



Pakistani security personnel deploy on a bridge near the provincial assembly building in Peshawar on Wednesday. Pakistani authorities beef up security outside the assembly building of the North West Frontier Province, which was highly-guarded ahead of presentation of the annual budget.

PHOTO: AFP

Suspected US missile kills 9 in Pakistan

Pak military starts pounding militant targets in South Waziristan

AP, AFP, Islamabad

Suspected US missile strikes pounded the hide-outs of a Taliban commander in northwestern Pakistan yesterday, killing at least nine people, government officials said.

Shahab Ali Shah, the top administrative official in the South Waziristan tribal area along the Afghanistan border, said the missiles hit close to the villages of Gharlamai and Nandaran, about 10km west of the Wana bazaar area. He said the death toll could rise as villagers dig through the rubble.

Two Pakistani intelligence officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they are not authorised to talk to media, said a training centre of Taliban commander Malang Wazir between the two villages was the target and that nine people were killed.

Two other intelligence officials, also

speaking on condition of anonymity, said four missiles were fired at two sites. They put the casualties at eight dead and about two dozen wounded.

Ali Khan Wazir, a shopkeeper, said drone aircraft had been flying over the area for hours before the explosions. He said Taliban vehicles were seen rushing to the scenes.

US missiles fired from unmanned drones have repeatedly struck South Waziristan, most recently on Sunday after nearly a one-month lull. The strikes have generated a backlash over civilian casualties.

Wednesday's strikes came as the Pakistani military has started pounding militant targets in the area with airstrikes. The highly anticipated operation is seen as a potential turning point in the years long and sometimes half-hearted fight against militancy in Pakistan. It could also help curb Taliban attacks on Western forces in

Afghanistan.

But while Washington has been pushing for the offensive, on the heels of a similar operation in the Swat Valley, fighting in the lawless tribal region will likely be the toughest yet for Pakistan's military, testing both its combat capability and the government's will to see it through.

The Swat offensive has triggered a wave of retaliatory attacks by militants across Pakistan that have been blamed on Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, whose base is in South Waziristan.

More than 100 people have died since late May in suicide bombings on targets including police and security buildings, mosques and a hotel catering to foreigners. The attacks have fueled anti-Taliban sentiment in Pakistan that in turn has emboldened the politically weak government of President Asif Ali Zardari.

North Korea plans to fire missile toward Hawaii

AP, Seoul

North Korea may fire a long-range ballistic missile toward Hawaii in early July, a Japanese news report said yesterday, as Russia and China urged the regime to return to international disarmament talks on its rogue nuclear programme.

The missile, believed to be a Taepodong-2 with a range of up to 4,000 miles (6,500 kilometres), would be launched from North Korea's Dongchang-ni site on the northwestern coast, said the Yomiuri daily, Japan's top-selling newspaper. It cited an analysis by the Japanese Defence Ministry and intelligence gathered by US reconnaissance satellites.

The missile launch could come between July 4 and 8, the paper said.

While the newspaper speculated the Taepodong-2 could fly over Japan and toward Hawaii, it said the missile would not be able to hit Hawaii's main islands, which are about 4,500 miles (7,200 kilometres) from the Korean peninsula.

A spokesman for the Japanese Defence

Ministry declined to comment on the report. South Korea's Defence Ministry and the National Intelligence Service, the country's main spy agency, said they could not confirm it.

Tension on the divided Korean peninsula has spiked since the North conducted its second nuclear test on May 25 in defiance of repeated international warnings. The regime declared Saturday it would bolster its nuclear programmes and threatened war in protest of UN sanctions taken for the nuclear test.

US officials have said the North has been preparing to fire a long-range missile capable of striking the western US in Washington on Tuesday, Gen. James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said it would take at least three to five years for North Korea to pose a real threat to the US west coast.

President Barack Obama and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak met in Washington on Tuesday for a landmark summit in which they agreed to build a regional and global "strategic alliance" to persuade North Korea to dismantle all its nuclear weapons.

Top clerical body hails Iran poll turnout but mum on result

AFP, Tehran

Iran's top clerical body, the Assembly of Experts, hailed yesterday the mass turnout in the June 12 presidential election but stayed silent on the disputed results.

"We congratulate the excited, epic-making and alert presence of 85 percent of the revolutionary people in the June 12 election, which was a display of the Islamic republic's greatness and dignity throughout the world," it said in a statement read out on state television.

The 86-strong body is headed by influential cleric and former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was the target of mudslinging during the campaign by the declared winner President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad's main opponent, Mir Hossein Mousavi, has dismissed the election as a "shameful fraud" and called for cancellation of the results and a re-run.

