

Pakistani troops take up positions at the army headquarters during the hostage rescue mission in Rawalpindi yesterday. Commandos stormed army headquarters on Sunday to end the 24-hour long hostage drama, freeing 39 people held by militants, who brazenly struck at the heart of the country's military establishment.

PHOTO: AFP

US confident Pakistan controls nukes: Hillary

Militant attack shows an 'increasing' threat to the state

AFP, London

The latest militant attack in Pakistan shows an "increasing" threat to the state, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday, but voiced confidence Islamabad was in control of its nuclear arsenal.

She said the militants' brazen bid to storm the Pakistani military headquarters in Rawalpindi on Saturday highlighted the scale of the threat faced by Islamabad.

"Yesterday was another reminder that extremists... are increasingly threatening the authority of the state," she said.

"But we see no evidence that they (the militants) are going to take over the state," she said at a press conference with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

"We have confidence in the Pakistani government and military's control over nuclear weapons," Clinton added.

Miliband made a similar point. "There's

no evidence that's been shown publicly or privately of any threat to the Pakistani nuclear facilities," he said following talks between the two top diplomats.

Analysts said the attack and subsequent siege was deeply embarrassing for the military and showed the Islamist militant threat to the nuclear-armed nation was far from quashed, despite Pakistan's claims it is winning the fight.

The strike at the heart of the military establishment left at least 19 people dead. Pakistani troops stormed the complex on Sunday, ending the day-long siege and freeing 39 people held by the militants.

It was the third dramatic militant attack in less than a week, after the Taliban vowed to avenge Battullah Mehsud's death.

A suicide car bomb on Friday killed 52 civilians at a busy market in the northwest city of Peshawar and an attack on a UN office in Islamabad last Monday left five aid workers dead.

In London during a tour of Europe and Russia, Clinton also issued a stern warning to Iran over its nuclear programme, saying the international community "will not wait indefinitely" for the Islamic republic to meet its obligations.

Global powers were outraged after Iran, just days ahead of talks in Geneva on October 1, revealed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it was building a second uranium enrichment plant near the holy city of Qom.

Clinton said the six-party talks in the Swiss city on October 1 were a "constructive beginning" but she said they "must be followed by action".

"Words are not enough," she added. "We are speaking with a single voice and delivering a clear message to Iran: the international community will not wait indefinitely for evidence that Iran is prepared to live up to its international obligations."

Pakistan probes links between army HQ siege, cricket attack

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani security forces are investigating possible links between the sole surviving militant from the army headquarters siege and an attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team, officials said yesterday.

Military officials said they had arrested a militant named Aqeel, also known as Doctor Usman, the apparent leader of a nine-member team, which tried to storm the military headquarters Saturday and then took 42 people hostage.

Troops stormed the besieged building early Sunday, freeing 39 of the captives. Three hostages, eight

soldiers and eight militants were killed over the course of the nearly 24-hour siege in the garrison town Rawalpindi.

Military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas said that Aqeel initially managed to flee and detonated a cache of explosives, injuring five security personnel, but was eventually injured and arrested.

"He was leader of the group," Abbas said.

He told AFP that the militant appeared to have the same name and alias as one of the militants wanted in connection with the March gun and grenade attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in the eastern city of Lahore.

Jihadi threat to lives of eminent Pak nationals

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Rawalpindi

There is a threat to the lives of 'known personalities' in Pakistan, warned Interior Minister Rehman Malik yesterday after the army ended a hostage drama at the army headquarters here.

"There is a threat to the lives of the country's known personalities," Malik told Geo TV, adding that 56 terror suspects had been arrested from Islamabad and surrounding areas.

Malik said Pakistan was being destabilised and claimed that terrorists were receiving arms from Afghanistan.

People in Pak tribal areas 'fed-up' with 'ineffective' govt, 'barbaric' Taliban

ANI, New Delhi

In the wake of Friday's suicide attack that killed more than 40 people in Peshawar, Pakistan has vowed to launch a military offensive against the Taliban in South Waziristan at the soonest, but people in this region are equally exasperated with both the government and the Taliban.

A few hours after the blast Pakistan's Interior Minister Rehman Malik had said, "We have no other option but to carry out an operation in South Waziristan. All roads are leading to South Waziristan. We will have to proceed."

However, ethnic Pashtuns - who have long witnessed the Taliban insurgency and the Pakistan Government's inef-

fective response to that - are now fed up.

"Earlier there may have been some sympathies toward these Taliban or al-Qaeda, but a reaction against them has been emerging," the Christian Science Monitor quoted Ijaz Khattak, a professor of international relations at Peshawar University, as saying.

"There is a general view coming forth - 'How do we get rid of these people?' People are losing confidence in the state's ability to provide them any protection," he added.

Many of the Peshawar's famed carpet merchants are planning to pack up their shops and leave due to government's inability to protect them from the Taliban.



