

Suu Kyi lawyers challenge ban on defence witnesses

AFP, Yangon

Lawyers acting for Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi appeared in court yesterday to challenge a ruling over the witnesses who can testify on her behalf, her spokesman said.

The Nobel laureate's lawyers presented appeal documents to a Yangon divisional court mid-afternoon, asking the court to overturn a ban on three of four witnesses whom she called to give evidence at her closed-door trial.

"We gave our statement this afternoon to the divisional court because the original decision regarding the three witnesses was not legal," said her spokesman, Nyan Win, who is also one of her three-man defence team.

Nyan Win said the judge announced that a ruling would be made on the appeal on Tuesday, June 9.



US Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke (R) is welcomed by Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi upon arrival for a meeting in Islamabad yesterday.

3 towns in northwest cleared of Taliban

Says Pakistani minister; 7 killed as militants ambush convoy of troops

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, PTI, Islamabad

Three towns in Pakistan's restive northwest have been cleared of the Taliban, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said yesterday as the military operations against the militants entered their 42nd day.

Speaking to reporters outside parliament, Malik said the towns of Mingora, Kalam and Buner in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) had been cleared of the Taliban and the civilians who had fled the fighting could now return home.

At the same time, he admitted it would take time for normalcy to return to the area.

Malik said some suicide bombers had been arrested during the operations in Swat, on which the security forces are now focussed, but indicated it could be a few

weeks before the area was cleared of the militants.

Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said Thursday that the situation in Swat has 'decisively turned' in the security forces' favour.

"The tide in Swat has decisively turned. Major population centres and roads leading to the valley have been largely cleared of organised resistance by the terrorists," Kayani said while presiding over the 119th Corps Commanders' Conference in the adjacent garrison town of Rawalpindi.

"High value targets are being aggressively hunted. To clear the remaining hideouts and sanctuaries, the army will continue to carry out operations at a limited scale," the army chief said.

The security forces were ordered into action April 26 after the Taliban reneged on a controversial peace deal with the

NWFP government and instead moved south from their Swat headquarters to occupy Buner, which is just 100 km from Islamabad.

Meanwhile, seven security personnel, including three police officers and a captain of the Frontier Corps, were killed when militants ambushed a security forces convoy near Malakand division, where the Pakistan Army is conducting operations against the Taliban.

The convoy was ambushed at Natyan in Mardan district and reinforcements were rushed to the area after the attack.

The attack triggered an operation that continued till late last night. Seven security personnel including Deputy Superintendent of Police Farid Hussain Bangash, Station House Officer Sherullah Khan, Assistant Sub-Inspector Hanan Khan and a captain of the paramilitary Frontier Corps were killed during the skirmish.

India rules out resumption of talks with Pakistan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, PTI, New Delhi

India yesterday ruled out resumption of talks with Pakistan until it took tangible measures to prevent terrorism directed against this country.

"Not unless they (Pakistan) take concrete measures to prevent terrorist attacks emanating from the soil of Pakistan aimed against India (can talks resume)," External Affairs Minister SM Krishna told reporters outside Parliament House when asked whether there was any move to resume the dialogue with Islamabad.

His statement puts at rest speculation that the government was contemplating the resumption of talks with Pakistan in the near future.

Krishna also said that the release of Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed by a court in Lahore only showed that Pakistan was not serious about acting against terror. India says Saeed was the mastermind behind the 26/11 Mumbai attacks that claimed over 170 lives, including those of 26 foreigners.

President Pratibha Patil, while addressing the joint session of parliament Thursday, said the reshaping of relations with Pakistan would depend on its 'sincerity' in preventing terrorist groups from launching attacks against India.

"My government will seek to reshape our relationship with Pakistan depending on the sincerity of Pakistan to confront groups who launch terrorist attacks against India from its territory," Patil had said.

The India-Pakistan peace process has been frozen in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai carnage that New Delhi blames on elements operating from across the border.

Meanwhile, the terror suspect arrested in the capital "does have" links with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba founder Hafiz Saeed, Home Minister P Chidambaram said yesterday.

"The man arrested in Delhi does have links with Hafiz Saeed," he told reporters here when asked about the arrest of Mohammed Omar Madni by the Special Cell of Delhi Police near Qutab Minar on Thursday.

Extremism not a threat for Pakistan: Zardari

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has said that extremism cannot pose a threat to the sovereignty of the country, and claimed that the Swat offensive is fully backed by Pakistan's political fraternity.

