

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 restive 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.

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 100,000 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.



US President Barack Obama (R) looks on as US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton speaks with Nicaragua 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 under way.

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.



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.

Karzai urges Nato to explain civilian death

AP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai called the top US and Nato general in Afghanistan again to explain civilian casualties caused by international forces, while an insurgent attack yesterday on a security checkpoint killed five police, an official said.

Karzai asked Gen David McKiernan to explain the reported deaths of six civilians in two incidents, Karzai's office said late Saturday. It was the second time in three days Karzai brought up the topic with McKiernan. On Thursday, the US general was summoned to the presidential palace to explain other deaths.

Karzai has long complained about civilian deaths

caused by international forces. Last year, McKiernan implemented new rules of engagement intended to cut down on the deaths of innocent Afghans, but they still occur, especially in nighttime raids.

Karzai's office said three civilians were killed by international forces in Helmand province on Friday. The Nato-led force said three people were killed when its forces fired on a vehicle from which a man who was "posing a threat" was exiting. Two people inside the vehicle were also killed, it said.

"The death of a single innocent Afghan is a tragedy," said Capt. Mark Durkin, a spokesman for the Nato-led force. An investigation is under way, he said.

Nato ships, helicopters foil pirate attack

AP, Nairobi

Nato warships and helicopters pursued Somali pirates for seven hours after they attacked a Norwegian tanker, Nato spokesmen said yesterday, and the high-speed chase only ended when warning shots were fired at the pirates' skiff.

Seven pirates attempted to attack the Norwegian-flagged MV Front Ardenne late Saturday but fled after crew took evasive manoeuvres and alerted warships in the area, said Portuguese Lt. Cmdr. Alexandre Santos Fernandes, aboard a warship in the Gulf of Aden, and Cmdr. Chris Davies, of Nato's maritime headquarters in England.

"How the attack was thwarted is unclear, it appears to have been the actions of the tanker," Davies said. Fernandes said no shots

were fired at the tanker.

Davies said the pirates sailed into the path of the Canadian warship Winnipeg, which was escorting a World Food Programme delivery ship through the Gulf of Aden. The American ship USS Halyburton was also in the area and joined the chase.

"There was a lengthy pursuit, over seven hours," Davies said. The pirates hurled weapons into the dark seas as the Canadian and US warships closed in. The ships are part of Nato's anti-piracy mission.

"The skiff abandoned the scene and tried to escape to Somali territory," Fernandes said. "It was heading toward Bossaso we managed to track them... warning shots have been made after several attempts to stop the vessel."

UN anti-racism meet falters amid Western boycott

AFP, 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 outlook for the conference, which starts today in Geneva, was also thrown into doubt by the prospect of an opening day speech by Iran's President Mahmoud

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.

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

years ago.

"Regrettably, we cannot be confident that the review conference will not again be used as a platform to air offensive views, including anti-Semitic views," Australian foreign minister Stephen Smith said in a statement.

Major European Union nations were still discussing their attendance in Geneva, a spokesman for Germany's Foreign Ministry said, as Berlin came under pressure to stay away.

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 Mehmood 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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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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