



A Pakistani local resident walks past the wreckage of an army tank destroyed by Taliban militants in the village of Pir Baba in troubled Buner district yesterday, where the military launched an operation against the Taliban.

UN seeks \$543m for Pak war refugees

Britain gives some extra aid

AP, AFP, Khwazakheh/London

Troops are encircling Taliban militants in their mountain base as well as the main town in the Swat Valley, a Pakistani general said yesterday, as the UN appealed for \$543 million to ease the suffering of nearly 2 million refugees from the fighting.

With scepticism growing about the progress of the month-old army offensive in the northwestern region, the army flew a handful of reporters from foreign news organizations into Swat on Friday.

An Associated Press reporter aboard the helicopter saw no cars and few people in the town of Mingora or on roads further up the valley, a former tourist haven just 100km from the capital, Islamabad.

From the air, there was little evidence of the fierce fighting and airstrikes that the military claims have already killed more than 1,000 militants as well as some 60 soldiers.

But a senior commander insisted the army was trapping militants in Mingora and Piochar, a side-valley further north that is the stronghold of Swat Taliban leader Maulana Fazlullah.

"The noose is tightening around them. Their routes of escape have been cut off," Maj. Gen. Sajad Ghani said. "It's just a question of time before (Taliban leaders) are eliminated."

Pakistan launched an offensive last month to halt a Taliban advance from Swat toward the capital, Islamabad, that prompted US warnings about the stability of the nuclear-armed country.

While the US has praised the military operation, it is also contributing to a gathering effort to shield the government from the political fallout from the humanitarian crisis.

Officials say 1.9 million people have fled the fighting. More than 160,000 are staying in sweltering camps just south of the battle zone. The rest have been taken

in by relatives. The United Nations said its appeal would help provide food, schooling and health care to the multitude displaced from the Swat area and by fighting in other border regions last year.

"The scale of this displacement is extraordinary in terms of size and speed and has caused incredible suffering," said Martin Mogwanja, the acting UN humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan. "We are calling for generous support from the international community."

Meanwhile, Britain announced Friday an extra 10 million pounds (15.9 million dollars, 11.4 million euros) in aid to help huge numbers of people displaced by a military offensive in northwest Pakistan.

The new money brings Britain's contribution to 22 million pounds, and will be distributed via UN agencies working in the affected areas, said international development minister Douglas Alexander.

US senators insist on conditions for Pak military aid

AFP, Washington

Several US senators on Thursday vowed to impose conditions on proposed military assistance to Pakistan, saying that past aid had been delivered without strings attached.

Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued the warning to the top US military officer, Admiral Mike Mullen, who was grilled over an administration request for 400 million dollars to help Islamabad with counter-insurgency operations against Islamist militants.

"There is a significant unease here in Congress over what has happened previously in the transfer of our funds," Democrat John Kerry, chairman of the committee, told the admiral.

The senator said that under the previous administration, there was little accountability for billions of dollars' worth of military assistance for Pakistan.

"Many of us did not learn until last year some time that for those six or seven years that the prior administration was transferring very significant sums of money to Pakistan, we didn't have a clue where it was going," Kerry said.

"And we learned subsequently that most of it was going into their general budget. That is not going to fly here and they need to know that," he said.

Kerry and other senators said they had proposed legislation that would ensure "adequate levels of scrutiny, accountability."

Pakistan, India, US share intelligence

AFP, Washington

Pakistan and India have started sharing intelligence as part of an unprecedented cooperation effort between the longtime nuclear-armed foes overseen by the United States, US media reported Thursday.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) arranged for the two South Asian nations to share more information on the Pakistan-based militant organization Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), widely accused of plotting the November attacks in Mumbai, the Wall Street Journal reported.

A US intelligence official confirmed to AFP that Washington was working to improve cooperation between the two countries.