Zardari said the country's civil society and the political forces would never allow the extremists to carry on their nefarious activities to expand their writ.

Terming the Swat Operation as the "war of Pakistan's existence," Zardari said terrorists must be stopped from entering the country, as they are a threat to the whole region.

He said it was very necessary to stem the increasing wave of extremism, otherwise it would seriously dent the democratic set-up of the country, The News reports.

"If we did not rise to the occasion on this critical juncture for the effective and complete elimination of militancy, the coming generations would not forgive us," Zardari added.

Referring to the exodus of over three million people in the Swat Valley, who have been forced to flee the region due to the military offensive, he said every step would be taken to ensure that the homeless people return to their homes to lead a peaceful life.

He also expressed fears that the displaced may fall a prey to the propaganda of the extremists if not rehabilitated soon.



Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) lawmakers tussle with police during a protest in front of the government administrative building in Singha Durbar in Kathmandu yesterday. The Maoists were demonstrating against the Indian government over the alleged encroachment of Nepal's territory by Indian security forces in southwest Nepal.

Advani demands inquiry commission on Mumbai attacks

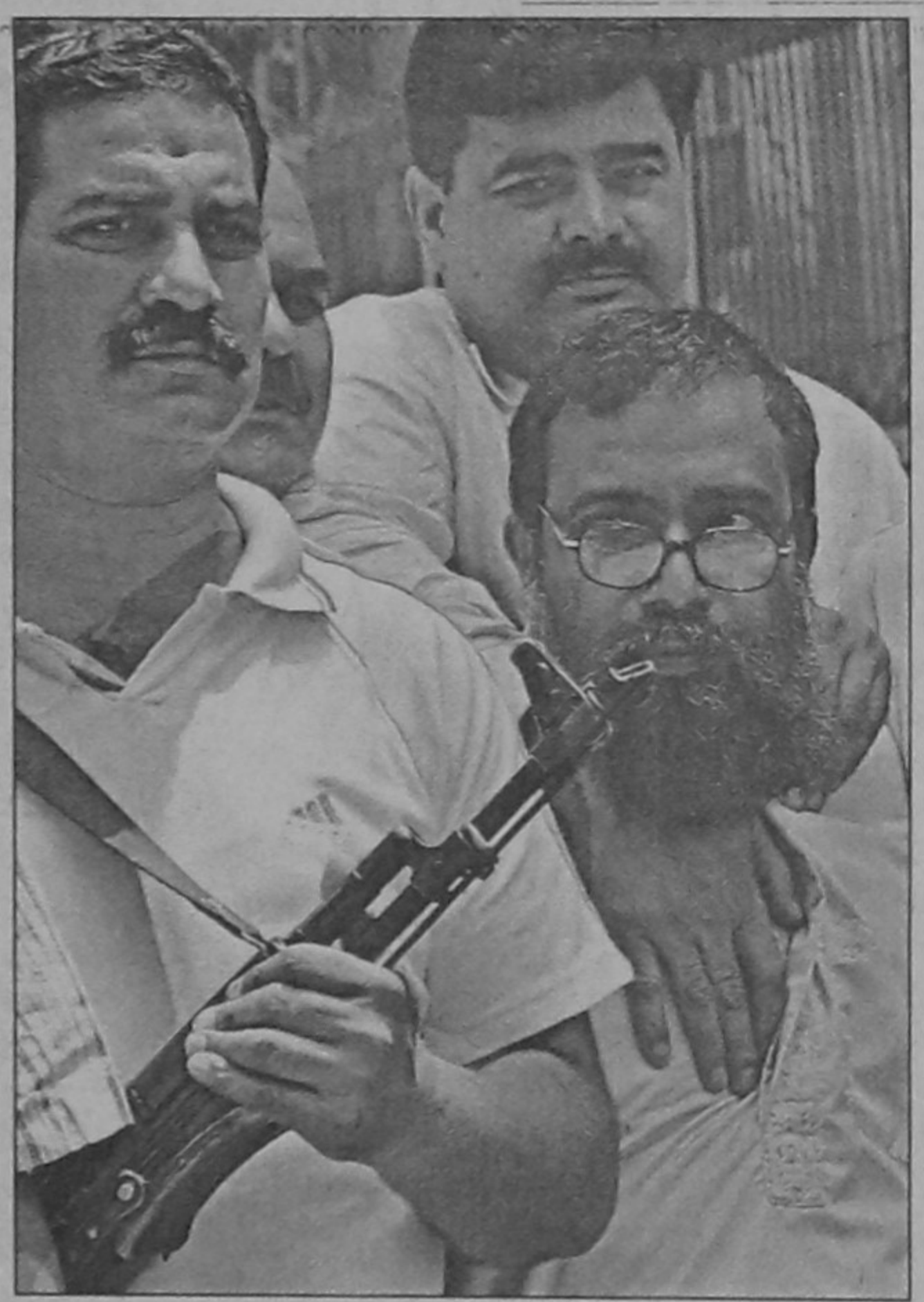
PTI, New Delhi

Describing the Mumbai attacks as an "invasion of India" launched from Pakistan, Leader of Opposition LK Advani today demanded setting up of an inquiry commission at central level to determine what went wrong and suggest steps to prevent recurrence of such terror strikes.

Speaking on the Motion of Thanks to President's address in the Lok Sabha, he also asked the government to share with the House the evidence given to Pakistan on 26/11, especially in the wake of release of Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Mohd Saeed apparently on the grounds of insufficient proof.

He also wanted the government to expedite the trial of Ajmal Kasab, the only terrorist arrested during 26/11 attacks. Advani, who was conciliatory towards government in his tone during the one-hour speech, appreciated the emphasis given to security in the President's address.

He said terrorism was "proxy war" launched by Pakistan on India after its defeat in three open wars. Referring to 26/11, he said it was not an ordinary terror strike but an "invasion of India" and "a kind of war".



Delhi Police Special Cell presents suspected Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militant and Pakistani national Mohammed Omar Madni (C) to media representatives in New Delhi yesterday. Indian police have arrested an Islamic militant with links to the chief of a Pakistan-based charity, who has been blamed for plotting the Mumbai terror attacks, an Indian minister said.

'Coup attempt' thwarted in Guinea-Bissau

Presidential candidate, ex-minister killed

AP, Bissau

Authorities in Guinea-Bissau said yesterday they foiled an attempted coup, and security forces killed two people allegedly involved, including a candidate in the West African nation's upcoming presidential ballot.

