



A Pakistani boy looks at a destroyed office of the banned terrorist outfit Lashkar-e-Islam after the security forces operation in Khyber Agency on Thursday. Local vigilantes allied to Pakistani soldiers claimed to have killed at least 167 militants in two months, an indication of the growing reach of private armies in the northwest.

Pakistan raises Swat militia to fight Taliban

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan on Thursday showed off teenagers and hundreds of armed men from a private army who vowed Thursday to kick out the Taliban from the Swat valley, officials and witnesses said.

"We killed three Taliban and captured three others yesterday," Syed Badshah, head of the private militia, told reporters in Qalagat town in northern Swat, where Islamists have fought for two years to impose Sharia law.

Pakistan's military invited journalists to visit the town and meet the lashkar, a tribal militia raised traditionally on a temporary basis, and show off bodies of purportedly slain militants.

Around 300 people, mostly ethnic Pashtuns sporting grey beards and a clutch of younger men, squatted on open ground with guns slung over their shoulders.

Holding a Kalashnikov rifle with visible ease, one boy told private TV channel Geo he was 12 years old and joined the Lashkar for the sake of peace.

"I want peace in the valley, I want the schools reopened in our area," said Gul Nawab. "Yes, I know how to use a

Kalashnikov," he claimed.

Pakistani government forces have been bogged down, fighting for years against Taliban militants spreading out of tribal areas into settled areas, such as the northwest district and one-time tourist region of Swat.

Saddled with a standing army that lacks equipment and counter-insurgency specialists, one of Pakistan's answers has been to arm and support tribesmen to protect local communities.

"This is the first Lashkar that people have formed in Swat on a self-help basis," said Major Suleman Akbar, army commander in the northern Kabal district of Swat, vowing full cooperation with the private militia.

"We will provide them arms, ammunition, rations and other logistic support" said Akbar as he handed three assault rifles and 3,000 rounds of ammunition.

"The Taliban are creating chaos in the name of Islam, they are terrorists," Badshah told AFP by telephone.

"We have taken up arms in our defence. The lashkar has been raised because life became miserable in Swat with the daily slaughtering of innocent people."

Around 5,000 people have joined the lashkar, he claimed, urging the government to arm them quickly. He confirmed that members were aged 12 to 50 years.

"Taliban know only the language of guns, we will also speak to them in their language now," 19-year-old Salman Ahmed told AFP.

In late April, Pakistan launched a blistering air and ground offensive designed to dislodge Taliban from in and around Swat after rebels flouted a peace deal and advanced into new territory further south towards Islamabad.

The valley had slipped out of the government control after a radical cleric Maulana Fazlullah mounted a violent campaign for tough Sharia laws.

Thousands of his supporters led a brutal campaign beheading opponents, burning schools and fighting against government troops since November 2007.

Commanders say more than 1,800 militants and 166 security personnel have died in the military operation but there is no independent confirmation of the death tolls, and skirmishes in and around Swat have continued.

Millions in Nepal face food shortages: UN

AFP, Kathmandu

Millions more people in Nepal are suffering severe food shortages after a "sharp and sustained decline in food security" in recent years, the United Nations warned yesterday.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said 3.4 million Nepalese people had become "highly to severely food insecure" due to sharp food price rises and the 2008-09 winter drought, the worst in 40 years.

"In recent years, Nepal has experienced a sharp and sustained decline in food security," the WFP said in a report released here Friday.

"Compared to neighbouring countries and indeed countries around the world, Nepal's food security situation has suffered considerably over the past three years."

Nepalese people are becoming more vulnerable to hunger every year as food production fails to keep pace with a growing population,

the report said.

It said the global economic crisis had exacerbated the food shortages caused by 10 years of civil conflict and ongoing political instability.

Nepal last year held its first elections since the end of the civil war in 2006, but the Maoist-led administration lasted just eight months and the coalition government that replaced it is widely viewed as weak.

"Even prior to the recent deterioration in food security, the rate of malnutrition was alarming," said the WFP.

"The rate of chronic malnourishment in children under five is estimated at 48 percent, with an average rate of 60 percent in mountain areas."

"This is the worst level of malnourishment in Asia, and is comparable to the worst countries in Sub-Saharan Africa... Yet Nepal is not internationally associated with harrowing images of hunger."

Pak provincial minister shot dead

AFP, Karachi/Peshawar

Gunmen in the port city of Karachi shot dead a minister from Pakistan's insurgency-hit southwestern province of Baluchistan on Thursday, police said.

Sardar Rustam Jamali, the provincial minister for excise and taxation, who was in Karachi on a private visit, was travelling in his car when gunmen opened fire and injured him seriously, local police official Qayyum Pitafi told AFP.

"He was rushed to hospital where he died of his injuries," the official said, adding that police were investigating whether it was a targeted killing.

Jamali, 46, a cousin of former prime minister Zafarullah Jamali, was elected in 2008 as an independent candidate and later joined the provincial coalition led by President Asif Ali Zardari's Pakistan People's Party.

