



Richard Holbrooke (L), special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, stands up in order to introduce US journalists to Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi (R) prior to the start of a meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan's foreign minister said US drone attacks are working to the advantage of the extremists, highlighting differences with Washington after talks with top US officials.

Pakistan 'fighting terror for its survival': Zardari

Islamabad complains about missile strike from Drones

AFP, Islamabad

The United States' military commander and regional troubleshooter Tuesday held key talks in Pakistan, where President Asif Ali Zardari told them his country was fighting terror for its survival.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Richard Holbrooke, special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, arrived late Monday for talks on Washington's sweeping new strategy to defeat al-Qaeda and its allies.

Pakistan's foreign minister said Tuesday US drone attacks are working to the advantage of the extremists, highlighting differences with Washington after talks with top US officials.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi said he flagged up "red lines" in Pakistan's cooperation

with the United States in fighting Islamist militants when he met US military commander Admiral Mike Mullen and envoy Richard Holbrooke.

"We did talk about drones and let me be very frank. There's a gap. There's a gap between us and them, and I want to bridge that gap," Qureshi told a news conference after the talks.

It is the first top-level visit since US President Barack Obama put Pakistan at the heart of the fight against al-Qaeda, unveiling a new strategy nine days ago to commit thousands more troops and billions of dollars to the Afghan war.

"Pakistan is fighting a battle for its own survival," a statement issued by the presidency quoted Zardari as telling Mullen and Holbrooke during their talks.

"The president said the government

would not succumb to any pressure by militants," it said, despite Zardari sparking controversy in the West with a call for dialogue with those who lay down their arms.

The talks covered regional security issues, the Afghanistan strategy announced by Obama less than two weeks ago and a recent surge in militancy and extremism in the region, the presidency said.

Pakistani officials said the US visitors were scheduled to hold separate talks with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi before leaving for India later Tuesday.

The visit came as The New York Times again reported that the United States intended to step up drone attacks on militants in Pakistan's tribal areas, which border Afghanistan, and might extend them deeper inside Pakistan.

Pak Army ready to counter 'internal and external' threats, says Kayani

ANI, Rawalpindi

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General, Ashfaq Kayani, has said yesterday, the army is fully capable of meeting all "internal and external threats" facing the country.

"The army is and will remain fully prepared to meet the current and emerging internal and external threats, with the full support of the nation," he said while addressing the 63rd Formation Commanders Conference at the army's General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi.

General Kayani also highlighted the need for improving coordination between various units to address challenges being faced by Pakistan.

India's ruling party unveils security agenda

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling Congress Party trumpeted its anti-terrorism credentials Tuesday ahead of general elections, with Home Minister P. Chidambaram warning of a "ring of fire" surrounding the country.

"The security situation in South Asia has deteriorated very, very sharply," Chidambaram said, citing attacks and violence in neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"We are in the middle of a ring of fire," the minister told reporters at a briefing to release his party's national security manifesto.

Chidambaram was speak-

ing the day after a series of bomb and grenade attacks in the northeastern state of Assam killed 10 people, despite intelligence warnings and heightened security.

"It is only the Congress that can deal with the scourge of terrorism squarely and decisively," he said.

The Congress-led government has come under strong criticism over perceived security failings surrounding the Mumbai attacks in November that left 165 people dead.

Chidambaram said that India's porous borders and "commitment to plurality" made it a target for militants in neighbouring countries.

Rescuers still hope for Italy quake survivors

100 people pulled alive as death toll rises to 207

AP, L'Aquila

Rescuers worked frantically in this central Italian city early yesterday, scooping through piles of rubble with their hands in the search for survivors after the country's deadliest earthquake in nearly three decades.

Tens of thousands of people left homeless by the powerful 5.8-magnitude quake slept in makeshift tents that provided little protection against the chilly mountain air; scores of survivors lined

up early Tuesday for a hot cup of coffee.

Workers dug through the night under powerful lights even as aftershocks continued to spook survivors. Mounting piles of rubble contained evidence of shattered lives: torn clothing, ripped stuffed animals and broken furniture.

Entire blocks were flattened in the mountain city of L'Aquila and nearby villages by Monday's temblor that killed at least 207 people and injured 1,500. More than 70

people were still missing. Firefighters said they had pulled 100 people alive from rubble in the area.

