



A Pakistani policeman inspects a destroyed car after a bomb blast at a market in Dera Ismail Khan yesterday. At least eight people were killed and 15 wounded when the bomb exploded in the northwestern Pakistan town troubled by Taliban attacks.

PHOTO: AFP

Suspected US missile, bomb kill 13 in Pakistan

Pak forces kill 20 militants in tribal belt

AP, Dera Ismail Khan

A suspected US missile strike killed at least five people Sunday in a tribal region where Pakistan's top Taliban commander is based, intelligence officials said, breaking a lull in such attacks and posing a test for growing anti-Taliban sentiment in the country.

The strike came as violence raged elsewhere in the volatile northwest region bordering Afghanistan: a bombing at a market killed at least eight people, while officials said clashes between the Taliban and security forces killed at least 20 militants in a tribal region supposedly cleared of insurgents months ago.

Local media have reported that the Taliban claimed responsibility for several recent attacks in Pakistan, including one that killed a moderate cleric, calling them revenge for the army's offensive in the northwestern Swat Valley.

The attacks seem to have bolstered growing anti-Taliban sentiment in Pakistan, something the US hopes will translate into support for sustained mili-

tary action against extremists who use Pakistani soil to plot attacks on Western troops in Afghanistan.

But US missile strikes could undermine that sentiment because they are deeply unpopular among Pakistanis. The government has publicly protested such strikes, fired by unmanned drone aircraft, saying they violate the country's sovereignty, even though many analysts suspect the two countries have struck a secret deal to facilitate the attacks.

The US rarely acknowledges or discusses the missile strikes.

The latest strike the first since mid-May occurred in South Waziristan, hitting three vehicles in an area not far from Maken, a village considered a stronghold of Pakistani Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud. It was not clear who the five people killed were. Two Pakistani intelligence officials confirmed the attack on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to media.

South Waziristan, which also is an al-Qaeda stronghold, is believed to be the

target of Pakistan's next offensive against militants. Mehsud has been linked to bombings on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and US defence officials said last week that Pakistan intends to go after him, though no timeframe was given.

In recent weeks, militants and security forces have repeatedly skirmished in South Waziristan, though the army insists it is merely responding to attacks.

In a statement, the army said it killed some 30 militants in South Waziristan in Saturday strikes aimed in part at avenging the death of cleric Saifraz Naemi. Naemi, killed in a suicide bombing Friday, had denounced the Taliban as murderers.

The market bombing Sunday occurred in Dera Ismail Khan, a town not far from South Waziristan.

Government official Inayat Ullah said 11 to 13 pounds (5 to 6 kilograms) of explosives were planted in a fruit vendor's hand-pulled cart. Police official Mohammad Iqbal put the death toll at eight, with 20 wounded.

US drops 'India, AQ Khan' riders from Pak aid bill

ANI, Washington

In what may be seen as a major concession to Pakistan, the US House of Representatives has dropped demands of access to the disgraced nuclear scientist Dr AQ Khan and preventing terrorist attacks against India as conditions from the aid bill offering Islamabad 1.5 billion dollars for the next five years.

When the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement Act (PEACE) was first tabled in the Congress in April, it required Pakistan to fulfil some major requirements in order to qualify for the aid.

The act asked Pakistan to improve relations with India, and stop supporting the cross border terrorism.

It also asked Islamabad to provide 'access to Pakistani nationals' and especially to Dr AQ Khan who is connected to proliferation networks.

However, the House Foreign Affairs Committee has now omitted the part that named Dr Khan, The Dawn reports.

Even though, the language of the US aid bill has been reworked, it still has certain benchmarks in place for Pakistan.

According to the restrictions included in the PEACE act, an evaluation of efforts would be undertaken by the Pakistan government to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other extremist and terrorist groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and other regions.

The act also asks for a crackdown on all terrorist camps operating inside Pakistan, including those of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

One of the major conditions put forth in the PEACE act is to cease all support for extremist and terrorist groups, and increase oversight over curriculum in madrasas.

It also asks for the closing down of all the madrasas, which are directly linked to the Taliban and other militant organisations.

Pakistan blames India for delay in Mumbai probe

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan has accused India for its laid back attitude in the Mumbai attack probe, and said that the delay being caused in the enquiry was primarily due to New Delhi's relaxed approach over the issue.

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's Advisor on Interior Rehman Malik met Indian High Commissioner Sharad Sabharwal here on Saturday, and assured him that Islamabad is sincerely probing the November 2008 terror attacks.

According to sources, Malik told Sabharwal that Pakistan is serious to bring the culprits of the terror attacks to justice.

Malik also asked India to provide the detail answers of its queries in English as soon as possible, for a rapid investigation.

20 Taliban, 2 civilians die in Afghan violence

AFP, Herat

Military operations by Afghan and foreign forces in western Afghanistan have killed 20 Taliban rebels, the army said yesterday, while two civilians were also killed.

Afghan army, police and Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) troops launched coordinated operations overnight in the provinces of Farah and Badghis, the army spokesman for western Afghanistan told AFP.

The joint forces attacked insurgent positions in Gulistan district of Farah, killing 15 Taliban militants, Abdul Basir Ghorisaid.