US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton looks toward the press during a press conference with Britain's Foreign Secretary David Miliband (L) at No.1 Carlton Gardens in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan, not India, exporting terrorism

Says Manmohan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Mumbai

Denying that India was to blame for terror in Baluchistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said it was Pakistan that was patronising terrorism and causing 'great harm' to South Asia.

Visiting Mumbai on the last day of campaigning for the Maharashtra assembly elections Tuesday, Manmohan Singh also asked Maoist guerrillas to shed violence and initiate a dialogue with the government.

"The government and people of Pakistan should realise the great harm that patronisation of terrorist groups has done to South Asia," the prime minister told reporters here.

He said the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan "is

not what it should be. The rising role of terrorist groups (in the two countries) is a matter of concern to all of us.

"We have to make adequate preparations to deal with the consequences of this overflow of terrorism from our neighbours to our country. We are taking all necessary measures in this direction," he added.

Manmohan Singh's comments came three days after a car bomb exploded outside the Indian embassy in Kabul and after the Pakistani military ended a bloody siege of its army headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The prime minister denied Pakistan Interior Minister Rehman Malik's allegation that India was responsible for the rising wave of terrorism in Baluchistan province.

Manmohan Singh said Islamabad's allegation was 'totally wrong'.

"We are not in the business of exporting terrorism to Pakistan or any other country," he said. "The people and government of Pakistan jolly well know that this is a false accusation."

He said that diplomatic pressure from India and other countries had forced Pakistan to admit for the first time that its nationals were involved in the Mumbai terror assault that killed some 170 people.

"For the first time Pakistan admitted that it (attack) had its origins in Pakistan, the conspiracy leading to the tragedy in Mumbai was hatched in Pakistan, that citizens of Pakistan were involved. Pakistan had never before agreed to this... So there is some progress," he said.



Chairperson of the UPA Government Sonia Gandhi holds a sword presented by party members during an election rally in Mumbai on Saturday. Sonia has appealed to rebels in the party to set aside personal ambitions and work for the larger interests of the organisation.

PHOTO: AFP

'Widespread fraud' in Afghan election

Says head of the UN mission

AP, Kabul

The head of the UN mission in Afghanistan has acknowledged there was "widespread fraud" in the August presidential election but is giving no specifics so as not to interfere with an ongoing recount.

Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide was responding Sunday to allegations made by his former deputy Peter Galbraith that his boss sought to cover up fraud committed on behalf of President Hamid Karzai during the Aug. 20 balloting.

Eide told reporters at a news conference that any figures on the number of fraudulent votes would be speculative until the recount is complete.

He appeared alongside ambassadors from the US, Britain and France in a show of support for Eide and the UN mission, whose reputa-

tions have been tarnished by Galbraith's allegations.

Earlier American and Afghan forces stormed a mountainside compound in eastern Afghanistan before dawn Sunday that had been used by an al-Qaeda commander, killing more than a dozen militants in a gunbattle, the US military said.

The clash comes amid a debate in the US about whether to send more forces to Afghanistan to gain control of the country or to more narrowly target terrorists taking refuge in the mountainous region that straddles eastern Afghanistan and western Pakistan.

al-Qaeda's leadership is widely assumed to be hiding in Pakistan, though Afghan officials have said they believe foreign fighters are increasingly crossing into their country to bolster the Taliban insurgency.

Scientists identify flood-tolerant gene in rice

AFP, Taipei

A Taiwanese scientist has said her research team has found the gene that allows rice to grow under water and believes the breakthrough could help develop other flood-resistant crops.

The gene, named CIPK15, a type of enzyme, "allows rice seedlings to survive and continue to grow even when submerged in water," said Yu Su-mei, a research fellow at the Institute of Molecular Biology at Taiwan's Academia Sinica.

Yu said she believed the discovery would help breeders generate new rice varieties with greater seedling growth under flood-water, which would save on labour and use of pesticides, potentially benefiting the environment.

The study was published in the current issue of the Washington-based journal Science Signaling.



Space tourist, Canadian billionaire and clown Guy Laliberte gestures shortly after leaving the Russian Soyuz TMA-14 space capsule after landing in north-central Kazakhstan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Canadian 'space clown' returns to Earth

AP, Moscow

The Russian Soyuz capsule carrying Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte and two other space travellers landed safely in Kazakhstan on Sunday, ending the entertainment tycoon's mythical space odyssey.

Laliberte, who wore a bulbous clown nose during his stay aboard the International Space Station, was extracted from the cramped Soyuz capsule Sunday morning following its landing in the steppes of northern Kazakhstan.

Govt sleeps as job market shrinks

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The private sector plays the key role in developing overseas jobs where around 90 percent workers are unskilled and semi-skilled.

Moreover, there has been no significant government initiative to improve and diversify their skills for the overseas job market, they added.