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi says that 207 people died in the powerful quake that devastated part of central Italy, and 15 people remain missing.

Berlusconi said Tuesday that at least 100 of the roughly 1,000 injured people are in serious condition. He says 190 of the victims have been identified.



This picture taken during a guided tour with Italian firemen shows rescuers standing on rubble after a violent earthquake in the village of Onna, near the Abruzzo capital L'Aquila yesterday.

UN voices worry over 100,000 civilians in Lankan war zone

'Deeply worried' Britain urges ceasefire

AFP, Colombo/London

The United Nations on Tuesday expressed "deep concern" for the safety of 100,000 civilians trapped in Sri Lanka's war zone as troops prepared for a final offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels.

UN secretary general's envoy for refugee rights, Walter Kalin, said many were in danger as the Tigers had been pushed into an area demarcated as a "safe zone"

for civilians.

"Following reports that LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) fighters now have been pushed almost entirely into this zone, many more are at risk of losing their lives," Kalin said in a statement.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said Tuesday he was "deeply" worried by reports of civilians being trapped by fighting in Sri Lanka, and renewed his call for an urgent ceasefire.

Miliband also voiced concern at reports that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had used civilians as human shields, and urged both the rebels and government forces to show restraint.

His comments came as Sri Lanka's military readied for a final assault on Tamil Tigers boxed into a strip of jungle with thousands of trapped civilians, after urging the rebels to surrender or face annihilation.

Egypt suggests delaying Palestinian unity govt

AFP, Cairo

Egypt has proposed that Fatah and Hamas suspend efforts to form a unity government and instead coordinate their rival Palestinian administrations, a senior Palestinian official said yesterday.

Egypt's chief mediator Omar Suleiman "proposed a new approach during the last talks that would include delaying seeking a government of national unity because of persistent divisions over its programme," the official told AFP.

Instead, the rival factions

would "proceed to a coordination between the governments of Ramallah (in the West Bank) and Gaza through a committee including representatives from the Palestinian factions."

Reconciliation talks between the Islamist group Hamas and the Western-backed Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas were suspended on Thursday for three weeks.

Shaath at the time said the talks were suspended because of "new proposals" which the factions wanted to discuss with their leaderships.



Protesters gather outside the House of Parliament in central London to demonstrate against alleged human rights abuses in Sri Lanka on Monday. Around 3,000 protesters staged the rally.

Bollywood gets political for Indian elections

AFP, Mumbai

Attracting legendary actors such as Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan, India politics have long been irresistible to Bollywood stars, who bring with them star quality -- and a touch of intrigue.

This month's general election looks set to be no different, with controversy over movie tough guy Sanjay Dutt's candidature, the withdrawal of actor Govinda and a string of other stars vying for a place in parliament.

But Bollywood is also getting involved in other ways, in particular by encouraging the 714-million-strong electorate to come out and vote.

Actor-producer Aamir Khan has teamed up with

Rakeysh Mehra, who directed him in the 2006 hit "Rang De Basanti" to make three one-minute television films appealing to people to "vote for integrity, vote for good people."

"The terror attack on Mumbai on 26/11 (November 26) has changed India," said Khan, whose film "Ghajini" became Bollywood's highest-grossing movie of all time earlier this year.

"Indians have become more sensitive and expect more from politicians. So, I felt it is necessary for voters to choose the right kind of candidates."

Khan, 44, said it was vital for people to know who they were voting for, as concern focuses on serving lawmakers who face criminal charges,

including murder and rape, and the role of corruption at the heart of Indian politics.

"I am not propagating for any particular party or its ideology. I just want people to select good candidates," he added.

Fellow actor Ajay Devgan, who starred in the 2006 hit "Golmaal", also said he would be voting, urging India's politically apathetic middle and upper classes to make their voices heard.

"We should own up responsibility when wrong leaders are voted to power, because educated people like us who understand things don't venture out to exercise our vote," he told the Hindustan Times in a recent interview.

US is not at war with Islam, says Obama

AFP, Ankara

Barack Obama on Monday seized upon his first symbolism-laced visit to the Muslim world as US president to declare that the United States is not and never will be at war with Islam.

