



Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (C) waves during the flag hoisting ceremony in Islamabad yesterday to mark the country's 62nd Independence Day. Gilani Friday vowed to win the war against terrorism as Pakistan celebrated its 62nd anniversary of independence with prayers and a minute of silence.

Terrorism is biggest threat to Pakistan: Gilani

Islamabad calls on militants to surrender

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, AP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Friday termed terrorism as the biggest threat to the country and said his government was committed to eliminate this menace through "determination and courage".

"I want to reiterate that we are not scared of the terrorists. We will eliminate their oppression and barbarity through our determination and courage," Gilani said in Islamabad at the flag hoisting ceremony on Pakistan's 63rd Independence Day, the APP news agency reported.

He said the country and the people were confronting a serious challenge posed by terrorists, and defended the military offensive against the militants in Swat and Malakand divisions.

"We opted for peaceful means to

resolve this issue. But we had to take a difficult and inevitable decision to initiate military action in the best national interest when our peace efforts and patience were construed as our weakness..."

"The entire nation has stood up against these elements and we would defeat their evil designs to make this country secure and peaceful."

Earlier Pakistan on Friday urged Islamist militants recovering from the apparent slaying of their leader to surrender, promising that those who did would be treated fairly.

The call could be a sign the government is seeking to exploit any potential weaknesses in the militant movement since Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud was reportedly killed in a CIA missile strike on Aug. 5. US and Pakistani officials believe he is dead, though his followers contend he is still

alive. "Say goodbye to terrorism and start a new life," Interior Minister Rehman Malik appealed to the militants in televised comments to the media. "This is a new day."

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani said the country is currently fighting against extremism and terrorism and "this is not a fight based on religion, ethnicity, sub-nationalism, or provincialism".

He said that a terrorist has no caste, creed or religion.

"He (Terrorist) respects no boundaries and has no nationality. Extremists are those who have blinded themselves in a self righteous mode and are not amenable to reason and logic," Kayani said at the Independence Day parade at the Military Academy in Kakul, a hill town in North West Frontier Province.

Rajasthan BJP MLAs bat for Raje

Stage sit-in at Advani residence

PTI, New Delhi

Defiant supporters of Vasundhara Raje on Friday sought to mount pressure on the BJP high command against the move to remove her from the post of Leader of the Opposition in Rajasthan, but were snubbed by senior party leader LK Advani who refused to meet them.

Over 50 MLAs, loyal to Raje, who has been asked to step down from the post by the party and RSS, met BJP president Rajnath Singh, who is believed to have stuck to his stand that she should make way for someone else following the party's defeat in the assembly elections in the state last year and the Lok Sabha polls this year.

Later, they went to the residence of Advani, in whose camp Raje is believed to be, for an audience. They staged a sit-in as he refused to meet them. Rajnath and Advani were in a meeting at the time of the sit-in.

Sources close to Advani said there was no meeting scheduled between him and the MLAs.

Meanwhile, the rebel MLAs maintained they had the right to decide who their leader should be.

"We, 62 MLAs from Rajasthan, have come to tell the Central leadership that our leader is and will continue to be Vasundhara Raje. We want to warn them that without her the people of Rajasthan and the party unit will be nothing. We do not want a change in the leadership," BJP chief whip in Rajasthan assembly, Rajendra Singh Rathore, said.

Security beefed up along border for Indian I-Day

ANI, Srinagar/Agartala/Guwahati/Patna/New Delhi

Authorities along border areas have taken extra precautions ahead of the Independence Day to thwart any attempts to disrupt the celebrations.

In Srinagar, numerous police and paramilitary personnel are keeping strict vigilance over the city.

Going by the increase in number of infiltration attempts in the recent past, extra care is being taken to keep a check on such militant activities as well.

Security measures have been tightened in and around the Bakshi Stadium in the city, where the main I-Day celebrations will be held tomorrow.

"There is militancy in this region and going by the reports which are coming in, we have made all the necessary arrangements," said Kuldeep Khoda, Director General of Police (DGP), Jammu and Kashmir Police.

Meanwhile, the police and the paramilitary forces are also placed on a high alert in Tripura.

Security has been beefed up in wake of

boycott call given by various militant organisations on the Independence Day.

