

Myanmar faces sanctions over Suu Kyi verdict

AFP, Brussels

Criticism poured in for Myanmar yesterday over the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi as the EU promised more sanctions and one of its key regional partners called for the democracy icon's immediate release.

After the authorities ordered the Nobel laureate to remain under house arrest for a further 18 months following a trial in Yangon, protesters rallied outside Myanmar's diplomatic missions to denounce the outcome.

With the sentence effectively ruling out any possibility of the 64-year-old standing in polls next year, there were immediate calls for a hardening of sanctions against the military rulers who prevented Suu Kyi from taking power after her party won elections in 1990.

"The EU will respond with additional targeted measures against those responsible for the verdict," the European Union's Swedish presidency said in a statement on behalf of the 27-nation bloc.

President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso said Suu Kyi's continued detention is "unjustified and unacceptable on all accounts."

An EU source said a "written procedure" had been launched to beef up the sanctions which will be able to come into force on Friday, as long as there is no

opposition from the bloc's members.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said any new EU sanctions had to hit the junta where it hurt.

The new measures "must in particular target the resources that they directly profit from, in the wood and ruby sector," said a statement from his office.

Gordon Brown, prime minister of the former colonial power Britain, said he was "saddened and angry" at the verdict in the "sham trial".

Brown said her "monstrous" prosecution, designed to stop her from taking part in next year's planned elections, meant the poll would have no legitimacy.

The British premier said it was time an arms embargo was slapped on the junta by the UN Security Council, whose permanent members include Myanmar's traditional ally China.

Criticism was more muted closer to home but Malaysia's foreign minister said Suu Kyi should be released immediately and called for an urgent meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) regional bloc.

"We were hoping that the junta will release her unconditionally and will hold an election to enable Suu Kyi and other political detainees to participate in that election," Anifah Aman told AFP.

Fellow Asean member Indonesia also expressed

concern, with the foreign ministry saying it was "very disappointed" at the verdict.

Asean had in July rejected US calls to expel Myanmar from the group and opposed sanctions on Myanmar.

Australia also called for tougher sanctions, expressing "dismay" at the conviction and urging the junta to release Suu Kyi in the interests of national reconciliation.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said the verdict was a "new low" for the military regime in Myanmar.

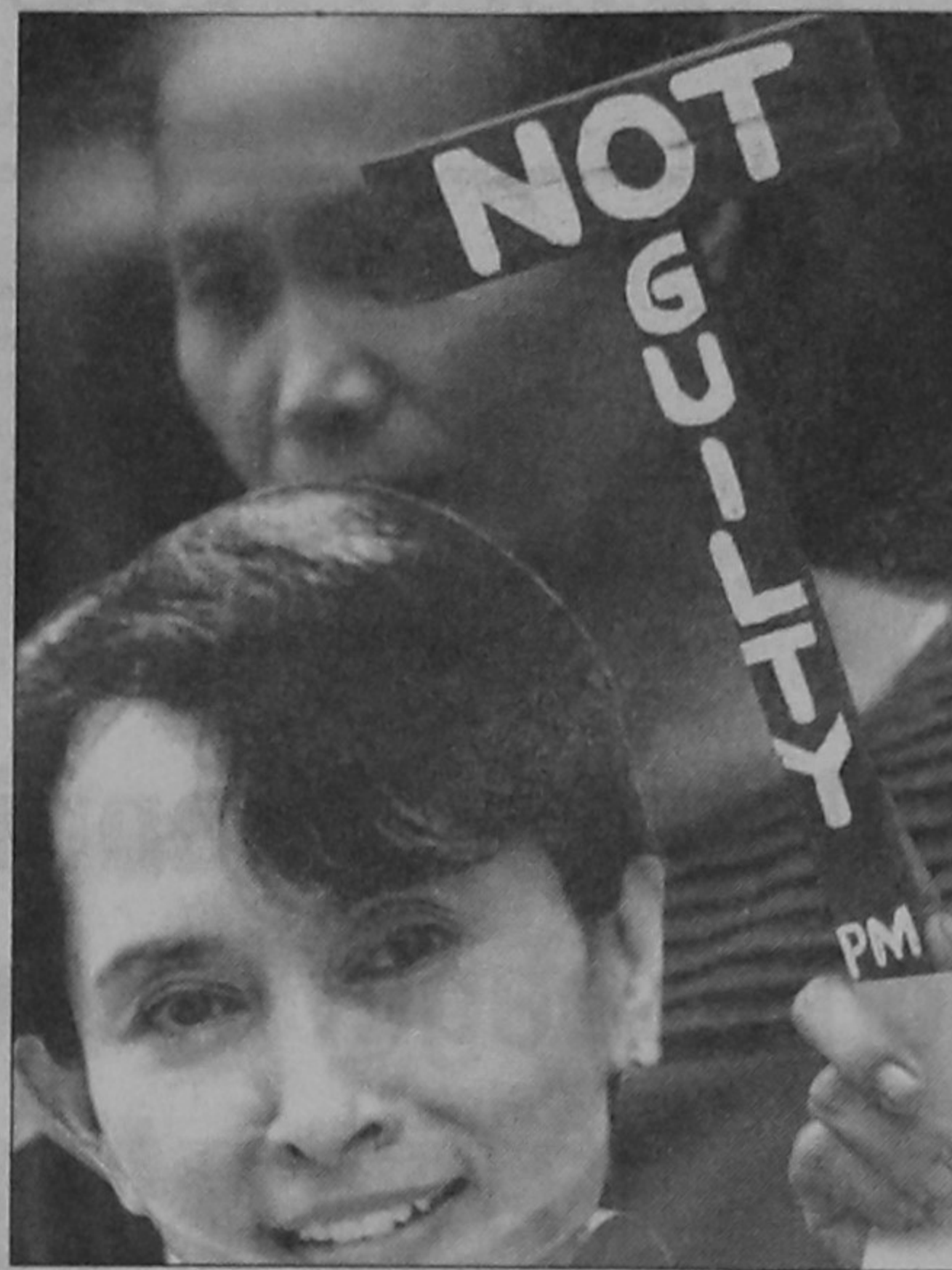
"The Australian government is convinced that Aung San Suu Kyi was tried on spurious charges and not granted a fair hearing," he said, adding that sanctions will continue "until we see genuine political change."

