

Pak troops raid militant bases: 12 killed

3 die in suspected US missile strike

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani jets and helicopters attacked suspected militant bases in a tribal area on the Afghan border yesterday, killing at least 12 rebels, a military official said.

The air assault near Ghiljo area in the tribal Orakzai district came a day after a suicide attack claimed by the Taliban killed more than 20 security personnel in nearby Hangu town, the official said.

"We had information about the presence of militants in the surrounding hills," a senior military officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We engaged jets and helicopters and at least four Taliban bases were destroyed in the bombing and shelling," he said.

"Our information is that 12 militants were killed and the final toll may go up."

Earlier a suspected US missile attack aimed at Taliban and Al-Qaeda rebels in Pakistan's tribal area along the border with Afghanistan killed at least three militants Sunday, officials said.

The attack was the latest in a series of strikes by pilotless US aircraft in the respective northwest region, they said.

"It was a drone attack," local administration official Shahab Ali Shah told AFP.

The official said two missiles hit a house in Gangi Khel area on the outskirts of Wana, the main town in South Waziristan district along the Afghan border.

Another official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the attack targeted a militant hideout, killing three suspected rebels. Five others were wounded, the official added.

But a security official said seven militants had died.

"Seven militants were killed in the twin strike," he said, adding that there was no immediate report of any high-value targets.

Residents said the attack flattened the compound and destroyed a vehicle parked nearby.

On Saturday a suicide attacker rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into a checkpoint in Doaba town, in north-western Hangu district, killing at least 20 security personnel, officials said.



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani firemen attempt to extinguish a burning tanker truck in Karachi early yesterday. Supporters of Pakistan's Awami National Party (ANP) torched vehicles on a street against the gunning down of a man in the port city.

Swat deal to remain intact if peace lasts: Gilani

THE DAWN, Karachi

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said on Saturday that Pakistan would coordinate with the United States on its policy to combat terrorism during talks in Washington next month.

The prime minister told a press conference here, after chairing a meeting of the Sindh cabinet, that it was wrong to think that Pakistan did not have a policy on the war on terror. "Our policy is ready and President Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and the ISI chief will share it with the US administration."

In reply to a question about the acrimony between the

Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the Awami National Party following the Swat accord, the prime minister said the two parties had different agenda, but it was his government's endeavour to defuse the tension.

He said the Swat deal was linked to restoration of peace in the valley. "The agreement will remain intact if peace endures," he said, adding that the president had signed the Nizam-i-Adl regulation only after 80 per cent peace was restored to Swat.

He said the new accord was an improved version of the agreements signed in 1994 and 1999. He said the government's reconciliation efforts would strengthen the country's econ-

omy and its institutions and urged political forces to show maturity because the people had voted for a change.

Gilani said Pakistan wanted good relations with neighbouring countries, including Iran, Afghanistan and India.

However, he admitted that the composite dialogue with India had been affected after the Mumbai attacks, but added that efforts were being made to revive the dialogue.

In reply to a question about Sindh government's demand for announcing the NFC Award before the budget and resolving the issue of GST, Prime Minister Gilani said he would discuss the matter with his Finance Adviser Shaukat Tarin.

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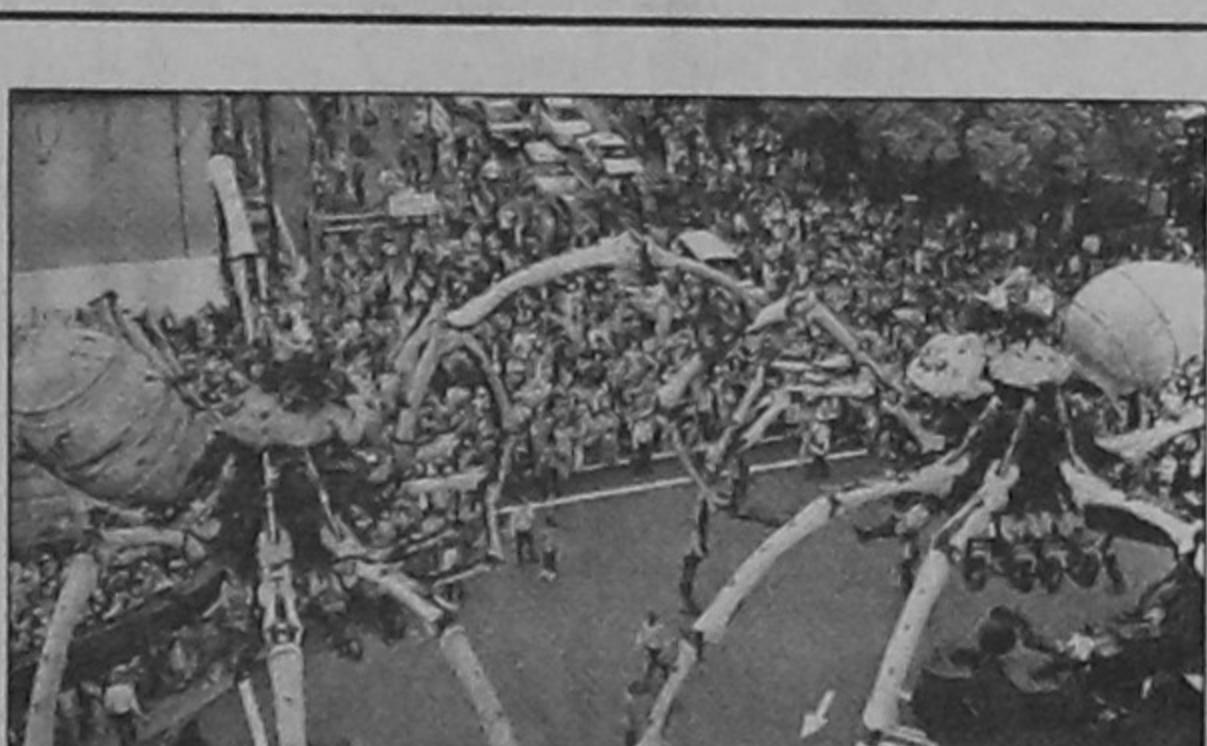
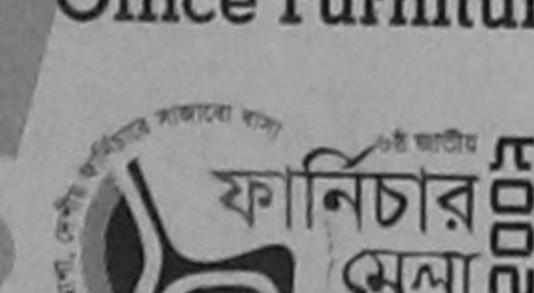