Paramilitary forces are conducting search operations in the interior parts of the states and are checking all vehicles and passengers at different locations including the national highway.

The Border Security Force (BSF) has intensified its vigil across the 856 kilometres long porous India-Bangladesh border to stop any possible trans-border movement.

"We also have coordination with the BSE. Security has been beefed up at the border and ambushes are being held more frequently," said SS Chaturvedi, Inspector General of Police (IGP).

In Assam, night running of all trains has been suspended for three days following the threat of extremists targeting passenger trains.

According to railway sources, the security measures along the tracks and railway stations have also been beefed up.

In Bihar, a high-alert has been sounded in the wake of the Maoists call to boycott Independence Day celebrations.



Indian security personnel make an inspection yesterday from above at the Red Fort on the eve of India's 62nd Independence Day celebration during which Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will deliver his speech at the fort in New Delhi. India has stepped up security ahead of its Independence Day, amid fears of fresh attacks by militant groups.



Indian women wear surgical masks to prevent infection from swine flu (H1N1 virus) as they queue up at the Lord Krishna temple to pray during the 'Janmashtami' Festival in New Delhi yesterday. The festival is the celebration of the birth of the Hindu god Lord Krishna.

Karzai leading Afghan presidential race

AP, Kabul

A new poll released yesterday shows President Hamid Karzai has a commanding lead over other candidates contesting next week's Afghan presidential election, but his main challenger has dramatically narrowed the gap.

Some 44 percent of those interviewed in July said they plan to vote for Karzai in Thursday's election, a rise of 13 percentage points compared to a poll conducted in May.

If no candidate wins 50 percent of the vote, the top two finishers will face off in a run-off. That could lead to a coalition uniting around a single, more powerful candidate to try to defeat Karzai.

Karzai's main challenger, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, has surged in popularity, the poll showed, with 26 percent of respondents saying they would vote for him. In the May poll only 7 percent supported him.

The poll, based on face-to-face interviews with 2,400 people, was conducted between July 16-26 and funded by the International Republican Institute, a non-governmental organization that receives funding from USAID, the US government aid arm. The poll, which sought to strike a representative sample along ethnic and gender lines, had a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Some 56 percent believe Karzai has done a good job in leading the nation as it faces growing Taliban insurgency and uncertainty about its future.

Money key stumbling block at UN climate talks

AFP, Paris

Developing countries will need billions to curb carbon pollution and cope with its consequences, and where that money will come from has emerged as a major stumbling block as another round of UN climate talks winds down in Bonn.

The five-day negotiating session ends Friday, with many participants expressing frustration at the lack of progress only four months ahead of the Copenhagen climate conference slated to deliver a planet-saving global climate treaty.

The best that can be expected from the December meeting, say some, is an "interim agreement" that lays out the basic architecture of a post-Kyoto accord, with hard numbers to be filled over the course of 2010.

The provisions of the Kyoto Protocol run out in 2012.

Efforts this week to whittle down an unwieldy 200-page document into a draft

treaty have been stymied by a deep rift between rich nations and poor.

Disagreement over how deeply wealthy economies must slash their greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, and whether commitments by developing nations should be binding, have helped deadlock the process.

The more than 180 nations engaged in talks cannot even agree on a procedure for drafting the text.

"There really isn't a very strong climate of confidence," said France's climate ambassador, Brice Lalonde.

But the most critical point of blockage today, say many participants, is money.

"The fact that there are no proposals for financing on the table is preventing progress," said Jose Romero, a negotiator from Switzerland. "This is the big issue."

The UN has estimated that, by 2020, the cost of mitigating and adapting to climate change will rise to 200 billion dollars and 100 billion dollars per year.

News in Brief

22 die in Panama bus-truck collision

AFP, Panama City

At least 22 people were killed and 10 more injured late Thursday when a bus and truck collided head-on in the Panamanian capital, authorities said.

"This is something painful. This is something shocking. Twenty-two people who were heading for home were killed as a result of this accident," said chief of civil protection services Arturo Alvarado.

Man caught hiding wife's body in wall

AFP, Sydney

A Chinese-born man whose estranged wife was reported missing to police was found trying to hide her body inside the wall of a house in Australia's north-east, officers said Friday.

