



Pakistani security officials examine the site after a bomb blast on the outskirts of Quetta on Wednesday. At least two passers-by were killed and four others injured when an improvised explosive device planted on a motorbike went off on the outskirts of Quetta, the capital of the oil and gas rich Baluchistan province.

Pak troops clash with Mehsud men: 15 die

AFP, Peshawar

Fighting between pro-Pakistan government forces and militants affiliated to Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud has killed at least 15 people, officials said yesterday.

Mehsud's Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan movement appears to have been thrown in turmoil following his presumed death in a US drone attack and analysts say Pakistan must now bolster efforts to eliminate militants in tribal strongholds.

Seven people died in gunfights on Wednesday between Taliban militants and militiamen loyal to a pro-government tribal warlord in the remote South Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, security officials said.

The fighting broke out when militants loyal to Mehsud, whom US and Pakistani officials believe was killed in a US missile

attack last week, attacked followers of Turkistan Bitani in Sur Ghar village.

"I can confirm the deaths of seven people in clashes between Taliban and Turkistan Bitani's group," a security official based in the area told AFP.

Another security official in the town of Dera Ismail Khan also said seven died in the gunbattles, but was unable to confirm reports that 20 to 25 people had been killed.

Intelligence officials in the region said Mehsud's men attacked Sur Ghar, burnt 12 houses and killed seven of Bitani's fighters.

Government security forces and helicopters were scrambled to pound Mehsud's men, but there were no reports about any casualties, they said.

In a counter-attack, Bitani's men, including commander Ismatullah Shaheen, an intelligence official told AFP.

Taliban and al-Qaeda rebels are believed to have fled Afghanistan after the 2001 US-led invasion, carving out bolt-holes and training camps in the remote mountains of Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal belt.

Pakistani helicopters and security forces killed eight militants in Kurram tribal district on Thursday, another security official told AFP.

The strikes took place at Spurkot village, located between Kurram and Orakzai, another district in Pakistan's tribal badlands.

"Eight militants in commander Tariq's group, which is affiliated with Baitullah Mehsud, were killed in the strike," the official said.

The militants had been hiding in Spurkot after fleeing Darra Adam Khel, a tribal area between Pakistan's northwest capital Peshawar and the garrison town of Kohat, he added.

US senator set for historic meet with Myanmar junta

AFP, Yangon

A US senator plans this week to become the first top American official to meet Myanmar's junta chief, his office said yesterday, days after the regime extended the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The talks between Democrat Jim Webb, who is close to US President Barack Obama, and military strongman Than Shwe come after Tuesday's conviction of Suu Kyi and an American man who swam to her lakeside house.

"Later this week, US Senator Jim Webb is scheduled to meet with leaders at the highest levels of the national government in Burma (Myanmar), including Senior General Than Shwe," a statement from Webb's office said.

Myanmar exile groups launch new 'movement'

AFP, Jakarta

Myanmar's government-in-exile and other opposition groups formed a new movement for democracy Thursday during a meeting in Indonesia, despite efforts by the junta to silence them.

The so-called Movement for Democracy and Rights of Ethnic Nationalities launched its "Proposal for National Reconciliation" at the end of talks in the Indonesian capital Jakarta.

The movement is made up of the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma plus six pro-democracy groups, but does not include the main National League for Democracy (NLD) opposition party.

The NLD is headed by Nobel laureate and democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi, who won a landslide election victory in 1990 which the junta has never recognised.

Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 14 years since then, and was sentenced to another

18 months' confinement on Wednesday in a major blow to her supporters ahead of fresh elections set for next year.

Government-in-exile prime minister Sein Win, the first cousin of the NLD leader, said reconciliation would fail unless Suu Kyi was released and allowed to resume her political activities.

"We have produced a detailed proposal for a democratic, federal union of Burma and we will continue to work in the interests of all the people of Burma. That is our job," he said, using the old name for the country.

"Without her release and that of all other political prisoners, the process of national reconciliation cannot commence nor can the planned 2010 elections be credible."

The movement's declaration, backed by former and exiled NLD members in the exiled government, concedes the military an "important political role" as a "stakeholder" in the country's transition to democracy.

Delhi tightens security for Independence Day

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Snipers, X-ray machines and choppers are part of tight security measures taken across Delhi ahead of Independence Day Aug 15. The historic Red Fort, where Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will unfurl the tricolour, has virtually turned into a security citadel.

Though senior police officials claim there is no specific terror threat, they are leaving no stone unturned to ensure 'extraordinary' security in and around the capital. Delhi Police have been busy coordinating with the police forces of the adjoining states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

According to police officials, over 5,000 security personnel would be part of the security arrangements.

The security agencies have decided to deploy snipers, metal detectors, X-ray machines, sniffer dogs, radio frequency jammers and CCTVs at all public places. Specialised units drawn from several wings of Delhi Police will be on the alert to thwart any terror attacks.

Contingency plans are in place should a terrorist strike happen. Designated safe houses for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other VIPs have been earmarked in case there is an emergency.

