

## India withdraws paramilitary from Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

India withdrew paramilitary forces from a curfew-bound town in Kashmir yesterday in an apparent bid to defuse tension after clashes with protesters left four people dead.

An official statement said the federal Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was being pulled out of Baramulla, north of Srinagar, and replaced by the armed wing of the Kashmiri police.

"The step has been taken to prevent further deaths," said a senior police officer who declined to be named.

The Muslim-majority Kashmir valley has witnessed a series of protests since the deaths last month of two young women who, local residents charge, were raped and murdered by members of the Indian security forces.

In New Delhi, Home Minister P. Chidambaram told reporters that the move was aimed at encouraging local police to take more responsibility for law and order.

"A decision has been taken to redraw the lines of responsibility among the army, the paramilitary forces and the Jammu and Kashmir Police," he said.

The latest protests in Baramulla and neighbouring

Sopore town were triggered by the alleged harassment of a local Muslim woman by police at the weekend.

Both towns have been under curfew since Monday, after security forces fired on demonstrators in Baramulla, killing two people.

Despite the curfew, the protests have continued and another demonstrator was killed Tuesday, while a fourth died of his injuries on Wednesday.

Residents have accused the CRPF of opening fire with only minor provocation.

Thousands of anti-India protesters marched in Baramulla again on Wednesday, chanting "blood for blood" and "we want freedom".

In the nearby village of Palhala, protesters set fire to an army ambulance and smashed the windows of other military vehicles that were part of a passing convoy.

A general strike -- called in response to the shootings -- crippled life in the summer capital Srinagar and other towns in the Kashmir valley for the second day running.

Most schools, shops and offices closed in Srinagar, where police sealed off some neighbourhoods to prevent protests.



Indian police detain separatist leaders of Indian-administered Kashmir's main alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference (APHC) as they shout slogans during a protest against human rights violations in Srinagar yesterday. Despite a curfew, protests have continued with another demonstrator killed on June 30, while a fourth died of his injuries yesterday. Picture L shows an Indian policeman throwing a stone towards Kashmiri protesters during a demonstration in Srinagar.



PHOTO: AFP

## WHO defends anti-virals for swine flu

AFP, Geneva

Existing anti-viral treatments are effective against swine flu, the World Health Organisation insisted yesterday, describing a reported case of resistance to Tamiflu as an isolated case.

"We are not changing our recommendations regarding the antivirals existing today," a WHO spokeswoman told AFP.

The WHO's comments came after Danish health officials on Monday reported the first case of resistance in an A(H1N1) patient treated with Tamiflu, an antiviral drug that is one of the key influenza treatments recommended by the WHO.

The WHO spokeswoman described the case as an "isolated case with no implications on public health."

She also pointed out that instances of resistance to Tamiflu were previously documented for avian flu.

Swiss pharmaceutical firm Roche, which manufactures Tamiflu, had also said that the Danish case was expected and likely to be isolated.

"This was very much expected," said David Reddy, Roche's pandemic task force leader.

## Pak tribes kill 28 militants

Tribesmen request army aid against Taliban

AP, Parachinar

Tribesmen attacked Taliban hideouts in northwest Pakistan yesterday, killing 28 militants and suffering seven fatalities themselves, and the intensifying battles prompted them to ask for army troops to help, a local lawmaker said.

The clash in the remote Kurram region was the latest in two weeks of battles between militants and tribesmen there that have killed 141 people, including more than 100 insurgents, two government officials said on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media. Their accounts could not be independently verified.

Pakistan's leaders have encouraged local tribesmen in the semi-autonomous areas close to the Afghan border to establish militias, known as lashkars, to flush out Taliban fighters blamed for attacks in the nuclear-armed country as well as in Afghanistan.

Such groups have been set up in several regions, but face stiff Taliban resistance.

Sajid Hussain Toori, a lawmaker from Kurram, said the militants were moving into Kurram from the Swat Valley, where the military is undertaking an offensive to root them out. He said hundreds of tribesmen took part in the attack early yesterday, triggering a gunbattle

that killed 28 militants and seven tribal fighters.

"Kurram is an important place because the Taliban can cross the Afghan border from here easily," Toori said. "The lashkar is facing these armed Taliban, but we request that the government send troops to Kurram to fight the Taliban as quickly as possible." The fighting comes as Pakistani troops gear up for an offensive in South Waziristan, another part of the tribal belt where Pakistan's Taliban chief is believed to be based.

This week, militants in North Waziristan announced they were pulling out of a peace pact with the government because of army operations in the northwest and continued US missile strikes in the region. The collapse of the peace deal raises the likelihood that the army will have to wage an offensive in North Waziristan as well as South Waziristan.

Elsewhere in the northwest Wednesday, a roadside bomb targeting a local police chief exploded, killing a passer-by, police said. The incident took place in Dera Ismail Khan, a city near South Waziristan, said police officer Miran Shah.

