

# UN urges Taliban to let Afghan polls go ahead

Insurgent bomb kills 8 guards

AFP, Kabul

The top UN official in Afghanistan yesterday urged the Taliban not to disrupt nationwide elections, as militants killed nine people and ambushed a presidential campaign manager.

A surge in attacks by Taliban and other militants battling the government and allied Western troops has raised concerns that spiralling unrest will lead to poor voter turnout and throw into doubt the legitimacy of the August 20 poll.

As only Afghanistan's second ever presidential ballot, the election is seen as a key test of US and Nato-backed efforts to install democracy and stability in a country besieged by decades of conflict.

Foreign and Afghan officials are at pains to reassure people that everything is being done to keep them safe as they vote for a head of state and provincial councillors, but on Tuesday a wave of fresh violence struck the country.

In eastern Laghman province, a campaign manager for leading presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah was shot and his driver killed.

Murtaza Qalandarzal, deputy provincial

governor, said local campaign manager Colonel Ismail was travelling to address a gathering.

"His vehicle was attacked on the way to the district. His driver was killed and he is wounded," Qalandarzal told AFP.

The interior ministry confirmed the incident and said the dead driver was the manager's nephew. Abdullah was not present at the time.

It was the second attack in as many days on Abdullah's campaign and came after a running mate of President Hamid Karzai escaped unharmless when militants on Sunday launched a gun and rocket attack on his convoy.

There are 41 candidates standing for president, including Karzai, who is tipped to win despite his failure to quell the raging Taliban insurgency.

In the south, a remote-controlled bomb planted by insurgents ripped through two vehicles and killed eight Afghan private security guards in the province of Helmand on Tuesday, the government said.

Kai Eide, head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), acknowledged that security concerns were "significant."

## The rains come at last, but Delhi is crippled

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The monsoon's heaviest rainfall Monday almost flooded the Indian capital, disrupting flights, inundating low-lying areas and snapping traffic lights, causing havoc all across the city.

Nearly seven hours of virtual non-stop downpour initially appeared to be the much awaited answer for a sweltering city but quickly turned life into a chaotic mess.

Delhi received 70 mm of rainfall till 8.30 pm, the highest for this season, the meteorological department said. More rains and thundershowers are expected Tuesday.

Trees were uprooted and overhead electrical cables collapsed in some areas, adding to the woes of people hit hard by huge pile-ups on roads and overflowing drains.



Indian policemen and rescue officials stand at the site of a collapsed wall in Noida Monday following heavy monsoon rain showers in the National Capital Region (NCR). At least 10 people, including four children and two women, were killed and nine others injured when a wall collapsed due to heavy rains in the satellite township of the national capital.

PHOTO: AFP

## Pak govt in 'secret talks' with Mehsud to avert Waziristan offensive

ANI, PTI, London/Washington

The Pakistan government has entered into 'secret negotiations' with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) chief Baitullah Mehsud, which is the prime reason why Islamabad has refrained from launching an all out operation in South Waziristan, a leading British daily reports.

A report in The Telegraph said that the government has delayed the ground assault against Mehsud due to secret negotiations between him and security forces.

The report said the government wants Mehsud, the mastermind of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination, to announce that he would not strike government establishments in future.

"This would not be a total surrender, but a guarantee that Baitullah would not indulge in any anti-state activity in future," an official said on conditions of anonymity.

The official's statements could not be verified, but the delay in ground offensive in Mehsud's stronghold region certainly raises questions over Islamabad's commitment against the insurgents.

Meanwhile, the wealthy landowners who turned the picturesque Swat Valley into a tourist paradise and who are considered to be economic pillars of the region are still shunning away from their native place. The wealthy are showing great reluctance to return back despite a strong persuasion pitch by the Pakistan military and influential NWFP politicians, even as hundreds and thousands of ordinary people have headed back. The New York Times reported today.

## Kashmir CM resigns over sex scandal

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir's chief minister Omar Abdullah resigned on Tuesday over what he described as "baseless" allegations that he was involved in a sex scandal. Authorities uncovered a prostitution racket in 2006 involving 40 women and underage girls whose clients allegedly included politicians, bureaucrats, security officials and businessmen in the conservative Muslim-majority state.

