



Indian army soldiers rescue flood-affected villagers as they were evacuated due to rising floodwaters at Motiarchar village, some 90kms from Siliguri on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

BJP battles over future

AFP, New Delhi

Crushed in general elections in May, India's opposition Hindu nationalists now seem embroiled in a bruising ideological squabble that has already resulted in the expulsion of one senior party leader.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) stunning electoral defeat at the hands of the Congress Party had triggered an intensive period of soul-searching, the fruits of which were to be discussed at a top-level strategy enclave this week.

But instead of agreeing a blueprint for the future, the gathering in the northern hill town of Shimla stunned observers with the announcement that it was expelling Jaswant Singh, a foreign minister in the last BJP-led government.

Singh's eviction on Wednesday came in the wake of a book he had written praising Pakistan's founding father Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

Jinnah is a highly controversial figure in India. The BJP and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Corps) blame him for the bloody partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Shaken by one of its own calling Jinnah a "great personality," the BJP leadership showed Singh the door, thus removing one of the party's most influential moderate voices.

The BJP defended his expulsion as unfortunate but necessary, while some observers saw the hand of the party's hardcore nationalist wing behind the move.

For Neeraj Chowdhury, syndicated columnist with the Indian Express newspaper, it reflected the "very painful transition" process churning away within the BJP since the election debacle.

Within the BJP administration that governed from 1998 to 2004, Singh was one of the three most powerful leaders with former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his hawkish deputy L.K. Advani, who is now the leader of the opposition in parliament.

Political analyst and author Rasheed Kidwai said Singh's sacking was "the BJP's attempt to return to the basics, to its hardline pro-Hindu politics," as it sought to consolidate its traditional base.

It also suggested that those in the BJP who had hoped the party might move to take the centrist ground from the ruling

Congress had lost the internal debate, Kidwai said.

Party moderates had blamed the electoral rout on the party's right wing, citing inflammatory anti-Muslim campaign speeches that they said had alienated large numbers of voters.

Hardliners responded that the BJP had drifted too far away from the militant Hinduism that originally propelled the party to prominence in the early 1990s.

BJP President Rajnath Singh indicated which side had won the day when, in a press conference at the end of the Shimla enclave, he insisted the party would remain "committed to its cultural nationalism... as outlined by its founding fathers."

"Let me say this very clearly. There is no question of dilution or deviation of the BJP's ideology. Our ideology is non-negotiable and will remain so in future," Singh said.

Several newspaper editorials argued that Jaswant Singh's expulsion reflected a party still in disarray.

"With squabbles among its top brass coming out into the open, it seems to have forgotten its role as the main opposition party," said the Hindustan Times.

Pak Taliban planned to target PM, others

Reveals intelligence report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

The banned Pakistani Taliban, against whom the security forces are engaged in a major offensive in the country's restive northwest, had planned to target Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and other dignitaries, an intelligence report said yesterday.

Among the others on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) radar were Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, as also sensitive buildings.

According to a private TV channel, intelligence sources had informed the law enforcement agencies that the TTP had started reorganizing despite the ongoing military operations in the Malakand divi-

sion of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the North and South Waziristan areas of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

The TTP's top commander, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in a US drone strike in South Waziristan earlier this month.

The intelligence sources said 50 suicide bombers had been sent to Punjab and the NWFP to avenge the Rah-e-Rast military operations through suicide bombings to put pressure on the government to release the militants arrested by the security forces.

The sources said the militants might target Gilani and Sharif in the guise of law enforcement agency personnel, after which the security of both leaders had been enhanced.

Pakistan loses \$1.8b to corruption

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan is estimated to have lost a staggering Rs.150 billion (\$1.8 billion) thanks to the immunity granted to politicians, bureaucrats and senior military officers charged with corruption and the scrapping of the country's corruption watchdog, a media report said Saturday.

While Rs.100 billion was lost due to the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) then president Pervez Musharraf promulgated in 2007, another Rs.50 billion will be lost with the winding up of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) that was investigating corruption cases against the high and the mighty.

While the nation is still mourning the loss of Rs.100 billion as a result of the infamous NRO, many more billions are about to be lost, as the dying NAB has been rendered useless to pursue ripe cases of corruption, The News said.

It quoted sources in the NAB as saying that 'after being made a dormant organisation for the last two years, the bureau is no more effectively pursuing certain high-profile cases of corruption involving at least Rs.50 billion'.

The sources said the NAB, 'which is on the verge of its death, has dozens of ripe cases of mega corruption while it is also receiving complaints of massive corruption in government departments, but it remains unmoved'.