From the well of the Turkish parliament, Obama warned "you cannot put out fire with flames," arguing that brute force alone could not thwart extremism as he sent a flurry of coded messages throughout the Middle East.

Obama drew on his own biography as the son of a believer as he sought to forge

new trust with the Islamic world, and portrayed Turkey as an example of a thriving Muslim nation where faith and democracy could thrive together.

The president said US ties with the Muslim world could not be simply defined by opposition to terrorism, decades into a US struggle with extremism that was sharpened by the September 11 attacks in 2001.

"The United States has been enriched by Muslim Americans. Many other Americans have Muslims in their family, or have lived in a Muslim-majority country -- I know, because I am one of them."

N Korea's Kim 'weeps' as US urges response on rocket launching

AFP, Seoul

North Korea hailed its controversial rocket launch as a famous victory yesterday but said reclusive leader Kim Jong-Il wept tears of regret that the money could not have been used to help his people.

As world powers struggled to agree on a response, with China and Russia both urging restraint, the North's media boasted of the "historic" achievement of putting a satellite into orbit that was now beaming back patriotic songs.

The United States and its allies said the satellite never made it into space and Sunday's launch was really a ballistic missile test that failed.

Washington is pushing for a stern response from the UN Security Council to condemn what it calls a provocative act, but the world body is split and the United States has hinted it may not insist on a binding resolution.

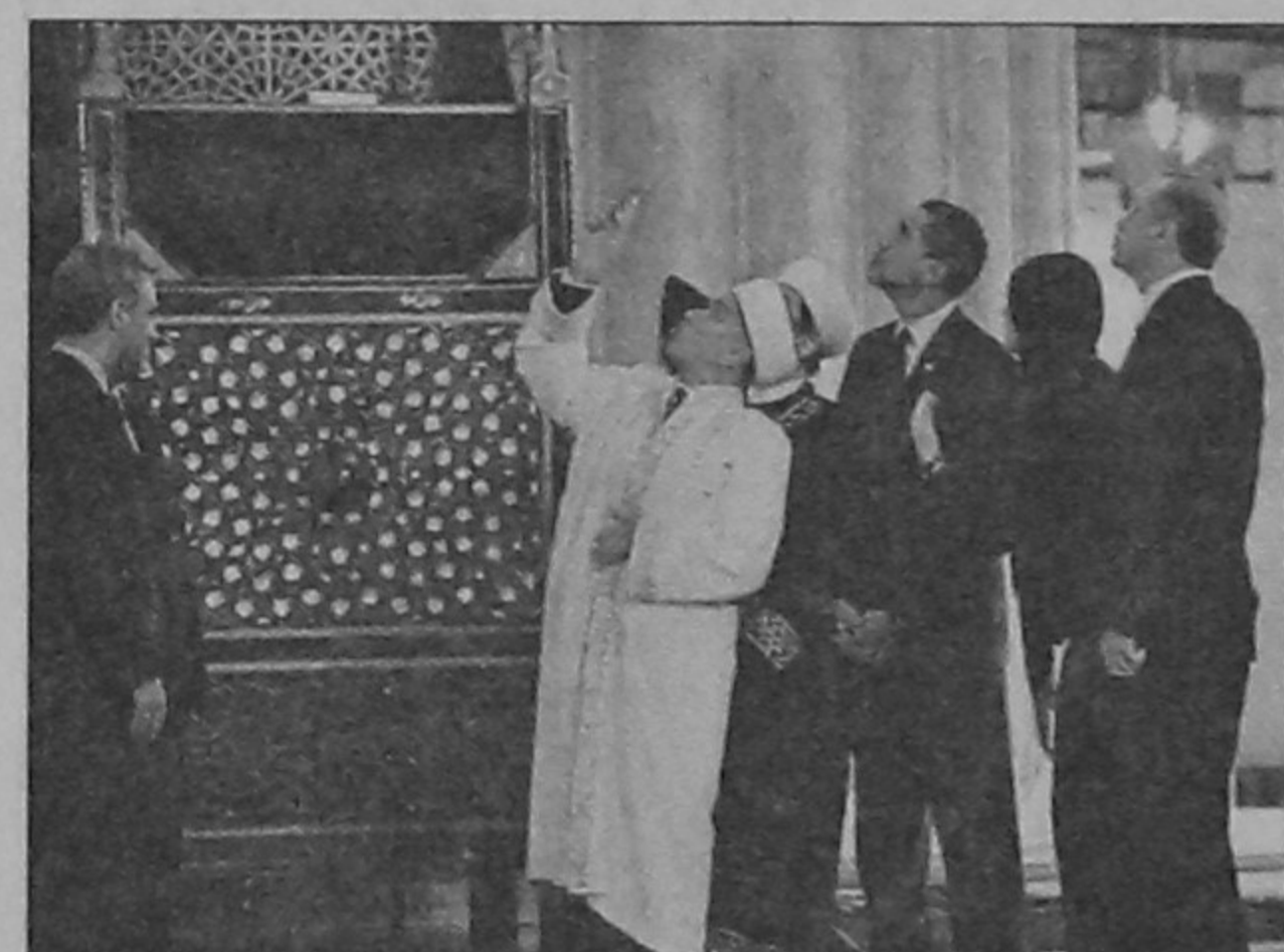
While the diplomatic wrangling goes on, people in the impoverished nation, which

