



Visiting Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni (L) shakes hands with her Sri Lankan counterpart Rohitha Bogollagama during a meeting in Colombo yesterday. Dipu Moni is in Colombo to attend a meeting of South Asian ministers to discuss ways for improving conditions of children in the region.

PHOTO: AFP

Suu Kyi's trial resumes in Myanmar

AP, Yangon

Riot police deployed outside Myanmar's main prison Friday as the trial of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi resumed, a week after the ruling generals blocked efforts by the UN chief to save her from a possible five-year prison term.

The 64-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate is charged with violating the terms of her house arrest by harbouring an American man who swam secretly to her lakeside home and stayed for two days.

Khin Moe Moe, a lawyer and a member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, was scheduled to appear as a defence witness during Friday's session.

Militants attack security post in Pakistan: 4 die

24 insurgents killed in air raids

AP, Islamabad

Militants overran a security post and killed four officers in a northwestern Pakistani region that the army claimed to have cleared of insurgents earlier this year, a government official said yesterday.

Elsewhere in the Afghan border region, fighter jets killed 24 insurgents and security forces arrested 40 militants, intelligence officers and a government spokesman said.

The attack on the post in Bajur shows the difficulties facing Pakistan as it seeks to clear and hold mountainous regions close to the Afghan border where al-

Qaeda and Taliban militants have long enjoyed a safe haven.

The United States and Pakistan's other Western allies are pushing it to undertake sustained action against extremists blamed for scores of attacks that are destabilising the country as well as neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Pakistani army said in March a six-month offensive in Bajur had defeated the militants in a stronghold that lies just next door to the insurgency-ravaged Afghan region of Kunar.

Dozens of militants late Thursday attacked the post manned by tribal police in Khar, killing four officers, said Idalat

Khan, a government official.

Khar is the main town in Bajur and was heavily damaged in the army offensive to retake it.

Pakistani jets destroyed several militant hide-outs late Thursday in the Aurakzai tribal region, killing 24 insurgents, two intelligence officials said on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

The raids took place in Mohmand region, also on Thursday. The captured men were loyal to Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, said the region's deputy administrator Syed Ahmad Khan.

Pakistan reconstruction could cost billions: UN

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's reconstruction effort after fighting forced nearly two million people from their homes could cost billions of dollars, the top UN relief coordinator warned on Friday.

Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes also warned there was no immediate guarantee of security in parts of the north-west as the government prepares to return the first of the 1.9 million displaced people.

"As for rehabilitation and reconstruction, costs should be in billions of dollars for a year or so," he told a news conference in Islamabad.

In May, the United Nations launched a flash appeal for 542 million dollars in emergency assistance, of which 42

percent has been donated.

"We are not intending a new appeal but hope that donors will respond generously to the appeal launched by the UN," Holmes said.

A massive Pakistani offensive that started in late-April in the three northwestern districts of Buner, Lower Dir and Swat sparked a huge evacuation, but army commanders say almost all areas are now clear of Taliban rebels.

Most of the 1.9 million displaced, including about 500,000 who fled an offensive elsewhere in the northwest last year, are living with relatives or in communities, while others are crammed into hot and dusty refugee camps.

Families say they are desperate to return to their cool mountain homes, but have expressed concern there is still

no guarantee of security.

"The security situation is not going to be 100 percent calm in these areas overnight and we must recognise that," said Holmes, who is scheduled to leave Pakistan on Saturday after a four-day visit.

"We hope that the returns (of internally displaced persons) are voluntary and conditions are right," he added.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Thursday said the displaced would start to return next Monday and tasked a special support group to finalise strategy.

UN officials say about 3,700 schools in the North West Frontier Province are being occupied by people seeking shelter from the fighting -- a matter of concern because the new school term begins on September 1.

22 Taliban killed in central Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

Fighting overnight between international troops and Taliban militants in central Afghanistan has left as many as 22 insurgents dead, police said yesterday.

The clashes came as Britain's Defence Ministry announced two more deaths, bring the country's toll to nine dead in southern Afghanistan in as many days.

The ministry said the two soldiers died in separate incidents Thursday. Britain's 8,000 troops have been joined in southern Helmand province by thousands of US Marines, who launched a major offensive in the province last week. It is aimed at uprooting Taliban insurgents before elections planned for next month.

In the clash in central Ghazni province, police chief Khail Boz Sherzai said the militants were killed in an airstrike.

But the US-led coalition gave a conflicting account of the fighting.

A US military statement only said that "several" militants died, and spokeswoman Capt. Elizabeth Mathias said the toll given by police sounded high.

Lanka's former rebels undergo retraining

AFP, Welikanda

They begin each day saluting the national flag of the country they had vowed to defeat or die trying.

Gone are the cyanide capsules that, like all Tamil Tiger rebels, they had worn around their necks for use if captured by the Sri Lankan military.

In their place hang religious symbols -- a substitution that perfectly reflects the image Sri Lanka wants the world to see: Its former enemies on the path to redemption and rehabilitation.

More than 300 former members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) -- including children forcibly recruited by the rebels -- are undergoing rehabilitation in tightly-guarded, state-run camps.

Where once they were trained for guerrilla warfare in the jungles of northeast Sri Lanka, they now receive voca-

tional training in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical wiring, sewing or cooking.

They are also learning computer skills, English and Sinhalese, the language spoken by Sri Lanka's ethnic majority.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese President Ram Baran Yadav leaves after presenting the new government's programme for the next fiscal year to parliament in Kathmandu on Thursday. Nepal's president pledged to strengthen law and order and take the peace process to a "positive conclusion" as he outlined the new government's priorities.

Nepal's president pledges peace, action on crime

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's president pledged to strengthen law and order and take the peace process to a "positive conclusion" as he outlined the new government's priorities on Thursday.

Ram Baran Yadav said Nepal had entered a "new era" after the abolition of the monarchy and the end of the civil war, and urged rival parties to work together to achieve the "epoch-making transformation sought by the people."

"More than two years have

elapsed since the comprehensive peace accord was signed with the commitment to move forward towards sustainable peace and democracy by ending the series of violence and counter-violence," he told parliament.



PHOTO: AFP

Photo taken on June 17 shows Karen refugees walking along a road on the Thai-Myanmar border in Per Nwe Pu village, around 100 km north of Mae Sot. Around 1100 Karen refugees arrived on June 2 in the village and are staying in temporary shelters.



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