Dera Ismail Khan has witnessed significant violence in recent years, some of it due to rivalries between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. Attacks on security forces in the region, however, tend to be blamed on Taliban militants.

## Information Commission formed

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headed by a Supreme Court judge earlier nominated a panel of six persons for the posts.

Now every citizen has the right to have access to information regarding any government and non-government organisation, with the exception of a few national security and intelligence agencies.

The authorities of any organisation or institution that undertakes public functions are obliged to release information to citizens on demand, according to the provisions of the act.

It however will require some more time for the people's right to information to be fully ensured, as no office of the Information Commission has yet been set up, while an information delivery system is also yet to be set up in government offices. The commission will form a set of rules for effective enforcement of the act.

Deputy Secretary to the Information Ministry Abul Hossain, who is dealing with the act, told The Daily Star

yesterday that a process of recruiting manpower for the commission is currently underway. He said the government will also soon disburse funds for the commission.

The Right to Information Ordinance 2008 was promulgated by the immediate past caretaker government, which was later ratified by the new parliament on March 29 this year. The president signed it into a law on April 5, and a gazette notification to that effect was published on April 6.

All provisions of the act will be retroactive since October 20, 2008 except only three regarding demanding information, adjudication of appeals against refusal to provide information, and regarding lodging of complaints with the commission against such denials.

The act however restricts public access to information of at least 20 categories, while it also clearly mentions that organisations related to intelligence and national security are obliged to release

information regarding corruption and violation of human rights.

Information seekers must apply in writing on prescribed forms or by e-mail to designated officers by paying a reasonable fee, which will be fixed by the commission.

Officers concerned must release requested information within 20 working days of application submissions.

Officers must let the information seekers know within 10 days of application submissions, if they are unable to release any requested information.

"In case of information involving more than one delivery unit or authority, officers may exhaust a maximum of 30 days for releasing the information... but the authorities must release the information within 24 hours if it is related to life and death, arrest, and release from jail," the law says.

The agencies kept outside the purview of the act are the National Security Intelligence, Directorate General of Forces

Intelligence, defence intelligence units, Criminal Investigation Department, Special Security Force, Intelligence Cell of the National Board of Revenue, Special Branch of the police, and the Intelligence Cell of Rapid Action Battalion.

The head office of the commission, to be located in the capital, will function independently and supervise general activities related to the people's right to information. It will also receive complaints against any authority for refusing to release information.

If any official refuses to provide information, individuals may file appeals with the Information Commission. Officials concerned, if found guilty of denying information, may be fined Tk 50 for each day of delay in releasing requested information, but the total sum of the fine must not exceed Tk 5,000.

The Information Commission will have the authority of a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedures 1908.



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar residents in Japan hold portraits of Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi at a rally demanding her release in front of the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo yesterday. Visiting UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said military-ruled Myanmar should release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's jailed democracy leader, in a press conference in Tokyo on June 30.

## Probe report on BNP

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action based on the findings of the probe, he said.

Committee sources said the parliamentary body, probing alleged corruption in Parliament Secretariat in the last seven years, also decided to consult Speaker Abdul Hamid and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina about how the probe finds would be disclosed in the House.

During a meeting yesterday at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, the committee started examining the constitutions of Bangladesh, India and Canada to see what actions could be recommended against Sircar, who is an incumbent legislator.

It also reviewed similar instances in the British House of Commons and actions against MPs found guilty of financial anomalies, a committee members said.

The committee is also mulling over contempt of parliament charge against them for their refusal to appear before the committee on July 27 after being summoned, a member of the committee said. Sircar and Hamid, however, contacted the committee and explained in writing why they did not appear before the committee.

Earlier, a sub-committee was formed by the all-party parliamentary probe committee to probe anomalies in drawing medical allowances by MPs.

The sub-committee after investigation recommended that the all-party committee ask the House to scrap Sircar's membership on grounds of "moral turpitude" and file criminal cases against Akhtar

and Delwar.

Former speaker Sircar drew medical allowance of Tk 27.86 lakh, Delwar Tk 6 lakh and Akhtar Tk 1.21 lakh "defying" the special medical attendance rules during the tenure of the last parliament.

Formed by the all-party parliamentary probe committee, another sub-committee found evidence and proofs of the trio's taking additional fuel bills illegally. Sircar took Tk 60 lakh, Delwar Tk 40 lakh and Akhtar Tk 36 lakh as fuel allowances, in addition to what they are entitled to, the sub-committee said and asked for the money to be refunded.

Besides, another sub-committee in its investigation found that the former speaker wasted a good amount of public money by appointing 42 staffs for parliamentary standing committees and gave them salaries for eight months even though parliament was non-existent in that period.

