

Pakistan seeks global help for displaced Swat people

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has expressed concern over the displacement of people in the Swat Valley as the troops intensified their battle against the Taliban in the region, killing at least 200 militants over the weekend.

The Pakistani leader has directed the local authorities to help the displaced civilians in the conflict, mainly in the Swat Valley and Malakand division in North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Online news agency reported Sunday.

Zardari said the issue of rehabilitation of the displaced people came up for discussion during his talks with the US leadership recently.

He urged the international community to help the government in its efforts for the safe return of people to their homes. He added that the rehabilitation of the affected population is a top priority of the government.

The president, who is currently in the US, has asked the relevant government departments to help the civilians, mainly women and children, caught in the conflict.

Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani has

declared a war against the Taliban, which he said is a threat to the country.

The Pakistani government has allocated Rs. one billion (about \$12 million) to help the displaced people. Zardari said the amount would be increased if required.

More than 360,000 people have fled fighting between the Pakistan military and Taliban in little more than a week and that number could double by the end of the year, UN officials warned yesterday.

Piling into vehicles or leaving on foot with hastily packed belongings, frightened civilians are trying to escape the military bombardments of Islamist extremists who are dug into three north-west districts.

"We have a major displacement crisis on our hands... The situation is very fluid. As we speak, people are on the move," said Manuel Bessler, the head of UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Pakistan.

"The figure as of (Sunday) evening is 360,675 individuals who are registered," he told AFP.

Bessler warned that the number of people fleeing the districts of Swat, Buner and Lower Dir was likely higher as many

people do not register.

"We have to be prepared to assist up to 800,000 in addition to the already pre-existing 500,000," he said. That figure was a rough prediction from now until December, he stressed, to allow the UN to plan humanitarian relief.

More than 500,000 people have already been displaced from Pakistan's northwest, where military offensives against Islamist militants have been conducted over at least six years.

A spokeswoman for the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said 360,600 people had been registered in and outside camps from Swat, Buner and Lower Dir since May 2.

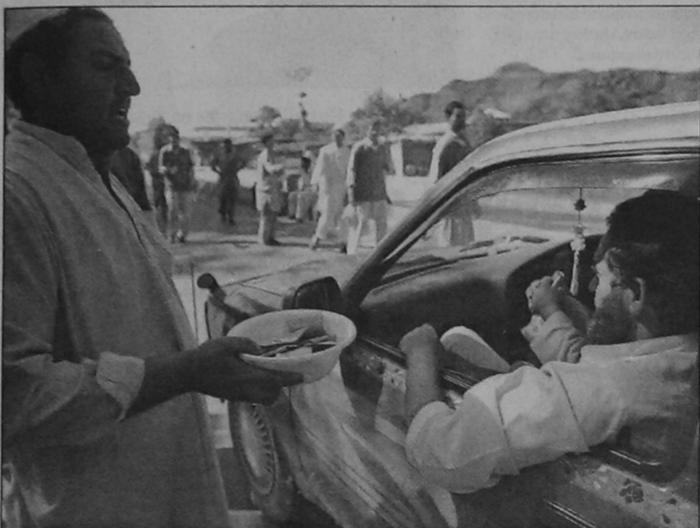
Ariane Rummery said the provincial government in North West Frontier Province, with the help of UNHCR, had set up 29 registration points.

Government air and ground forces launched an offensive against Taliban fighters in Lower Dir on April 26 and in neighbouring Buner on April 28. Heavy clashes between insurgents and the military broke out in Swat on May 6.

On Friday, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani said the military had been ordered to eliminate militants, which prompted a further civilian exodus.



A Pakistani UNHCR official (C) registers displaced women, who fled military operations against Taliban militants, at a makeshift camp in Mardan yesterday. At least 360,000 people have fled heavy fighting in northwest Pakistan in little over a week and registered with authorities, officials said.



A volunteer collects donation on a street in Mardan yesterday for internally displaced Pakistanis who have fled military operations against Taliban militants in troubled Swat valley and Buner.

Pakistan suicide bomb kills 10

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide car bomber Monday killed 10 people at a paramilitary checkpoint in northwest Pakistan, where heavy fighting has sent more than 350,000 people fleeing in little more than a week.

The bomb blast struck the outskirts of Darra Adam Khel, south of the city Peshawar, in a worrying sign that Islamist violence could be escalating away from military offensives designed to crush the Taliban further north.

"Ten people were killed. Three of them died of their injuries in hospital. And seven people are injured," an intelligence official told AFP.

Officials said a six-year-old girl and two security personnel were among those killed when the suicide bomber exploded his car near the checkpoint.

No one claimed responsibility for the blast, but Islamists claim or are blamed for the deadliest bombings against security forces, who have been locked for years in fighting against encroaching Taliban militants.