In Japan, about 100 activists protested outside Myanmar's embassy.

The demonstrators, many of them refugees from Myanmar, waved portraits of the Nobel laureate and challenged the ambassador to explain the ruling.

Amnesty International meanwhile issued a statement calling the verdict "shameful".

"Her arrest and trial and now this guilty verdict are nothing more than legal and political theatre," said Irene Khan, secretary general of the London-based human rights organisation.



Activists display a portrait of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi during a protest in front of the Myanmar embassy in Manila yesterday.

News in Brief

'This Is It': Jackson film out in Oct

AFP, Los Angeles

Fans saddened by Michael Jackson's sudden death on June 25 before a long-awaited return to the stage may find comfort in a film showing his final rehearsals to be released at the end of October.

"This Is It," to be released worldwide starting on October 30, will be drawn from hundreds of hours of backstage footage of Jackson rehearsing and feature interviews with some of his closest friends and creative collaborators, Sony studios announced Monday.

Sweden's Princess to marry

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's Princess Madeleine, the youngest child of King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia, is engaged to marry her boyfriend, the Swedish royal palace said on Tuesday.

"Today, Tuesday 11 August 2009, the engagement between Her Royal Highness Princess Madeleine and Mr. Jonas Bergstrom was announced," the palace said in a short statement. The palace announced the nuptials after the king received approval from the Swedish government, according to procedures set out in the constitution.

Mexican drug violence kills 18

AFP, Ciudad Juarez

Eighteen people have been killed in execution-style murders in Mexico since Sunday, in violence blamed on bloody feuds between rival drug cartels, officials said.

The grisly discoveries came as US President Barack Obama visited Mexico on Monday, tracing a spotlight on the country's war against drug gangs transporting cocaine from Andean nations to the United States, the world's largest consumer.

Amnesty slams Suu Kyi conviction as 'shameful'

HRW blasts abuse of power

AFP, London/ New York

Amnesty International condemned the conviction of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi on Tuesday as "shameful" political theatre and called for her immediate and unconditional release.

"Her arrest and trial and now this guilty verdict are nothing more than legal and political theatre," said Irene Khan, secretary general of the London-based human rights organisation.

Human Rights Watch yesterday also blasted the conviction of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi as a "reprehensible abuse of power" by the junta and

urged regional allies to press for her release.

"This trial was a farce, a brutal distortion of the legal process," said Brad Adams, Asia director of the New York-based rights group.

"By silencing prominent opponents through bogus trials, the generals are clearly showing why the elections they have been touting for next year won't bring change."

In a statement, Amnesty described the court's decision to convict the Nobel laureate for breaching the terms of her house arrest, following an incident in which a US man swam to her lakeside residence in May, as "shameful".

'The Lady' still threatens Myanmar junta

AFP, Bangkok

It was meant to be a rare flash of mercy from Myanmar's iron-fisted ruling junta. But Aung San Suu Kyi seemed unimpressed.

