



Pakistani residents stand amongst the rubble of a classroom after militants blew up a girls' school on the outskirts of Peshawar yesterday. Pakistan has been hit by a wave of deadly suicide bombs in recent weeks, attacks blamed on Taliban rebels seeking to avenge the campaign against them.

# Airstrikes kill 21 more in Pakistan

## Militants attack 3 bases of security force, suicide blast kills 2 policemen

AP, AFP, Islamabad/Peshawar

Pakistan's army offensive in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan heated up yesterday, with militants attacking three security force bases and military jets responding with airstrikes that killed at least 21 people, intelligence officials said.

The overnight and early morning clashes follow artillery attacks Sunday on suspected militant hide-outs in two towns in the northwest that killed 27 fighters, officials said. Elsewhere in the volatile region, a citizens' militia killed seven suspected militants.

The government announced last week that the military would go after Pakistan's Taliban commander, Baitullah Mehsud,

in the South Waziristan tribal area. His stronghold is a chunk of the remote and rugged mountainous region where heavily armed tribesmen hold sway and al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders are believed to be hiding.

Washington supports anti-militant operations, seeing them as a measure of nuclear-armed Pakistan's resolve in taking on a growing insurgency. The battle in the tribal region could also help the war in Afghanistan because the area has been used by militants to launch cross-border attacks on US and other troops.

Militants used mortars, rockets, gunfire and even an anti-aircraft gun to attack three military bases overnight in South

and North Waziristan, five intelligence officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they are not authorised to talk with media. Their reports could not be confirmed due to lack of media access to the conflict zones, and official military spokesmen could not be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, two policemen were killed Monday when a suicide bomber blew up explosives packed in his vehicle in Pakistan's northwest, where the military are battling Taliban rebels, police said.

The attack happened just on the border of Mansehra district and Swat, a scenic valley region where the military are currently locked in an eight-week offensive to crush Taliban militants in the area.

# Lanka-Maldives to share intelligence info

THE ISLAND/ANN, Colombo

Sri Lanka and the Maldives have agreed to share intelligence information following Maldivian concerns that money laundering and drug trafficking through its territory may be linked to Tamil Tigers activities.

Informed sources said visiting Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed, during talks with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and foreign minister Rohitha Bogollagama in Anuradhapura had referred to the dual problem of money laundering and drug trafficking faced by his country and stressed the need for concrete measures to deal with the problem.

Narcotics which, has deeply affected the social fabric of the Maldives, he had pointed out was worth about US\$10 million, for those involved in trafficking it through his country.

# Pak president pleads for international help

## Military offensive to go on till extremists are eliminated: Gilani

AFP, ANI, Washington/Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday asked for urgent international assistance to his country, arguing the world should rally in support of Pakistani democracy.

"We need immediate assistance," Zardari wrote in an op-ed piece in The Washington Post. He noted that the administration of US President Barack Obama recognised that only an economically viable Pakistan could contain the threat of terrorism and the United States had committed 1.5 billion dollars a year for five years to help stabilize the Pakistani economy.

"Now, the rest of the world must step up and match the US effort," the Pakistani leader wrote. "Pakistan needs a robust assistance

package so that we can deliver for the people and defeat the militants."

He also called for international assistance in helping Pakistan deal with the millions of people displaced by a conflict in the northwest of the country.

In Islamabad, Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani has said that the offensive against the extremists breeding on the country's soil will continue till militancy is eliminated completely.

Addressing a gathering of thousands of people at the Convention Centre here on the occasion of 56th birth anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, Gilani warned the militants to lay down arms or face the consequences.

# Lalgarh people flee as forces arrest 3 Maoists

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lalgarh

Hundreds of villagers in this West Bengal area fled as security forces Sunday started combing operations and arrested three suspected Maoists.

A group of visiting intellectuals demanded an immediate ceasefire to facilitate talks and complained that women and children were being tortured.

On the fourth day of the security operation launched by the state government to flush out Maoists from this troubled zone of West Midnapore district, the forces nabbed the three rebels at Chakadoba village under Belpahari police station after sporadic clashes since Saturday.

"We have found a lot of Maoist literature and other materials from them," Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) Raj Kanojia told IANS in Kolkata.

A Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel suffered injuries on his hand when he was hit with a sharp weapon during a clash at Chakadoba Sunday before the arrests.

Another trooper was rushed to a hospital in Midnapore after he fell sick due to the oppressive heat and humidity, Kanojia said. One trooper had died of sunstroke Saturday.



Indian villagers stand in line to collect rations at a government distribution centre in Lalgarh, in Midnapore district, some 130km west of Kolkata yesterday. India deployed troops to West Bengal on June 17 to tackle an upsurge of Maoist violence after days of clashes between tribal villagers and police.

# Rights should start

FROM PAGE 16

government officials and proper preservation of information. Anam, who chaired the session, said the list of exemption in the RTI is long and urged the government to review it. "People at grass-roots level must know what RTI is and how they can be benefited from it," she observed.

Responding to the speakers' call to form a strong information commission in Bangladesh, chief guest Law Minister Shafique Ahmed assured that the information commission will function properly and its members will be selected in a transparent way.

"To give democracy an institutional shape, first of all there should be rule of law, while judiciary must be independent and separate and people should have the right to know what is going on inside the government," he said.

The government is 100 percent with the demand that people have the right to know what is inside the government and how power is being exercised, the minister added.

He said the government has nothing to do in formation of the information commission as the selection body is transparent and independent.

"The commission has the power to act as a court of justice. It has the power to summon anybody for submission of information. So, I must say the commission will work independently and there is none to intervene."

Shafique said the government believes in transparency and has no intention to suppress anything. "The RTI law passed immediately after the present government assumed office is the manifestation of our willingness to let people know how this government is running."

He assured that the government would do everything possible in order to see that the provisions of this law be executed, applied and people get best results of it.

The law minister claimed till date there is no complaint of suppressing or concealing anything by the government. "People are watching this government and its activities and after five years there will be an acid test," he cautioned,

assuring that the recommendations which are beneficial and in confirmative with the RTI law would be accepted.

Noted economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said although information is an asset and power it has been regarded as an enemy. Terming information a resource, he said the government can render a great service by giving power to people, which has not been seen so far.

Commissioner of Central Information Commission of India Shailesh Gandhi said implementation of RTI will make democracy stronger and powerful in Bangladesh. He emphasised on how poor people will be benefited by RTI.

He also advocated for a fair and independent information commission.

Cabinet Division Joint Secretary Khandaker Anwarul Islam also addressed the concluding session, while members of the civil society, NGO representatives and experts from the UK, Mexico, Pakistan and New Zealand attended.

# Trains collide

FROM PAGE 1

Isakhan was partially damaged.

Director General (DG) of Bangladesh Railway Mohammad Belayet Hossain said generally incoming and outgoing trains run at low speed in and near the Kamalapur Railway Station and for this reason the casualty figure was low.

Rail communication from the station was suspended at 2:40pm for an hour after which an incoming line and an outgoing line were opened.

Of the injured, members of the Railway Nirapatta Bahini (RNB) Abdur Rahman and Naheed Hossain were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). The two drivers of the trains and their assistants were taken to Railway Hospital while a female passenger was taken to a local hospital, Kamalapur Railway Station sources said.

Naheed was shifted to Pangu Hospital where he died at 5:50pm, said chief inspector of RNB Shahidullah.

DG Belayet said, "The accident might have happened due to wrong signaling from the signal cabin."

Abdur Rahman of Mohanagar said, "When the

train [Mohanagar] passed Khilgaon level crossing and was heading towards the station I saw a man with a red flag, moments later I heard a big bang... and found myself in the DMCH bed."

DG Belayet said, "It is our fault and we have formed a four-member probe committee to investigate the accident. The committee was asked to submit its report within four days."

The probe committee led by Chief Engineer Nur Mohammad also includes Chief Operational Supervisor (COPS) Zahurul Islam, Additional Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) Ratan Kumar Sarkar and Chief Signal Telecommunication Engineer (CSTE) Khandakar Shahidul Islam.

Another railway probe committee investigating the Moghbazar level crossing accident on July 17 is yet to submit its report.

Belayet said he is yet to receive that probe report even though the committee was supposed to submit it on June 20.

Communication Minister Syed Abul Hossain visited the spot and enquired about the health of the injured.

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