

Musharraf warns US against micromanaging Pak war on terror

ANI, Houston

Former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf has warned the United States that it should not try to "micromanage" Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts against the Taliban.

"Don't get into micromanaging how Pakistan works because we know how to do it better than you," the Daily Times Quoted Musharraf, as saying.

Musharraf said that while Islamabad needed America's financial support to defeat the Taliban and other extremists, his country could manage anti-terrorism on its own.

"I am a firm believer that Pakistan is a country that has the resources and human capital to rise on its own with no assistance from anybody in the world," he said.

Pak jets bomb militants near Afghan border

26 insurgents killed in the northwest

AP, Dera Ismail Khan

Pakistani jets bombed militant targets in the main insurgent stronghold along the Afghan border yesterday ahead of an expected ground offensive there, while the army killed 26 insurgents elsewhere in the northwest, authorities said.

The army says 80 percent of the militant attacks plaguing nuclear-armed Pakistan are planned from South Waziristan, while the United States says insurgent leaders blamed for spiralling violence in Afghanistan are also based in the lawless, remote area.

The army and the government have agreed to launch what is expected to be a bloody and difficult ground operation in

the mountainous region. An army spokesman Monday declined to say when the operation would begin, but there has been speculation it could be imminent.

For the past three months, jets have been bombing target in the region, and the military has been attempting to cut off militant supply and communication lines. Authorities are also trying to secure the support of militant factions that in the past have agreed not to attack Pakistani troops.

Bombing runs Tuesday destroyed around 15 houses in the Makeen, Ladha and Barwand regions of South Waziristan, a local intelligence official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief the media.

In a reminder of the reach of the militants,

authorities said helicopter gunship attacks killed 26 insurgents in Bajur, a tribally administered region that is 300km north of Waziristan. The army undertook a major offensive there six months ago and declared it free of insurgents, but some still remain.

Abdul Malik, a local government official, said the attacks took place in Damadola and Sawai, known as militant-held areas. He said he got the information about militant casualties from intelligence and military sources.

The militant threat to Pakistan has been highlighted by four major terrorist attacks over the last nine days, including a suicide attack on a UN office in the capital that killed five staffers and a 22-hour siege on the army's headquarters over the weekend.



A Pakistani woman places flowers yesterday at a shrine to army soldiers killed by Taliban militants who stormed Pakistan's army headquarters in Rawalpindi.



Indian tribeswomen queue up to cast their votes at a polling station in the village of Kokila, some 45km from Itanagar yesterday, for state assembly election in the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. Three Indian states went to the polls in the first test for the ruling Congress party alliance since it won a thumping general election victory in May on promises of economic reform.



Bollywood votes, calls polls 'tool of change'

PTI, Mumbai

Film star John Abraham, lyricist Javed Akhtar and his actress wife Shabana Azmi were among the early voters from the Bollywood fraternity who exercised their right to franchise for the Assembly elections in Maharashtra.

John voted in Bandra, while Akhtar and Shabana cast their votes in Juhu in suburban Mumbai yesterday.

Stressing the importance of vote as an instrument of change, John said infrastructure in Mumbai needed an overhaul. Akhtar said each and every citizen should be thankful to the constitution of India for providing them the important fundamental right of choosing one's government.

"Not many countries give this right to its citizens. We have it and must make full use of it," the lyricist said.

Shabana, also a social activist, said, "It is very important to vote in an assembly election because we can bring about the change in our own area." Villain of yesteryear Prem Chopra, actors Rahul Bose and Nagma also cast their votes.

Obama okays 13,000 US troops for Afghanistan

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama has approved the deployment of an additional 13,000 US troops to Afghanistan beyond the 21,000 he announced publicly in March, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

The additional troops are primarily support forces -- such as engineers, medical specialists, intelligence experts and military police -- the paper said, bringing the total build-up approved by Obama to 34,000.

"Obama authorised the whole thing. The only thing you saw announced in a press

release was the 21,000," an unnamed defence official familiar told the paper.

The maximum number of US forces expected in Afghanistan by year's end -- 68,000 -- would remain the same, the paper said.