"They left the bodies behind at the battle field," he said, adding that there were no casualties to the troops.

In another operation in Bala Murghab district of the same province on Saturday night, four Taliban were killed and 18 wounded, Ghorisaid.

Local and foreign troops also launched an operation in

Pusht Rod district in Badghis, and five hours of fighting left one militant dead, while two others including their group commander were arrested, said the spokesman.

Afghan forces supported by international troops have launched search and clean-up operations ahead of the upcoming August 20 presidential vote.

Rohul Amin, governor of Farah province, confirmed the incidents in Pusht Rod and Gulistan districts, and added that a female health worker and her husband were also killed in the provincial capital.

A midwife received a phone call Saturday night for an emergency at the clinic where she worked in Farah. She left with her husband, but the pair were ambushed and killed on the way by Taliban insurgents, the governor said.

Police found the bodies Sunday morning.

The insurgents have intensified their campaign against the government and foreign forces in recent months.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri delivers her speech during a campaign in Porong, east Java yesterday. The Indonesian Survey Circle poll of 4,000 voters found on June 11 that 63.1 percent of respondents backed the liberal ex-general, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as the next president, with former president Megawati Sukarnoputri gathering only 16.4 percent support and outgoing Vice President Jusuf Kalla 5.9 percent. Presidential elections will be held in Indonesia on July 8.

Pakistan is on a suicidal course, says Imran Khan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London

Pakistan's cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan has expressed fear that the ongoing military operation against the Taliban in Swat could backfire and fuel extremism and terror attacks in the country.

"Pakistan is on a suicidal course," said Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) party was quoted by Online news agency Sunday.

He criticised the Pakistani government for launching an all-out war against the Taliban in the northwest on the advice of the United States.

Talking to the Sunday Times, Khan pointed out that the launch of the operation coincided with President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to Washington in late April, after which the US agreed a five-year deal worth dollar 1.5 billion (pound 910m) a year.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2L) is watched by his wife Shiranthi (L) as he shakes hands with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of the Union of Myanmar General Than Shwe following his arrival at Nay Pyi Taw International Airport in Naypyidaw. Rajapaksa is on a two-day visit to the Southeast Asian nation, which commemorates the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Major arms cache found after Lankan rebels' defeat

AFP, ANI, Colombo/Chennai

Sri Lankan troops have unearthed the largest haul of weapons and ammunition discovered since the defeat of Tamil Tiger rebels last month, the government said yesterday.

Hundreds of automatic assault rifles, mortar bombs and land mines were found during a two-day search in the north of the island.

A clearing operation was also under way in the area where Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was killed last month.

"Troops conducting search and clear operations in the Wanni areas uncovered some more LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) weapons, ammunition and explosives,"

the defence ministry said.

Military officials said the discoveries made over the weekend formed the largest haul since the government's recent victory over the Tiger rebels ended decades of ethnic conflict.

Meanwhile, Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram has said Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa will be told by New Delhi to fulfill his promise to rehabilitate displaced Tamils and grant equal rights to the minority community in the island-nation.

"New Delhi believes that President Rajapaksa will fulfill his promises and that India will have to wait and see," Chidambaram said here.

He said that India's aim is to ensure that the Sri Lankan Tamils get equal rights.

Myanmar rejects EU concern over ethnic rebels

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's ruling junta "categorically rejects" European Union concerns over a growing offensive against Karen rebels which has forced civilians to flee to Thailand, state media said Sunday.

The criticism, which came in a statement by the Czech EU presidency on Thursday, was politically motivated, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper quoted the military regime's foreign ministry as saying.

More than 3,000 people have fled to Thailand to escape the Myanmar army's latest push against camps of the Karen National Union (KNU), a guerrilla group that has fought the government for autonomy since 1949.

The foreign ministry statement said Myanmar was "disappointed with the politically

motivated declaration of the EU presidency which was released without a thorough study of Myanmar's insurgency problem".

"Therefore, the ministry categorically rejects the factually incorrect declaration made by the EU presidency relying on inaccurate information originated from the insurgent groups and biased media reports," it said.

Much of the information on the exodus of Karen from eastern Myanmar has come from exiled activists, although the Thai military has confirmed that at least 3,000 have fled to the kingdom.

The EU presidency "noted with serious concern the mounting offensive of the Burmese Army... which has resulted in large numbers of civilians fleeing from the conflict area", it said in its statement.

Sinha isn't quitting BJP

ANI, Hazaribagh

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Yashwant Sinha, on Sunday said that he had no intention of quitting the right-wing party, and expressed happiness over the party leadership accepting his resignation from top posts.

Interacting with journalists here, Sinha said: "I had sent my resignation to be accepted. Therefore, I'm happy that my resignation has been accepted and I have no further comments to make."

"Of course, I'm in the party. I will be in the party," he added.

He had on Saturday quit as the party's Vice President and from other posts, charging the leadership with not taking responsibility for the electoral debacle.

Sinha is apparently upset over the party's chief election strategist Arun Jaitley being made the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha.