suffers chronic food shortages, were reported to have been in raptures over the launch.

"Chants of jubilation are reverberating throughout the country on the news that our satellite is beaming back the 'Song of General Kim Il-Sung' and the 'Song of General Kim Jong-Il,'" the ruling communist party paper Rodong Sinmun said, referring to the North's founding president and his son.

It reported that Kim Jong-Il "felt regret for not being able to spend more money on the people's livelihoods and was choked with sobs."

"Our people will still understand," it quoted him as saying. In New York, diplomats said China and Russia, which have veto power on the Security Council, have been pressing for a more muted response to the launch than that demanded by the United States.



US President Barack Obama (3rd R) and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (R) tour the Sultanahmet Mosque, better known as the Blue Mosque for its distinctive tilework, in Istanbul yesterday.

Baby survives Iraq bombing in mother's lap

AFP, Baghdad

A baby miraculously survived a Baghdad car bombing cradled in his mother's lap as she was burned alive in a blast that claimed the lives of eight people on Tuesday, witnesses said.

The baby boy's father was also seriously wounded in the attack not far from a holy Shiite shrine in the Kadhimiyah neighbourhood of northern Baghdad, police and witnesses said.

REQUEST FOR Proposal (RFQ)

ICT Equipment for Access to Information (A2I) Programme

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bangladesh seeks proposals from interested, registered, and well qualified vendors to provide ICT Equipment for Access to Justice Program.

Submission of Quotation: The envelope should state "Quotation for 'ICT Equipment for Access to Justice Program' and should be marked as 'Confidential' and addressed to the UNDP Procurement Unit, IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207. The deadline for submission of Proposal is April 15, 2009 (Wednesday) 11:00 AM in the Bid box in IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.

All interested firms may request the Bidding Documents from procurement.bc@undp.org by formal request to UNDP that will register firm on the list of participants, so that any correspondence, questions regarding the bidding documents and their respective answers can be sent to all bidders.



Bangladesh

REQUEST FOR Proposal (RFP)

Update and Enhance GIS Application

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bangladesh seeks proposals from interested, registered, and well qualified organizations for "Updating and Enhancing of Web based Customized ARIS Application for Dissemination of Knowledge at the Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Institutions Division, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh" under the project "Assistance to SICT (BGD 04/005)".

Submission of Proposal: The envelope should state "Updating and Enhancing of Web based Customized ARIS Application for Dissemination of Knowledge at the Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Institutions Division, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh" and should be marked as 'Confidential' and addressed to the UNDP Procurement Unit, IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207. The deadline for submission of Proposal is April 22, 2009 (Wednesday) 11:00 AM in the Bid box in IDB Bhaban (12th Floor), Begum Rokeya Sharani, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.

All interested firms may request the Bidding Documents from procurement.bc@undp.org by formal request to UNDP that will register firm on the list of participants, so that any correspondence, questions regarding the bidding documents and their respective answers can be sent to all bidders.



Bangladesh