

A Pakistani security official (R) checks identity cards of students as they enter their college campus in Lahore yesterday following a weeklong closure. Pakistan shut schools and colleges nationwide last week a day after a suicide attack on a prestigious Islamic university as ground troops pressed home an anti-Taliban offensive.

Pak troops kill 19 militants, lose 6 soldiers in fighting

Many schools reopen

AP, AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan killed 19 suspected militants and lost six soldiers in fighting inside a Taliban stronghold close to the Afghan border, the army said yesterday as insurgents elsewhere in the frontier region struck back with deadly attacks.

The fierce clashes in South Waziristan and regions further north showed the difficulties facing Pakistan's stretched army as it seeks to root out militants close to its northwestern border, from where Western officials say they also plan attacks on targets inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan Monday partially reopened schools shut nationwide following a suicide attack on a university campus and a spike in Taliban-linked attacks in which nearly 200 people have died this month.

"All 417 schools under the federal education directorate reopened on Monday. Provinces and private schools are reopening institutions according to their own circumstances," education ministry spokesman Atiqur Rehman said.

The vast majority of schools in Pakistan's two most populous and developed provinces, Punjab and Sindh, had reopened and those in the insurgency-hit North West Frontier Province would do so on November 2, Rehman told AFP.

The army moved into South Waziristan tribal region nine days ago vowing to crush the Pakistani Taliban, a militant network it says is behind 80 percent of the suicide bombings in Pakistan. Washington backs the operation because militants in the northwest region are believed to shelter al-Qaeda leaders and attack Western troops in Afghanistan.

An army statement said soldiers were progressing on three fronts in South Waziristan, but were meeting resistance on all of them. It said over the last 24 hours, 19 militants and six soldiers had been killed.

Independent verification of army claims is very difficult because the military has blocked access to South Waziristan and other tribal regions on the border.

Militants assaulted security officials in

Toraware village overnight, killing two and wounding four in a three-hour shoot-out in the area some 95km north of South Waziristan, police officer Mir Chaman Khan said. Some 10 insurgents were believed to have been killed.

In Bajur, a tribal region further north, Taliban fighters attacked a checkpoint at Matthak village, killing four security officials. Seven militants died in the clash, said Syed Ghulam Rasool, a local government official. The militants also attacked security check posts at Khar, the main town in Bajur, and Siddiqabad, an adjoining village, wounding at least three security personnel.

Militant attacks in Pakistan have surged this month, killing more than 200 people, as the Taliban have tried to avert the army offensive in South Waziristan. The military announced Saturday it had captured the hometown of Pakistani Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud its first major achievement in the offensive.

The army said Kotkai, Mehsud's hometown, had hosted a training camp for suicide bombers.

India funding Taliban fighters: Pakistan

PTI, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad/ New Delhi

Interior Minister Rehman Malik has once again claimed that India is fomenting unrest within Pakistan through steps such as funding Taliban fighters based along the border with Afghanistan.

Malik said he was "convinced" India is among "certain hostile agencies" that are backing the Taliban to create instability in Pakistan.

Asked during an interview to a TV news channel as to that was backing the Taliban, he said: "There are certain hostile elements against Pakistan and there are certain hostile agencies which do not want Pakistan to be (stabilised)."

In response to a question on whether India is among the hostile agencies, Malik said, "Yes, of course, I am convinced. I have no doubt

about it. I was very open. I have given the full details.

"If the interior minister of India or anyone else wants to confront me, I will be very happy to confront them because I know what I am saying," he added.

Malik had said last week that Pakistan has "solid evidence" of India's alleged involvement in fomenting unrest in Baluchistan province and this can be shared with Indian ministers or representatives at any forum of their choice.

"I invite their interior minister or anyone else (to come to Pakistan) and I will put on record all the material about India's interference in Baluchistan. I'll prove it to the world," he had said.

India Monday rejected Pakistan's allegations of funding the Taliban to foment unrest in that country as "baseless" and asked it to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism targeted at New Delhi.

Musharraf did 'colossal damage' to Kashmir issue: Sharif

ANI, Lahore

Former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif has blamed former President General Pervez Musharraf for the current chaotic scenario in the country and said that he (Musharraf) had done 'colossal damage' to the long pending Kashmir issue.

"Musharraf is sitting abroad and boasting of being a messiah, despite the fact that he brought about colossal damage to the Kashmir cause," Sharif said during a television interview.

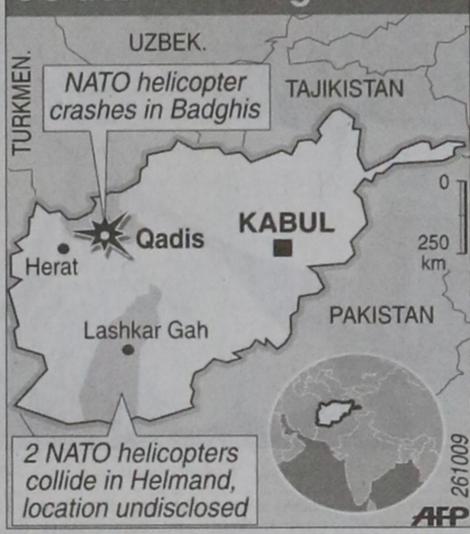
When enquired about his much-touted meeting with President Asif Ali Zardari, Sharif said meeting has no particular agenda.

