



Pakistani policemen secure the site after a suicide bomb blast in Rawalpindi yesterday. The bomber on a motorbike ripped through a queue of people collecting salaries near a four-star hotel in the city, killing 34 people. Pakistani women mourn the death of their relatives outside a hospital (Inset).

Obama asks Pakistan, KSA to help US initiate talks with Taliban

ANI, Lahore

President Barack Obama has reportedly requested Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to help Washington initiate a dialogue process with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

According to the Daily Times, Obama's request has come in the wake of the United State's new strategy to deal with the Afghan-Taliban, which is to talk to the Taliban.

Sources said Taliban commander Mullah Akhund would represent the Afghan-Taliban in the talks.

The paper quoted Mullah Akhund, as saying that the US cannot create a rift between

Taliban ranks with money.

He has also demanded the US to pull out of Afghanistan as soon as possible so that the people could form a government of their own choice.

Earlier Pakistan reportedly told US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that members of any Afghan Taliban Shura were not hiding in Baluchistan, against whom the US had demanded a crackdown.

According to The Nation, during her recent visit to Islamabad, Hillary pushed Pakistan for a crackdown but to her sheer disappointment, the demand was rejected for lack of evidence.

11 killed as train hits truck in Uttar Pradesh

ANI, Gonda

At least 11 people were killed and over 20 others injured on Sunday, when a passenger train hit a truck at an unmanned railway crossing in Uttar Pradesh's Gonda district.

The accident took place around 1.30 p.m. when a Gorakhpur-Ayodhya passenger train hit the truck at Kalyanpur railway crossing in Gonda.

According to reports, nine train passengers and the driver of the truck were among the victims. The injured have been admitted to a local hospital where the condition of some people were said to be serious.

US diplomats, troops, ready to help Karzai Says US lawmaker

AFP, Washington

US diplomats and troops in Afghanistan say they need a military "surge" there to succeed and stand ready to work with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a US lawmaker said after a visit there.

Republican Representative Duncan Hunter, who sits on the House Armed Services Committee, told AFP by telephone that US personnel were "unanimous" on both fronts in a series of at least 10 meetings in the war-torn country.

"Everybody seems very confident, very excited. Everybody thinks that they can win it, we can win it, we can hand it over to the Afghans, and we can get out of there," he said during a brief stop in Dubai.

But US officials underlined that "we've got to have the surge to do what we've been asked to do. Nothing's going to work without more security. If we have the security, it's going to work," said Hunter.

The California lawmaker -- who enlisted in the US Marines after the September 11, 2001 attacks and served two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan before being honourably discharged -- said Afghanistan's troubled presidential election run-off was of "very little importance" to US-led efforts.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai meets with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the Presidential Palace in Kabul yesterday. Ban flew into Kabul on Monday for talks on the Afghan election crisis.

Pakistan urges India to avoid public rhetoric

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Foreign Office on Sunday strongly reacted to Union Home Minister P Chidambaram's strict warning to Pakistan that any further attack on the Indian soil will be strongly retaliated.

Pakistani Foreign Office spokesperson Abdul Basit said that India should stop making public statements about such issues, which are vital to both the countries and should work with Pakistan to fight terrorism. My advice to India would be that they should avoid resorting to such public rhetoric because it serves no purpose, and only serves the cause of the common enemy - terrorism. India knows fully well Pakistan's contribution towards countering terrorism," The Times Now quoted Basit, as saying in a report.

"If India is serious about this then they should respond to our suggestions, and proposal that the Joint Anti-terrorism Mechanism should be activated, should be revitalized so that our two countries can jointly work again terrorism and extremism," it added.

Earlier in the day, addressing a public function in Madurai, Chidambaram said that he has been warning Pakistan not to play with India and that the Mumbai attacks should be the "last game."

Nepal can't pay ministers as Maoists block its new budget

AFP, Kathmandu

The Nepalese government has run out of money for essential services including hospitals and schools after the Maoist party blocked its new budget, the finance minister said yesterday.

Surendra Pandey said the impoverished nation faced a "financial crisis" if parliament failed to pass the budget in the next two weeks, and had already been forced to stop paying ministers' salaries.

Maoist demonstrators have repeatedly prevented Nepal's parliament from sitting since the party's gov-

ernment fell in May, blocking the new administration's attempts to pass this year's budget.

"We are at a very critical stage," Pandey told AFP. "If the budget is not passed in the next two weeks, there will be a financial crisis in the country."

"We are in discussions with the Maoists to open parliament to pass the budget and we hope they will allow the resumption of house business."

Pandey said the crisis would affect thousands of patients in government-run hospitals as well as school pupils and prison inmates.

Smarter, younger wives secret to happy, longer marriages

ANI, London

Forget candlelit dinners, romantic weekends away and showering your other half with compliments, the secret to a happy marriage is easy: the woman should be smarter than the man and at least five years younger.

A Bath University team, which recently did a study, has found that men who choose wife at least five years younger to them and even preferably smarter are more likely to sustain the relationship longer.

The researchers first read five-year-old interviews of more than 1,500 couples who were either married or in a serious relationship.

Then they followed it up by checking on 1,000 of the interviewed couples to see how many of the pairs were still going strong, reports the BBC news.

The group noted that in cases where the wife was five or more years older than her husband, they were more than three times as likely to divorce than if they were the same age.

However, when the age gap was reversed, the odds of marital bliss got higher.

The researchers also observed that couple who had never divorced were more likely to maintain a stable love life.



Supporters of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) take part in a torch rally in protest against the government in Kathmandu on Sunday. Nepal's Maoists said on Sunday they would launch protests aimed at destabilising the government in a dispute over the military that led to the Maoists' fall from power in May.

Banking enters new era

FROM PAGE 1
Minister's Office, told The Daily Star.

Vice Chairman of Association of Bankers Bangladesh Nurul Amin, also managing director of National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, said: "Banks need to be prepared for offering such services. Customisation and integration are necessary for this purpose."

Security measures along with a legal framework need to be put in place to safeguard both customers and banks, he added.

These transactions will only be possible now within the accounts under the same bank offering online banking.

Online transaction between banks will be possible with the introduction of e-Payment Gateway, an e-commerce application service provider service that authorises payments for e-businesses and online retailers.

Bangladesh Bank had taken the initiative to implement the e-Payment Gateway back in 2008.

According to a report, the system should be ready for deployment within the next six to eight months and is expected to be operational at the beginning of the next financial year.

"We collect payment manually from 300-400 clients every day. The system consumes huge time and money. Now we are ready to start online payment collection on a pilot basis. We were waiting for this to happen for quite long," said Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of Bdjobs.com.

Shoeb Ahmed, former general secretary of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services, also appreciated the initiative.

He said, "Banks are probably ready for this. But stakeholders

and government bodies should be prepared for online banking, otherwise it might not be utilised properly."

Shoeb said they proposed that the government establish a central payment gateway.

Physical credit and debit card payments are available across the country. Banks need to introduce Application Programme Interface (API) to implement the online credit card payment system. API ensures secure payment on the internet by providing both credit card and PIN numbers.

All banks have been advised to remain alert to the misuse of online payment system for money laundering. They will have to report to the financial intelligence unit on whether any irregularity or crime has been committed in violation of the anti-money laundering act.

Pakistan posts \$5m rewards for Taliban leaders

Pak army captures key town, kills 9 Taliban militants

AFP, ANI, Islamabad/Lahore

Pakistan yesterday offered rewards worth five million dollars for information leading to the capture, dead or alive, of the country's Taliban warlord Hakimullah Mehsud and 18 lieutenants.

Pakistan's military spokesman said Monday that troops had taken full control of Kaniguram, one of the biggest towns in South Waziristan and formerly a key Taliban operational centre.

"Kaniguram area has been completely cleared of terrorists," Major General Athar Abbas told a news conference in Islamabad.

The rewards for top-ranking Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants were offered in a black-and-white government advertisement on the front page of The News daily and flashed on Pakistani television channels overnight.

Mehsud, who took on the leadership

mantle after a US drone attack killed his predecessor Baitullah Mehsud in August, headed the list with 50 million Pakistan rupees (600,240 dollars) slapped on his head.

TTP has been blamed for some of the worst attacks in Pakistan, which have killed around 2,400 people in a deadly wave of carnage over the past two years.

The hardcore faction has also claimed responsibility for many strikes in a recent surge in bloodshed, in which more than 300 people died last month, as the military launched a ground offensive against the TTP in South Waziristan.

Wali-ur Rehman Mehsud, head of the Baitullah Mehsud faction in South Waziristan and considered a contender for the TTP succession, and Qari Hussain Mehsud, commander for his hometown, Kotkai, were also the subjects of 50-million-rupee awards.

Eleven other commanders had rewards of 20 million rupees and the government

posted rewards of 10 million rupees each for five lesser-ranking militants.

Informants should contact the local administration or law enforcement agencies, said the advertisement, pledging full anonymity.

The rewards were offered less than a week after at least 118 people were killed last Wednesday when a massive car bomb flattened a market street in the northwest city of Peshawar in one of Pakistan's deadliest ever attacks.

Pakistan ground troops, backed by jet fighters and helicopter gunships, are pressing a major offensive against TTP strongholds into a third week in which they have massed outside Taliban bastions and fought in streets.

Pakistani security forces killed nine terrorists and arrested two others, while two soldiers also lost their lives on Sunday in Waziristan, where an offensive against the Taliban is going on, Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence Agency (ISPR) has said.

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