

# Thousands flee Pak tribal belt ahead of offensive

Airstrikes killed 9 militants

AFP, AP, Dera Ismail Khan

Pakistani jets pounded militant hide-outs along the Afghan border and killed at least nine guerrillas, intelligence officials said yesterday, part of a stepped-up campaign of airstrikes before an expected government offensive in South Waziristan.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled Pakistan's tribal South Waziristan region fearing an imminent army offensive against Taliban militants, officials said yesterday.

Authorities have registered 90,000 people displaced from the tribal belt on the Afghan border since August, with a fresh exodus after a weekend hostage siege at army headquarters near Islamabad deeply embarrassed the military.

The government in June ordered an operation into the mountainous north-west stronghold of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but so far only air raids and occasional artillery strikes have hit rebel sap-

tuaries.

However, a wave of Taliban attacks in Pakistan that has killed 125 people since last Monday has stoked fears that the long-awaited ground offensive is looming, sending more people fleeing.

The military launched a new wave of air attacks across the militant heartland late Tuesday and early Wednesday, hitting at least five different areas, two intelligence officials said. One attack on a hide-out in Makeen killed three insurgents, and another in Barwand killed six, they said.

Meanwhile, forces in an army camp in Razmak shelled militant positions in the surrounding mountains, they said.

"Around 90,000 people have left the area (since August) and have been shifted to safer places in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank," said Shahab Ali Shah, the top administrative official in South Waziristan.

An AFP reporter in Dera Ismail Khan saw dozens of families entering the city in cars

and trucks, packed full of whatever belongings the panicked residents had managed to gather before fleeing their homes.

"Again people have started coming out of the area because of the fear of an army operation," Amir Latif, chief administrative official in Tank district, told AFP. "We have started registering them and giving them help."

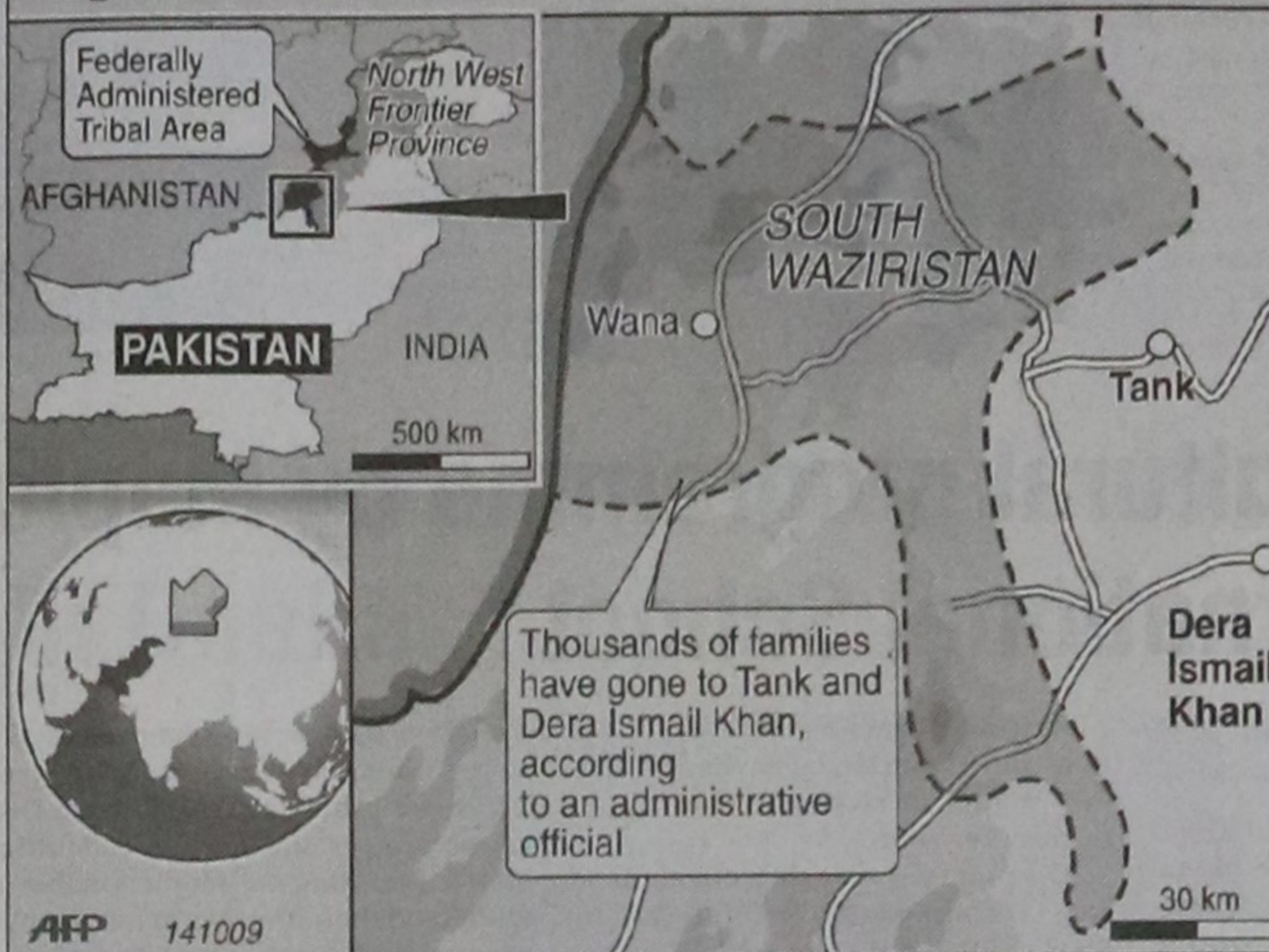
Government official Hameedullah Khan said about 60,000 people had registered in Dera Ismail Khan, with the rest taking sanctuary in Tank and elsewhere.

Most people were flocking to relative's homes or were renting houses, while officials said the government planned to establish one refugee camp in Dera Ismail Khan and another in Tank.

An anti-Taliban offensive in and around northwest Swat valley earlier this year forced nearly two million people from their homes, creating a massive humanitarian crisis in impoverished Pakistan.

## Civilians flee South Waziristan

Tens of thousands leaving region fearing Pakistani government offensive against Taliban militants



Thousands of families have gone to Tank and Dera Ismail Khan, according to an administrative official

AFP 141009

## Musharraf booked for Bugti's murder

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

A case has been registered against former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf for his alleged role in the 2006 murder of Baluch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, a lawyer said.

Others named in the first information report (FIR) are former prime minister Shaukat Aziz, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Governor Owais Ahmad Ghani, former interior minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Serpao and former Baluchistan chief minister Jam Yousaf, advocate Sohail Raput told Geo TV.

Sohail said police would move against the NWFP governor after he relinquished charge.

However, it was unclear how the police would proceed against Musharraf as he had ignored a Baluchistan High Court order to appear before it Oct 7 for a hearing in the case.

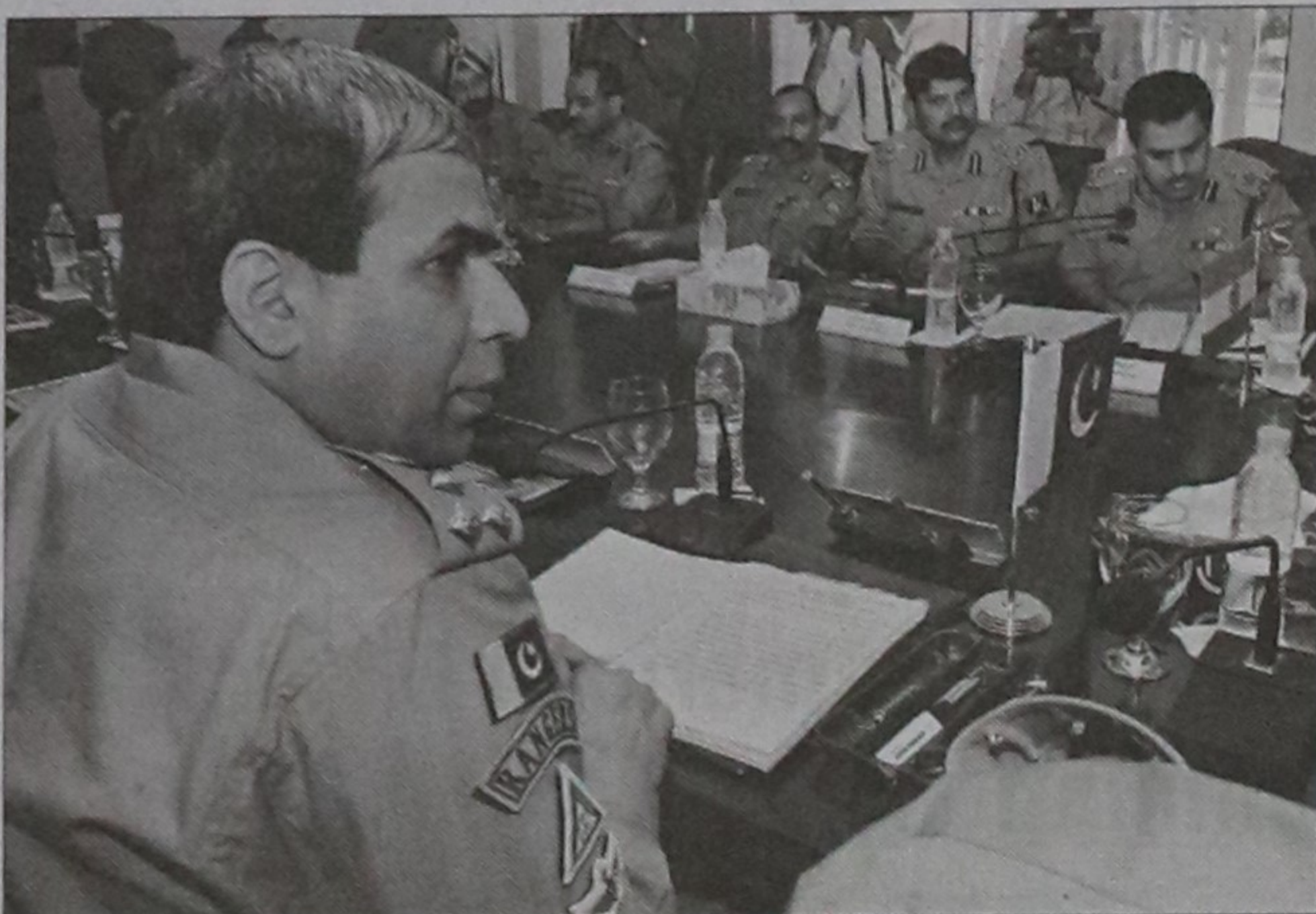


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Rangers Brigadier Shafaq Nawaz (L) holds talks with Indian Deputy Inspector General of Border Security Force (BSF) Mohammad Aquil (R) during a meeting yesterday at the Wagah Border Post, which marks the border between Pakistan and India. Quarterly coordination meeting between Pakistani Rangers and Indian BSF are being held at Wagah to discuss issues related to border including illegal infiltration.

## BDR reform

FROM PAGE 1  
2009" to Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder at the home ministry.

The proposals also suggest setting up four regional headquarters across the country to decentralise the BDR administrative hub from Pihkhana, Dhaka. The southwestern regional headquarters will be set up in Jessore, the northwestern in Naogaon, the northeastern in Sarail under Brahmanbaria and the southeastern in Khagrachhari district.

"The proposals will be placed before the cabinet soon and, if approved, steps will be taken for its implementation gradually," the home secretary told The Daily Star after a meeting with a BDR delegation where the BDR chief briefed the home secretary about the proposals.

About reducing the retirement age of soldiers the home secretary said it would be done similar to that of the army based on the ranks of soldiers. "Now there is only one category and that is, all soldiers retire at the age of 57. Now it will be divided into several categories based on promotion of the soldiers," he said.

Like police department, BDR is also under the home ministry and the members of the force, excepting deputed military officers, are considered as civil servants of the country.

In his yesterday's proposal, Mainul Islam suggested setting up 15 more battalions and 60 more BOPs to strengthen the force, which was demoralised and weakened following the mutiny at the force's headquarters in which 74 people were killed including 57 army officers.

"The distance between the border outposts is huge, which could be reduced once the new outposts are set up. It will also help effective patrolling on the border," said the home secretary, adding that all the battalions and BOPs would be provided with small trucks and motorbikes for smooth and quick movement on the border.