A statement issued by Guinea-Bissau's intelligence service said the coup plot was masterminded by former defence minister Helder Proenca. It said presidential candidate Baciro Dabo was also involved, Portugal's national news agency Lusa reported.

Both men were confirmed dead in separate shootings. "This being a subversive act and its perpetrators being armed, police help was requested in order to disarm them," the intelligence service statement said. "During the operation some gave themselves up while others resisted, bringing an exchange of gunfire that caused their deaths."

There were no details of how many people were involved in the plot, or whether any are under arrest.

A former Portuguese colony, Guinea-Bissau has a long history of instability with numerous coups and attempted coups, most of which were led by the army.

The West African country's president, Joao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, was assassinated March 2, just hours after his longtime rival, the head of the armed forces, was killed by a bomb.

An interim government was set up after Vieira's death and elections to choose a new leader are due June 28, with campaigning to begin Saturday.

The intelligence service statement alleged that former Prime Minister Faustino Imbali and retired armed forces officers were also involved in the attempted overthrow. The plotters planned to oust the interim president, dissolve parliament, and kill armed forces Chief of Staff Zamora Induta and Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior, the statement said.

The statement claimed intelligence officials had audio recordings and films of the plotters preparing the coup.

Amnesty presses UN for Lanka war crimes probe

Lanka seizes ship on 'mercy mission'

AFP, Colombo

Amnesty International on Friday urged the UN Security Council to probe war crimes allegations against Sri Lanka, ahead of a briefing to the world body by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The London-based rights watchdog said the Security Council should also demand full humanitarian access to state-run camps where up to 300,000 people who fled Sri Lanka's war zone are being held.

Ban was to brief the council later Friday on his recent visit to the island.

Amnesty called for an international, independent inquiry into the allegations of war crimes that have been levelled against both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tiger rebels.

"Alternatively, the UN secretary general should establish such an investigation under his own mandate," Amnesty said.

Earlier this week, Ban rejected charges that the UN had deliberately underestimated the death toll in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Press reports cited confidential UN estimates that more than 20,000 civilians were killed by Sri Lankan army shelling.

"I should emphasise that the final total is not yet known," Ban said in New York. "Most of these figures do not emanate from the UN and most are not consistent with the information at our disposal."

Ban, however, made it clear that whatever

the total, the casualties in the conflict were "unacceptably" high.

