

Passports linked to 9/11 found along Afghan border

AP, Sherwanga

Pakistani soldiers battling their way into a Taliban stronghold along the Afghan border have seized passports that may be linked to 9/11 suspects, as they confront an enemy skilled in operating in a mountainous terrain with endless ways to wage a guerrilla war.

The military on Thursday took foreign and local journalists for a first look inside the largely lawless territory since it launched a ground offensive here in mid-October. The US-backed operation is focused on a section of the tribal region where the Pakistani Taliban are based and are believed to shelter al-Qaeda.

Soldiers displayed passports seized in the operation, among them a German document belonging to a man named Said Bahaji. That matches the name of a man thought to have been a member of the Hamburg cell that conceived the 9/11 attacks. Bahaji is believed to have fled Germany shortly before the attacks in New York and Washington.

The passport included a tourist visa for Pakistan and a stamp indicating he'd arrived in the southern city of Karachi on Sept. 4, 2001.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (C, in blue) gestures as she speaks with Pakistani elders in Islamabad yesterday. Hillary heard advice from Pakistani elders, wrapping up a diplomatic visit overshadowed by an outburst against the government over al-Qaeda and a devastating attack.

Pakistanis facing 9/11 daily fighting America's war

Says Pak woman to Hillary

AP, Islamabad

US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton came face-to-face yesterday with Pakistani anger over US aerial drone attacks in tribal areas along the Afghan border, a strategy that US officials say has succeeded in killing key terrorist leaders.

In a series of public appearances on the final day of a three-day visit marked by blunt talk, Hillary refused to discuss the subject, which involves highly classified CIA operations. She would say only that "there is a war going on," and the Obama administration is committed to helping Pakistan defeat the insurgents and terrorists who threaten the stability of a nuclear-armed nation.

Earlier, in a give-and-take with about a dozen residents of the tribal region, one man alluded obliquely to the drone attacks, saying he had heard that in the United States, aircraft are not allowed to take off after 11 pm, to avoid irritating the population.

"That is the sort of peace we want for our people," he said through an interpreter.

The same man told Hillary that the Obama administration should rely more on wisdom and less on firepower to achieve its aims in Pakistan.

"Your presence in the region is not good for peace," he said, referring to the US military, "because it gives rise to frustration and irritation among the people of

this region." At another point he told Hillary, "Please forgive me, but I would like to say we've been fighting your war."

A similar point was made by Sana Bucha of Geo TV during the live broadcast interview.

"It is not our war," she told Hillary. "It is your war." She drew a burst of applause when she added, "You had one 9/11. We are having daily 9/11s in Pakistan."

Capturing a feeling that Hillary heard expressed numerous times during her visit, one woman in the audience said, "The whole world thinks we are terrorists." The woman said she was from the South Waziristan area where the Pakistani army is engaged in pitched battles with Taliban and affiliated extremist elements and where US drones have struck with deadly effect many times.

Hillary said she could not comment on "any particular tactic or technology" used in the war against extremist groups in the area.

The use of Predator drone aircraft, armed with guided missiles, is credited by US officials with eliminating a growing number of senior terrorist group leaders this year who had used the tribal lands of Pakistan as a haven beyond the reach of US ground forces in Afghanistan.

attacks amount to "executions without trial" for those killed.

Another asked Hillary how she would define terrorism.

"Is it the killing of people in drone attacks?" she asked. That woman then asked if Hillary considers drone attacks and bombings like the one that killed more than 100 civilians in the city of Peshawar earlier this week to both be acts of terrorism.

"No, I do not," Hillary replied.

The Pakistani army said Friday its forces had killed two dozen militants in 24 hours and were closing in on a prominent insurgent stronghold as its offensive in the remote region continued.

Hillary's main message on Friday was that the US wants to be a partner with Pakistan, not just on the military front but also on trade, education, energy and other sectors. She stressed, however, that Pakistan needs to do its part in demonstrating a real commitment to democracy.

Hillary also was asked about her remark on Thursday that she found it hard to believe that Pakistani officials don't know where leaders of terrorist groups are hiding in Pakistan.

On Friday she took a bit of the edge off that comment, saying, "I don't know if anyone knows, but we in the United States would very much like to see the end of the al-Qaeda leadership, and our best information is that they are somewhere in Pakistan."

Sharif urges Obama to fulfil his promises on Kashmir issue

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif has urged US President Barack Obama to deliver on his promises of addressing the Kashmir issue.

Sharif met US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton here and told her that Obama, during his presidential campaign, had promised to work towards promoting peace in the region and help normalise the relationship between India and Pakistan.

Terming Obama's proposal as a 'positive concept', Sharif said it was time that the idea should be given proper shape.

"People of Pakistan would welcome such an objective,

which would make a meaningful contribution for establishing peace in the region," The Daily Times quoted Sharif, as saying.

Praising Obama's special policy with regard to the Muslim world, Sharif said it would help promote understanding, reduce tension and allay negative emotions associated with the western countries.

The former Prime Minister also took up the issue of the controversial Kerry Lugar Bill with Clinton and urged her to resolve the crisis.

Hillary, however, appeared to be in no mood to address the issue. She said that the Obama Administration is aware about the reservations of the people of Pakistan.

US to fund ex-Tigers to build life anew

AFP, Colombo

The United States yesterday announced funding for up to 1,000 former Tamil guerrillas to reintegrate in society by starting their own businesses or learning new skills.

The US embassy here said they were giving equipment and supplies to ex-fighters while vocational training was also being made available to help them start small enterprises in the island's east.

"The project, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), is part of USAID's larger efforts to increase human security and stability in the Eastern Province," the embassy said in a statement.

Pak court asks police to confiscate Musharraf assets over probe

PTI, Islamabad

A court in northwest Pakistan on Friday directed police to declare former President Pervez Musharraf a "proclaimed offender" and confiscate his property if he failed to cooperate with the probe into the whereabouts of a man allegedly detained by security agencies during his tenure.

The district and sessions court in Abbottabad in North West Frontier Province issued the order in response to a petition filed by the family of the "missing" man.

In the petition, the family had accused Musharraf of having a role in the abduction of the man.

Mohammad Iqbal, the lawyer for the complainants, said he was satisfied with the court's decision directing police to declare Musharraf a "proclaimed offender" and confiscate his property if he failed to cooperate with the probe into the case.

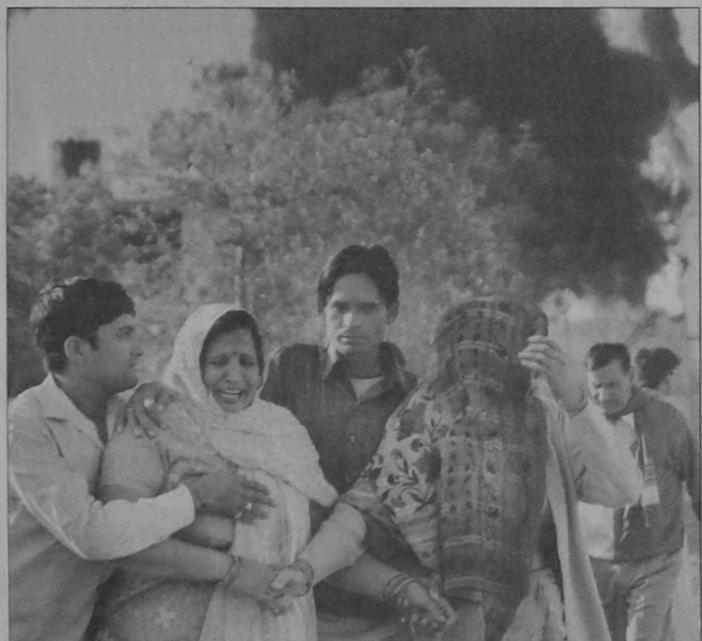
He said the petition was filed in March under provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code and Article 6 of the Constitution, which relates to the trial of the President on charges of treason.

"Now the police have got the order from the court. If they will not proceed, the judge will take action against the police," Iqbal told a TV news channel.

Police had been investigating the matter for the past six to seven months and had accepted that they cannot arrest Musharraf and others named in the complaint, Iqbal said.



Internally displaced Pakistani tribesmen, who had fled military operations against Taliban militants in South Waziristan, wait for their turn outside an aid distribution point in Dera Ismail Khan yesterday.



Relatives of people who died in a fuel depot fire grieve as flames rage in the background in the northern Indian city of Jaipur yesterday.

Oil depot fire in Jaipur still raging: 12 killed

ANI, Jaipur

The massive fire that erupted at the Indian Oil Corporation's fuel depot in Sitapura industrial area on the outskirts of Jaipur on Thursday night is still raging.

At least 12 people were killed and 150 others were injured in the incident.

The army has been deployed to handle the situation. Twenty-two fire tenders, 300 army personnel and two teams of oil fire experts are engaged in bringing the fire under control.

The injured have been admitted to different hospitals of Jaipur. Loss of over 500 cr is estimated in the incident.

Five lakh residents around the area have been moved to safer locations, including hostellers of 10 engineering and medical colleges.

UN chief pleads for extra Afghan security

AFP, United Nations

United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon Thursday warned that the world body was vulnerable to more attacks in the week leading up to the Afghan elections and pleaded for more help to protect his staff.

"We cannot do it alone," the secretary general told a crisis meeting of the UN Security Council following Wednesday's suicide attack by Taliban fighters on a UN guesthouse in Kabul that killed five UN staffers and wounded nine.

"We need the support of the member states," he told diplomats from the world's most powerful countries.