Defence Secretary Robert Gates had said previously he would be sending more support troops or "enablers" to Afghanistan even as Obama weighs the best war strategy going forward, amid an appeal for tens of thousands of additional combat forces from the commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal.

Pak army HQ attackers demanded release of 100 militants

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan's ISPR DG Major General Athar Abbas has revealed that the Taliban militants, who took 42 people hostage at the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi on Saturday, were demanding the release of about 100 terrorists.

"Their target was to take senior officers of the GHQ hostage and make demands. The main demand was the release of terrorists including

high-profile ones. It included over 100 names, from all the groups, all the terrorists across the board," the Daily Times quoted Abbas, as saying.

Earlier, the Pak-Taliban had claimed responsibility for the GHQ attack.

Abbas said the attackers were trained in South Waziristan.

"The main training area for this operation was in South Waziristan," he said, adding that intelligence agencies had intercepted Taliban leader

Waliur Rehman's telephone conversations in this regard.

Replying to a question, Abbas said the attack has prompted the Pakistan Government and military to initiate an offensive in Waziristan at the earliest.

"They have taken a principled decision that there will be an operation in this area. It is now a matter of military judgement, what is the appropriate timing in the best national interests," he said.

Polls test for India's ruling Congress party

AFP, Mumbai

Three Indian states went to the polls yesterday in the first test for the ruling Congress party alliance since it won a thumping general election victory in May on promises of economic reform.

Campaigning for state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh focused on relief for drought-hit areas after a poor monsoon, electricity shortages, unemployment and rising food prices.

The Congress power trio of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, party president Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi toured the states ahead of voting, with much attention focused on the vast city of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra.

Key concerns in Maharashtra range from improving security after the Mumbai attacks last year in which 166 people died, the recent slowdown in economic growth, and rural poverty that has triggered a spate of farmers' suicides.

"There is no single decisive vote factor," Kumar Ketkar, analyst and editor of Marathi newspaper Lok Satta, told AFP, describing the campaign as "bitter and chaotic".

Voting on Tuesday was largely peaceful, though police said Maoist rebels opened fire at one polling booth near where 17 officers were gunned down last week.

The Congress alliance has ruled for 10 years in Maharashtra, and Ashok Chavan was battling to retain the chief minister role that he took over soon after the attacks on Mumbai.

The main opposition is an uneasy alliance between two Hindu nationalist parties -- the regional right-wingers Shiv Sena, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who have struggled since their heavy defeat in national elections.

Chavan appealed for Maharashtra's voters to judge him on his record.

"In the last six to seven months the police have done a good job. The trial of (militant attacks suspect) Kasab is progressing fast," he said while campaigning.

"A lot of money has been sanctioned to procure weapons and equipment for the police."

Among those who voted in Mumbai were Bollywood heartthrobs Salman Khan and Priyanka Chopra, cricket hero Sachin Tendulkar and industrialist Anil Ambani.

Middle path needed to resolve Kashmir crisis Says Farooq Abdullah

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Srinagar

Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Farooq Abdullah asserted Tuesday that Kashmir would never become a part of Pakistan, but said New Delhi would have to work out a middle path to resolve the political dispute.

Addressing a two-day All India Editors Conference on social and infrastructural issues here, the ruling National Conference (NC) patron Farooq Abdullah said: "Kashmir would never become a part of Pakistan but peace in South Asia would only be assured after the political dispute over Kashmir is resolved and, for this, New Delhi must work out a middle path."

Abdullah regretted that the recommendations of the working groups on Kashmir had been gathering dust.

"Those recommendations need to be implemented," he said.

State Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who also addressed the conference, said the social and infrastructural issues could only be addressed if political security was guaranteed.

"The centre should engage Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir in a dialogue process to resolve the political dispute," Omar said.

The chief minister regretted that the media had given unnecessary hype to the so-called presence of Taliban guerrillas in the state which had adversely affected the state's economy.



China's President Hu Jintao (2nd R) walks with Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (2nd L) prior to their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Gilani is on a four-day visit to China.

Kashmir glaciers shrinking at 'alarming' speed

AFP, Srinagar

Rising winter temperatures are shrinking Himalayan glaciers in Indian Kashmir at "alarming" speeds, threatening water supplies to vast tracts of India and Pakistan, according to a new study.