In a widely watched televised debate with Mousavi ahead of the vote, Ahmadinejad charged that Rafsanjani, a strong supporter of his main rival, led opposition to his government and accused the cleric's sons of having received financial privileges in the past.



PHOTO: AFP

A picture released by the Fars News Agency shows supporters of defeated Iranian presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi taking part in a rally in Tehran on Wednesday. Iran's opposition stepped up its challenge to the Islamic regime holding another rally even as the authorities intensified a crackdown on the media to try to contain the biggest crisis since the 1979 revolution.

No compromise on nukes: Pakistan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan's nuclear weapons formed the cornerstone of its deterrence doctrine and would be retained at all costs, a top military commander said yesterday.

"No amount of coercion, direct or indirect, can force us to compromise on this core interest," Online news agency quoted General Tariq Majid, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, as saying while addressing the convocation of the National Defence Course, Armed Forces War Course and Allied Officers War

Course at the National Defence University here.

Deprecating the "vicious campaign unleashed to malign and discredit" Pakistan by "deliberately spreading disinformation" about the security of its nuclear assets in the uncertain political scenario in the country, Majid said: "Based on the pillars of restraint and responsibility, we have developed and operationalised a very effective nuclear weapons security regime which is multi-layered, has stringent access controls and incorporates modern technical solutions and rigorous personnel reliability programmes."

Verdict reserved in Sharif plane 'hijack' case

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

The Supreme Court yesterday reserved orders in a case in which former prime minister Nawaz Sharif is accused of 'hijacking' an aircraft carrying then army chief Gen Pervez Musharraf by attempting to prevent it land at Karachi in 1999.

Concluding his arguments in the case, Sindh Prosecutor General Shahadat Awan maintained that Sharif had been rightly convicted by the trial court and his appeal was thus liable to be dismissed.

Hillary asks India to back Pak anti-terror efforts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

Two days after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh talked tough with Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hoped that India and the US will both support Pakistan's efforts as it works to take on terrorists in its own country.

The US, she told the US-India Business Council's (USIBC) Synergies Summit here Wednesday, also welcomed a dialogue between India and Pakistan, but it was for the two countries to decide the pace, scope and character of the dialogue.

"Of course, we believe that India and Pakistan actually face a number of common challenges, and we welcome a dialogue between them," Hillary Clinton said. "As we have said before, the pace, scope and character of that dialogue is something that Indian and Pakistani leaders will decide on their own terms and in their own time."

"But as Pakistan now works to take on the challenge of terrorists in its own country, I am confident that India as well as the United States will support those efforts," she said.

NEWS ANALYSIS

No 'smoking gun' for Iran polls rigging

AFP, Washington

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election victory is disbelieved by hundreds of thousands of Iranians who have poured onto Tehran's streets in protest, but experts say hard evidence of vote rigging is elusive.

Since the government handed the incumbent president a landslide win over opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi hours after Friday's vote, Tehran has been convulsed by protests unseen since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Outside Iran, debate over the election result is split down largely political lines.

Former US presidential candidate John McCain, a conservative, has insisted he is "sure" the elections in Iran were rigged. With equal ferocity leftist Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has lambasted "foreign efforts" to discredit an "historic" election.

But with few independent observers on hand to witness the vote, analysts warn there is little evidence of a smoking gun of electoral fraud, or evidence that would affirm a fair vote.

Statisticians, pollsters and Iran experts have been poring over the results for hints of vote-rigging, or the possibility that the controversial president is backed by around 63 percent of voters.

Ken Ballen, president of the Washington-based Terror Free Future think tank, three weeks ago conducted a rare country-wide poll by phone of 1,001 people to gauge Iranians' voting intentions.

According to Ballen it is not obvious from that poll that the results of the election were rigged. "At that time Ahmadinejad was ahead by two to one. Is it plausible that he won the election? Yes."

The survey showed that 34 percent of Iranians intended to vote for Ahmadinejad. Mousavi was the choice of just 14 percent of respondents.

But Ballen cautioned against concluding that the vote was fair.

The poll result fell far short of Ahmadinejad's margin of victory, and 27 percent of Iranians surveyed were still undecided at the time the survey was taken. "Anything could have changed," Ballen said.

Mousavi supporters point to the amazingly quick tallying of millions of hand-counted ballots and the Ahmadinejad's surprise win in Mousavi's home town, Tabriz, as proof positive of foul play.

