



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani paramilitary soldiers and officials gather beside the wreckage of oil filled wagons after the Muzaffargarh-bound Oil Special derailed outside the Kotri railway station near Hyderabad some 160km east of the southern port city of Karachi yesterday. Both tracks of Karachi-Hyderabad main railway line were blocked following the accident, which injured at least five as 15 oil filled wagons went off the rails and fell on the tracks.

New Zealand PM's office firebombed

AFP, Wellington

The Auckland electorate office of New Zealand Prime Minister John Key was firebombed early Thursday, police said.

The office in Key's Helensville electorate in the semi-rural outskirts of the city was attacked with a Molotov cocktail, which caused a small fire in the early hours of the morning, police said.

Firefighters were able to quickly extinguish the blaze and damage was minor, police area commander Janet Hope said.

Key had no immediate response to the attack on the building, which was unoccupied at the time.

Total, Chevron propping up Myanmar junta

Military elite stash \$5b in Singaporean banks, says rights group

AFP, Bangkok

Energy giants Total and Chevron are propping up Myanmar's junta with a gas project that has allowed the regime to stash nearly five billion dollars in Singaporean banks, a rights group said yesterday.

France's Total and US-based Chevron have also tried to whitewash alleged rights abuses by Myanmar troops guarding the pipeline, including forced labour and killings, two reports by US-based EarthRights International said.

The group urged the international community to exert pressure on the two companies, which have long managed to evade Western sanctions against the generals who rule the impoverished Southeast Asian nation.

"Total and Chevron's Yadana gas project has generated 4.83 billion dollars for the Burmese regime," one of the reports said, adding that the figures for the period 2000-2008 were the first

ever detailed account of the revenues.

"The military elite are hiding billions of dollars of the peoples' revenue in Singapore while the country needlessly suffers under the lowest social spending in Asia," said Matthew Smith, a principal author of the reports.

The iron-fisted junta had kept the revenues off the national budget and stashed almost all of the money offshore with Singapore's Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) and DBS Group (DBS), the watchdog said.

"The revenue from this pipeline is the regime's lifeline and a critical leverage point that the international community could use to support the people of Burma," added Smith, the group's coordinator for the country.

Total was recently at the centre of controversy over its lucrative dealings with the regime, following the extension in August of the house arrest of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

1.65m Pakistanis who fled offensive return home, says UN

AFP, Islamabad

The number of Pakistanis who returned home since fleeing a recent military offensive against the Taliban has increased to 1.65 million, a UN official said yesterday.

The offensive forced 1.9 million civilians from their homes in northwest Pakistan. Most sheltered with relatives and the rest crowded into refugee camps, creating a humanitarian crisis for impoverished Pakistan.

"According to latest figures from the government, about 1.65 people have gone back to

their areas of origin," Pakistan's UN humanitarian coordinator Martin Mogwanja told a press conference in Islamabad.

"More than 235,159 families have returned home as of September 8," said a separate UN statement, with around 25,279 families still living in various displacement camps.

A senior official from UN Children's Agency Unicef said 550 primary and secondary schools were destroyed or partially damaged during the conflict in the northwest area of Malakand, which is home to about three million people.

Afghan voter turnout numbers too high

Say US monitors

AP, Kabul

A US monitoring group said yesterday that "large numbers of polling stations" had more than 100 percent turnout in Afghanistan's election, the latest black mark against a vote increasingly tainted by reports of fraud.

Though there are no official turnout figures from the Aug. 20 poll, government officials and independent observers have generally said that voters showed up only in low numbers because of Taliban threats

ahead of the vote and attacks on election day. Dozens of people were killed amid rocket bombardments, bombings and polling station raids.

International censure of the vote has increased since Tuesday, when election officials released results from 92 percent of polling stations showing that President Hamid Karzai had finally passed the 50 percent threshold needed to avoid a runoff.

A UN-backed commission in charge of investigating fraud has ordered an audit and

re-count of any station with turnout at or above 600 votes which represents 100 percent turnout along with stations in which one candidate won more than 95 percent. However, the commission has not said how many polling stations will be affected.

The Washington, DC-based National Democratic Institute said its analysis of results found large numbers of stations with more than 600 votes in Nuristan, Paktia, Helmand and Badghis provinces, along with others.



