wake of the GJM joining the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and extending support to Jaswant Singh's candidature from the Darjeeling seat.

The BJP manifesto has promised to consider sympathetically the GJM's demand for a Gorkhaland state to be carved out of parts of north Bengal including Darjeeling.

No talks with Pakistan unless it dismantles terror setup: BJP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has asserted that if elected to power it would have no peace dialogue with Pakistan unless Islamabad dismantles the terror infrastructure on its soil. The party delineated its approach towards foreign policy in its manifesto released here Friday.

The manifesto, released in the presence of BJP's prime ministerial hopeful LK Advani, said: "There can be no comprehensive dialogue for peace unless Pakistan dismantles the terrorist infrastructure on the territory under its control."

The BJP also said Islamabad should start prosecuting terror elements and organisations

and put an end to the use of cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

It said if elected to power, it would have a dialogue with Pakistan only if it "stops using the territory of third countries to launch terror attacks on India."

The party said its government would "re-craft India's Nepal policy to rid it of the (United Progressive Alliance) UPA's biases that had influenced" the country's response to events in Kathmandu.

The party manifesto said India shared a common civilisational and cultural history with Nepal, and added that 'India-Nepal relations must be based on friendship, mutual cooperation and harmony of interests'.

Sharif says he 'forgot his anger' in national interest

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif has claimed that he has forgotten his anger in the national interest and agreed to work with other parties for building Pakistan.

Addressing party workers in Raiwind, he said he wanted to support the government for

fulfilling the national agenda, but linked his working with the government to the implementation of the Charter of Democracy.

"The politicians should not engage in fighting and work in unison for resolution of the serious problems being faced by the country," The News quoted Nawaz Sharif, as saying. He said the long march was

launched in the national interest, which led to the restoration of the deposed judges overnight. Had it been for personal interest, the objective might not have been achieved, he added.

Sharif said the people of Pakistan would themselves have to confront the elements attempting to derail the democracy.

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