



An internally displaced Pakistani civilian, who fled military operations against Taliban militants in South Waziristan, walks past an army vehicle outside a registration office in Dera Ismail Khan yesterday. Pakistani troops and Taliban fighters were locked in fierce clashes on Tuesday in a major offensive that officials said had killed more than 100 people and uprooted 110,000.

Pak army chief asks tribals to rise up against Taliban

AP, Dera Ismail Khan

Pakistan's army chief has appealed to members of a major tribe linked to the Taliban to support an offensive against the insurgents, a move aimed at further isolating an enemy blamed for a wave of bloodshed in the nuclear-armed, US-allied nation.

The Pakistani military's operation against the Pakistani Taliban in South Waziristan is considered its most critical fight against Islamist extremists threatening its stability, and its strategy involves convincing other warlords and tribes in the region to stand aside during the fight, even if they are involved in anti-US activities in Afghanistan.

Army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani's letter dropped as leaflets from the air in South Waziristan was addressed to the Mehsud tribe, whose members populate the top ranks of the Pakistani Taliban, a group bent on overthrowing the central government.

The Mehsuds are a huge tribe with several

subsections. Many members live far from the tribal badlands, and are involved in a range of professions and businesses. The tribe dominates Pakistan's transport sector.

The Pakistani Taliban chief is Hakimullah Mehsud, a main target of the offensive.

The Taliban have killed hundreds of tribal elders throughout the Afghan border region to undermine the age-old administrative system there and solidify control. Loyalties run deep among tribesmen, and codes of honour prevent them from informing on each other, even if one is suspected of anti-government activity.

Kayani described the Mehsuds as courageous, loyal Pakistanis, urging them to "rise collectively" against militants in their midst.

"The ongoing operation by the Pakistani army is not aimed at the patriotic Mehsud tribes," he wrote, according to a version posted on the army's Web site. "Instead the target is for the good-riddance of the Mehsud tribes from the cruel clutches of terrorist elements who have ruined the law and order and peace of this area."

Over 112,000 flee Pak offensive, says UN

AFP, Islamabad

More than 112,000 people have fled South Waziristan, the lawless area on the Afghan border where Pakistan has launched a major offensive against the Taliban, a UN official said yesterday.

"Almost 4,477 families, or 32,000 individuals, got themselves registered since October 13 as against 11,000 families, or 80,500 people, who fled South Waziristan since May," UN refugee agency spokeswoman Ariane Rummery told AFP.

The latest migration "brings the total number of displaced people to more than 112,000," she added.

Rummery said the displaced were registered at different distribution points at the northwestern towns Tank and Dera Ismail Khan.

Pakistan Information Minister Qamar Zaman Kaira said Monday that the government was monitoring the displaced at checkpoints set up on exit and entry points of South Waziristan.

"We will soon start distributing food and non-food items for one month to newly displaced people as soon as we have the lists," Kaira said.

He added that cash assistance of 5,000 rupees (60 dollars) would also be given to each displaced family every month as non-food support.

Afghanistan to hold election run-off on Nov 7

Karzai accepts ruling

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan will hold a second round of its presidential election on November 7 after incumbent Hamid Karzai failed to win a clear majority in the fraud-tainted contest, officials said yesterday.

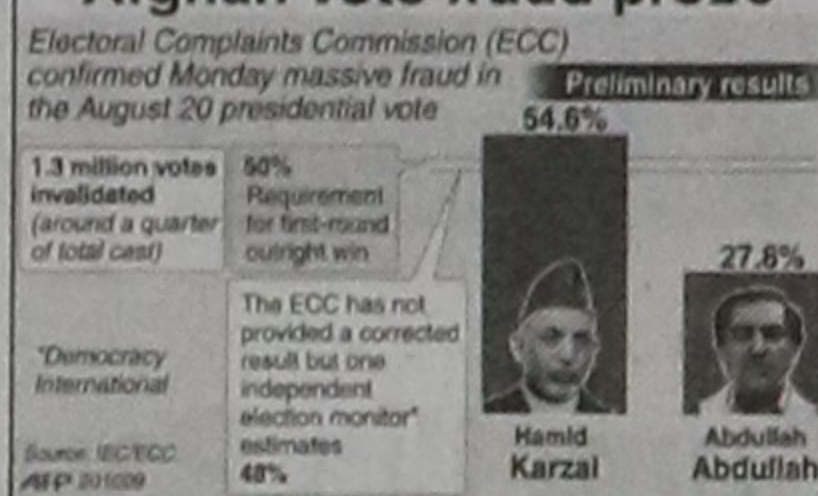
Exactly two months on from polls that Karzai had been expected to win easily, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) confirmed that he had fallen short of the 50 percent needed to avoid a run-off against his main challenger Abdullah Abdullah.