US on war trial, BDR deaths

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mutiny in the border security force, he said the matter should be probed seriously and persons responsible for the deaths should be brought to justice.

"We talked how it is important for the government to investigate those, to carry out a credible investigation and to bring those, who might have been responsible for the deaths in custody, to justice," Blake said referring to his meetings with Bangladesh government leaders.

He underscored the need for investigating all extra-judicial killings as well.

"In all our discussions with our friends in the government of Bangladesh, we emphasised the importance of investigating those extra-judicial killings, and bringing those responsible for those killings, to justice," he said.

He however avoided a direct reply to a question regarding whether the US supports Bangladesh government's

move to try war criminals.

"Let me say on the question of war crimes, that the United States believes strongly in the importance of accountability, but in my discussion with our friends here in the government, we also urged for this not to be a politicised issue," he told journalists.

"Your country just had the freest and fairest election in your history... democracy is being strengthened. It's important that no action be taken that could be considered by the people of Bangladesh as a mechanism to weaken democracy, and undermine the progress that has been made," Blake said at a media briefing in the American Club.

He said Bangladesh government must walk a very fine line and maintain a fine balance in respect to war crimes trials.

Blake, who came to Dhaka on a two-day visit on Saturday, met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Home Minister Sahara Khatun, and Foreign Minister

Dipu Moni yesterday.

He also had talks with Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia, members of the civil society, and the business community on Saturday.

"I wanted to see first hand, how we can work with the new government here and the people, to expand the good cooperation we already enjoy. My visit is to show the importance of the relationship of our two countries," said Blake, whose visit to Bangladesh was his first since being appointed to his current post.

He said although his visit was short, he learnt a great deal about Bangladesh, and was impressed with the important changes that had happened here, and the opportunities that had been created.

Elaborating on the outcomes of his talks with the leaders of the country, Blake said he offered cooperation in strengthening democracy, ensuring development, clean

energy, dealing with climate change, and in countering extremism and terrorism.

"Not only the maritime security aspect, but security at land borders are also required, to make sure that terrorist groups like Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, and transnational terrorist groups cannot use the territory of Bangladesh, and operate from Bangladesh to threaten their own country and other nations," said Blake, supporting Dhaka's move to form a South Asian joint taskforce to combat terrorism in the region.

He, however, made it clear that the US has no role to play in the proposed taskforce.

"We will continue to support Bangladesh as it extends its democratic roots. We also are here to help you develop your economy, to help you protect your people against terrorist threats, and from those who wish to destabilise your democracy," he said.

He appreciated

Bangladesh's effort to expand women's literacy, and the government's move to reform madrasa education through modernising the curriculum, which he said, could spread to parts of the Arab world too.

Asked about sustaining democracy in Bangladesh when the opposition is boycotting the parliament, Blake said his government welcomed the 'freest, fairest and most transparent elections in the history of Bangladesh'.

"At the same time Bangladesh faces new challenges, the finance minister just delivered the budget speech, and in many ways this now is a new beginning... a new beginning for the opposition and for the government to work together. The US government hopes that the opposition will participate in the new parliament and work constructively with the government to not only exploit the new opportunities, but also to face the challenges."

He said he was carrying a

message of friendship on behalf of the Obama administration. "Now with new governments here and in the United States, we believe there are opportunities to expand our friendship and cooperation."

Asked whether the US has any plan or programme to help Bangladesh in mitigating and adapting to climate change, he said, "We are just beginning the discussion. I myself is not the person responsible for it... we have special negotiators, and I will be going back to talk to my colleagues about some of the possibilities."

Blake said climate is one of many new areas in which the government thinks it might have cooperation with Bangladesh.

On President Obama's recent visit to Cairo, he said the US president is committed to improving relationship with the Muslim world, based on mutual interests and respect.

Robert O Blake left Dhaka late last night.

Govt to sue criminals

FROM PAGE 1

sought an allocation of Tk 10 crore to do things necessary to ensure trial of those who committed war crimes during the Liberation War in 1971.

For now the government however has no plans to hire foreign consultants and lawyers, he added.

His ministry has sought the law commission's opinion if there is any need to bring any amendment to update the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act.

He made the remarks in scripted answers to queries from Awami League lawmakers Mubibur Rahman Manik and Meher Afroz.

Replying to Jatiya Party lawmaker AKM Maudud Islam, he said the government has plans to appoint ombudsman to ensure the rule of law.

He said the government has an obligation to appoint an ombudsman under section 3 (2) of Ombudsman Act 1980. "The appointment will be made on receiving recommen-

dations from parliament."

In answer to BNP lawmaker Syed Ashifa Ashrafi Papi's question, the law minister said the investigation officer has given a final report in the case against former military ruler HM Ershad on charges of usurping state power by suspending the constitution and dissolving the legislature.

He said there is no scope to file an appeal against the final report.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Chief Hasanul Haque Inu filed the case with the Motiheel Police Station on March 9, 1991.

CONTRACTUAL

APPOINTMENTS In response to Jatiya Party lawmaker Hafizuddin Ahmed, IGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam said the government has appointed 63 individuals on contract since it came to office in January.

The appointments were made for the Prime Minister's Office, foreign missions, and autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations.