

Pakistan appeals against HC order freeing JuD chief Hafiz Saeed

PTI, Islamabad

Punjab government on Friday filed a petition in Pakistan's Supreme Court challenging the release of outlawed Jamaat-ud-Dawah chief Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, linked to the Mumbai terror attacks, from the house arrest.

The appeal against the Lahore High Court order, filed in the apex court this morning, said Saeed needed to be detained for his own "protection".

Saeed, also the founder of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba terror group, was freed from detention on the orders of the Lahore High Court on June 2 after spending nearly six months under house arrest.

Japan's Amano wins race to head IAEA

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A Japanese diplomat with a lengthy record of working on disarmament and non-proliferation issues will be the next chief of the United Nations nuclear watchdog after winning a secret ballot Thursday against two other candidates, according to a UN news received here yesterday.

The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, meeting at the IAEA's headquarters in Vienna, chose Yukio Amano as Director General to succeed Mohammed ElBaradei when he steps down at the end of November.

Amano was elected after he received 23 votes in his favour, securing the necessary two-thirds majority from the 35-member board. He has beaten Abdul Samad Minty of South Africa and Spain's Luis Echavarrri. Belgium's Jean-Pol Poncelet and Ernest Petric of Slovenia had already withdrawn their candidatures.

Amano, 62, becomes the fifth director general in the IAEA's history. He is Japan's current Ambassador to International Organisations in Vienna, and a member of the IAEA Board of Governors.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani security officials collect evidence next to vehicles wrecked in a suicide blast in Rawalpindi on Thursday. An apparent suicide bomber riding a motorcycle killed one and injured 30 people when he rammed a bus carrying staff from a Pakistani government department in the garrison city Rawalpindi on Thursday.

'Pak Taliban buying children for suicide attacks'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

Pakistani Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud is buying children as young as seven years old to carry out suicide bombing, the Online news agency said citing reports on Thursday.

The price for a child bomber is between \$7,000 and \$14,000, a Pakistani official requesting anonymity said.

Mehsud has turned suicide bombing into a production company, not like the way Toyota produces cars, a US Defence Department official said recently to reporters.

He said the price depends on how quickly the bomber is needed and how close the child is expected to get to the target.

"Mehsud produces these suicide bombers, which are sold or bartered, which can be used by (Afghan Taliban leader Mullah) Omar's Taliban or... other groups," the Washington Times said in a report citing the US official.

In some cases, he said, the children are kidnapped and then sold to Mehsud. He added that Mehsud remains the main target for US and Pakistani security forces.

On Sunday, the Pakistani government offered a reward of about \$615,300 for information leading to the capture of Mehsud, dead or alive. The US State Department has offered a reward of \$5 million for Mehsud, who is thought to be hiding in the Pakistani tribal areas near the Afghan border.

Floods wreak havoc in Assam

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, ANI, Guwahati/ Majuli

Flash floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains in Assam have displaced an estimated 200,000 people in the past two days with the state government sounding an alert as more than 300 villages were inundated, officials said on Friday.

"Four districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat and Nagaon were hit by the current wave of flooding that has left about 200,000 people displaced in some 350-odd villages during the past two days," said Assam Revenue and Rehabilitation Minister Bhupinder Barman.

An alert has been sounded in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sonitpur, Jorhat and Majuli. The National Disaster Rescue Force has been called for rescue operations.

According to official sources, over two lakh people in nearly 300 villages have been affected by the overflowing river.

In Majuli, an embankment was breached at Nayabazaar flooding Jengraimukh, Fuloni, Halodiat, Kherkotamukh and Nayabazaar areas.

In Lakhimpur, a 100-metre stretch of geofabric embankment was breached at Matmota affecting nearly 200 villages.

Marines in 'hell of a fight' in Afghanistan

Says US commander

AFP, Garmsir

US Marines are in a "hell of a fight" as they storm into Taliban strongholds in a major assault in Afghanistan, their commanding officers said yesterday.

Nearly 4,000 Marines launched the operation Thursday in parts of the southern province of Helmand, suffering their first fatality in a pivotal test of President Barack Obama's aggressive new strategy against the Taliban.

The 1/5 Infantry Battalion met only light resistance in their push south and had already been able to meet locals at Shuras (councils), Brigadier General Larry Nicholson said, speaking to a convoy with which AFP was travelling.

But "for 2/8 there is a hell of a fight going on in the southern quarter of the sector," the top Marine said on arrival at Garmsir, a town along the Helmand River that was a key objective for the offensive.

"2/8 are going to face some challenges," he said. The Marines were in an area called Toshtay about 25 kilometres (16 miles) south of Garmsir.

Commanders said they would persuade locals that the Afghan security forces -- backed by Western troops -- offered them a better long-term future than the fundamentalist Taliban militia as Afghanistan braces for elections next month.

On Thursday Marines were inserted into Garmsir and Nawa with little resistance, and quickly overran Khanishin further south where the Taliban had set up a proxy government and justice system.

But they also recorded their first death in an air and land assault that is the Marines' biggest operation since in Fallujah in Iraq in November 2004.

"We lost a man yesterday," Nicholson confirmed. "Any Marine casualty is a terrible thing."

Troops had on Thursday destroyed a militant position in Garmsir, the commander said after a nearly two-hour drive through the desert from Camp Dwyer.

"An enemy-controlled baseline just south of Garmsir was crushed yesterday but that doesn't mean all the enemy have gone," he said.

African leaders agree to Libya-led AU changes

AP, Sirte

Concluding marathon talks held late into the night, African leaders agreed yesterday to a Libyan-driven push to transform the African Union and in theory greatly extend its powers.

The change was materialised by morphing the African Union's executive body, the commission, into an "African Authority."

The draft document adopted at 4 am at the AU summit of heads of states in Sirte, Libya, showed that the new Authority would simplify the AU's structure and boost its power over defence, diplomatic and international trade matters.

The document, obtained by The Associated Press, was viewed as a milestone for the buildup to what Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has long envisioned as a federal government overseeing a "United States of Africa."

