



A Pakistani internally displaced family, who fled military operations against Taliban militants in troubled Swat valley and Buner, walks beside tents at a makeshift camp in Mardan yesterday.

Pakistan drops commandos into Taliban stronghold

US missile strike kills 8 on suspected militant hideout

AP, Mardan

Army helicopters dropped Pakistani commandos behind Taliban lines in the Swat Valley yesterday as part of a widening offensive against the militants, while a US missile killed eight people in an attack on a suspected insurgent hideout elsewhere in the northwest.

Choppers inserted troops into the remote Pochar area in the upper reaches of the valley, an army statement said. Officials identified it as the rearbase of an estimated 4,000 Taliban militants also entrenched in Swat's main towns. It is seen as possible hiding place of Swat Taliban chief Maulana Fazlullah.

A military spokesman declined to give details of the Pochar assault.

Pakistani authorities launched a full-scale assault on Swat and surrounding districts last week after the Taliban pushed out from the valley on the back of

a now-defunct peace deal and extended their control to areas just 100 kilometres from the capital, Islamabad.

The military response has won praise from American officials, who insist Islamabad must eliminate safe havens used by militants to undermine the pro-Western governments in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The government claims to have killed some 700 militants in Swat and neighbouring districts so far.

But it has also unleashed a tide of at least 360,000 refugees. Their plight could sap public support for the kind of sustained action against an increasingly inter-linked array of Islamist extremists that the cash-strapped country's Western backers are desperate to see. Around 30,000 are staying camps set up by the government and international organisations.

Also Tuesday, a missile strike destroyed a house in Sara Khora, a village in the South Waziristan tribal region,

Pakistani security officials said. The identities of those killed were not immediately known.

Two security officials, citing initial intelligence reports, said eight people died. They said agents on the ground were still trying to discover the identities of the victims. The officials asked for anonymity because they are not authorised to speak openly to the media.

Yar Mohammad, a resident of the area, told The Associated Press by telephone that he had seen Taliban militants removing nine bodies from the building and taking them away in vehicles. The discrepancy over the number of deaths could not be reconciled immediately, but was not unusual in the aftermath of such attacks.

Over the past year, the US has carried out dozens of missile strikes on al-Qaeda and Taliban targets in the border area, where American officials say al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden is likely hiding.

Pakistan 'most dangerous country in the world'

Says Canadian Defence Minister

ANI, Ottawa

"Extremely concerned" by the current volatile situation in Pakistan, Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay has termed Pakistan as the "most dangerous country in the world."

"I'm extremely concerned. The instability in Pakistan in my view makes Pakistan the most dangerous country in the world," the Globe and Mail quoted MacKay, as saying.

Addressing a press conference at St. John's, MacKay said it was very difficult for the

Pakistan Army to quell the insurgency that has engulfed the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of the country.

"As long as insurgency is allowed to foster and to incubate inside Pakistan, the problem remains very real, very difficult," he added.

MacKay said the operation against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan would not yield the desired results until the extremists are rooted out from Pakistan, and some greater strides are made in taking on the insurgency in Afghanistan as well.

Half a million people flee fresh Pak fighting: UN

UNHCR urges aid for displaced Pakistanis

AFP, Islamabad/ Geneva

More than half a million people have fled fighting between the military and Taliban in northwest Pakistan and registered with authorities in the last 10 days, the UN refugee agency said yesterday.

"As of late yesterday (Monday), a total of 501,496 displaced people from the new influx have now been formally registered by authorities, with UNHCR's help, since May 2," the UNHCR said in a statement.

The refugees are trying to escape the military bombardments of Islamist extremists who are dug into three districts in northwest Pakistan.

The number has jumped from 360,000 people who had registered late Sunday. UNHCR spokeswoman Ariane Rummery told AFP the lifting of a curfew in Swat district on Sunday likely led to the leap in those fleeing.

The new refugees join another 500,000 civilians who fled previous bouts of fighting in Pakistan's troubled North

West Frontier Province last year, taking the total number of displaced people here to more than one million.

Earlier on Monday the UN refugee chief called for international aid for hundreds of thousands of displaced people fleeing fighting in northwestern Pakistan.

"This is a huge and rapidly unfolding emergency which is going to require considerable resources beyond those that currently exist in the region," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said.