PHOTO: AFP

Vice-President Ahmad Zia Massoud (4 R) and Afghan Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Yunus Qanooni (C) pay tribute to national hero Ahmad Shah Massoud at his grave site on the 8th anniversary of his assassination in the Panjshir Valley yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

Onlookers watch as rescue work continues at a building, which collapsed in Faridabad's New Industrial Township (NIT) on Wednesday. Heavy generators had been installed on the top of the City Market under restoration when it came crashing down, trapping people inside.

Nato probe finds German officer at fault over Afghan bombing

AFP, Berlin

The German officer who ordered the deadly bombing of fuel trucks in Afghanistan violated procedures, a preliminary Nato probe has found, the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily reported yesterday.

Colonel Georg Klein overstepped his authority and poorly evaluated the situation, says the Nato report conducted following the air strike last Friday in the northern province of Kunduz, which killed dozens.

"It is 'completely clear' that Klein did not respect decision-

making procedures, a high-ranking German officer in Nato told the daily.

Such a decision should have been referred to the headquarters of the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), he said.

Klein called in US warplanes last Friday to bomb two coalition fuel trucks that had been captured by Taliban militants, fearing they would be used as truck bombs against Nato forces.

The preliminary report concluded however that Isaf troops were not in imminent

Laden sponsored Sharif's election campaign in '88

Claims ex-ISI official

ANI, Lahore

A former Pakistani spy master has revealed that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif maintained a close relationship with Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden and claimed that the chieftain had sponsored the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief's election campaign in 1988.

Former Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) officer Khalid Khawaja said bin Laden not only funded

Sharif's campaign, but also paid him huge money to ensure protection of al-Qaeda operatives inside Pakistan and to 'Islamise' the state and society.

In an interview with television channel, Khawaja said he had personally arranged the meeting between Sharif and bin Laden on the former Prime Minister's request, and he has evidence to prove his claims.

Khawaja said that he used to be a close associate of bin Laden in the past and might

have met him more than a hundred times, but said he never met him after 9/11.

Meanwhile, the ABC News has also confirmed that al-Qaeda chief had paid huge money to Sharif, The Daily Times reports.

It quoted former FBI agent Jack Cloonan as saying that bin Laden paid nearly one million dollars to Sharif's representative for not initiating any action against militants based in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP).

Hunt on for outlaw patrons

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should take action no matter which political parties they belong."

Sources said the process of preparing fresh list started upon directive from the government amidst escalating violence and killings in the outlaw-infested 10 districts of the southwest.

At least 269 people were killed, mostly by different outlaw outfits, in the 10 southwestern districts since January this year.

Kushtia tops the list of killings with 70 murders followed by 49 in Jhenidah, 46 in Jessore, 30 in Khulna, 26 in Chuadanga, 12 in Meherpur, 11 in Satkhira, nine in Bagerhat, and eight each in Narail and Magura.

Frequency of killings during July-August period prompted Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad and Rab Director General (DG) Hassan Mahmood Khandker to rush to Kushtia on August 20 and declare that a joint drive plan was in the offing.

Intelligence agencies of different law enforcement agencies including police and Rab with the help of other agencies prepared the latest short-list, sifting through two previous lists—one prepared in 2004 during the rule of BNP-Jamaat

coalition government and another last year during the tenure of caretaker government.

The list prepared in 2004 had names of some 2,200 criminals of 12 outlawed parties and crime rackets along with a number of their political patrons while the second list prepared in September-November of 2008 included names of 2,847 criminals and their godfathers.

Sources at different law enforcement agencies said use of criminals by the godfathers for various purposes is an old tradition in the region. The influential persons mainly belonging to different political parties use the outlawed parties' strength to establish supremacy, to kill opponents or to rig vote during the elections.

They said though lists were prepared in the past on a few occasions, no massive step had been taken to net the political mentors of the outlawed parties.

This time the high officials of law enforcement agencies are determined to arrest the most wanted criminals, their kingpins and political godfathers as well, they said.

100 die of cholera in PNG

AFP, Port Moresby

Papua New Guinea on Thursday raced to contain a triple outbreak of cholera, flu and dysentery which has claimed at least 100 lives and prompted a health emergency, a report said.