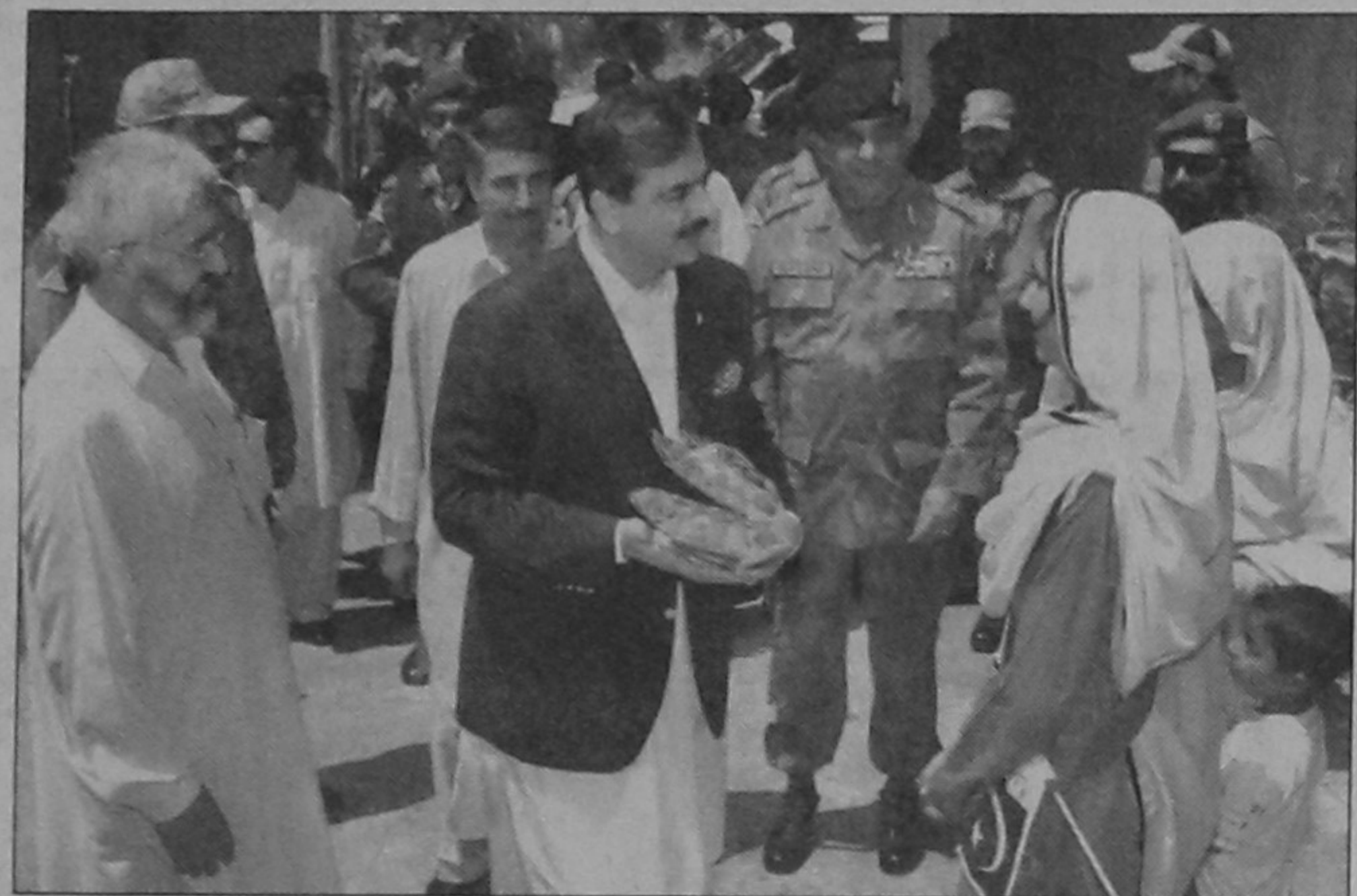
"Thank you for the verdict," the 64-year-old said sarcastically after a minister made a surprise entrance to the courtroom to announce that a three-year sentence of hard labour had been commuted to 18 months house arrest.

Wearing an elegant pink and grey longyi -- the country's traditional dress -- the Nobel peace laureate also refused to stand up as others in the courtroom at the notorious Insein Prison did when Home Affairs Minister Maung Oo entered.

Her reaction at Tuesday's ruling may have been grim faced but it was still in keeping with her status as the most powerful symbol of peaceful resistance in a nation ruled with an iron fist.

And the junta's determination to keep her detained showed that the woman known here as "The Lady" remains their biggest threat, despite recent questions over her relevance as a new generation of dissidents emerges.

"The only person that matters is Aung San Suu Kyi; that's why they are so determined to lock her up," said Zarni, a research fellow on Myanmar at the London School of Economics, who goes by one name.



Handout photograph shows Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (C) chatting with a student upon his arrival at a girls' school as Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani (3rd R) looks on in Mingora the capital of troubled Swat Valley on Monday.