PHOTO: PB
Members of the French performance group "La Machine" operate two large spider robots, 12 metres tall and weighing 37 tonnes, as they parade down a street in Yokohama in Kanagawa prefecture, suburban Tokyo yesterday. Spectators enjoyed the gigantic spiders' "performance", held during celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the opening of the port of Yokohama.

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Mandela gives ANC a boost in final polls rally

AFP, Johannesburg

Former South African president Nelson Mandela made a surprise appearance Sunday at a final election rally of the ruling ANC party, drawing wild cheers from a throng of 10,000 people.

To the chants of "Mandela! Mandela!" the 90-year-old anti-apartheid icon drove into the Ellis Park stadium in Johannesburg in a golf cart accompanied by party leader and presidential favourite Jacob Zuma.

"Nelson Mandela is here, Jacob Zuma is here," campaign leader Fikile Mbalula announced from the stage as African National Congress songs blared and Mandela, walking with difficulty, was helped to the stage.



PHOTO: AFP

US President Barack Obama (R) looks on as US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton speaks with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (L) and an unidentified man during a multilateral meeting for the 5th Summit of the Americas at the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain, Trinidad yesterday.

Obama assessing Cuba's next steps

AP, Port of Spain

President Barack Obama says America's estranged relationship with Cuba will not change overnight. It just did at least in tone.

Immersed for the first time in Latin American politics, Obama now is assessing whether a genuine change in relations with the isolated communist island is already underway.

While no one is talking of fundamental reform in Cuba soon and overtures by no means lead to actions it is clear that US dealings with Havana have changed.

The White House on Saturday sought again to insert some wait-and-see caution as analysts debated whether a sudden conciliatory flurry was a breakthrough or bluster. As Obama talks of overcoming "decades of mistrust," now he must calibrate how to handle something else: hope.

When the week started, Obama lifted some travel and telecommunications restrictions on Cuba; before it ended, he was hearing Cuban leader Raul Castro admit "we could be wrong" and having chummy moments with the man he once branded a demagogue, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

At the Summit of the Americas here in Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba is the only nation in the hemisphere banned from taking part because of its undemocratic rule. The White House had called Cuba "the odd man out" and wished openly it would not dominate the event.

Turns out, Cuba's shadow is everywhere. Obama got another earful about it on Saturday when South American leaders praised him for the steps he's taken but pushed him to do even more: lift the 47-year-old US trade embargo against the nation.

"We will continue to evaluate and watch what happens," said Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs. "We're anxious to see what the Cuban government is willing to step up to do."

So, too, are many anxious to see what Obama will do.

"I think both governments are saying, 'We're ready to walk through the door. I don't think they know where they want to go yet,'" said Julia Sweig, a scholar on the US-Cuban relationship and director of Latin studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. "I think this is much closer to a major breakthrough than it is to the same old, same old," Sweig added.

UN anti-racism meet falters amid Western boycott

AP, Geneva

A UN conference on racism was undermined by a growing boycott by Western nations yesterday amid concern that it will serve as a bully pulpit against Israel, which slammed the meeting as a "tragic farce".

The meeting is meant to take stock of progress in fighting racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance since the controversial World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, eight

Ahmadinejad, who has stirred outrage by repeatedly calling the Holocaust a "myth".

Australia and the Netherlands joined the United States, Canada and Israel in deciding to stay away from the five-day Durban Review Conference.

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