US sacks top commander in Afghanistan

AFP, Washington

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has sacked the top commander in Afghanistan to make way for "new thinking" in the seven-year-old war that has struggled to halt a widening Taliban insurgency.

Gates, explaining Monday his decision to replace General David McKiernan after less than a year on the job as the US and Nato commander, said "that our mission there requires new thinking and new approaches from our military leaders."

He said he had tapped Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, a former commander of special operations forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, to replace McKiernan.

"Today, we have a new policy set by our new president. We have a new strategy, a new mission and a new ambassador," Gates told a news conference. "I believe that new military leadership also is needed."

The change comes as President Barack Obama escalates the war against a spreading Taliban insurgency, approving deployments that will double the size of the US force in Afghanistan before he took office in January to 68,000 by the fall.

'Laden was US operator destabilising Benazir'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has alleged that elusive al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was a US operator who had tried to destabilise his late wife Benazir Bhutto's government back in 1989.

In fact, as premier Benazir Bhutto had "warned America about Osama bin Laden in 1989 with a call to then US president George H. Bush," Zardari said on NBC's Meet the Press programme Sunday.



Indian election officials carry Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) from a distribution centre in Amritsar yesterday, on the eve of the final phase of polling in India.

Stage set for today's final phase of Indian polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Balloting in the five-phase Indian elections draw to a close today with voters in seven states and two union territories deciding the fate of 1,432 candidates, including union ministers P Chidambaram and Mani Shanker Aiyar who are contesting from Tamil Nadu.

Polling will be held in 86 constituencies with 107 million voters eligible to exercise their franchise to choose their nominee in the Lok Sabha.

The candidates include 93 women.

The staggered elections began April 16 and the millions of votes cast would be counted May 16 to decide the outcome of one of India's most fiercely fought electoral battles that is expected to throw up a hung parliament.

In the month that was, alliances came under strain and new allies were sought in a campaign with both major coalition leaders, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), looking at a

splintered verdict.

The Election Commission has set up over 121,000 polling booths to be overseen by a polling staff of 500,000. There would be 186,000 electronic voting machines.

Officials have identified 5,995 villages and hamlets as vulnerable, apprehending that there could be trouble.

Testing their electoral luck will be Home Minister P Chidambaram (Congress) from Sivaganga and his colleague, Panchayati Raj Minister Mani Shanker Aiyar, from Mayiladuthurai.



Asian travellers wear face-masks to protect themselves against Swine Flu as they arrive at Los Angeles International Airport on Monday.

Israel under UN pressure to back two-state deal

AFP, United Nations

Israel came under pressure Monday to commit to the creation of an independent Palestinian state as the UN Security Council debated how to breathe new life into the dormant Middle East peace process.

The ministerial session wrapped up with the unanimous adoption of a non-binding statement calling for "urgent efforts ... to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace."

It said such peace should be "based on the vision of a region where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders."

The debate was chaired by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country presides over the 15-member council this month.

But Israel and the Palestinians did not take part.

"Israel does not believe that the involvement of the Security Council contributes to the political process in the Middle East," its ambassador to the United Nations, Gabriela Shalev, said in a statement.

"This process should be bilateral and left to the parties themselves," she said.

"Furthermore, the timing of this Security Council meeting is inappropriate as the Israeli government is in the midst of conducting a policy review, prior to next week's visit by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the United States," she added, explaining her country's decision not to attend the council debate.

Disaster looming on rising sea levels

Say island nations at World Ocean Conference

AFP, Manado

Rising sea levels that could wipe whole nations off the map and displace scores of millions of people are being overlooked in global climate change talks, island countries said yesterday.