The case is being investigated by India's Central Bureau of Investigation, which has charged several former state ministers and top security officials over the scandal. During a state assembly session on Tuesday, opposition lawmakers and former finance minister Muzaffer Beigh said Abdullah was one of the accused.

## Dairy foods 'extend life' of children

BBC ONLINE

Children who eat plenty of dairy foods such as milk and cheese can expect to live longer, a study suggests.

Some 4,374 UK children from a 1930s study were traced 65 years later by researchers in Bristol and Queensland.

They found those who had had high dairy and calcium intakes as children had been protected against stroke and other causes of death, journal Heart reports.

Despite dairy containing artery furring fat and cholesterol, high consumption did not raise the heart disease risk.

The findings appear to back the practice of giving extra milk to schoolchildren.

The study looked at family diets and found higher intakes of both calcium and dairy, predominantly from milk, cut mortality by a quarter.

## Robbers net \$4.8m in Baghdad heist

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Robbers stole at least 4.8 million dollars in an overnight raid on a Baghdad bank that left eight police guards dead, police and a bank employee said yesterday.

The money had just been transferred to state-owned Al-Rafidain bank's branch in the central Baghdad shopping district of Karrada on Monday, according to the employee, who declined to be named.

"The thieves arrived and stole at least 5.6 billion dinars, which we received yesterday for the salaries of policemen who work for the interior ministry," he told AFP.

The employee added that no doors or windows were damaged in the raid.

Another official said the robbery appears to be the work of insurgents trying to get hold of cash to finance their operations. The official did not say what evidence led police to believe the robbery was the work of insurgents.

## US, China upbeat on climate treaty: Envoy

AFP, Washington

The US pointman on climate change voiced optimism Monday at reaching a new global treaty this year, saying that top polluters China and the United States were both serious about taking action.

The top developed and developing economies discussed global warming among a host of issues as they held top-level talks in Washington.

The talks come as the clock ticks to a December conference in Copenhagen, which is meant to seal a new international accord on fighting climate change after the Kyoto Protocol's requirements expire in 2012.

"I'm not going to kid anybody -- I don't think it's easy -- but I think that we will get there," Todd Stern, the US special envoy on climate change, told reporters on a conference call after the first of two days of talks here.

"I think there's a lot of interest on the Chinese side fundamentally to arrive at a constructive and successful outcome in Copenhagen," Stern said.

Stern said that President Barack Obama's administration has made it clear to China that global warming was a top priority, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other officials raising the issue at all opportunities.

China sees global warming as important "as a substantive matter, but also of real importance in the US-China bilateral relationship and increasingly something that's going to be important on its own for the way they are perceived by the rest of the world," Stern said.

But Stern acknowledged that China, India and other developing nations still had different views than rich countries on climate change.

Developing nations have resisted pressure to commit to binding targets on cutting carbon emissions blamed for global warming, saying that rich nations bear historic responsibility.

The US House of Representatives, led by Obama's Democratic Party, last month narrowly approved a plan to restrict emissions. It marked a sharp turn from the era of Obama's predecessor George W. Bush, a sharp critic of international action on climate change.

Obama, inaugurating the talks with China, said that the two nations can "chart a low carbon recovery" from the global financial crisis.

"Let's be frank: neither of us profits from a growing dependence on foreign oil, nor can we spare our people from the ravages of climate change unless we cooperate," Obama told the opening session.

"Common sense calls upon us to act," he said.