Besides, suitable air defence measures have been taken to counter possible threats.



Kashmiri college girls participate in a rehearsal for an Independence Day parade at Bakshi stadium in Srinagar yesterday. India has stepped up security ahead of Independence Day, amid fears of fresh attacks by militant groups.

Little house help tortured

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and extremely stressed out by the situation and was not able to answer all our questions."

The girl, however, said that her employers -- both husband and wife -- keep her more or less confined in the house. She was brought to work for them six years ago and since then has not been allowed to go to her village home. They beat her regularly, even for small mistakes in her work.

On Monday last week the doctor forcefully dipped her face in hot water for some mistake she made while working, and also they did not give her any food to eat for an entire day, the girl told the police.

Police said the girl appeared very hungry and also expressed reluctance to go back to her parents' house as her mother is not alive, and her stepmother doesn't want her there. She told the officer-in-charge of the police station that she wished to die.

When contacted on the phone, Dr Anwar refused to comment on allegations that he had sexually assaulted the minor girl. However, he said that

no one could do anything to him as he has 'ample influence over all police and journalists'."

A labourer first came to know of the minor girl's woes while working at Fakirapool and Rajarbagh areas.

The worker said, "I used to hear a girl crying whenever I came to this building to work. When I managed to meet her one day, she told me that her employers didn't allow her to talk to anyone and kept her confined in the house all the time. She also told me he (the doctor) often physically touched her body parts and did 'bad things' to her, which she couldn't explain. The maid had also said that the doctor beat her up if she didn't allow him to do those things to her."

Hospital officials said Dr Anwar has been on leave since last week. His residence on the hospital premises was also locked up.

Meanwhile, sources at the police hospital said that there are various allegations against this doctor all of which are under the investigation of the Police Intelligence Overseer (PIO) and Security Cell of the

police department.

The physician is alleged to have stolen medicine and also meat, fish and other food items allocated for the patients in the hospital.

The Security Cell is also investigating allegations about Dr Anwar's wife Nargis Akhter's involvement with the banned Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) outfit and the doctor's involvement in illegal activities on hospital premises which include phensidi intake and other anti-social activities on the terrace of the hospital.

The OC of the Paltan police station also said, "We are ready to accept a case against the doctor but her grandfather refused to file any case."

The victim's maternal grandfather Siddique, who came to the city after learning of the situation, said, "I am a poor man, I don't have the money needed to get a lawyer to run a case for my unfortunate granddaughter."

A general diary was filed by the Paltan Police on August 11 in this regard.

India's water use 'unsustainable'

BBC ONLINE

Parts of India are on track for severe water shortages, according to results from NASA's gravity satellites.

The Grace mission discovered that in the country's north-west - including Delhi - the water table is falling by about 4cm (1.6 inches) per year.

Writing in the journal Nature, they say rainfall has not changed, and water use is too high, mainly for farming.

The finding is published two days after an Indian government report warning of a potential water crisis.

That report noted that access to water was one of the main factors governing the pace of development in the world's second most populous nation.

About a quarter of India is experiencing drought condi-

tions, as the monsoon rains have been weaker and later than usual.

But weather and climatic factors are not responsible for water depletion in the north-western states of Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, according to the NASA study.

"We looked at the rainfall record and during this decade, it's relatively steady - there have been some up and down years but generally there's no drought situation, there's no major trend in rainfall," said Matt Rodell, a hydrologist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre near Washington DC.

"So naturally we would expect the groundwater level to stay where it is unless there is an excessive stress due to people pumping too much water, which is what we believe is happening."



Kashmiri government employees react as Indian police spray water cannon during a protest in Srinagar on Wednesday. The demonstrators, numbering in the hundreds, took to the streets to demand a pay hike.

Climate cuts mountains down to size

AFP, Paris

Climate, and not the upward thrust of Earth's clashing tectonic plates, is the main factor limiting the height of mountains across the globe, according to a study published yesterday.

The forbidding peaks of Mount Everest and K2, in other words, might have been even higher were it not for what scientists call the "buzzsaw" effect of glaciers that form when temperatures stay below a certain threshold.

"Glaciers are very effective at destroying mountains," said David Engstrom, a researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark and lead author of the study.

"Even if you look at the most active mountain ranges, you see that once plate tectonics have pushed them across the snowline altitude, they do not get much higher," he told AFP by phone.

The study, published in the British journal Nature, showed that peaks are generally prevented from thrusting more than 1,500 meters (5,000 feet) above the line where snow permanently forms.

The findings also explain why none of the world's tallest mountains are found anywhere near the North or South Poles.

"The reason is simply that the snowline is higher at lower latitudes than at higher latitudes," Engstrom said.

At the equator, glaciers do not accumulate before an elevation of 5,000 metres (16,400 feet). In Canada and Norway, or Chile and New Zealand, by contrast, the snowline altitude is as low as 1,000 metres (3,300 feet), he said.