PHOTO: AFP

An activist of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a Sunni Islamic extremist outfit, handles a burning tyre during a protest in Lahore on Friday against the killing of their leader, Allama Ali Sher Haideri who was killed along with one of his associates in the shooting at Pir Jo Goth village, Khairpur district, in southern Sindh province on August 17.



PHOTO: AFP

Afghan presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah speaks in the garden of his home during an interview with AFP in Kabul on Friday. The main rival in Afghanistan's presidential election, former foreign minister Abdullah insisted that he is ahead of incumbent Hamid Karzai based on partial results.

US fears rifts if Afghan presidential vote heads for runoff

ANI, Kabul

Western officials here have expressed relief that many Afghans defied Taliban threats of reprisals and came out to vote, but they were clearly concerned on Friday that a second round of voting could extend the paralysis of a government that already barely functions and deepen ethnic tensions, in the worst case, to the point of a north-south civil war.

A runoff, according to the New York Times, would also leave many of the Obama administration's Afghanistan policy initiatives up in the air - like fighting corruption and improving distribution of aid.

The new uncertainties come on top of the stiff military challenges facing the Obama administration as it sends thousands more troops to southern Afghanistan, where Taliban attacks and very low turnout on election day made clear the insurgents' influence.

Privately, however, American officials have set out a number of possible ways that the election aftermath could affect their operations.

Steps being taken to initiate talks with Mullah Omar

Says PML-Q

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) Secretary General Mushahid Hussain has said steps are being taken to initiate talks with the Taliban chief Mullah Omar.

In an interview to a private television channel, Hussain said he had talks with an Afghan 'intellectual' last week, who told him that he wanted to convene a grand Afghan 'jirga' (meeting) to start negotiations with all factions of the Taliban.

Hussain claimed that the Saudi, German and Norwegian leaderships were also making efforts to form the 'jirga'.

He said United States was also expected to

hold talks with Omar.

Meanwhile, political analyst, Hassan Askari Rizvi, has said that Washington wants the Taliban to recognize its power and realize that the US has the ability to destroy them in Afghanistan.

"The US believes that a potential dialogue process could be advanced if the Taliban became aware of the US deterrence capability against the Taliban," the Daily Times quoted Rizvi, as saying.

Rizvi, however, said the Obama administration would not talk to the Taliban directly, instead would ask Hamid Karzai to initiate a dialogue with the banned outfit.

No personal grudge against Musharraf but trial a 'must'

Says Sharif

ANI, Islamabad

Former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif has said his party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), had no personal grudge against former President General Pervez Musharraf, but that it was a unanimous call of the country to try the former general under Article 6 for disregarding the Constitution.

Interacting with media persons at Punjab House here, Sharif said Musharraf's trial is 'must' to ensure supremacy of law.

"It is a golden opportunity to block the path of military interventions and if the government does

not move against the dictator, it would be a great disappointment for the nation," Sharif said.

He said with the Supreme Court declaring Musharraf's November 3, 2007 acts as 'illegal' and 'extrajudicial', the Government had no option but to try the former military ruler.

Sharif also threatened that the PML-N would come out of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reforms if the PPP government fails to revoke the 17th Constitutional Amendment as soon as possible.

He also regretted the delay in implementation of the Charter of Democracy (CoD) in true letter and spirit.

Strike over Indian PM's remark shuts Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Separatists called a one-day strike Saturday in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir to protest against a statement by Premier Manmohan Singh that there was "no place for separatist thought" in the region.

The shutdown, declared by hardliners belonging to Kashmir's separatist political alliance, closed shops, schools and businesses in summer capital Srinagar and other Muslim-majority towns.

Singh said in a speech last week in recent elections staged in Kashmir were "proof that there is no place for separatist thought in the region".

The remarks were "condemnable", the hardline wing of the separatist Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference said in a statement.

State polls last year recorded 60 percent voter turnout in a rebuff of calls by separatist politicians and militants for an election boycott. But voter turnout was just 30 percent in national elections earlier this year.

Drug agents raid Beverly Hills pharmacy in Jackson probe

AFP, Los Angeles

US federal drug agents on Friday raided a Beverly Hills pharmacy as part of an ongoing investigation into Michael Jackson's death two months ago.

Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents served a warrant at Mickey Fine Pharmacy & Grill west of Los Angeles to search for evidence that controlled substances had been provided inappropriately, authorities told AFP.

A Beverly Hills police spokesperson said the raid began shortly before midday but said the department was not involved in the investigation.

Egyptian traders turn Obama into a date!

ANI, London

Egyptian grocers have named the finest variety of dates for the month of Ramadan after US President Barack Obama because of his popularity since his visit to the predominantly Muslim nation last June.

