



Handout photo released yesterday shows Afghan National Policemen exit a cave after searching for enemy weapons caches during a mission with US soldiers in a cave near Shah Wali Zarat in Khowst province on July 24.

PHOTO: AFP

UN calls for talks with Taliban leaders

Five Nato soldiers killed in attacks

AP, AFP, Kabul

The top UN official in Afghanistan called yesterday for talks with Taliban leaders at the highest level, another indication that parts of the international community are reaching out to the top echelons of the radical Islamist movement.

Kai Eide did not name Taliban leader Mullah Omar in his call for negotiations, but he dismissed plans that call for reaching out to only some militant commanders.

"If you want relevant results, you have to talk to those who are relevant. If you want important results, you have to talk to those who are important. If you only have a partial reconciliation process, you will have partial results," said Eide, a Norwegian diplomat who heads the United Nations mission to Afghanistan.

While the need for talks with the Taliban is recognised across the international community, the conditions attached to such proposals and the timing of the talks are a bone of contention.

President Hamid Karzai, facing a re-election challenge later this month, has repeatedly called for talks with Taliban

leaders on condition that the militants accept Afghanistan's constitution. Karzai has even personally guaranteed safe passage for Omar if he attends such talks.

Omar, who is believed to be hiding out in Pakistan, has publicly dismissed the overtures, calling Karzai an American puppet and saying no talks can happen while foreign troops are in the country.

But behind the public posturing, several Gulf countries are working on sketching out the contours of a political process that could eventually bring an end to the expanding conflict. The war is claiming a record number of lives among US and Nato troops and Afghan civilians nearly eight years after the US invaded the country and ousted the Taliban from power.

In the latest violence, five Nato soldiers, three of them US troops, were killed in insurgent attacks in Afghanistan, the force said Sunday, adding to a bloody start to the month in a growing fight against the extremist Taliban.

The three US troops were part of a patrol in eastern Afghanistan that was struck by a homemade bomb and then ambushed with gunfire, the Nato-led International Security

Assistance Force (Isaf) said in a statement.

"The patrol responded to the attack but three service members died in the engagement," it said in a statement.

Isaf, made up of around 64,000 troops from 40 nations, does not release the nationalities of its casualties but the US military in Kabul said the three were from its ranks.

Two other Isaf troops were killed when two bomb blasts struck their patrol in the south on Saturday, the alliance announced separately. They were not US nationals, the US military said, without being able to identify them.

The soldiers were killed the same day one French and three US soldiers in separate attacks already announced by Isaf.

"Yesterday was a very tough day for Isaf as we lost more brave soldiers who were striving to provide security to the Afghan population," the force said in a statement.

Seventy-five international troops were killed last month, most of them in attacks, according to the independent www.iccasualties.org website, making July the deadliest month for troops since the US led invasion in 2001.

Parliament should decide Musharraf's fate following SC verdict: Pak PM

PTI, ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan's Parliament should decide the fate of former president Pervez Musharraf following the Supreme Court's verdict that the emergency imposed by him in 2007 was unconstitutional and illegal, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has said.

"They (Supreme Court) have given their verdict...I have been saying from day one that Parliament is the forum which has to take these decisions. Let the Parliament decide (the fate of Musharraf)," he said.

Gilani said he did not hold a

personal opinion in the matter. "My party (the ruling PPP) will have an opinion and the party will never support a dictator," he said in an interview to a TV news channel when he was asked if Musharraf would be brought to trial.

On Friday, the apex court declared the emergency imposed by Musharraf in November 2007 as unconstitutional and illegal. The ruling has made it possible for the former military ruler to be tried for treason for violating the Constitution. However, such a trial can only be initiated by the government.

Gilani said he appreciated the

apex court's decision declaring the emergency and Musharraf's subsequent actions as null and void.

As Pakistan now has a free media, strong political forces and an active judiciary, people have more expectations though the government has to act with a balanced approach, Gilani said. "Parliament has to act very maturely," he added.

Meanwhile, former Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Kasuri has advised the present government to take the route of justice and not vengeance in the case of former president Pervez Musharraf.

India hands Pakistan fresh evidence against JuD chief Saeed

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India on Saturday handed over to Pakistan a fresh dossier of evidence to investigate the Mumbai terror attacks and prosecute Hafiz Saeed, the suspected mastermind of the three-day carnage that killed 166 people.