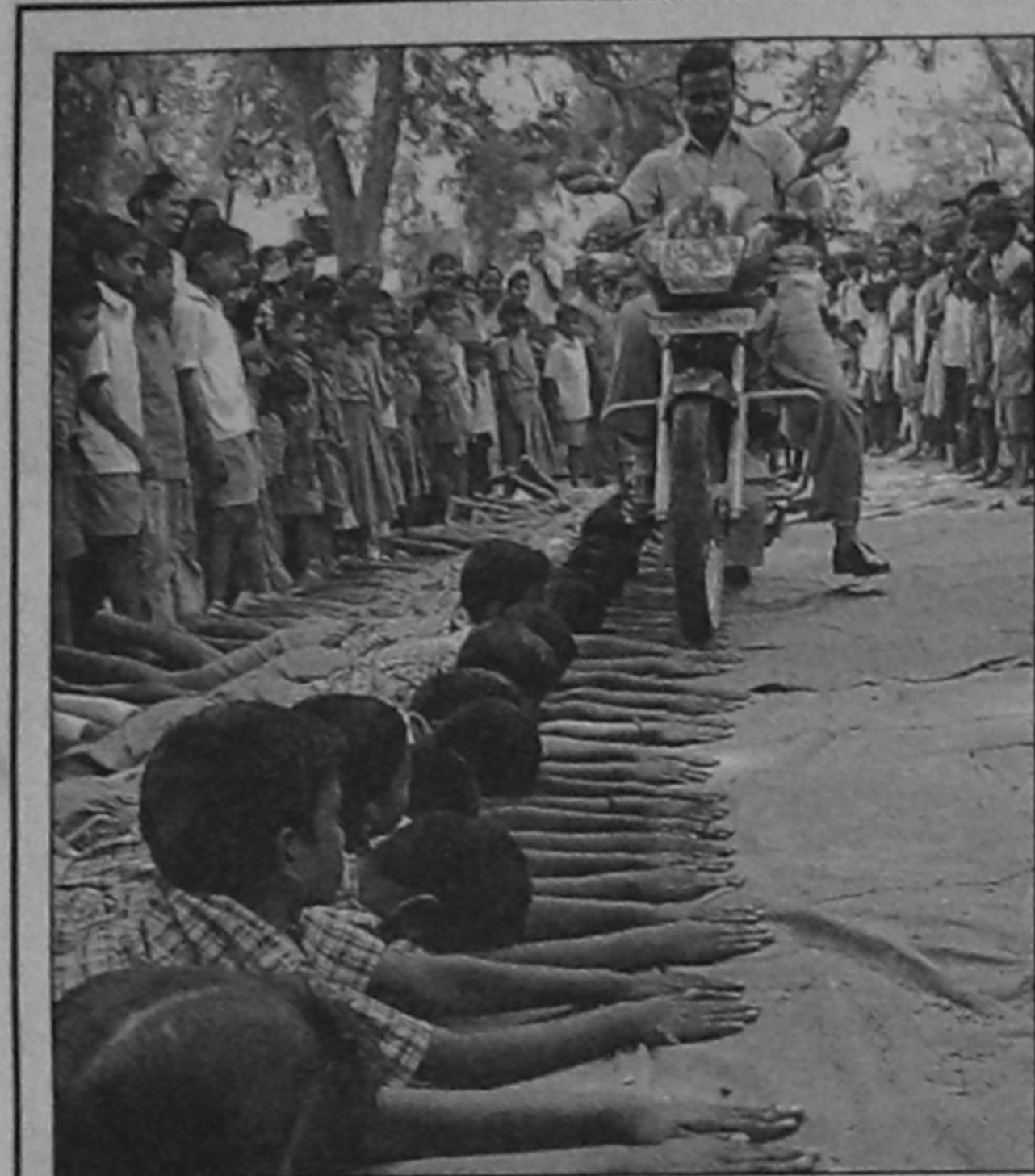


PHOTO: AFP

This photograph taken on Monday shows a motorcyclist riding over the outstretched hands of schoolchildren lying on the ground during a "bravery show" organised by a government elementary school in Villupuram in India's Tamil Nadu state. The school's headmaster said that the event, which drew protests from children rights activists, was organised with the consent of the school's parents-teachers' association, according to local reports.

## MUMBAI ATTACK

## Pakistan not arresting Saeed for lack of proof

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan has denied arresting Jamaat-ud-Daawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed, in connection with the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

Interior Adviser Rehman Malik said there is 'not enough proof' of Saeed's involvement in the 26/11 carnage, so the alleged mastermind could not be put behind bars.

Malik said Islamabad has asked New Delhi to provide details of Indian citizens convicted in the Mumbai attacks. The Daily Times reports.

It may be noted that a full bench of the Lahore High Court ordered the release from house arrest of Saeed, the prime accused of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, on the basis of a habeas corpus petition filed by his lawyer. The high court said that it had not received substantial evidence to continue his detention.