"The CIA has urged Pakistan and India to share more information on counterterrorism matters, and the agency continues to play a key role in fostering productive exchanges in the months since the Mumbai attacks," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The cooperation has also applied to intelligence sharing on Taliban commanders who are

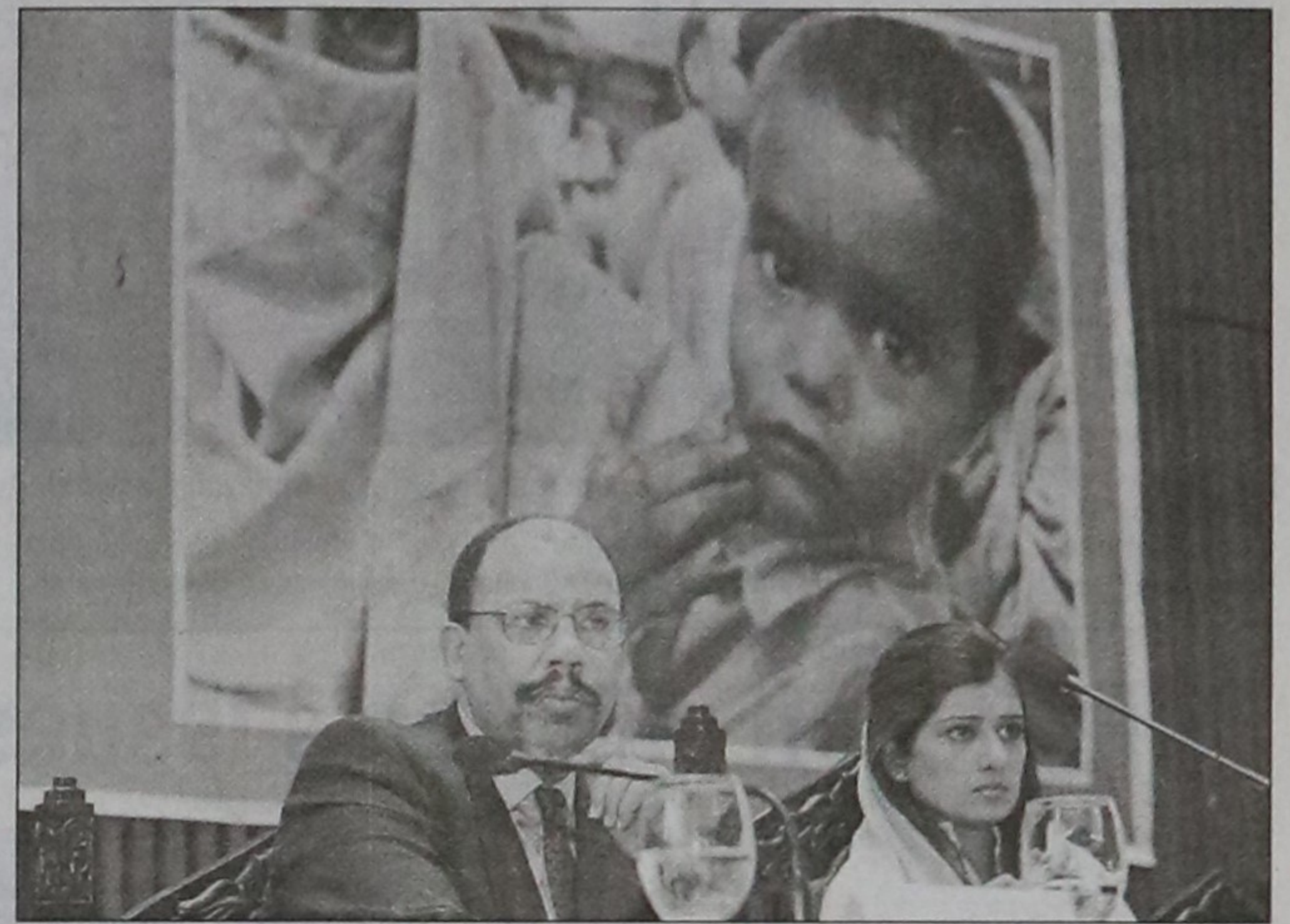
leading a mounting insurgency against the Pakistani government, the Journal wrote, citing US officials.

"We have to satisfy the Mumbai question, and show India that the threat is abating," an official involved in Washington's South Asia strategy told the paper.

An official at Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency said India and Pakistan had shared "a lot" of information about the Mumbai attack and were now working directly with one another, while keeping the CIA informed.

Although Washington is not "under any illusions" about erasing long-standing suspicious between the two countries, it does see some progress, a US official told the Journal.

In an effort to stress to Islamabad that the Taliban pose a greater threat to Pakistan than its historic foe India, the US government shares information with Islamabad -- and sometimes with India -- about the location of Taliban commanders and their training camps, the report said.