The seven-page dossier was given to Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner here Riffat Masood by the External Affairs Ministry Joint Secretary TCA Raghavan.

The new dossier of evidence was given nearly three weeks after Pakistan gave India an update on its investigation on last November's attacks and

sought more information.

India's new Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao told reporters here on Saturday evening that New Delhi expected a "meaningful response" from Islamabad after the latest dossier.

Indian Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram earlier told mediapersons that the dossier has "enough evidence" for Pakistan to continue the probe against Saeed who heads Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) charity, which the United Nations said in December was a front for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), an outlawed militant group accused of carrying out the assault on India's financial capital.



PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani soldier patrols Mingora, the main town of Swat valley, on Saturday. Schools reopened in Pakistan's restive northwest after nearly three months of closure due to fighting between the military and Taliban militants.

Newly discovered pieces by Mozart presented in Salzburg

AFP, Vienna

Two newly discovered piano pieces, which scholars now say were almost certainly composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, were performed Sunday in the composer's birthplace of Salzburg.

The partitions, a four-minute concerto for piano and a one-minute prelude, were found in Mozart's sister Nannerl's notebook, in the archives of the International Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg.

They were "in all probability, bordering on certainty" the works of the young Mozart, composed around 1763-1764 when the prodigy was seven or eight years old, the foundation said Sunday.

Nannerl's notebook contained 18 pieces, which had until now been attributed to Mozart's father Leopold or unknown composers.

The two newly discovered works were also written in Leopold's hand.

"But neither the style of composition, nor the hasty correction-laden writing point to Leopold's authorship," Mozarteum researcher Ulrich Leisinger said.



PHOTO: AFP

Two piano pieces almost certainly composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart are presented yesterday as musicians perform during a press conference in the composer's birthplace of Salzburg. The partitions, a four-minute concerto for piano and a one-minute prelude, were recently discovered in Mozart's sister Nannerl's notebook, in the archives of the International Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg.

Plane carrying 16 disappears over Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

A plane carrying 16 people disappeared yesterday over a jungle-clad and mountainous region in eastern Indonesia, authorities said.

By nightfall, there was no trace of the Twin Otter plane, which lost contact with officials on the ground as it flew over Papua at a height of 9,500 feet (2,895 meters), said Transportation Ministry spokesman Bambang Ervan.

Police said they would start a land and air search operation at first light Monday.

The plane Sunday was on a 50-minute journey from Sentani, a major airport in Papua, to the town of Oksibil, said Capt. Nikmatullah, the director of operations of the airline operating the plane, Merpati Nusantara.

The aircraft was carrying enough fuel to keep it in the air for 3 1/2 hours, said Nikmatullah, who goes by a single name. When dark fell, it had been missing for around eight hours.

Indonesia, a nation of more than 18,000 islands, has seen a string of air crashes in recent years.

In 2007, the European Union banned all Indonesian carriers from landing in the bloc. It recently lifted the ban on four of them, including Garuda, the country's flag carrier, saying standards had improved.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Myanmar wants to minimise fallout over Suu Kyi trial

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's junta showed rare concern for foreign opinion by delaying the Aung San Suu Kyi verdict, but only because it wants to minimise the fallout while pursuing its hard line against her, analysts said.

The postponement of the judgment until August 11 is a sign that normally intransigent military ruler Than Shwe is at least partly considering the domestic and international uproar a long jail term would provoke, they said.

But the regime's apparent indecision over the trial is about balancing its determination to have Suu Kyi locked up during elections next year with its desire to give the trial a veneer of legitimacy abroad, analysts added.

"It's international pressure and they're worried about domestic anger," Thailand-based Myanmar analyst and academic Win Min told AFP.

Since Suu Kyi was charged in mid-May with breaching the terms of her house arrest after an American man swam uninvited to her house, a trial that was expected to last a few days has become a two-and-a-

half-month farrago.

The court has repeatedly put off hearings -- helped by frequent appeals by Suu Kyi's defence team -- and Friday said it would not hand down a verdict as expected but would pass judgment later this month instead.

Suu Kyi's lawyers hailed the delay as a sign that the judges have "serious legal problems."

Win Min said domestic anger over the case was worrying the authorities, as evidenced by recent editorials in Myanmar's state media, which warned people against demonstrating in case of a guilty verdict.