"I accepted the president's invitation for the sake of democracy and national interests," The Daily Times quoted Sharif, as saying.

Sharif said he would not call parliament 'a rubber stamp', but added that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led government should take necessary steps to implement the Charter of Democracy (CoD) as soon as possible.

"I have no intention to manipulate or draw any advantage. My party's demand in this regard is in the national interest and to fully restore the sovereignty and dignity of parliament. Benazir Bhutto and I had signed the charter in London," he said.

US deaths in Afghanistan



Around 200,000 flee Pak offensive

AFP, Islamabad

Around 200,000 people have abandoned their homes in Pakistan's South Waziristan tribal area, where the military is pressing an offensive against Taliban militants, an army spokesman said yesterday.

"As of today, 26,165 families have been registered," Colonel Waseem Shahid, spokesman for the army's special support group, told AFP.

He said the army uses a working average of eight members to each family. "The cricket stadium in Dera Ismail Khan has been converted into a hub of registration and IDPs are being facilitated in registration," he added.

The Red Cross warned last week that relief workers were being kept out of South Waziristan and that the civilian toll is believed to be mounting.

EC wants to know 14 MPs' tax status

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Rajshahi-3, Afaz Uddin Ahmed of Kushtia-1, Sultana Arun of Kushtia-2, Shafiqul Azam Khan of Jhenidah-3, Sheikh Abdul Wahab of Jessore-6, Mir Shawkat Ali Badsha of Bagerhat-2, Ishak Hossain Talukder of Sirajganj-3, Shawkat Momen Shajahan of Tangail-8, Khandaker Abdul Baten of Tangail-6 and Rebeka Momin of Netrakona-4.

Golam Mostafa of Joypurhat-2 is the BNP lawmaker and Ziaul Haque Mridha of Brahmanbaria-2 is the Jatia Party MP on the list.

According to the law, an individual having annual income over Tk 1.65 lakh must pay taxes. But the news earlier published in newspapers that these lawmakers did not pay tax triggered widespread criticism as they

spent huge amount of money to win the elections.

The electoral law allowed a candidate to spend highest Tk 15 lakh as his election expenditure but according to a report of Transparency International Bangladesh, a large number of candidates spent more than that.

Initially, the EC Secretariat found anomalies in the tax records of 42 lawmakers. Of them, 17 were found to have not submitted copies of their income tax return along with the applications seeking candidacy in the December 29 polls.

According to article 44AA of the Representation of the People Order (RPO), it is mandatory for a parliamentary candidate to submit statements of probable sources of funds for election

expenses and also of assets and liabilities, annual income and expenditure, and copies of tax returns if he or she is an income tax payee.

On receiving information on the 42 lawmakers, the commission secretariat thoroughly scrutinised the documents submitted by those lawmakers along with their applications seeking candidacy in the December 29 parliamentary elections.

It also instructed the deputy commissioners, who were Returning Officers (ROs) during the last polls, to properly scrutinise the documents submitted along with the applications.

The deputy commissioners checked all the documents, which are preserved at their offices, and informed the EC

Secretariat that the 17 lawmakers submitted their copies of income tax returns along with their applications seeking candidacy, EC officials said.

But the ROs at that time did not send soft copies of all documents of the 17 lawmakers to the EC despite repeated instructions by the commission.

On receiving the soft copies from the ROs, the EC posted all documents of all candidates on its website before the last parliamentary election. Copies of the income tax returns of the 17 lawmakers were not posted on the website.

Thus information extracted from the soft copies earlier showed that 17 lawmakers did not submit their copies of income tax return along with their applications.

Lanka denies Tiger chief executed after surrender

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan government rejected on Monday fresh accusations that Tamil Tiger separatist leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was executed after surrendering to security forces.

Sri Lanka's military announced on May 18 the killing of Prabhakaran, who led a 37-year campaign for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the majority Sinhalese country.

Ten killed in Maoist-hit central India

AFP, Raipur

Four policemen died in a Maoist landmine attack in central India and six rebels were killed in a shoot-out, officials said yesterday, as government troops prepare to tackle a growing insurgency.

The police officers were killed on Sunday about 450 kilometres (280 miles) from Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh state, which is a stronghold of the left-wing rebels, superintendent Ambrish Mishra told AFP.

In a separate incident,

police said they shot dead six suspected rebels and recovered a cache of weapons and explosives in a nearby district.

Government and paramilitary forces are preparing for a major operation to take on the Maoists in the densely forested Chhattisgarh region.