A little over a week before Afghanistan's November 7 run-off presidential election, Ban said UN staff faced a "dramatically escalated" threat and were seen as a "soft target."

"Increasingly, the UN is being targeted, in this case precisely because of our support for the

Afghan elections," Bansaid.

The Security Council issued a statement promising "strong support for the secretary general" and saying it "commends the determination of the United Nations not to be deterred by the tragic incident and to carry on its mission in Afghanistan."

Ban gave few details of what could be done to secure the unarmed UN staff, who are playing a crucial role in the holding of Afghanistan's run-off election.

Wednesday's attack on the Bekhtar guesthouse, carried out by three Taliban fighters who blew themselves up after a two-hour gun battle, has raised the stakes for the international community ahead of the crucial poll.

The Taliban have vowed to disrupt the vote, which was called in response to massive fraud in the first round.

"We'll intensify our attacks in the coming days. We'll disrupt the elections," Taliban

spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"We have new plans and tactics for attacks to disrupt the elections," he added.

Assaults and intimidation by the Taliban, who were toppled by US-led forces in 2001, were a major deterrent to voters in the first round of the election on August 20, when turnout in some provinces was as low as five percent.

Ban said that as a precaution, "we are first of all trying to consolidate our staff who are scattered around in Kabul."

Extra measures would be most needed "outside Kabul where UN security is clearly insufficient," he added.

The UN chief said more forces were needed, possibly including private security firms, and he praised the "heroism" of Afghan guards who on Wednesday attempted to hold off the Taliban assailants at a UN residence in Kabul.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Chirac ordered to stand trial

AP, Paris

A judicial official says former French President Jacques Chirac has been ordered to stand trial in an alleged corruption scandal dating back to his 1977-1995 tenure as Paris mayor.

The prosecutor had asked the court to drop the case. But a magistrate ordered Chirac to stand trial for "misuse of public funds" and "breach of trust." The judicial official spoke Friday on condition of anonymity because the case is ongoing.

Haitian PM fired by Senate

AP, Port-au-Prince

Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis was removed from office by the Haitian Senate shortly after midnight Friday, in a move that could imperil efforts to attract foreign investment to the storm-ravaged, impoverished country.

The vote of 18 of 29 senators to censure Pierre-Louis most voting against her were members of President Rene Preval's party also dissolves the cabinet.

Chopper crashes in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

An Indian airforce helicopter crashed Friday into a river in southern district of disputed Kashmir, police said.

"An Indian airforce Mi-17 helicopter has crashed in Doda district," a police spokesman said, adding the fate of people on board was not known.

"Both army and police rescue teams have reached the spot," he said.

Roadside bomb kills 9 Afghan civilians

AFP, AP, Jalalabad

A roadside bomb struck a station wagon in Afghanistan yesterday, killing nine civilians, including a woman, a provincial government spokesman said.

The vehicle was travelling through the Khwarano area of Khogyani district in eastern Nangarhar province, which shares a long porous border with Pakistan.

"Nine civilians, including one woman, were killed in the roadside bomb explosion," Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, a spokesman for the provincial governor's office, told AFP.

Afghans caught between Taliban, US promises

AFP, Somali Segosa

"We're caught in the middle," Abdul Rahim tells US Marines as they try to induce his fellow Afghan villagers to turn on the Taliban fighters in their midst.

As Rahim mulls the Marines' offers, he sums up the no-win situation that rural populations find themselves in, trapped in a vicious Taliban insurgency but with US troops stretched too thin to provide lasting protection.

"The Taliban will come down (from the mountains) and say 'you are spies working with the Americans, give us stuff and we won't kill you.'"

After conducting a sweep through this village in Farah province, the men from 2nd

Battalion, 3rd Marines Regiment and their allies in the Afghan army offered the tribal leaders medical treatment and development projects if they made a "fresh start" and kicked militants out of their communities.

"We've got a lot invested in these villages," said Sergeant Colby Johnson, whose men were recently stuck for five days in the nearby Bhujji Bhas Pass, an area littered with homemade bombs and a key supply route for foreign troops.

"We are like a bridge. We can help you cross to the other side," said Mohammed Anwar Sakra, a lieutenant colonel in the Afghan army, as he tried to win over hearts and minds of

elders seated around a carpet.

The Marines left Somali Segosa with two detainees and some bags of bomb-making materials.

But with the soldiers having neither the manpower nor time in their six-month deployment for a continued presence in sparsely populated villages, experts say that local allegiances are unlikely to change in the long term.

"It's very difficult to build up local structures that can withstand a Taliban campaign of force and intimidation if the military presence is fleeting," said Andrew Exum, an Afghanistan expert at the Centre for a New American Security in Washington.



Armed private Afghan security personnel stand alert at a security barrier of a hotel in Kabul yesterday. UN and other foreign agencies in Kabul have restricted movement of their personnel while a UN personnel said a curfew has been imposed for foreign and local staffers following October 28 suicide attack.