A few more allegations of financial anomalies were raised against Sircar, and Delwar.

The all-party parliamentary probe body started preparing the final report based on the findings of investigations carried out by three sub-committees. It will sit on July 5 again to finalise the report with recommendations, members of the committee said.

All of them refuted the allegation brought against them and said the probe body was formed to harass them politically.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Iran bans defeated candidate's newspaper

AFP, TEHRAN: Iran halted the publication yesterday of a reformist party newspaper after its defeated presidential candidate said he would refuse to recognise Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election, its website said.

Former parliament speaker Mehdi Karubi said on Tuesday that the government emerging from the disputed June 12 election was not "legitimate" after Ahmadinejad's victory was certified by the nation's top electoral body.

"Last night, after Karubi's statement was released, representatives of the Tehran prosecutor and the culture ministry prevented the publication of Etemad Melli newspaper," his Etemad Melli party said on its website.

### Comoran youths block Paris flight in crash protest

AFP, PARIS: Angry Comoran youths staged a protest at Paris' main airport yesterday over flight conditions between France and their home islands after a Yemeni Airbus crash left 152 feared dead.

France's large Comoran community was plunged into mourning by the A310 jet crash off the Indian Ocean archipelago. Angry Comoran youths yesterday blocked the boarding of a Yemenia flight to Sanaa at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport, which left 40 minutes late with only 60 of its planned 160 passengers, airport officials said.

### Japan PM names new fiscal policy minister

AFP, TOKYO: Japan's embattled Prime Minister Taro Aso yesterday appointed Yoshimasa Hayashi as the new state minister in charge of economic and fiscal policy, local media reported.

"Prime Minister Taro Aso... has decided to appoint former defence minister Yoshimasa Hayashi as the state minister in charge of economic and fiscal policy," said the Jiji Press news agency.



PHOTO: AFP

Youths in the United Arab Emirates are seen from behind a thick glass enjoying a minus 3 degree Celsius climate at Ski Dubai in the Emirates Mall yesterday. As temperatures soared to more than 45 degrees, most people living in Dubai find refuge at the many air-conditioned malls across the rich emirate.

### Iran hangs six for murder

AFP, TEHRAN: Six people convicted of murder were hanged in Tehran's Evin prison yesterday, ISNA news agency reported.

"Six people sentenced to Qisas (retribution) were hanged this morning," judiciary official Esmatollah Jaberli told the agency.

He did not identify the convicts but said that some of them had murdered their spouses. The latest hangings bring to at least 133 the number of people executed in Iran so far this year, according to an AFP count based on news reports.

### Three dead, 18 missing after Afghan raft sinks

AFP, JALALABAD: At least three people were killed and about 18 others reported missing when a raft sank yesterday in a river in eastern Afghanistan, an official said.

The raft was used by villagers to cross a narrow part of the Kabul River in Nangarhar province near the Pakistan border, provincial government spokesman Ahmad Zai Abdulzai told AFP. Local residents and police were searching for the missing people, Abdulzai said.

### Philippines calls for prayers for ailing Aquino

AFP, MANILA: Former Philippines leader Corazon Aquino, who is suffering from cancer, is undergoing "a difficult time," a senator and family friend said yesterday, calling on the nation to pray for her.

"President Cory Aquino is undergoing a difficult time in her illness. I join our people in the prayers for her quick recovery," Senator Manuel "Mar" Roxas said in a statement. The 76-year-old Aquino, who led the nation from 1986 to 1992 after the fall of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship, was admitted to hospital last week and is being fed intravenously after showing signs of poor nutrition. She had been undergoing chemotherapy and was hospitalised from March to May.



### Thousands march for democracy in Hong Kong

AFP, HONG KONG: Tens of thousands of people took to the sweltering streets of Hong Kong yesterday for an annual pro-democracy march, as the city marked the 12th anniversary of its return to China.

Organisers said the major impetus for the turnout was a combination of dissatisfaction with the government's response to the economic slowdown, surging unemployment and delayed moves towards universal suffrage.

### Australia boosts aid funding to South Asia

AFP, CANBERRA: Australia yesterday committed an extra US\$ four million to humanitarian assistance in Pakistan and one million dollars to support elections in Afghanistan.

The Pakistan funds would be used to help 2.5 million people displaced by fighting with Taliban militants in the country's troubled northwest, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said. Smith said the funds came on top of 18 million dollars already committed to humanitarian aid in Pakistan since September last year.

### Farrah Fawcett laid to rest

AFP, LOS ANGELES: Hundreds of mourners paid tribute to Farrah Fawcett Tuesday as the "Charlie's Angels" star was laid to rest in a private ceremony in Los Angeles.

The 62-year-old actress and pin-up girl died last Thursday after a three-year battle with anal cancer, news that was quickly overshadowed by the death of King of Pop Michael Jackson later that day.