With critics accusing the junta of using the charges against her as an excuse to keep her behind bars during the 2010 elections promised by the ruling generals, the international community has meanwhile kept up the pressure.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called, during a regional meeting in Thailand last month, for Suu Kyi's release and also held out to Myanmar the carrot of possible US investment.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon

visited Myanmar last month, when Than Shwe refused to let him see Suu Kyi, and in a meeting with Myanmar's UN ambassador on Thursday Ban pressed for the Nobel Laureate's release, a spokesman said.

The last time Myanmar bowed to international pressure was in 2008, when it allowed in foreign aid for victims of Cyclone Nargis following another trip by Ban.

But it is close ally China that is likely to have the most sway in the Suu Kyi case -- and analysts said Beijing has so far avoided giving overt support with its usual statements that the country's internal affairs are its own business.

"There could be pressure from China. If China said this was an internal matter they (Myanmar's leadership) would make the (verdict) as they like," Win Min said.

But while the junta was keen to dampen the international outrage, its intentions towards the woman it has kept in detention for nearly 14 of the last 20 years remained the same, said Benjamin Zawacki of Amnesty International.

NEWS IN BRIEF

China suspends 2 for pollution

AP, Beijing

Authorities in central China suspended two environmental officials and detained a chemical plant boss after hundreds of residents protested, claiming the factory polluted a river and caused at least two deaths in the area, an official said yesterday.

Nearly a thousand villagers gathered at government and police offices in Zhenzhou township in Hunan province on Thursday to highlight what they say is deadly pollution being discharged from the Xianghe Chemical Factory in nearby Liuyang city, the official Xinhua News Agency said Saturday.

Karachi building collapse kills 24

AP, Karachi

A five-story building collapsed in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi, killing at least 24 people, mostly women and children, authorities said Saturday.

Local Mayor Mohammad Dilawar, who was supervising the rescue work, said the building caved in late Friday in the congested downtown Lea Market neighbourhood.

'Too many tasks' failing Afghan mission: British MPs

BBC ONLINE

The military mission in Afghanistan has failed to deliver on its promises - as troops have too many tasks, MPs say.

The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee says "mission creep" had brought too many responsibilities, including fighting the drugs trade.

Poor government planning and a lack of realistic strategy and clear direction undermined the mission, the MPs said.

The report said the focus should be on security, but Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell said it always had been.

He also told Sky News the committee "wildly overstated" the amount of British resources put into the drugs fight and despite the army's co-ordination role, troops were "overwhelmingly" engaged in security.

The report said Britain's deployment to Helmand province was "undermined by unrealistic planning at senior levels, poor co-ordination between Whitehall departments and crucially a failure to provide the military with clear direction".

Rammell said it was important to have a "comprehensive approach" to ensure better governance and delivery of basic services.

British forces experienced their bloodiest month in Afghanistan during July, with 22 troops killed during a major offensive against insurgents in Helmand.

The report warns the security situation, particularly in the south, could be expected to remain "precarious for some time to come".

The committee suggests the continued instability is due in part to the failures of the international community and criticised some of Nato's allies for delivering "much less" than had been promised.

"We recognise that although Afghanistan's current situation is not solely the legacy of the West's failures since 2001, avoidable mistakes - including knee-jerk responses, policy fragmentation and overlap - now make the task of stabilising the country considerably more difficult than might otherwise have been the case," it said.

The committee said government claims the Afghan drugs trade was a justification for the continued presence of British troops in Helmand were "debatable".

"We recommend that in the immediate future the government should refocus its efforts to concentrate its limited resources on one priority, namely security."

It also said Afghanistan was a "most critical and seminal moment" for the future of the Nato alliance as it was the first deployment outside its "area".

80 more Indians fly to Lanka to clear landmines

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Over 80 former Indian soldiers have left for Sri Lanka following the defeat of the Tamil Tigers to join Indians already there in clearing thousands of buried landmines.

The new group has teamed up with compatriots working since 2003, mainly in the northern districts of Mannar and Vavuniya, in defusing mines laid by both the military and the Tigers during their prolonged conflict.

While 50 of the latest batch of Indians are attached to the Pune-based Horizon Group, 32 are from Sarvatra Technical Consultants, a company that is based in Gurgaon, Haryana. Sarvatra will send 32 more men.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) soldiers stand guard in Srinagar yesterday as security has been beefed up after suspected Muslim militants shot dead an Indian policeman and injured two paramilitary soldiers on Saturday during clashes in the Kashmir summer capital.