Health inspectors were ordered to close schools and markets, dig toilets and restrict people's movements in remote parts of three provinces. The National newspaper said, as the World Health Organisation and Australia

provided help.

The impoverished Pacific nation declared the emergency on Wednesday after the deaths doubled in a week. Earlier fears of a "mystery flu" proved unfounded after the virus was confirmed as seasonal influenza.

"Under this direction, all health professionals, government agencies and NGOs in this life-saving mission are empowered to improve hygiene and sanitation and contain the diseases in affected areas," Health Minister Sasa Zibe said.

Stampede kills 5 at Indian school

AP, New Delhi

Hundreds of students jammed into a narrow school staircase panicked and set off a stampede yesterday that left five girls dead and 31 other students injured, a New Delhi hospital official said.

Five of the injured were in critical condition, said OP Kalra, medical superintendent of the Guru Tegh Bahadur Hospital, where the injured boys and girls were taken.

The stampede occurred early in the school day as students arrived for an exam, Kalra told reporters. The Press Trust of India news agency said the stampede was set off by rumours about an electrical short-circuit in the government-run school.

200 go missing as boat sinks in Sierra Leone

AFP, Freetown

Around 200 people, including a large number of children, are missing after a river boat sank in Sierra Leone, the government said on Thursday.

At least 241 passengers were on board the vessel when it sank on Tuesday night east of the capital Freetown, but the overall number could be more than 300, said deputy transport minister Osmond Hanciles.

"The official list showed 241 passengers on board and these were only those who had cargoes on board and totally excluded the number of school children that were aboard," he told AFP.

"It is possible that there were over 300 people on board," Hanciles added.

Authorities announced late Wednesday that they had

recovered eight bodies. Police spokesman Ibrahim Samura told AFP that 37 people "have been rescued."

Divers are still searching the waters of the Sierra Leone river near the village of Tombo, 80 kilometres (50 miles) east of the capital Freetown, although the operation is being hampered by heavy rains.

Information Minister Ibrahim Ben Kargbo told AFP that the circumstances leading to the accident "will be thoroughly investigated."

"President Ernest Koroma feels very sad about the incident and he wants it to be known that the military and the navy did all that they could to make sure they took part in the effort to rescue the passengers. We are sending the condolence of the country to all," he headed.

Hartal called

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The cabinet last month approved Petrobangla's signing of three offshore Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) with two international oil companies.

APSC is different from leasing oil and gas blocks, as the contractor is not a co-owner of the petroleum licence or the lease. Under a PSC, Petrobangla remains owner of the blocks while the oil companies, upon successful investment and operation would share the production with Petrobangla.

Meanwhile, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam yesterday said those who have called the strike on September 14 "in the name of protecting the country" are rather trying to harm her.

The national committee convenor Sheikh Mohammad Shahidullah announced the 6:00am-12:00noon shutdown at a rally near Shishu Park,

Shahbagh.

The rally was organised after police intercepted the protesters marching towards the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to press their demand yesterday. Earlier the protesters chanting slogans marched towards the PMO from Muktangan around 12:30pm against leasing out of offshore blocks and export of natural gas.

Police intercepted the marchers near Shishu Park where the protesters staged a peaceful demonstration.

At least 20 people including Prof Anu Muhammad, member secretary of the national committee, were injured as police clubbed the demonstrators at Bijoynagar in the city on September 2. The protesters came under the attack as they were marching towards Petrobangla to lay siege there demanding scrapping of the deals.

The LGRD minister termed the police acts on September 2

"excess".

Talking to reporters at his ministry Syed Ashrafur said the government was transparently doing whatever necessary for exploring oil and gas.

"The government has taken a fresh initiative to explore oil-gas to meet the demand of the country, neither for exporting nor giving benefits to others," said the minister.

Saying that the AL could not assume power in 2001 due to its policy of exporting oil-gas only after keeping it preserved for 50 years for the country, Ashraf stated that AL still maintains the policy.

Shahidullah said the committee would call a national convention after the Eid-ul-Fitr to announce its next programme.

Communist Party of Bangladesh at its central committee meeting yesterday asked all to make the September 14 hartal a success.

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