British diplomat fails to garner Sharif's support for Musharraf

ANI, Lahore

Talks between senior British diplomat Mark Lyall Grant, who is trying to garner the support of Pakistani leaders to prevent former President General Pervez Musharraf from being tried for high treason, and Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif have failed to yield the desired results.

According to sources, the meeting did not result in any 'fruitful' outcome over the issue of a possible trial of Musharraf.

Sources said that the PML-N chief told Grant that since the Supreme Court had put the ball in parliament's court, the party wanted the government to take further action on the issue.

US may arm Afghan air corps with drones

AFP, Washington

The US military is looking at eventually equipping Afghanistan's air corps with unmanned aircraft for surveillance missions, a general said on Wednesday.

"Right now, UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) are not part of that capability that we are envisioning for them," said US Brigadier General Walter Givhan, who is helping Kabul revive its air force.

No decision on freeing Lockerbie bomber

AP, Edinburgh

Two British broadcasters reported yesterday that Lockerbie bomber Abdelbaset Ali al-Megrahi would likely be freed from prison on compassionate grounds, but Scotland's government denied any such decision had been made.

Officials dismissed the reports by Sky News and BBC television as speculation, and said Scotland's justice minister had yet to review all case information before deciding whether al-Megrahi should be released from a Scottish prison. The former Libyan secret service agent is terminally ill with cancer.

Neither Sky News nor BBC cited sources for their reports. "The decision will be made next week," Scottish Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill told Scottish Television late Wednesday.

Al-Megrahi is serving a life sentence for the bombing of Pan Am 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in December 1988. The attack killed 270 people, most of them Americans.

His legal team has sought his release on compassionate grounds in the past, and it has made a separate request that he be allowed to serve the rest of his sentence in a Libyan jail.

The BBC said al-Megrahi's release was influenced by the hope that he could be back on Libyan soil in time for Ramadan next week.

Ministry to sue Matin

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of corruption committed by the former adviser and the eight government officials who favoured Ishaque Brothers for awarding the deal, breaching government rules.

The report recommended realisation of Tk 9 crore from the former adviser and two other government officials who allegedly inflicted the amount of loss on the government by not awarding the deal to the lowest bidder.

"As the investigation team got clear evidence of their involvement in the irregularities, the ministry will sure take measures to file cases against them," the shipping minister said.

The ministry will also take departmental actions against the eight accused government officials including a member of the Privatisation Board, and the chairman of Chittagong Sea Port Authority, added Shahjahan Khan.

The former influential adviser to the immediate past caretaker government, MA Matin, however rejected outright all allegations against him.

He also claimed that he rather saved the government money by awarding the job to the 'lowest bidder'.

The High Court on Tuesday however declined to hear an anticipatory bail petition filed by MA Matin seeking a court order against any attempt to arrest or harass him. He filed the petition on Monday following recommendations of the parliamentary standing committee

on shipping for taking legal steps against him and the eight government officials.

The sub-committee revealing its 200-page report yesterday, claimed that Matin forced the authorities concerned to invite a second tender in an effort to disqualify Everest Enterprise which had been selected as the lowest responsive bidder in the first tender.

It also said the former adviser violated the constitution by appointing the terminal operator for Chittagong Sea Port, as he did not have the authority to do so.

Revealing the probe report to media in the Parliament Media Centre, chairman of the standing committee, Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury said they already submitted the sub-committee report to the shipping ministry for taking actions against the accused. The standing committee also sent a copy of the report to the Anti-corruption Commission for a deeper probe into the matter, he added.

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE ACCUSED

The seven-point recommendations made by the parliamentary sub-committee for investigating the alleged corruption includes scrapping of the second tender which was invited in November 2008; invitation of a fresh tender in line with Public Procurement Rules 2008 to appoint a new terminal operator for Chittagong Sea Port as early as possible; taking actions against Ishaque Brothers and its

owner; filing of cases against former shipping adviser MA Matin, filing of cases and taking departmental actions against former shipping secretary also incumbent Member of the Privatisation Board Sheikh AK Motahar Hossain, and former senior assistant secretary Sharif Mohammad Masud who is currently working at the agriculture ministry, and realisation of Tk 9 crore from the above three; filing of cases and taking departmental actions against Abdul Matin who is presently working at the industries ministry, Chairman of Chittagong Sea Port Authority (CPA) Commodore RU Ahmed, CPA Member (Finance) Harun Mia, CPA Director (Transport) Ahsanul Kabir, and DTIM (ICD) of CPA Golam Sarwar.

It also recommended necessary steps against CPA Deputy Traffic Manager (Administration) KM Moazzem Hossain in light of verdicts in the corruption cases against him, and keeping a watchful eye on him while not giving him any important responsibility; and taking necessary steps to continue normal activities of the port.

The parliamentary standing committee on shipping formed the four-member sub-committee on May 27 to investigate the allegations against Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin, who had also been the home adviser and chief of the now defunct corruption-busting national coordination committee formed by the immediate past caretaker government.

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