Acting UN humanitarian coordinator, Martin Mogwanja (L) and State Minister for Economic Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar attend the launching of a Pakistani Humanitarian Response Plan in Islamabad yesterday. The United Nations has called for 543 million dollars in humanitarian relief for around 1.5 million people displaced by the ongoing military offensive in northwest Pakistan.



A screen capture of an MRTV television broadcast shows Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi as she is escorted to a car on the third day of her trial at Yangon's Insein Prison on May 20. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband on Thursday called on Myanmar to stop the 'charade' of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's trial, as the junta again barred media and diplomats from the court.

Suu Kyi proclaims her innocence in court

Myanmar launches offensive over trial

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi proclaimed her innocence in front of a prison tribunal Friday, her lawyer said.

"Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said 'I have no guilt as I didn't commit any crime,'" Nyan Win said at the end of the fifth day of her trial on charges of breaching the conditions of her house arrest.

Nyan Win said Aung San Suu Kyi spoke to the court, held behind closed doors, as the prosecution wrapped its case before the trial resumes on Monday with her legal defence.

Earlier Myanmar's junta went on the offensive over Aung San Suu Kyi's trial yesterday, blaming "anti-government elements" for the visit of an American to her home and alleging he was a "secret agent or her boyfriend".

The rare comments came after widespread condemnation of the decision to try the Nobel Peace Prize winner on charges of breaching the

terms of her house arrest because of the intrusion.

The New Light of Myanmar reported Foreign Minister Nyan Win as saying that he believed the bizarre incident -- in which a 53-year-old man used homemade flippers to swim across a lake to Aung San Suu Kyi's house -- had been set up by anti-junta forces.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's consul general in Hong Kong also pointed an accusatory finger at the defendants, controversially suggesting in an online posting that Yettaw knew Aung San Suu Kyi as a "secret agent or her boyfriend."

But a court report in the New Light contradicted the conspiracy theories and said Yettaw had "frightened" Aung San Suu Kyi with his arrival.

She had refused the American's request for photographs to post on the video sharing website YouTube it said. A two-hour film Yettaw made of his visit was shown to the court on Thursday according to a defence lawyer, also called Nyan Win.

Rich nations must cut emissions by 40 pct

Says China

AP, Shanghai

Wealthy nations, as history's biggest polluters, should cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020, China says in a policy document on climate change. The government also rolled out fresh help for solar power and other "green energy."

The reductions China is calling for are based on the principles of "historical responsibility and fairness," the position paper says, and set a hard line ahead of international negotiations on addressing global warming.

A UN conference set for December in Copenhagen aims to draft a new agreement on controlling carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases that scientists say are causing the Earth to warm. Delegates will meet in Bonn, Germany, next month to begin discussing the text of that agreement.

China's position paper was posted Thursday on the Web site of the National Development and Planning Commission, the country's main economic planning agency.

Meanwhile, the government announced new support for solar and wind power and other renewable energy sources.

In a meeting Thursday with provincial officials, the Ministry of Finance promised 38 billion yuan (\$5.6 billion) in subsidies to promote wider use of wind and solar power and encourage the use of energy efficient cars and appliances, state-run media reported Friday.

EU-Russia summit fails to mend rifts

AFP, Khabarovsk

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Friday condemned EU moves to strengthen ties with former Soviet states after a summit that failed to smooth out the bloc's tetchy relationship with Moscow.

The controversy over the Eastern Partnership plan was just one dispute laid bare at the summit in Russia's Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk, alongside conflict on an energy charter and a new warning over gas supplies.

Czech President Vaclav Klaus, holder of the rotating EU presidency, said the European Union had sought to reassure Russia over its Eastern Partnership initiative. But he failed to assuage Medvedev's suspicions.

"I'll put it succinctly. We tried to convince ourselves but in the end we couldn't," Medvedev said at a joint news conference.

"What bothers us is that for some (ex-Soviet) states this is seen as a partnership against Russia," he said, in a veiled reference to pro-Western governments in Georgia and Ukraine.

"We don't want the Eastern Partnership to become a partnership against Russia."

The partnership aims to strengthen political and economic ties between the 27 EU nations and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and has already alarmed Russia.

EU Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso argued in vain that the initiative "is against nobody. It's to support prosperity and stability."

