

6 soldiers killed in Pak helicopter crash

3 troops, 15 militants die during fighting

AFP, Peshawar

Six soldiers were killed when a Pakistani military helicopter crashed in a restive tribal area bordering Afghanistan overnight while three other soldiers and 15 militants were killed during fighting in the same area, the military said yesterday.

The MI-17 helicopter crash landed at Nawapass in Bajaur district due to a technical fault, the military said in a statement.

"Six soldiers embraced martyrdom. The pilots of the helicopter were injured but are safe and out of danger."

A senior military official late Saturday told AFP the MI-17 helicopter was returning from a routine supply mission to the border areas of Bajaur when it crashed near Charming village, killing three people and wounding two others.

Earlier three Pakistani soldiers were killed and several wounded in the past 24 hours as troops pressed a major anti-

Taliban offensive in the northwest, officials said yesterday.

Troops advanced further on militant positions a day after overrunning Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud's hometown of Kotkai, killing "at least 15 militants over the past 24 hours," a senior military official told AFP.

He put military losses in the militant stronghold of South Waziristan over the same period at three soldiers dead and several wounded.

"Today after intense engagements security forces secured the significant mountain top of Tarkona Narai after an effort lasting 16 hours," the military said in a statement.

Troops clashed with militants during their advance from Kotkai towards Shesham Wam and Baddar areas in the rugged tribal terrain on the Afghan border, another official said.

Jets and attack helicopters were providing support to the ground forces, officials said.

Pakistan launched the major offensive in the semi-autonomous South Waziristan region on October 17 and the army says more than 160 militants and some two dozen troops have been killed since then.

The figures are impossible to verify independently with the area closed and communication lines down.

The army said many of the houses in Kotkai had been converted into bunkers by militants and it was also the site of a training camp for suicide bombers.

"Security forces are in the process of clearing the build-up area of IEDs (improvised explosive devices), booby-traps and mines," military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas told a news conference on Saturday.

In its drive the army has pitted 30,000 troops against an estimated 10,000-12,000 Taliban fighters in an area where al-Qaeda-linked militants are believed to have plotted attacks against the West as well as in Pakistan.



PHOTO: AFP

Picture taken on Saturday shows armed private militia members, known as a lashkar are gathering for a rally and a battle in Bajaur against Taliban militants in their area. Pakistan said on Saturday it had captured Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud's hometown as the US demonstrated its support for the war on the Islamists with an air strike that killed 14 people.



PHOTO: AFP

Afghan university student shouting anti-US slogans during a demonstration in Kabul yesterday. Furious students also burn an effigy of US President Barack Obama (inset) during demonstration amid allegations that Western troops fighting the Taliban had set fire to a copy of the holy Quran.

Questions about how free, safe Afghan election can be

AFP, Kabul

As Afghans prepare for a re-run of their presidential election after a first round marred by staggering levels of fraud, concerns are growing about how free, fair and safe a second round can be.

Taliban threats to disrupt the November 7 run-off with the same violence and intimidation that kept first-round turnout below 40 percent have sparked fears that the next Afghan government will lack legitimacy and credibility.

With more than one million of the ballots cast in the August 20 poll -- of a total of 5.66 million -- invalidated as fake, experts said it was difficult to know how fraud could be avoided in the run-off.

In Kabul, ordinary Afghans said they had little faith in the electoral process, after President Hamid Karzai conceded last week to a run-off when most of the phony ballots, almost a million, were found to have been cast for him.

As the Taliban threatened voters, tribal elders from all 34 provinces met in Kabul on Saturday to discuss security and urge participation in the run-off.

Karzai will run against Abdullah Abdullah after the Independent Election Commission (IEC) threw out so many of the president's votes his share fell below the 50-percent threshold for outright victory.

Kilometre-long invite for Obama from UP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lucknow

Barack Obama has mail - from a place in Uttar Pradesh state in India that he would never have heard of.

And how! Measuring over one kilometre, the letter has been put together by more than 11,000 people over eight months and carries a simple message for the US president - "Come and inspire hope: lots of love from Basti district, Uttar Pradesh."