At present about 43,500 BDR men are stationed in 12 sectors, 64 battalions and 524 BOPs mostly across the country's borders.

The home secretary said that the proposed recruitment age would be applicable to only the newly recruited soldiers.

Earlier a draft plan for the reconstitution of BDR was submitted to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 19 proposing changes in the name, uniform, logo, service rule and composition of the paramilitary force.

The PM, in principle, agreed to change name and gave a go-ahead to the proposal of introducing new uniform of 'brown combat colour' keeping its motto 'Shimante Atondro Prohori' unchanged.

The new uniform has already been introduced in the force. Hasina, however, asked the authorities concerned to work out a concrete proposal and submit it to the home ministry for further steps.

The draft plan also suggested reduction of manpower by 30 per cent in phases and changes in the border force's composition.

It suggested the BDR soldiers, not proved guilty of being involved in the rebellion but might have link with the incident, should be given a golden handshake in phases, and the force's manpower should be brought down to 70 per cent in this manner.

The home secretary avoided saying anything when asked about the matter.

## US tries to reassure Pakistan on aid

Pak FM rushes back to Washington

AFP, Washington

The United States on Tuesday hit back at Pakistani critics of a giant aid package, rejecting charges it was violating the nuclear power's sovereignty in the fight against Islamic extremism.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi rushed back to Washington just days after a previous visit as his nation's powerful military led a nationalist backlash against the five-year, 7.5 billion-dollar aid plan.

In a hastily arranged meeting, Senator John Kerry -- a key author of the aid package -- promised to come up with a congressional statement

clarifying that the United States was not imposing conditions on Pakistan for non-military aid.

"There is nothing in this bill that impinges on Pakistani sovereignty -- period, end of issue. And we have no intention of doing so," Kerry told a joint news conference with Qureshi.

The legislation, with its stated hopes for Pakistan to tackle extremism, does not "require anything of Pakistan that isn't already the stated policy of the government and opposition parties," he said.

The package aims to build schools, roads and democratic institutions and improve the plight of women, all part of a

US drive to thwart the appeal of Islamic extremists in a nation gripped by violence.

Qureshi said he felt obligated to return to Washington due to the uproar in Pakistan, where anti-American sentiment runs high.

"It is my responsibility as a friend of this relationship -- a person who wants to deepen and strengthen this relationship -- that we address these concerns," Qureshi said.

Kerry said the package marked a landmark US commitment to Pakistan's people -- not necessarily its government -- and noted that it came despite Americans "going through their own economically challenging times."

## Restriction on US officials' unfettered Pak movement

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan has restricted the hitherto unfettered movement of US and UN officials at the international airport here, citing misuse of the facility that was granted in the wake of the 9/11 terror attack.

"All US officials and diplomats will now have to go through normal airport checks at the Islamabad airport as the government has decided to withdraw the extraordinary concession

offered to them after 9/11 by former president Pervez Musharraf," The News said Wednesday.

Under the concessions, US officials and their vehicles enjoyed unchecked arrivals and departures and no scrutiny of their luggage was done at the Benazir Bhutto International Airport (BBIA) here.

"On the direction of the defence ministry, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued orders for the withdrawal of this facility as of Oct 15. The decision has been

taken after reports that this concession was misused in the past," the newspaper said.

New standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been devised and notified that would now make US and UN officials to go through normal checks.

Garmon gate of the BBIA, which was basically meant for catering services and had a direct outside airport link without passing through immigration and customs checks, was specified for US and UN officials too.

## India's ruling party struggles in key state elections

AFP, New Delhi

India's ruling party could struggle to form a government in the key state of Maharashtra after elections this week that were seen as a test for the national leadership, exit polls showed yesterday.

In Maharashtra, the biggest of three states that voted Tuesday and home to financial capital Mumbai, the ruling Congress party and its ally are set for 127-139 seats in the 288-member assembly, short of the 145 needed for a majority, a

Cvoter poll showed. Political analyst and author of a book on Congress leader Sonia Gandhi Rasheed Kidwai called Maharashtra "the big trophy".

"It's a big state, its capital Mumbai is the financial capital of India. The person who administers Maharashtra is seen as the one holding the second most important job in the country after the prime minister," he said.