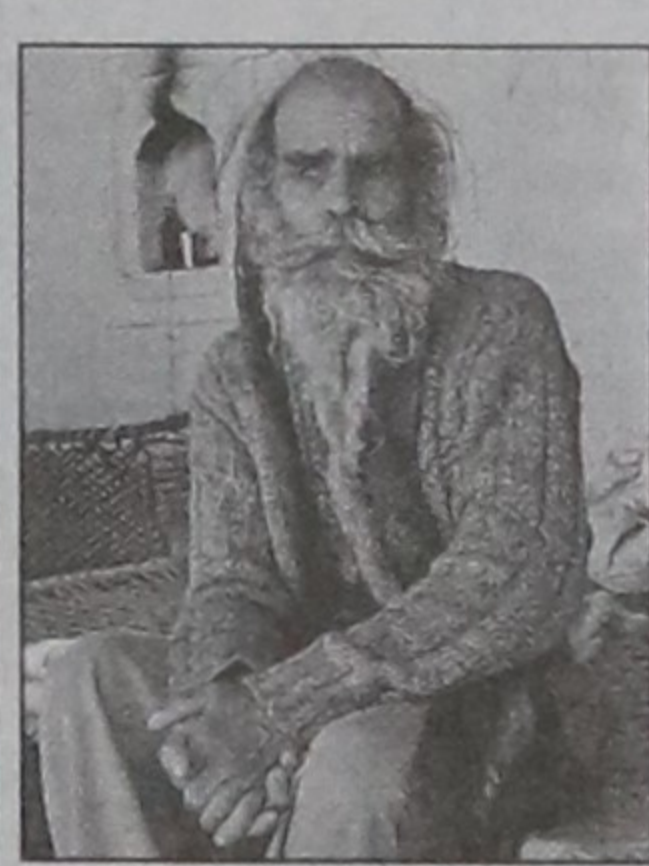
Major emitters are pushing for greenhouse gas emissions cuts that are too low to prevent devastating sea rises, representatives said at the World Ocean Conference in Indonesia's Manado city.

"Dealing with environmental refugees will have a much more serious impact on the global economy and global security in fact than what wars have ever done to this planet," said Rolph Payet, a presidential adviser from the African island nation of the

Seychelles. Nations under threat from even small rises in sea levels include the Pacific island states of Kiribati and Tuvalu, while major cities and vast tracts of heavily populated coastline from Bangladesh to West Africa could also go under this century.

The five-day conference has attracted hundreds of officials and experts from 70 countries and is being billed as a prelude to December talks on a successor to the expiring Kyoto Protocol.

Payet said there had been "zero" serious discussions in top international forums on how to deal with massive flows of "climate refugees" from low-lying and drought-prone areas.



Indian man Kailash "Kalau" Singh, who reportedly has not taken a shower in 35 years, looks on as he sits on a rope bed at a village in the outskirts of Varanasi on May 8.

Life without bathing for 35 years

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian man who fathered seven daughters has not washed for 35 years in an apparent attempt to ensure his next child is a boy, newspapers reported.

Kailash "Kalau" Singh replaces bathing and brushing his teeth with a "fire bath" every evening when he stands on one leg beside a bonfire, smokes marijuana and says prayers to Lord Shiva, according to the Hindustan Times.

"It's just like using water to take a bath," Kalau was reported as saying. "A fire bath helps kill germs and infection in the body."

Kalau, 63, from a village outside the holy city of Varanasi, outraged his family by refusing to take a ritual dip in the river Ganges even after his brother died five years ago.

"I still don't remember how it all began," he said in Saturday's edition of the paper. "I just know it started about 35 years ago."

Military probes shooting of 5 US soldiers in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

The US military on Tuesday was investigating the killing of five American soldiers at its largest base in Iraq after detaining one of their comrades suspected of carrying out the shooting.

The US soldier, whose name has not been released, was in custody after allegedly firing on his colleagues at a counselling clinic in the sprawling Camp Liberty in Baghdad.

"The investigation is ongoing," the US military said on Tuesday after earlier saying it had detained a soldier at the base lying northeast of central Baghdad.



Nepalese police scuffle with activists of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) during a protest against Nepalese President Ram Baran Yadav in Kathmandu yesterday.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

Sajeeb Corporation a well reputed and leading Manufacturer, Exporter, Importer & Marketing organisation of consumer products (Shezan Juice, TANG, Nocilla, Kolson Lascha Semai, Kolson Macaroni, Kolson Vermicelli, Kolson Noodles, Sajeeb Biscuits & other food items) in the country is looking for:

- Asstt. Brand Manager:** The candidate should have minimum Masters Degree/MBA from any recognized university. Must have 5 (five) years experience in similar position in any reputed organization (Preferably-Food & Beverage).
- Asstt. Manager (HR & Training):** The candidate should have minimum Masters Degree/MBA from any recognized university. The incumbent must have minimum 3 (Three) years job experience in any consumer goods/food manufacturing concern.
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