## Fazlullah hiding in Pechoar, would be arrested soon: Malik

ANI, Islamabad

Swat Taliban chief Mullah Fazlullah aka Radio Mullah is injured and is hiding in the terrains of Pechoar along with his close aides, Interior Adviser Rehman Malik has said.

Malik claimed the security forces have surrounded Fazlullah and his accomplices, and that they would be arrested soon.

Over the past few days media reports as well as the Pakistan Army have been claiming that Fazlullah, who has a 50-million-rupee bounty on his head, has been grievously wounded in missile hit and is on his death bed.

However, neither the Pakistan government nor the Army was able to confirm the reports.

Recently, Mingora residents said they had heard Fazlullah over his illegal FM radio station, but it could not be confirmed whether the broadcast was live or a pre-recorded one.

Talking to a private television channel Malik said the military offensive against the Taliban and other extremists have been successful and nearing its end.

## 'Taliban is under intense pressure'

ANI, Kabul

US President Barack Obama's Special Envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, believes that the Taliban is under a huge amount of pressure because of the fresh Nato troop surge, especially in the southern part of Afghanistan.

Speaking during a trip to Kabul and Ghazni, he told the BBC that he wanted "clear visible progress in about a year", and added that some engagement with the Taliban

had "long been a part of the policy" for the region.

Outlining new tactics for the war in Afghanistan amid indications that war's long stalemate has weakened support for President Hamid Karzai in next month's election, Holbrooke was also quoted by ABC as saying that he is determined about pursuing an aggressive approach to altering US policy in Afghanistan, unafraid to blame the previous administration as much as decades of war for the country's woes.