The ruling combination had 140 seats in the previous assembly and was supported by independent lawmakers.

The opposition Hindu

nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its regional ally would win 106-118 seats, against the 116 they held in the outgoing assembly, the Cvoter poll said.

A survey by the Star News channel and the market research firm AC Nielsen forecast similar results giving the Congress combine 137 seats in Maharashtra and 113 to the opposition alliance.

Premier Manmohan Singh's Congress has governed the wealthy western Maharashtra state for two successive five-year terms.

## Huge dinosaur find in China may include new species

AFP, Beijing

Palaeontologists in east China may have discovered the remains of a new species of dinosaur at what is said to be the world's largest group of fossilised dinosaur bones, state media said yesterday.

Scientists in Zhucheng city, Shandong province, have for months been exploring a gully over 500 metres (1,650 feet) long and 26 metres deep that is strewn with thousands of dinosaur bones, the Jilu Evening News said.

Palaeontologists believe that a fossilised skeleton dug up in Zhucheng and shipped to the China Academy of Sciences in Beijing last week could be a new species of dinosaur, the report said.

They have already dug up the biggest-ever or "duck-billed dinosaur" -- and found Asia's first remains of a ceratopsidae, or a giant horned dinosaur, it added.

The trove of dinosaur bones lies in an area in Shandong that has been known for numerous similar finds, with two major digs taking place in the region since 1964, the report said.