Many of the two million-odd residents of Uttar Pradesh's Basti district, some 300 km from state capital Lucknow, have collaborated to prepare the one-km long invitation letter for President Obama. They want the US president to visit the district and address them.

Political, spiritual leaders on terror hit list Warns Pak intelligence

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistani intelligence agencies have warned about a series of terror strikes across the country targeting political and spiritual leaders.

According to sources, an intelligence report has revealed that several imminent personalities and strategic establishments are on the terror hit list and could be targeted in near future.

Political leaders such as the North West Frontier (NWFP) Information Minister Mian Iftikhar Hussain and other leaders feature high on the hit list, The News reports.

Security agencies have already been warned that three would-be suicide bombers in guise of security personnel and three other extremists have entered Punjab to create havoc in the province.

According to an intelligence report, terrorists could use vehicles belonging to an army official to carry out the attack.

Following the intelligence report, the Interior Ministry has directed the concerned authorities to beef up security in and around strategic installations across the region.

Meanwhile, security in and around former President General Pervez Musharraf's Chak Shahzad farmhouse has also been beefed up.

Over two-dozen closed circuit television cameras (CCTVs) and a separate monitoring room with modern surveillance systems has been set up at the farmhouse.

Congress retains Chavan and Hooda as CMs Khandu sworn-in

PTI, New Delhi

Going for status quo, Congress has named Ashok Chavan and Bhupinder Singh Hooda as leaders of its legislature parties in Maharashtra and Haryana, clearing the decks for their return as chief ministers even.

On Sunday Arunachal strongman Dorjee Khandu was sworn in for a second consecutive term in the state's top post.

Chavan and Hooda were chosen to head the CLPs in their respective states well past midnight Saturday night by Congress president Sonia Gandhi after she held several rounds of consultations with senior party leaders who as central observers had interacted with the newly-elected party MLAs in the last two days

on the leadership issue.

After long-drawn meetings at 10 Janpath, the official residence of Gandhi, senior party leaders AK Antony and Prithviraj Chavan told reporters that 51-year-old Ashok Chavan will be the CLP leader in Maharashtra while Hooda, 62, will head the legislature party in Haryana.

Khandu, 54, who led Congress to a two-thirds majority in the Arunachal Pradesh assembly elections, was Sunday sworn in as the fifth Chief Minister of the border state.

Governor Gen (ret'd) JJ Singh administered the oath of office and secrecy to Khandu, a former army intelligence officer and social activist who returns as Chief Minister for a consecutive second term, at a ceremony in Itanagar.

Pak troops fire across Kashmir border: India

AFP, Srinagar

Pakistani troops on Saturday fired at Indian army positions across the de facto border dividing Kashmir between the two nations, the Indian army said, accusing Islamabad of violating a ceasefire.

Pakistani troops fired from light and medium machine guns towards Indian forward posts in the southern Poonch sector, army spokesman Bipal Nath told AFP over the telephone from the state winter capital Jammu.

He said an Indian soldier was wounded in the "unprovoked firing that lasted for some 30 minutes."

"It was yet another violation of ceasefire by Pakistani troops," Nath said, adding the matter has been taken up with Pakistani authorities.

India in the past has accused the Pakistani army of providing covering fire for

infiltrating militants. Islamabad denies the charge.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over mainly Muslim Kashmir, held in part by each country but claimed in full by both.

They agreed to a ceasefire along the Line of Control in 2003 and launched a peace process in 2004. Since then there have been sporadic small clashes with both sides accusing each other of violating the ceasefire.

An insurgency against New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir has raged since 1989. Islamabad denies helping the Muslim rebels. But violence has sharply declined since the start of the peace process.

Meanwhile, Indian troops Saturday morning shot dead a Kashmiri youth who tried to enter their camp after injuring a soldier by hitting him with an axe, an Indian army spokesman said in Srinagar.

Single shot of gene therapy can help cure blindness

ANI, London

A single jab of genes that produce light-sensitive pigments can make children with congenital blindness see, according to a new study.