The demand for nurses, caregivers and health technologists in the developed countries has not decreased during the recession but no initiative has been taken in this regard, said Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) President Ghulam Mustafa.

The US alone will be in need of 1.4 million nurses and caregivers by 2014, said a study of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

"Supply of nurses is short in all regions. By 2050, one in every 11 persons will be over the age of 80 in the developed west, which will need huge number of caregivers for their aging population," it said.

In 2006 RMMRU recommended allowing private institutes to introduce nursing and

other healthcare-related programmes. The then government paid no heed to it. The present government in January pledged to eliminate bottlenecks in training up nurses but still it has failed to make any headway.

"The health ministry rather laid down some tough conditions. It says any private institute must have a 100-bed hospital and 80-bed dormitory to run BSC nursing programme," said Professor Tasneem Siddiqui of RMMRU.

A private university can easily run BSC nursing programme in collaboration with a hospital, but such opportunity was not created, she noted.

Recruiting agencies demanded that the government ask the US-based Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) to open a branch in Bangladesh so that nurses can take exams to qualify for overseas jobs, but no effective measure has been taken until now, said Abdul Alim, a recruiting agent.

If a CGFNS centre were set up here, nurses could easily have chances to qualify and go for overseas jobs, he said.

Expatriates' Welfare Minister Mosharraf Hossain, however,

said the government does not have so much capacity of providing international standard training to nurses at the moment.

"But if any country comes forward we will welcome. Even if any private institute makes the proposal I will try to relax the conditions," he told The Daily Star.

On training of caregivers and health technologists, the minister said, "I have to assess their demand first and then decide on the matter."

Meanwhile, amid recession Libya is recruiting a large number of workers from different countries and will recruit several lakh more in next years, but Bangladesh's diplomatic relations with the country is very poor, said a recruiting agent. From January to August, 13,696 workers went to Libya.

"But, our minister did not feel like visiting Libya and this is very unexpected," he said.

When asked the expatriates' welfare minister said he would soon go to Libya. It has been a long-standing demand that the government create an overseas market research cell to streamline the sector but the government has made no headway yet in this regard, Baira President Mustafa said.

Salam Pintu

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Harkatul Jihad (Huji) member Maulana Abu Taher was also produced before the same court yesterday on expiry of his remand period. But he was sent to jail, as the investigation officer (IO) did not seek any remand prayer for him.

In the forwarding report, Additional Superintendent of CID and IO of the case Abdul Kahar Akond said a meeting was held at Pintu's Dhanmondi government quarters residence to implement the conspiracy before blasting grenades on the AL rally on August 21, 2004.

In the meeting, Pintu, his brother Maulana Tajuddin, a Huji member, Tajuddin's brother-in-law Maulana Abu Taher and other Huji members were present.

Pintu needs to be remanded to identify those who had supplied the grenades to the Huji members, IO Akond added.

Defence lawyers filed a petition seeking cancella-

tion of the remand prayer saying their client was implicated in the case as part of a conspiracy to harass him. So, they prayed for rejecting his remand, lawyers said.

On August 3, a Dhaka court ordered further investigation into the August 21 attack stating the probe conducted earlier could not identify the collectors and suppliers of the grenades used in the attack.

The CID, which misdirected the investigation during BNP-led government, finally pressed charges in June last year accusing Pintu and 21 Huji members including its top leader Mufti Abdul Hannan.

The eight absconding accused in the case are Pintu's brothers Tajuddin and Maulana Liton, Anisul Mursalin and his brother Mahibul Muttakin, Iqbal, Maulana Abu Bakar alias Selim Howlader, Jahangir Alam Badar and Khalilur Rahman.

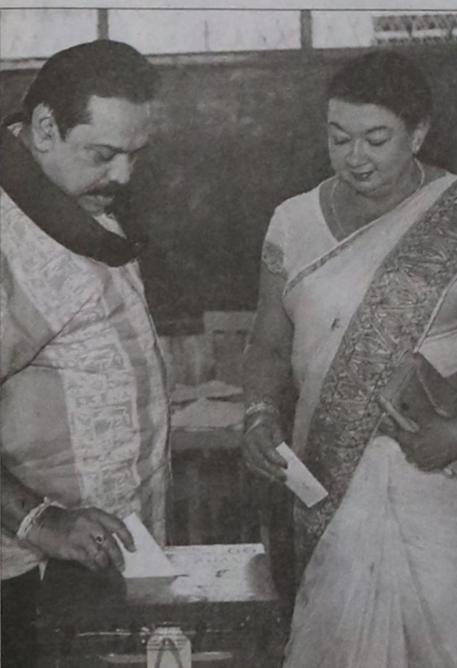


PHOTO: AFP

Handout picture shows Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse (L) and his wife Shiranthi casting their ballots at their southern Lankan constituency of Belliatta on Saturday. Sri Lanka is conducting the southern provincial council, the final round of local polls, which is seen as a test of popularity for the government ahead of national elections due early next year.