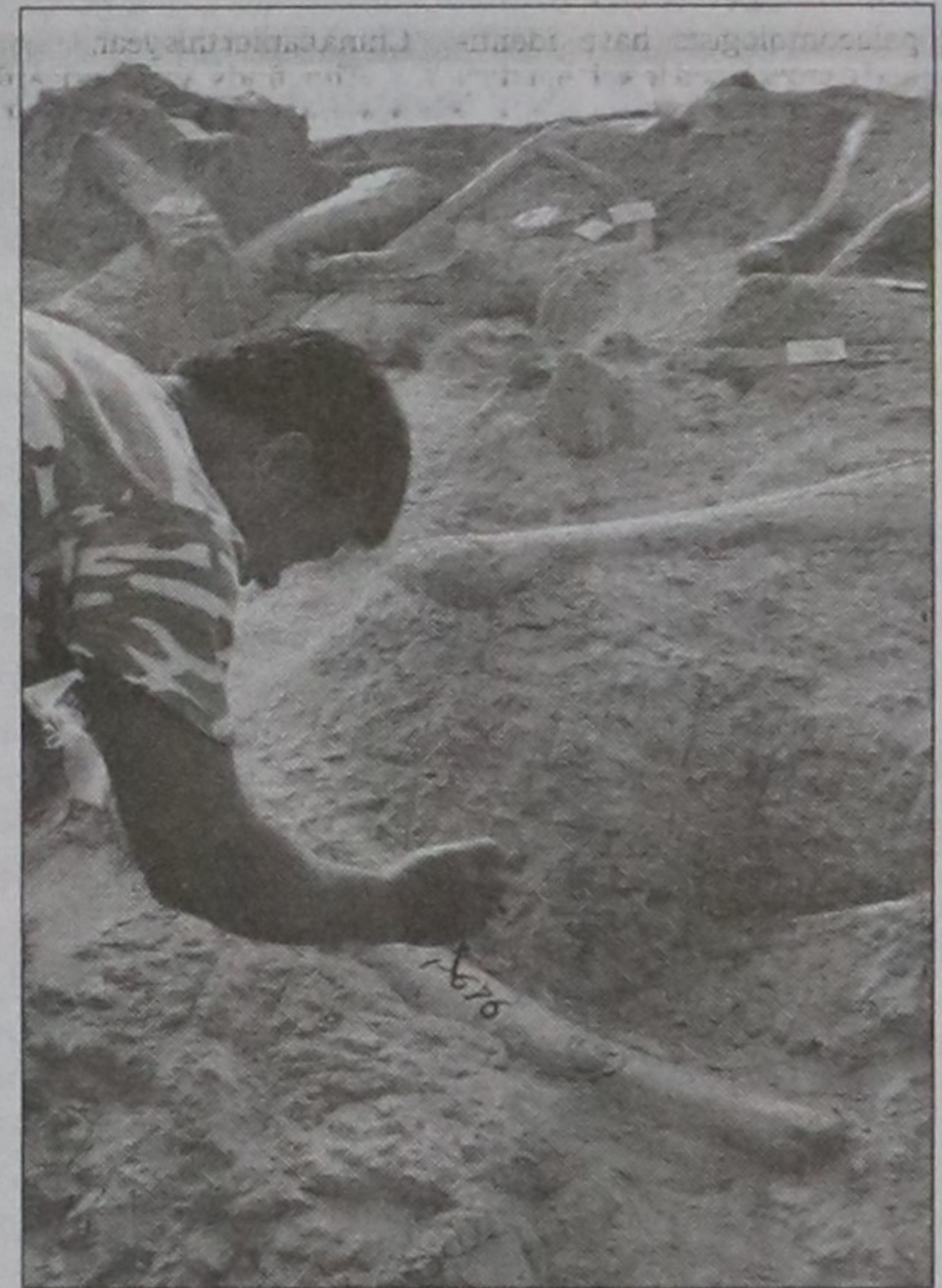


PHOTO: AFP

A Chinese worker labels a piece of bone at a gully that is strewn with thousands of dinosaur bones in Zhucheng, north-east China's Shandong province on October 11. Palaeontologists in east China may have discovered the remains of a new species of dinosaur at what is said to be the world's largest group of fossilised dinosaur bones.

## Govt strictly against it

FROM PAGE 1

The envoys discussed human rights situation and parliamentary affairs among other matters of common interest during the meet.

The PM told the ambassadors that everyone of the land has equal rights to get legal assistance and justice.

"I am personally and our government is strictly against any type of extrajudicial killings," she was quoted as saying by her Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad.

As some recent incidents of alleged extrajudicial killings were raised in the meeting, the PM said investigation into the incidents has been ordered. And if anyone is found guilty of committing such act, one will be brought to law.

She however said a few incidents of extrajudicial killings have occurred when the security personnel were about to come under grenade attacks and such other terrific attacks by terrorists.

In this context, Hasina said practice of extrajudicial killings was taken recourse to by the last BNP-Jamaat government.

The human rights ambassadors expressed the hope that under able and wise leadership of Hasina, human rights in Bangladesh would be upheld in the days to come.

The premier told the envoys that Bangladesh Awami League and the present government believe that human rights means people will have full socioeconomic safety and dignity, food security, rights to get accommodation, health, education facilities, freedom of expression and voting rights.

She said her government, after assuming office, is working hard to strengthen further the watchdog bodies like Human Rights Commission, Right to Information Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, Election Commission and all other institutions to establish people's rights.

The European envoys assured the PM that their governments would work together with the government of Bangladesh to attain these targets for accelerating people's welfare.