Gas-rich Baluchistan has been in the grip of a two-year insurgency launched by ethnic Baluch rebels who want more political rights and a greater share of profits from the region's natural resources.

Meanwhile, local vigilantes allied to Pakistani soldiers on Thursday claimed to have killed at least 167 militants in two months, an indication of the growing reach of private armies in the northwest.

Pakistan asks Interpol for help to track Mumbai suspects

AFP, Lyon

Pakistan has asked Interpol to issue a global alert for 13 suspects wanted for the attacks in Mumbai of November 2008, the international police agency said Thursday.

The alert asks member countries to help locate the fugitives and notify Pakistani authorities who will then issue arrest warrants and seek their extradition, an Interpol statement said.

"The authorities in Pakistan are to be commended for making full use of Interpol's global network and tools," said secretary general Ron Noble in the statement issued from the agency's headquarters in Lyon.

"This demonstrates their commitment to allowing all of Interpol's 187 member-countries to benefit from and help with the investigation into the Mumbai terrorist attacks," he said.

The 13 suspects were not named in the media statement, but Interpol said their names and other information would be included in the police agency's databases and circulated worldwide.



India's National Security Adviser MK Narayanan (L) shakes hands with Chinese State Councillor and Special Representative Dai Bingguo prior to talks in New Delhi yesterday. India and China are holding two days of talks to discuss the framework of a final settlement in resolving frontier issues between the two Asian neighbours.

India, China begin border talks

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Special representatives of India and China yesterday began two-day talks that will focus on devising a framework for a final settlement of their decades-old boundary dispute.

While the Indian delegation was headed by National Security Adviser MK Narayanan at the 13th round of boundary talks, the Chinese delegation was led by Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Dai Bingguo.

Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, a former ambassador to Beijing, and officials of the external affairs ministry and the prime minister's office (PMO) were also part of the Indian delegation.

Besides Dai, the Chinese delegation had Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and officials of the defence ministry and department of boundary and ocean affairs.

The 13th rounds of talks are being held against the backdrop of China's renewed assertions over Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeastern state that is claimed in entirety by both countries.

The two special representatives are likely to focus on bridging the gap in the interpretation of political parameters and guiding principles finalised during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to India in 2005.



Indian youths with peace messages painted on their faces, take part in a rally to mark Hiroshima Day in Mumbai on August 6 to mourn victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945.

Nepali Maoists insist on Army's future before drafting constitution

ANI, Kathmandu

CPN (Maoist) Chairman and former Prime Minister Prachanda on Friday said that the new Constitution cannot be drafted if President Dr Ram Baran Yadav's move to reinstate Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) General Rookmangud Katawal was not discussed in the parliament.

Talking to reporters here, Prachanda claimed the new Constitution cannot be drafted unless the issue was not discussed as they were vital for the national sovereignty.

Prachanda opined that civilian supremacy would be established in the country once the proposal is tabled in the parliament and his party would accept any kind of decision taken by the parliament.

On Thursday, the meeting of the High Level Political Mechanism taskforce, which comprises leaders from the UML, the Nepali Congress and the Maoists, had ended inconclusively after failing to reach an amicable agreement on the issues raised by the Maoists. According to Nepalnews, the ruling parties and the Maoists remained adamant on their respective positions.

No arms deal with India, says Nepali defence minister

ANI, Kathmandu

Nepal Defence Minister Bidhya Bhandari who returned to Kathmandu from New Delhi refuted any agreement with the Indian government regarding the import of arms.

"There is no agreement on arms. But the country can import arms from neighbouring countries whenever there is a need," she told reporters upon her arrival at the Tribhuvan International Airport here on Thursday.

She said her visit was primarily for smoothing the relations between the two countries in the arms sector.

Lankan rebels say new leader arrested

AP, Colombo

Sri Lankan authorities questioned the new leader of the Tamil Tiger rebels Friday after he was arrested in Southeast Asia and flown to this island nation.

Selvarasa Pathmanathan, the insurgent group's former chief arms smuggler, assumed the leadership of the Tamil Tigers after government forces routed the rebels in May in northern Sri Lanka and killed their revered leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Pathmanathan was believed to be based in Southeast Asia in recent years and was one of the few rebel leaders to survive the government

offensive that demolished the separatists' shadow state in northern Sri Lanka and ended the quarter-century civil war.

But as Pathmanathan, known by his nom de guerre KP, worked to revive the Tamil Tigers, the government pushed for his arrest.

The rebels said in a statement that Pathmanathan was arrested Wednesday near a hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A pro-rebel Web site said Pathmanathan had gone to the hotel to meet relatives of the group's slain political leader, Balasingham Nadesan. He left the room to answer a phone call, but did not return, it said.

Malaysian officials declined to comment.



Activists from India's Leftist parties including Communist Party of India-Marxist, Communist Party of India (CPI) shout anti-government slogans during a rally near Parliament House in New Delhi yesterday against food price hikes.

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