Pakistan holds up start of UN nuke talks

AFP, Geneva

Pakistan on Monday held up the resumption of nuclear arms control negotiations at the UN Conference on Disarmament as it asked to reopen a work plan already agreed on by the main nuclear powers.

The Pakistan delegation, which on Friday asked for more time to consult with Islamabad, on Monday said it wanted fresh discussions on procedural questions in a draft text detailing the various heads of negotiating groups and the timetable for the talks.

"I was told by the Pakistan (delegation) that they have received instructions and the instructions are to reopen the text that I

thought we had agreed on," said Caroline Millar, the Australian chairwoman of the conference.

"I'm concerned that the compromise that we have may be put in jeopardy," she added.

Disarmament negotiations have been stalled since 1996 but a thaw in US-Russia relations following Barack Obama's arrival in the White House, and a renewed superpower pledge to back the separate Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, generated fresh momentum.

In May, the nuclear powers agreed to restart talks by agreeing on a work plan for 2009, which would cover the issue of full nuclear disarmament, a ban on fissile material and the arms race in outer space.

50m Asian women at risk of HIV infection

AFP, Nusa Dua

More than 1.5 million women living with HIV in Asia were infected by their husbands or boyfriends and 50 million more are at risk of infection, according to a report released yesterday.

The "HIV Transmission in Intimate Partner Relationships in Asia" report by UNAIDS said the women at risk are either married or in long-term relationships with men who engage in "high-risk sexual behaviours."

"That is, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, the clients of sex workers," UNAIDS regional director Prasada Rao said.

"(It's) a problem of great magnitude that the countries have largely ignored (and) a challenge that we may no longer ignore," Rao told reporters on the sidelines of the ninth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP), which is being held on the Indonesian resort island of Bali.

Women accounted for 35 percent of all adult HIV infections in Asia in 2008, up from 17 percent in 1990, according to the report.

In Cambodia, India and Thailand, the largest number of new HIV infections occur among married women and in Indonesia the virus is now spreading to long-term partners and sex workers, it added.

"The facts speak for themselves. It is estimated that more than 90 percent of the 1.7 million women living with HIV in Asia became infected (by) husbands and partners while in long-term relationships," Rao said.

"These women are often perceived as low risk... women who have not been adequately covered in our national responses."

The Bali congress, which runs until Thursday, covers topics ranging from HIV risks among transgenders and migrant workers to biomolecular advances in HIV treatment and the impact of the financial crisis on those with HIV/AIDS.



Indian schoolchildren wearing protective masks play outside a school in Bangalore yesterday. The number of people to die from swine flu in India rose to eight, health officials said, as the government called for calm and people flocked to public hospitals for tests.

Indian swine flu toll keeps on rising

ANI, Pune

A 13-year-old schoolgirl died of swine flu yesterday at the Sassoon General Hospital in Pune, taking the all India swine flu death toll to eight.

Shruti Gawade, a student of the Ahilyadevi School, was the fifth Pune victim of the deadly swine flu virus in Pune.

According to Dr Pandurang Pawar, Medical Superintendent of the Sassoon General Hospital, Shruti succumbed to the virus at around 1.30 am on Tuesday.

Shruti, a resident of Pune's Narayan Peth area, had tested positive last Saturday.

She was admitted to the Sassoon General Hospital on Sunday in critical condition.

The girl had been kept on ventilator since August 7 when she was brought there after being referred from a private hospital in critical condition.

Her death in the Sassoon General Hospital came barely hours after a 35-year-old chemist Sanjay Tilekar died here last night.

On Monday, a 35-year-old ayurvedic doctor and a four-year-old boy had also died of swine flu in Pune and Chennai respectively.

So far, a total of 333 people have been affected by the virus in Maharashtra.



Pedestrians waded through a flooded street after heavy monsoon rain in Lahore yesterday. Last month at least 26 people, mostly women and children, were killed and hundreds injured after the first torrential rains of the monsoon lashed Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi.

Three US soldiers killed in Afghanistan

AFP, AP, Kabul

Three US soldiers and 12 militants were killed in attacks in Afghanistan, the Nato force announced yesterday, as troops pushed on with offensives to clear out insurgent strongholds ahead of August 20 elections.

The three died on Saturday, Sunday and Monday after separate attacks in southern Afghanistan, the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) said, confirming it had not already announced the deaths.

Insurgents killed a Nato soldier during a firefight in eastern Afghanistan, bringing the death toll among foreign troops this month to at least 24, officials said Tuesday.

Clashes and airstrikes in the south killed a dozen Taliban fighters, officials said.

Nato said the soldier was killed after insurgents attacked Monday. A Nato statement gave no further details, but the US command said the soldier was not American.

Vacancy Announcement

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