The summit held in Khabarovsk -- the most easterly venue chosen for such a meeting -- aimed to raise spirits after ties were frayed by the 2008 war with Georgia and the New Year gas crisis with Ukraine.

"The European Union considers Russia to be its strategic partner. We must do something to make this real and not just a formal proclamation," said Klaus.

Russia had been hoping for a positive EU response to Medvedev's proposal for a new document to replace an Energy Charter Treaty adopted in 1991 to integrate the energy sectors of the former Soviet bloc.

The EU leaders said they were ready to listen to the proposal from Russia but insisted there was no reason to rip up the existing pact.

Jury spares ex-US soldier's life for Iraq rape, murders

AFP, Paducah

A Kentucky jury Thursday handed a former US soldier a sentence of life in prison for the gang rape and murder of an Iraqi girl and the slaughter of her family, sparing him from the death sentence.

After 10 hours of deliberation Wednesday and Thursday the nine women and three men on the jury returned without a unanimous verdict for an execution.

Their failure to agree effectively handed Steven Dale Green life in prison without the possibility of parole for the rape and killing of 14-year-old Abeer al-Janabi and the murder of her mother, father and six-year-old sister.

The judge will impose the sentence on September 4.

Green, named as the ring-leader in the March 2006 atrocity, was tried in a civilian court after being discharged from the army due to a "personality disorder" before his role in the crime came to light.

Three other soldiers were given life sentences for the attack, which they plotted over whiskey and a game of cards at a traffic check point in Mahmudiyah, south of Baghdad.



Chairman of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and Kashmir's chief priest Moulvi Umar Farooq (L) prays at his father's grave during a procession to commemorate the killing of two prominent separatist leaders Mirwaiz Mohammad Farooq and Abdul Gani Lone, in Srinagar on Thursday.

Mutharika sworn in for second term as Malawi president

AFP, Blantyre

Bingu wa Mutharika was Friday sworn in for a second term as Malawi's president before several African heads of state and crowd of dancing supporters in a Blantyre stadium.

His running-mate Joyce Banda was also sworn in as the first female vice president of the impoverished African state.

Mutharika and Banda both held a Bible as they took the oath vowing to "truly perform the function of the highest office" of president and vice president.

Chief Justice Lovemore Munlo -- who reserved judgment in an appeal by US pop star Madonna against a failed bid to adopt a second toddler from the country earlier this month -- presided over the ceremony, as women danced and sang their praises.

Crops rot on Pak battle lines

AFP, Yar Hussain Camp

Farmers in Pakistan's northwest were preparing for a bumper harvest when a punishing military assault against Taliban fighters sent them fleeing their homes.

They fear hardship and hunger as crops spoil in untended fields, with aid agencies warning that it could take years for farmers to recover.

Aerial bombardments, shelling and fierce battles between government troops and Islamist insurgents in the rugged northwest have uprooted about 1.5 million people from their homes since the onslaught began on April 26.

Most of them were farmers who abandoned fields of wheat, maize, vegetables and rice, which now lie rotting as the battles rage.

"I have left it at the mercy of Allah, only he

can now look after my fields and my crop," said 68-year-old Fazal Karim, standing under the scorching sun outside his tent at Yar Hussain camp just south of the fighting.

Karim grows onions, wheat and rice on five acres (two hectares) of land in a small village in the fertile Swat valley, but as Taliban fighters infiltrated his hometown, he left the cool mountains for the dusty government-run camp.

"The wheat crop was almost ready. I think I should forget about my crop. It will ruin me financially and I will have no money to live," he told AFP.

Agriculture accounts for about 20 percent of Pakistan's gross domestic product, and many people depend on the land in Buner, Lower Dir and Swat districts, where the military has gone on the offensive against the Taliban.

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**Request for Expression of Interest
for Promoting a Market for Composting Technology**

Katalyst is a market development project under Ministry of Commerce and funded by a consortium of donors. Katalyst is looking for organizations or individual experts who have modern technologies related to compost production and are interested to promote their technology on commercial basis.

Interested parties are requested to submit their Expression of Interest along with a profile detailing their background, the composting technology (i.e. composting time, composting agent, and raw materials) they want to promote, to the **Division Manager, Rural Sectors Division, Katalyst, House 20, Road 6, Baridhara, Dhaka- 1212**, mentioning **"EOI for Promoting a Market for Composting Technology"** on top of the envelope by **June 4, 2009**.