The Maoists, known as Naxals in India, have vowed to fight back by unleashing a "tornado" of violence.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the insurgency, which began as a peasant uprising in 1967, as the single greatest threat to India's internal security.

Afghan governor escapes attempt on his life

AFP, Jalalabad

The governor of Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province survived an assassination attempt on Monday which saw one of his attackers gunned down in a shoot-out, an official said.

Two gunmen armed with AK-47 machine guns and hand grenades carried out the attack at an information technology conference near the governor's office in the city of Jalalabad, said a provincial government spokesman.

Attack on Taposh Babar shown arrested

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"We have yet to cull any concrete information from the detainees," an additional deputy commissioner of DB told The Daily Star in his office yesterday.

AC Mohammad Nasir Uddin Khan of DB said, "We suspect that Mehnaz might have been serving as an agent of a foreign intelligence agency of a South Asian country, and she might have been coordinating criminals trying to carry out subversive activities in the country."

He however declined to go into any more detail for the sake of the investigation.

Mehnaz told police that Brig Gen (ret'd) Chowdhury Fazlul Bari, who she claimed to be one of her ex-husbands and who was a DGFI director during the immediate past caretaker government, visited the US and Singapore with her during the immediate past regime, and before he left Bangladesh he took her passport away from her.

Meanwhile, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) intelligence wing, and Rab-3 are also investigating the attack on Taposh.

Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan, chief of Rab intelligence, told The Daily Star that they suspect cohorts of Bangabandhu murder case convicts and other people linked to the recent Bangladesh Rifles mutiny might also have links with the attack.

Chief Executive Officer of Rab-3 Lt Col Mamun Mahmud Firoz Chowdhury said they interrogated several suspects, and are gathering information and evidence regarding the bombblast.

He said they are also keep-

ing DB posted about the latest findings in their investigation.

DB so far arrested four Freedom Party leaders and put them on remand for different terms following court orders. Freedom Party was founded by another condemned convict in Bangabandhu murder case, Col (ret'd) Syed Farooqur Rahman.

In the case Taposh filed with Motijheel police station in connection with the attack on him, without naming any person he accused family members, relatives, and associates of Bangabandhu murder case convicts, of attempting to kill him in a bid to obstruct the proceedings of the case, and to create anarchy in the country.

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The court fixed October 28 for hearing on the remand prayer in presence of Babar and asked the jail authorities to produce him before it on that day.

Twenty-three people were killed and 300 others injured in the grenade attack on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Police filed two cases -- one for murder and another under the Explosive Substances Act -- with Motijheel Police Station a day after the grenade attack.

In the forwarding report to the court, the IO said former deputy minister and BNP leader Abdul Salam Pintu while on remand told interrogators that Babar gave administrative support to the attackers.

Babar hurriedly gave directives to detonate the "unexploded grenades" recovered from the scene without following legal procedures to prevent identification of the users' fingerprints, the IO said.

At that time Babar was the chief of home ministry's monitoring cell that handled the case. He gave the investigation officers guidelines for probing the case.

Following his directives, the investigation officers of the case arrested several people including Jui Miah and forced them to make confessional statements.

The report said Babar and other people linked to the case were involved in supplying the grenades hurled at an Awami League rally on August 21, 2004.

Harkatul Jihad (Huji) Chief Mufti Abdul Hannan also disclosed Babar's involvement in the grenade attack while on remand in a case filed with Narayanganj Police Station under the Explosive Substances Act.

The report further said Babar had secret business transactions with another Huji member and Pintu's brother Moulana Tajuddin.

Babar needs to be remanded to get information about the grenade suppliers and patrons of the attackers, the investigation officer added.

On August 3, a speedy trial tribunal ordered further probe into the cases following petitions filed by the prosecution seeking fresh investigation.

Pintu and Huji member Abu Taher were remanded several times in connection with the case and later sent to jail.

Pintu, Hannan and 12 others are now in jail custody in connection with the case.

The CID had earlier pressed charges against 22 people including Hannan and Pintu.

Of the accused, eight including Hannan gave confessional statements before separate courts.

Eight other accused including Pintu's brother Tajuddin are on the run since the cases were filed.

On March 5 this year, a Dhaka court sent Babar to jail for the second time on his surrender seeking bail in an arms case in which he was sentenced to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment.

He had earlier been arrested on charge of corruption on May 28, 2007 but later released on bail.

Special Tribunal-9 on October 30, 2007 sentenced Babar to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment for possessing illegal arms and ammunition at his Gulshan residence in 2007.

The High Court on October 16 last year granted Babar a six-month bail on health grounds in the case following an appeals

against the verdict of trial court.

However, the Supreme Court on October 23 revised the HC order and granted Babar bail for three months asking him to surrender before the trial court within the time.

The Anti-Corruption Commission filed a corruption case against Babar with Ramna Police Station on October 4, 2007 for taking Tk 21 crore in bribe to drop murder charge against Bashundhara Group chairman's son.

He was also accused of amassing wealth illegally and concealing wealth information from the ACC.

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