"The election has gone to a second round. On November 7 it will be re-held," said Noor Mohammad Noor, spokesman for the commission.

Karzai confirmed at a news conference that he would take part in the second round, calling it a "step forward for democracy".

"This is not the right time to discuss investigations, this is the time to move forward to stability and national unity,"

Afghan vote fraud probe



Karzai said.

He spoke alongside UN envoy Kai Eide and US Senator John Kerry, whose presence in Kabul underscored intensive Western lobbying of Karzai to resolve the weeks of political paralysis.

Karzai also urged the international community to help ensure the second round can pass off peacefully, with about 100,000 US-led troops fighting a worsening Taliban insurgency.

"People need to cast their votes free of

any security threats so that by the power of their ballots and votes they can build this country," he said.

The announcement came a day after an inquiry by a UN-backed watchdog confirmed staggering levels of fraud in the August 20 vote, declaring more than one million ballots suspect -- a quarter of the total cast.

An election official confirmed that from a preliminary tally of 55 percent, Karzai's share of the first-round vote had now fallen to 49.67 percent.

Karzai had initially dismissed allegations of widespread fraud as fabricated, convinced he had won a clear victory, but international pressure has been mounting in recent weeks.

"Having a second round seems to me to be very important, because it's a proof of democracy, and for Afghanistan to take the path of democracy is a good thing," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said on Tuesday.



A Pakistani police commando (L) secures an area as police bomb squad officials (R) investigate the scene of a bomb blast at the Islamabad's Islamic International University in Islamabad yesterday. Twin bomb blasts ripped through the university campus here Tuesday, killing at least seven people.

'Disappointed' Kerry asks Pakistan to take or leave \$7.5b aid

ANI, Islamabad

The body language of US Senator John Kerry was weary disappointed during his Islamabad visit where he was having "so much difficulty in trying to give away 7.5 billion dollar aid."

Although he was careful not to express his disappointment after his meeting with Pakistani politicians and military leaders, a frustrated Kerry ended up saying, "take it or leave it."

"We should not play to cheap galleries here. If you don't want the money, say so. We're not forcing you to take it," The Daily Times quoted Senator Kerry as saying.

Tensions rise as Bhutan refugees leave Nepal

AFP, Beldangi Refugee Camp

Seventeen years ago, Narad Muni Sanyasi was forced to flee his native Bhutan in the middle of the night, leaving his home and all his possessions behind.

Sanyasi was one of more than 100,000 Bhutanese who fled the country when ethnic tensions flared in the early 1990s and who ended up in eastern Nepal, where they have lived ever since in camps run by the UN refugee agency.

Now, the 65-year-old former member of

Bhutan's parliament is once again facing threats -- this time apparently from within his own community.

Last month Sanyasi's name appeared on pamphlets distributed by an anonymous group in the Beldangi refugee camp where he works as camp secretary, threatening him and eight other community leaders with death.

The pamphlets accused Sanyasi of supporting the resettlement of the refugees in Western countries and turning his back on the fight for their repatriation in Bhutan -- a charge he strongly denies.

Manmohan cautions commanders over security in S Asia

ANI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday addressed senior defence commanders here in the wake of a deteriorating security scenario in the South Asian region, especially in neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Defence Minister AK Antony, Union Home Minister P Chidambaram, External Affairs Minister SM Krishna along with the Chiefs of the three Defence services attended the conference.

Manmohan Singh is understood to have outlined India's immediate and medium-term defence policy with respect to China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the internal security challenge posed by left wing extremism.

Lanka's rights record under scrutiny

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka found itself under renewed international pressure yesterday over its human rights record, with the European Union threatening to withdraw the island's preferential trading status.

At the same time, New York-based Human Rights Watch condemned what it described as unacceptable delays in the government's release and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians displaced in the final months of the island's long-running ethnic conflict.



Indian Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh (C) talks with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Sarc) Secretary General Sheel Kant Sharma (2L) prior to addressing media representatives in New Delhi yesterday after the conclusion of the eighth meeting of Sarc environment ministers.



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