Ground and air forces are waging fresh battles against fighters in three northwest districts in what Islamabad has hailed a fight to eliminate militants -- branded by Washington the greatest terror threat to the West.

Artillery pounded Taliban hideouts in the Swat valley, where around 4,000 militants are estimated to be fighting for control of the former ski resort once popular with Westerners but now devastated by violence.

CIA, ISI together created Taliban, says Zardari

PTI, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

In a frank admission, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday said America's intelligence agency CIA and his country's ISI together created the "monster" called Taliban.

Taliban was "part of our past and your past, and the ISI and CIA created them together," Zardari told the NBC news channel in an interview.

"There is a war," the President said. "It (the Taliban) was (a) monster created by all of us... We forgot to make a cure for it." "It's a war of our existence. We've been fighting this war much before they attacked 9/11. They're kind of a cancer created by both of us, Pakistan and America and the world," he said when asked whether there was any war inside Pakistan.

He also accused the US of supporting the military rule of Pervez Musharraf who was alleged to be taking side of the Taliban.

"But, the game changed after 9/11 when US decided to root out this threat and Pakistan was straddling both sides," the Pakistani President said.

But he disagreed with the popular belief in the US that the Pakistan military and intelligence

services still have sympathies for the Taliban.

Earlier a three-way summit here has apparently brought home to Pakistan the US message delivered by President Barack Obama to officials down the line that Taliban extremists within the country rather than India pose its real threat.

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari acknowledged as much in interviews with various TV channels here over the last couple of days after a series of meetings with US officials and a trilateral summit with Obama and Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai.

"Well, I am already on record. I have never considered India a threat," Zardari told PBS Public Broadcasting Service. "I have always considered India as a neighbour, which we want to improve our relationship with."

"We have had some cold times and we have had some hard times with them. We have gone to war three, but democracies are always trying to improve relationships," he said. Asked about moving troops from the Indian border to the tribal areas of Pakistan to fight the war against terrorism, Zardari said, "Pakistan has already done so."

6000 villages vulnerable in last phase of Indian polls

40 with criminal charges in fray in UP

PTI, New Delhi

People in over 6,000 villages and hamlets in nine states and two Union Territories going to polls in the final phase of polling in Lok Sabha election on May 13 are vulnerable to threats and intimidation, the Election Commission said yesterday.

Nearly 19,000 trouble-makers have been identified against whom preventive measures have been initiated to ensure free and fair polls, Deputy Election Commissioner R Balakrishnan told reporters here.

He said 86,782 villages and hamlets in various parts of the country have been identified as vulnerable to threats and intimidation in the ongoing election process and specific action taken against over 3.73 lakh people.

The EC reviewed the arrangements for the fifth and final phase of elections to 86 Lok Sabha seats in which a total of 10.78 crore voters would be eligible to exercise their franchise in over 1.21 lakh polling stations, he said.

With the five-phase poll coming to an end on Wednesday, the Commission will lift the ban on opinion and exit polls which can be telecast after close of the final phase of polls at five PM on May 13.

On April 14, the EC banned dissemination of results of opinion and exit polls by the media.

Meanwhile, the last phase of Lok Sabha polls

in Uttar Pradesh will witness 40 contestants with criminal background trying their luck at the hustings, with Samajwadi Party fielding the largest number of such candidates.

Out of a total of 203 candidates in fray for 14 Lok Sabha seats of the state going to polls in the final phase, 40 have criminal charges against them, 50 are crorepatas, 33 are school dropouts, 17 are literate and one illiterate, a report by the Association of Democratic Reforms said.

There are 19 candidates who are charged with heinous crimes including murder, attempt to murder, causing death by negligence, theft and extortion, it said.

Topping the chart is Samajwadi Party which has fielded a maximum of eight candidates with criminal charges, Bharatiya Janta Party six, four from Bahujan Samaj Party and three from Congress.

There are also five independents candidates who have criminal cases against them, the report, prepared on the basis of affidavits filed by candidates, said.

There are nine Red Alert Constituencies where three or more candidates have been charged with criminal charges. This includes Amroha which has five such candidates, followed by four candidates each in Moradabad, Aonla, Bareilly and Kheri where three such nominees are contesting from Bijnor, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur and Rampur seats.

Mexico's schools cleaned, ready to resume classes

AP, Mexico City

Scoured and disinfected, most of Mexico's primary schools and kindergartens stood ready to welcome back millions of students Monday after a nationwide shutdown ordered to help put a brake on the spread of swine flu.

Children who turned up with symptoms of the illness would be turned away, education officials said.

But it wasn't the nationwide restart that leaders had hoped for. Six of Mexico's 31 states put off reopening schools for another week amid a rise in suspected flu cases in some regions, and a seventh ordered a one-day delay. Some parents were worried about sending their children back so soon.