The Kolahoi glacier, the largest in the region, has shrunk by 2.63 square kilometres (one square mile) in the past three decades to just over 11 square kilometres, said the study presented at a three-day international workshop on climate change that began Monday in the Kashmiri summer capital Srinagar.

Himalayan glaciers feed into Asia's nine largest rivers that flow to China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The Kolahoi glacier is shrinking 0.08 square kilometres a year, "which is an alarming speed", said the three-year study led by Shakil Ramsoo, associate professor of geology at Kashmir University.

"Other small Kashmir glaciers are also shrinking and the main reason is that the winter temperature in Kashmir is rising," said the study, citing an increase of 1.1 degrees Celsius over the past 100 years.

The quantity of snowfall in Kashmir, known as the "Switzerland of the East", has clearly fallen in recent decades.

Despite occasional heavy snowfall, the inability of snow to freeze and develop into hard and longer-lasting crystals owing to higher temperatures has resulted in faster meltdown, say experts.

"If you talk about Kashmir and you look at the statistics of climate change, it is melting faster here than any other place in the world," said Sally Dotre, an expert from Cambridge University.

"And that's going to have a dramatic effect in Kashmir and Pakistan, because it is already affecting water levels," Dotre said.



Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith (R) shakes hands with Indian Minister of External Affairs Minister SM Krishna during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Smith is in India for a five-day official visit.

China slams Manmohan's Arunachal visit

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Beijing

China Tuesday expressed "strong dissatisfaction" over Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, a state whose ownership they dispute.

"China is strongly dissatisfied with the visit to the disputed region by the Indian leader disregarding China's serious concerns," Xinhua quoted Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ma Zhaoxian as saying. The official did not refer to Manmohan Singh by name.

Manmohan Singh visited Arunachal Pradesh Oct 3 to campaign for assembly elections taking place Tuesday.

Ma said China and India had never officially settled the demarcation of their border, and China's stance on the eastern section of the China-India border was consistent and clear-cut.

"We demand the Indian side address China's serious concerns and not trigger disturbance in the disputed region so as to facilitate the healthy development of China-India relations," Ma said.

Pasha shot dead Begum Mujib, Jamal

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before a five-member bench of the SC Appellate Division headed by Justice Md Tafazzul Islam during the seventh day's hearing of appeals filed by five convicts challenging their death sentences in the case.

The HC verdict stated that Maj (retd) Bazlul Huda first killed Sheikh Kamal, eldest son of Bangabandhu, and then Bazlul Huda and Maj (retd) Nur Chowdhury killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Mamun read out from the verdict, "In this case 11 innocent persons were brutally and diabolically murdered. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the then president of Bangladesh, became a target of a vicious intrigue, and was murdered by a handful of disgruntled army officers, some of them were dismissed. With him 10 other persons including three ladies and one little boy were murdered. The manner in which they were so brutally and mercilessly murdered repels any con-

sideration of reduction of sentence."

Justice ABM Khairul Haque on December 14, 2000 affirmed the death sentences of all 15 persons convicted by the trial court on the grounds that all of them were involved in the conspiracy of killing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family.

Five of the convicts -- Bazlul Huda, AKM Mohiuddin, Nur Chowdhury, Aziz Pasha, and Muslemuddin were physically present in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's house during the killings.

The judge convicted and sentenced the other 10 on the grounds that their intentions were the same, and they assisted the other five convicts in the killings while remaining prepared with tanks and other weapons at different places around Bangabandhu's Dhanmondi house, to tackle any resistance against the killings.

Justice Khairul Haque reached the judgment and

observations after analysing statements made by the accused and witnesses, and documents, evidence and arguments submitted by lawyers.

Mamun yesterday concluded reading out the verdict pronounced by Justice Khairul Haque, and started reading out another verdict delivered by another erstwhile HC Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim who affirmed the convictions and sentences of only 12 of the 15 convicts on April 30, 2002, and who is also at the SC Appellate Division now.

The court is scheduled to resume the hearing today at 9:30am.

Five convicts -- Syed Faruque Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Mohiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mohiuddin, and Bazlul Huda who are now behind bars -- filed the appeals with the SC against their death sentence pronounced by the HC.

The SC started hearing the appeals on October 5.