The Amnesty statement also cited reports of young men being taken away from the displacement camps by pro-government paramilitary forces and said they risked being tortured or even killed.

Among those detained by the military are six foreign nationals of Sri Lankan origin and three doctors who worked inside the war zone and provided information about civilian casualties.

The Sri Lankan government is also detaining some 9,000 suspected Tamil Tigers without legal safeguards or notice to their families, Amnesty said.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's navy Thursday seized a foreign-owned ship loaded with medical, food and other supplies, saying the vessel was carrying provisions for the defeated Tamil Tiger rebels.

The defence ministry in a statement said the Syrian-registered ship Captain Ali was seized off the island's western coast and was being escorted to the port of Colombo with a total of 15 people onboard.

It said the ship had set sail "under the pretext of a mercy mission" carrying essential logistical materials for the Tamil Tigers before they were defeated late last month.

"We have seized the vessel and we are bringing it ashore now," Captain DK Dassanayake said, adding the crew offered no resistance when the navy boarded the vessel 140 kilometres west of Sri Lanka.

Three children among 34 killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Three Afghan children were killed yesterday by a mortar left over from a battle between police and Taliban, as bomb attacks and clashes left 31 more people dead, most of them insurgents, officials said.

There has been a steady increase in attacks and clashes across Afghanistan in recent weeks as US military reinforcements move into the south and Afghan forces target insurgent hotspots ahead of August 20 presidential elections.

The children, aged four to 10, were killed Friday when they touched a mortar shell left over from an exchange of fire the previous day between Taliban and police in the central province of Ghazni, police said.

Another child was wounded, said provincial police chief Khial Baz Sherbaz.

Two roadside bombs exploded an hour apart in separate areas of the eastern province of Nangarhar on Friday, killing six policemen, provincial government spokesman Ahmad Zia Abdulzai told AFP.

Also in Nangarhar, a man was killed late Thursday by a bomb he was trying to plant inside a university faculty, the official said.

No one claimed the responsibility for the

bombings. Most of the almost-daily bomb blasts in the country, however, are linked to an insurgency being waged by the extremist Taliban, who were in government from 1996 to 2001.

Heavy fighting erupted in the troubled eastern province of Khost when militants attacked a compound where foreign troops were based, police said.

The bodies of 15 militants remained at the site in the Sabari district, said the area's counterterrorism chief, named only Ghazoddin.

A policeman and a militia soldier contracted to the US military were also killed, he said.

The international forces sent attack helicopters to the battle, he said.

A Taliban spokesman confirmed the militia was involved, saying 100 men had attacked the district.

Meanwhile, police killed three Taliban militants in the neighbouring province of Paktya overnight, the provincial government said.

Separately, the US military said troops rounded up seven men with suspected ties to Taliban operations in the volatile southern province of Helmand, Afghanistan's number one opium producer.

Interior minister assassinated in Russia's Dagestan

AFP, Makhachkala

A sniper assassinated Friday the interior minister of Russia's turbulent Dagestan region as he left a wedding party, a doctor and reports said.

Four policemen were badly wounded in the attack which will deal a further blow to Kremlin efforts to stabilise Dagestan -- one of the most violent parts of the North Caucasus which borders Chechnya.

Initial reports said Lieutenant General Adilgeri Magomedtagirov was shot by a sniper as he left a restaurant where he was attending the wedding of a colleague's daughter. The colleague, responsible for investigation of tax-related crimes, was among those injured.

Magomedtagirov "was wounded in the heart and died -- did not recover consciousness," the chief doctor at the Orthopaedic-Casualty centre in Makhachkala, Magomed Omarov, told AFP.



Greenpeace activists pose next to a balloon demanding a future without nuclear power on World Environment Day yesterday in the centre of Madrid. World Environment Day was established by the UN General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

Mystery behind how plants make eggs solved

ANI, Washington

In a landmark discovery, scientists at the University of California, Davis, have found that a hormone called auxin is responsible for egg production in plants.

It is the first definitive study of a plant hormone acting as a morphogen - a substance that directs the pattern of development of cells based on its concentration.

In addition, the results provide tantalizing new insights into the evolutionary pathway that flowering plants took 135 million years ago when they split off from gymnosperms - the "naked-seeded" plant group that includes conifers, cycads and ginkgo trees. The researchers also used their discovery to make additional egg cells within plant reproductive structures, raising the prospects that these techniques might someday be used for enhancing the reproduction and fertility of crop plants.