Jiagen Pan, 43, was charged with murder after detectives investigating the disappearance of his wife discovered him trying to hide her body in the wall, Brisbane city police said. Wife Linjin Cui, 32, was also from China, and had been living in a different house to Pan while they divorced, police said.

Pak parties differ over charging Musharraf

ANI, Islamabad

Political parties in Pakistan have no consensus among them over the trial of former president General Pervez Musharraf.

While the Awami National Party (ANP) has supported charges against Musharraf, the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) has clarified that it would not support any legal action against the former general.

Interacting with media persons here, ANP chief Asfandiyar Wali Khan said

Musharraf should be tried under Article 60 of the constitution.

Khan said he was never against holding Musharraf responsible for country's present chaotic situation.

In an interview with a private television channel, PML-Q chief Shujaat Hussain said his party would never support any case filed against Musharraf.

"Those who failed to resolve the people's problems should be tried in court before Musharraf was charged for treason," The Daily Times quoted Hussain, as saying.

US slams India for failing to protect minorities

AFP, Washington

An official US commission accused ally India of failing to protect Christian and Muslim minorities from violent attacks, prompting a denial Thursday from New Delhi.

The report from the US Commission on International Religious Freedom placed India on a watch list over alleged failure to prevent a "disturbing increase in communal violence" in the majority Hindu state.

The annual report, released Wednesday, cited attacks in Orissa against Christians in 2008 and against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002.

"It is extremely disappointing that India, which has a multi-tolerance of religious communities, has done so little to protect and bring justice to its religious minorities under siege," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chairman.

Antarctic glacier 'thinning fast'

BBC ONLINE

One of the largest glaciers in Antarctica is thinning four times faster than it was 10 years ago, according to research seen by the BBC.

A study of satellite measurements of Pine Island glacier in west Antarctica reveals the surface of the ice is now dropping at a rate of up to 16m a year.

Since 1994, the glacier has lowered by as much as 90m, which has serious implications for sea-level rise.

The work by British scientists appears in Geophysical Research Letters.

The team was led by Professor Duncan Wingham of University College London (UCL).

Calculations based on the rate of melting 15 years ago had suggested the glacier would last for 600 years. But the new data points to a lifespan for the vast ice stream of only another 100 years.

The rate of loss is fastest in the centre of the glacier and the concern is that if the process continues, the glacier may break up and start to affect the ice sheet further inland.

Early humans forged tools with fire

AFP, Washington

Humans living along the southern tip of Africa some 72,000 years ago used fire to forge and shape their stone tools and weapons, said a study published Thursday by the journal Science.

The findings indicate that modern humans were capable of complex thought much earlier and in a different part of the world than previously believed, the study said.

"We show that early modern humans at 72,000 years ago, and perhaps as early as 164,000 years ago in

coastal South Africa, were using carefully controlled hearths in a complex process known as heat treatment," said study lead author Kyle Brown.

"These early modern humans commanded fire in a nuanced and sophisticated manner," said Brown, a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Town.

Until now, the widely held belief was that humans began using heat to forge tools 25,000 years ago in Europe, the researchers said.

The study bases its conclusions on pieces of silcrete, a type of stone, that were found in various states of glossi-

ness, indicating they had been treated with heat.

"Heat treatment technology begins with a genius moment -- someone discovers that heating stone makes it easier to flake," said study co-author Curtis Marean.

"This knowledge is then passed on, and in a way unique to humans, the technology is slowly ratcheted up in complexity as the control of the heating process, cooling and flaking grows in sophistication," Marean said.

"Prior to our work, heat treatment was widely regarded as first occurring in Europe at about 25,000 years ago,"

said Marean. "We push this back at least 45,000 years, and, perhaps, 139,000 years, and place it on the southern tip of Africa at Pinnacle Point."

He believes that human living in this part of Africa began migrating north at least 50,000 years ago and "penetrated into the colder glacial environment of Europe and Asia, where they encountered Neanderthals."

Their mastery of fire "provides us with a potential explanation for the rapid migration of these Africans across glacial Eurasia."



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (R) releases a dove whilst campaigning for the upcoming August 20 presidential elections in Herat yesterday.