While Mexicans are feeling a little more relaxed, the swine flu outbreak is continuing to spread around the globe, with international health authorities reporting more than 4,500 confirmed cases in 29 nations. There are 53 deaths tied to the virus 48 in Mexico, three in the US, one in Canada and one in Costa Rica.

The United States now has the most confirmed cases, 2,532 in 44 states, more than 900 ahead of Mexico's total, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said Sunday.

In Mexico, crews worked through the weekend to clean school buildings and make sure they were stocked with sanitary supplies as 25 million children prepared to resume their studies after a two-week break that began when authorities ordered schools closed in the Mexico City region on April 24 and then the whole country three days later.

"We have cleaned the windows, classrooms, blackboards, floors, bathrooms, everything," Flor Carpio, whose husband is the custodian at Mexico City's Horacio Mann grade school, said Sunday.

At the Rosaura Zapati day care centre in central Mexico City, Miguel Sanchez cleaned a staircase with bleach even though he was not totally convinced that swine flu existed.



An elderly Chinese couple wear masks as they walk by the hospital in Chengdu, southwest China's Sichuan province yesterday where a 30-year-old man surnamed Bao was hospitalised with a fever after arriving on a flight from the United States via Tokyo and Beijing. China confirmed its first mainland case of swine flu and launched a search for the patient's fellow air passengers to prevent the virus spreading in the world's most populous nation.

12 policemen killed by Naxal's landmine in Chhattisgarh

PTI, Raipur

Twelve policemen and a civilian were killed and seven others injured in a landmine blast triggered by Naxals at Risgaon village in Dhamtari district today.

"The incident took place when Naxals blew up a police vehicle carrying the jawans," Bastar IGA N Upadhyaya said.

The police party was on their way to Kanker district in Bastar region for a combing operation when they were attacked by the rebels, he said, adding that the injured security personnel were rushed to Raipur hospital by helicopter.

A police team has been sent to the spot. However, dense forests and tough terrain has blocked communication from the jawans at the blast site hindering the rescue operations, Raipur IGDMA Wasthi said.

During the last one month more than 36 people were killed in Naxal attacks in Chhattisgarh.



India's Trinamool Congress (TMC) Party leader Mamata Banerjee addresses supporters during last minute campaigning in Kolkata yesterday prior to the fifth and last phase of polling due tomorrow.

PM woos Left, wants secular parties to keep NDA out of power

PTI, Ludhiana

Apparently wooing the Left for support, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today said secular parties had an obligation to provide a "purposeful, secular" government at the centre and prevent the NDA from coming to power at "all cost".

He said allies of the UPA, which were "unhappy", could be mollified but ruled out support to any government led by the Left parties arguing that they would not get more seats than the Congress.

"I always believe that all secular forces have an obligation to work together to give the country a purposeful, secular government," Singh told a press conference when asked specifically about whether he would appeal to the Left to again support a UPA government.

Zardari's dialogue offer has no takers in India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari's latest overture to India to restart talks after elections has found no takers in the political establishment barring the Left parties.

With Islamabad showing no sign of action against those behind the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, New Delhi is unlikely to resume the stalled dialogue process with Islamabad in the near future if either the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) or National Democratic Alliance (NDA) forms the next government.

Islamabad's best bet seems to be a Third Front government in which the Left parties will have a decisive say as they appear to be the only ones favouring restoration of the dialogue process on a parallel track with the process of bringing the Mumbai attackers to justice.

"They have not acted against the perpetrators of Mumbai attacks. They have not abandoned their support to terrorism as an instrument of policy. Nothing has changed," Brajesh Mishra, former national security adviser in the government of prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told IANS.

"It's unlikely any government will resume dialogue with Pakistan in such a situation," Mishra said.

"The government has made it clear that there will be no resumption of dialogue unless

Pakistan shows visible action against the Mumbai terrorists. A new government is unlikely to change that position," said Mishra.

Agrees G. Parthasarathy, a former envoy to Pakistan: "Restoring dialogue at this stage does not make sense. There is no movement against those behind the Mumbai attacks. Some of those arrested have been released."

A day after Zardari said he would start fresh dialogue with India once elections were over, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Saturday reiterated the Congress-led UPA government's oft-repeated stance that any rethink on starting dialogue with Pakistan will depend on 'effective steps' by Pakistan against the Mumbai culprits.

"Our minimum demand is that Pakistan must take effective steps to bring the Mumbai culprits to book before we can resume the dialogue," Manmohan Singh told reporters in Chennai while on a campaign tour.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads the NDA and never misses a chance to criticise the Manmohan Singh government for its alleged soft approach on terror and Pakistan, is unlikely to change this position.

"Though we want friendship, peace and cross-border terrorism can't go hand in hand. Pakistan has to prove its intention to punish the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks and dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism before talks can start," senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar told IANS.