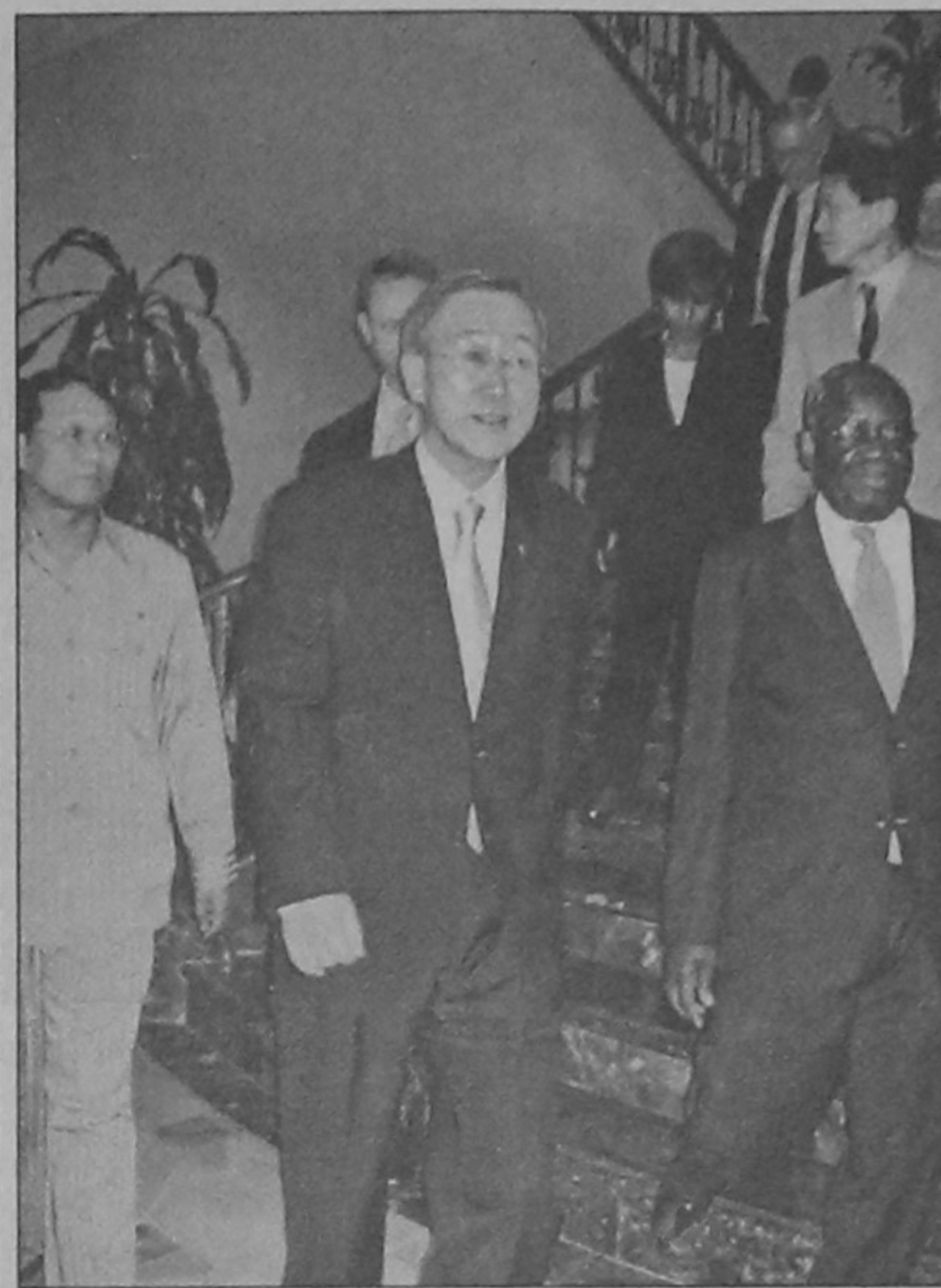


PHOTO: AFP

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (C) walks down the stairs at a hotel in Yangon, following his arrival in Myanmar early yesterday on his way to the capital Naypyidaw. The UN secretary general is pressing the chief of the ruling military junta to free opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Biden visits Iraq as he takes role in US exit

AFP, Baghdad

US Vice President Joe Biden flew in to Baghdad on Thursday on a surprise visit just two days after a long-planned pullback of American troops from conflict-hit Iraq's towns and cities.

Biden was greeted at Baghdad airport by Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, who said the vice president would hold talks with Iraqi political leaders, expected to focus on military issues and efforts to reconcile the country's sects.

"This visit comes at a very important time after the withdrawal of US forces," Zebari told AFP.

Biden's trip came just after President Barack Obama asked his vice president to take on a new role overseeing the US departure from Iraq and Washington's effort to promote internal political reconciliation in Baghdad.

The White House said Biden will visit American troops now stationed on the outskirts of Iraqi cities.

'Lankan building permanent camps for Tamil refugees'

ANI, Colombo

Despite promising to resettle 80 percent of Tamil refugees by the end of this year, the Sri Lankan Government has reportedly started building permanent camps for most of the 300,000 refugees, who are being held there since Tamil Tigers' defeat in May.

The Times quoted aid workers, as saying that permanent buildings are being erected at the Manik Farm site where the UN says that 230,000 of the refugees are kept.

The aid workers were able to do humanitarian work in four of six zones at Manik Farm but were barred from two others, including the mysteriously named Zone Zero.

"We're not allowed to work in these areas. But you can see from the outside proper brick-walled buildings going up," said Rajinda Jayasinghe, the head of Relief International in Sri Lanka.

The Government originally proposed holding the Tamil refugees in "welfare villages" for up to three years to check that they were not Tigers, and to clear their villages of mines.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Foreign Minister SM Krishna talks with Japan's Prime Minister Taro Aso in Tokyo yesterday. India's foreign minister called for an ambitious but fair greenhouse gas reduction target under a new climate treaty, saying any pact should not hinder the economic growth of developing countries.

Toad captured on camera while eating snake in China

ANI, Melbourne

In a rare case of a predator hunted by its prey, a toad has for the first time been captured on camera while eating a whole snake in just five minutes.

A tourist at Qingcheng Mountain Park in Sichuan, central China, took the picture of this instance of reversal of roles.

The photo showed a mountain toad eating a Jerdon's pit viper.

In an interview with IC Media, Ran Longzhong, from Chongqing, said that he could not believe his eyes when he saw the rare spectacle, and was happy he had his camera with him.

"I was wandering on the mountain road, and suddenly I spotted a toad that was eating down a snake, which was still struggling," the Daily Telegraph quoted him as saying.

He added: "The toad ate down the whole snake in around five minutes. It's hard to believe that a predator can be hunted by its prey."

A local zoologist claimed that it was for the first time that he had heard of a snake being eaten by a toad.

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