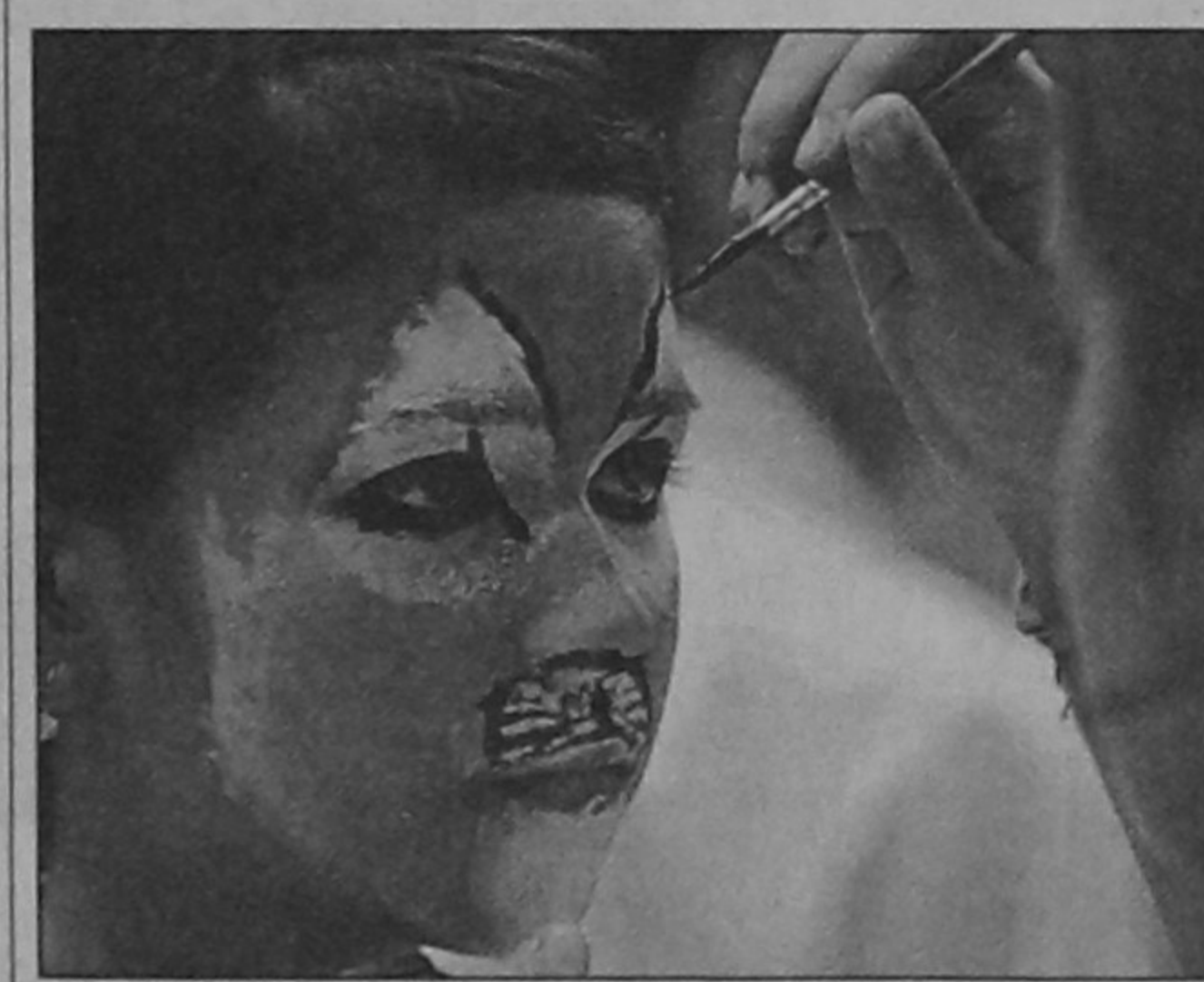


PHOTO: AFP

An Indian schoolgirl has her face painted as a tiger during the inauguration of the Fifth National Bengal Tiger consultation talks on climate change in New Delhi yesterday. A host of concerned wildlife activists and politicians from around the country met during the talks to discuss the fate of The Royal Bengal Tiger.

## East London on swine flu frontline

AFP, London

Pharmacies in Tower Hamlets no longer stock Tamiflu: the east London borough has Britain's highest swine flu rate, and the drug is only available at a distribution centre whose address is kept secret.

Up to 400 people flock every day to the centre, near the working-class district's Mile End hospital, which is on the frontline of the swine flu pandemic gripping Britain harder than any other European country.

"We've got more swine flu cases per head of population than anywhere else in England. That means we're experiencing it first," said Dr. Douglas Russell, medical director of the National Health Service (NHS) in Tower Hamlets.

Doctors and nurses are working extra hours and extra shifts, with some

cancelling holidays, to meet the demand - last week there were 792 doctors' consultations for every 100,000 people.

"We've experienced significant additional pressure but I think everyone is coping," said Russell.

The infection rate in Britain as a whole almost doubled last week, with an estimated 100,000 new cases, while at least 30 people with the virus have died, in a scenario which could be repeated in other European countries, experts say.

To limit the spread, health authorities are asking people with the A(H1N1) virus to stay at home, and send a so-called "flu friend" to fetch the precious anti-viral drug.

Tower Hamlets, which has a large young population and Britain's biggest Bangladeshi community, is pulling out all the stops to advise people how to avoid

swine flu, and what to do if they think they have it.

Mosques have been making announcements after prayers, while leaflets in English, Bangladeshi and Somali have been distributed to back up a media campaign telling people not to go out if they suspect they have the virus.

Only people who have been positively diagnosed are being given Tamiflu, and pharmacies have been asked to give back their stocks of the drug, which can only be distributed at the official centres.

"I've seen an influx of people, on a busy day 350 people, on a quieter day 200," said nurse Lindsay Collins, taking packets of Tamiflu pills from a cupboard kept under lock and key.

"People are generally anxious, there is a lot of concern in the community out there," she added.

## News in Brief

### Rains leave 22 dead in Nepal

AP, Katmandu

Flooding and landslides brought on by two days of heavy monsoon rains in Nepal have left 22 people dead and several more missing, officials said Tuesday.

Home Ministry official Iswor Regmi said the death toll from the rains that began over the weekend could rise as reports pour in from remote villages, some of them several days' walk from the nearest town or telephone.

### 4 shot dead in Thai south

AFP, Yala

Suspected separatist insurgents in Thailand's troubled Muslim-majority south shot dead four civilians while a remote-controlled bomb wounded five other people, police said Tuesday.

Militants gunned down a Buddhist man and his wife in an ambush early Tuesday while they were travelling by motorbike to tap rubber in restive Pattani province, police said. As police investigated the shooting, rebels detonated a bomb hidden beneath the bodies of the couple, wounding three policemen and two villagers, they added.

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