Hasina said the last AL government had been successful in stopping violence in the hilly region through the signing of Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord 1997 and ensuring water share of Bangladesh people through the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty with India.

She held the view that all other problems in the South Asian region can be solved through discussion, as in all of the countries democratic governments are in power.

"This way, we can establish peace in the region -- and peace will expedite human rights also."

On parliamentary affairs, the PM reiterated her call for the abstaining opposition party to join the parliament for national welfare.

She said the ongoing session has been extended so that the opposition party can join the House in due deference with people's aspiration.

front seats than their proportional strengths according to the parliamentary rules.

"We never evaluate opposition side in terms of the number of their MPs," the prime minister said.

As an outstanding example in the history of parliament, all parliamentary standing committees were formed in the very first session of the House and chairmen of seven parliamentary committees were selected from the opposition.

They said Bangladesh and the European nations have been enjoying friendly relations since the country's independence attained in 1971 under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The PM thanked the European nations for extending their support in restoring Bangladesh's democracy by holding the free, fair, neutral and acceptable elections on December 29 last year.

PM's Principal Secretary MA Karim, Office Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman and ambassador M Ziauddin were present.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka's main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe shakes hands with Indian parliamentary delegation leader DMK politician T R Baalu (L) in Colombo yesterday. The delegation arrived in Sri Lanka to assess the conditions for minority ethnic Tamils who were driven out of their homes during the final stages of the fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger guerrillas earlier in 2009.