Taking the next step towards using gene therapy to cure disease, the study conducted by researchers from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and the Center for Cellular and Molecular Therapeutics at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, showed notable improvement in children with congenital blindness.

For the study, the researchers used gene therapy to safely improve vision in five children and seven adults with Leber's congenital amaurosis (LCA).

2 Hizbut offices raided

FROM PAGE 16

Motijheel Zone Deputy Commissioner Khandaker Mahid Uddin who led the drive said the seized materials will help law enforcers in their investigation.

"We have seized these properties and documents on information that the banned outfit was planning to carry out subversive acts, and its leaders are some of the masterminds of anti-state activities," DC Mahid Uddin said.

Police said the organisation has at least 24 publications and innumerable leaflets and posters, and that they collected books and documents about jihad.

Since the banning, police had kept the central office cordoned off disallowing anyone to enter.

Officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Majibur Rahman said, "The materials were seized

after we broke the lock of the office which had been under our observation."

Earlier in the morning, Sub-inspector Shahjahan of Paltan Police filed a petition with a Dhaka court seeking permission to raid the office and to seize materials from it.

Our staff correspondent reported from Sylhet that Kotwali police there seized over 500 books and leaflets of the organisation, raiding its Sylhet divisional office in Ambarkhana area.

Police broke the lock there as well to enter the office, and seized books and other materials, and then shut the office down.

The office was located on the ground floor of a multi-storied building, which also houses a private hospital.

Regional chapter operatives of the outfit removed its signboard and went into

hiding following the banning of the organisation, local residents said.

Police said a board containing a list of the outfit's organisational activities, about 500 jihadi books, a carpet, and leaflets including some on the recent BDR mutiny were seized from the office.

The office used to remain locked almost always, except during meetings or other events in there, said some of the local residents.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international Islamist organisation founded in Jerusalem in 1953. It started its activities in Bangladesh in 2000. It is a pan-Islamist group, the goal of which is to establish a global Islamic caliphate. It has been banned in a number of other countries as well, mainly in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Troops, Maoists trade fire in West Bengal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kolkata/Raipur

Days after their daring raid on a police station, the Maoist rebels triggered three landmine blasts and engaged the security forces in a heavy exchange of fire in West Bengal's Lalgarh belt Saturday evening.

The troopers opened fire at the suspected extreme ultras near the Kantapahari forest area under the Lalgarh police station, West Midnapore district magistrate NS Nigam said.

"The gun battle continued for almost 20

minutes. No injury has been reported so far in the firing," Nigam told IANS.

He said the ultras also triggered three landmine blasts near Baropelia in the district.

"The Maoist opened fire at the joint forces when they were carrying out patrol in the area," he said.

Security has been intensified in the district after the Maoists attacked the Sankrail police station, shot dead two officers and kidnapped the officer-in-charge besides looting the fire-arms kept there.

News in Brief

Uruguayans vote to elect president

AFP, Montevideo

Uruguayans voted yesterday in a presidential election that could bring to power an ex-guerrilla leader who was shot nine times and twice escaped from jail during the military dictatorship.

Jose Mujica, 74, candidate for the incumbent Broad Front party, needs more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round to avoid a November 29 runoff against either of his main rivals.

Puntland jails 12 pirates

AFP, Bosaso, Somalia

A court in Somalia's break-away Puntland region yesterday sentenced 12 pirates to jail terms of between three and eight years, officials said.

Judge Mohamed Abdi Aware sentenced eight pirates who were handed over by Egyptian authorities last month to eight years in jail and the rest to three years.

The four other pirates were arrested by the region's coast guards, Abdulkadir Jama, a senior security official, told AFP by phone.



PHOTO: AFP

Lance Corporal Joe Glenton (3rd R) joins a demonstration by the Stop the War coalition calling for troops to leave Afghanistan in Central London on Saturday. Glenton, the first serving British soldier to openly attend an anti-war demonstration, is fighting a court martial for refusing to return to Afghanistan.

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