Mousavi is from Iran's Azeri minority, so voters in his native region in East Azerbaijan province were expected to back him to the hilt, according to Ali Alfoneh, an Iran expert at the American Enterprise Institute.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian activists of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCPA) go to set the house of a Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) member on fire in Lalgarh village in Midnapore district, some 200 km west of Kolkata, on Wednesday after days of clashes between tribal villagers and police.

Somali minister among 20 killed in bombing

AP, Mogadishu

A suicide bombing outside a hotel in western Somalia killed at least 20 people yesterday including the national security minister.

The Somali president accused al-Qaeda of being behind the attack.

Witness Mohamed Nur said a small car headed toward the

gate of the Medina Hotel in Belet Weyne, then drove into vehicles leaving the hotel and exploded.

Information Minister Farhan Ali Mohamud announced the death of National Security Minister Omar Hashi Aden but declined to give any other details.

Somalia's president accused al-Qaeda of being behind the bombing, which he

said also killed a senior Somali diplomat.

"It was an act of terrorism and it is part of the terrorist attack on our people," Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed told journalists in the capital. "al-Qaeda is attacking us."

Experts have expressed fears that foreign Islamic militants could use Somalia as a base for terror in the region.

Rights groups want Lankan probe into war abuses

AP, Colombo

Human rights groups called yesterday for an international investigation into wartime abuses in Sri Lanka, saying the government lacks the political will to investigate the incidents on its own.

Rights groups accused the government of firing heavy weapons into civilian areas in the final months of this island nation's quarter-century civil war, which ended last month. The Tamil Tigers were accused of holding the civilians as human shields and shooting those who tried to flee. Both sides denied the allegations.

UN figures show that more than 7,000 civilians were killed in fighting this year before the war ended in May.

The Tamil Tigers' intelligence wing confirmed Thursday that rebel chief Velupillai Prabhakaran was among those killed in the fighting, ending an apparent rift with other rebel officials who announced Prabhakaran's death last month.

"We confirm emphatically that the national leader did not surrender and was not arrested,

but fought attaining martyrdom," Kathirkamathamby Arivazhakan, a top rebel intelligence official, said in a statement e-mailed to The Associated Press.

After declaring victory last month, President Mahinda Rajapaksa told UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon the government would look into abuse claims itself, but Human Rights Watch said Sri Lanka's decision to shut down a presidential inquiry into earlier abuses proved it had little intention of pursuing justice.

That commission was investigating 16 cases, including the killing of 17 aid workers in eastern Sri Lanka in 2006. Though it had only completed seven of the cases, its mandate expired Sunday and was not renewed.

"The decision to disband the presidential commission shows that President Rajapaksa has little intention of fulfilling his promise to Secretary-General Ban," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at the New York-based rights group. "It's now up to concerned governments to step in and ensure that justice is done for the victims of abuses in Sri Lanka's long war."

Another minister quits as details of British MPs' expenses published

AFP, London

Details of British MPs' expenses were officially published online for the first time yesterday, as the scandal, which has already forced a slew of resignations claimed a fresh victim.

The roughly 1.2 million pages of documents on parliament's website seem unlikely to throw up many fresh surprises, partly because the Daily Telegraph newspaper has already published swathes of leaked information showing how MPs claimed lavishly for everything from a duck island to moat cleaning.

But there was fresh controversy as it emerged that large sections of the information put online Thursday have been blacked out, including lawmakers' addresses, prompting criticism from transparency campaigners.

Maurice Frankel of the Campaign for Freedom of Information said the published, redacted details were a "very poor substitute" for full disclosure.

And Heather Brooke, a campaigner whose legal battle led to publication of the information, told the BBC: "People will get a lot out of it, particularly when they look at their own individual MPs, but I think they'll also become frustrated because they will want to see the different detail".



United Nations World Food Programme
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Vacancy Announcement

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Bangladesh invites applications from qualified, experienced and motivated Bangladeshi nationals for recruitment in the following position for its Rangamati Sub-office by 30 June 2009, duration 8 months:

Post Title: Field Engineer - Civil

Type of Appointment: Service Contract (SC), Post Grade: BL 6

Qualifications and Experiences: Graduate from any recognized Institution or University with degree in Civil Engineering. Three years of experience in implementing work schemes to create community assets such as new roads, road maintenance, pond/dam excavation, school and homestead ground raising and clearing, tree plantation, etc.

Candidates meeting the requirements of the positions are requested to send their applications to **Human Resources Officer, WFP, UN Offices, IDB Bhaban, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Agargaon, Dhaka, Bangladesh** or e-mail to: **Bangladesh_Vacancy_Announcement@wfp.org**

For details please visit our website: **www.wfp.org/bangladesh**