Egyptian traders have the tradition of naming dates after politicians and celebrities to woo customers during Ramadan when the demand for dried fruits usually surges.

Muslims in the country usually break their dawn-to-dusk fasting with either dried dates or dates soaked in milk, reports The Scotsman.

Egyptians consume an estimated 500,000 tonnes of dates during Ramadan, but traders expect higher consumption this year.

Hakeemullah named new Pak Taliban chief

ANI, Islamabad

The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has declared Hakeemullah Mehsud as the successor to Baitullah Mehsud.

TTP spokesman Maulvi Faqir Muhammad announced Hakeemullah's appointment while claiming that Baitullah was alive, the News reports.

Muhammad said Baitullah wanted to appoint his successor in his lifespan, so he has asked Hakeemullah to take over.

Muhammad said a 42-member council of the Taliban



appointed Hakeemullah their chief and Azam Tariq as the new spokesman of the banned outfit.

Death toll from US missile strike increases to 21

AP, Parachinar

Nine more bodies were pulled from the rubble of houses hit by a suspected US missile strike targeting a Taliban commander in northwestern Pakistan, bringing the total number of dead to 21 yesterday.

The airstrike in North Waziristan on Friday near the Afghan border was aimed at Siraj Haqqani, a Taliban commander with suspected close ties to al-Qaeda who is blamed for masterminding ambushes on American troops in Afghanistan. It was unclear whether he was among the dead, intelligence officials said.

Local tribal elder Safdar Khan said those killed included six children.

Three intelligence officials confirmed the death toll, although they did not say whether any children were among the casualties. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release information.

Haqqani is known to have visited the house that was targeted, the officials said. Khan did not specify whether Haqqani was there at the time.

The attack was the latest by unmanned aircraft in northwestern Pakistan, and suggests a return to the original aim of the covert programme to kill al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders who use the lawless region as a base to plot attacks. A drone apparently killed Pakistan's most-wanted militant, Baitullah Mehsud, on Aug. 5.

Friday's strike was the third in three weeks in Pakistan, which officials protests the drone assaults as a violation of its sovereignty. The United States is believed to have launched more than 40 such attacks in the northwest since last year.

Book reveals India's 'hidden hand' in Lankan war

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

India played a critical, albeit covert, role in the success of Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers, with the Indian Navy providing vital intelligence in locating and destroying at least a dozen LTTE rogue vessels laden with arms, says the first such detailed account of the operation.

India's covert support to Sri Lanka in the war against the LTTE assumed many forms, ranging from back-channel talks and a tacit endorsement of Colombo's destroy-LTTE mission to supply of military hardware and sharing of real-time intelligence, says Nitin A. Gokhale in his book 'Sri Lanka - From War to Peace' (Har-Anand Publications).

New Delhi helped Colombo in myriad ways despite its public hands-off posture and denial of offensive weapons to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) due to domestic political compulsions, contends Gokhale.

The ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in New Delhi was dependent upon the DMK party from Tamil Nadu, perceived to be sympathetic to the LTTE, for its survival in parliament.

"Publicly, India maintained that it would not give Sri Lanka any offensive weapons. Yet, in early 2006 India quietly gifted five Mi-17 heli-

copters to the Sri Lankan Air Force," Gokhale writes. "The only Indian condition was: these helicopters would fly under Sri Lankan Air Force colours. New Delhi clearly did not want to annoy UPA's Tamil Nadu allies like the DMK unnecessarily," he says.

The author singles out the Indian Navy for special praise. The Indian Coast Guard gifted a Sukanya Class offshore patrol vessel (OPV) to the Sri Lankan Navy in 2002, which played a major role in several daring missions launched by the Sri Lankan Air Force to rescue the Army's Deep Penetration Units when they were surrounded by LTTE's counter-infiltration units.

The OPVs also helped when injured soldiers had to be airlifted from deep inside LTTE-held territory.

The author quotes Sri Lanka's Navy Chief Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda to underline the Indian Navy's contribution in locating and destroying at least 10 'floating warehouses' owned and used by the LTTE for storing arms, ammunition and even armoured personnel carriers.

According to Indian and Sri Lankan Navy sources quoted by the author in his book, well-coordinated operations by the two navies between 2006 and 2009 actually broke the backbone of the LTTE's Sea Tigers.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan Air Force troops display their commando skills during a passing out ceremony of 329 men and officers in the north-eastern town of Trincomalee on Friday. Sri Lanka plans to maintain 2010 defence spending at the same level as in 2009 despite the defeat of Tamil Tiger separatists in May this year.