



British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2nd L) and Afghan President Hamid Karzai (2nd R) talk with US soldiers at a military base in Kandahar on Sunday. Brown vowed a renewed effort to defeat the Taliban insurgency during a visit to Afghanistan on Sunday, hailing the next few months as critical.

## Stalled talks with India benefit terrorists: Gilani

ANI, Multan

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani has said that not talking with India would only benefit terrorists.

Addressing a press conference here, Gilani admitted that the Mumbai terror attacks had created a rift between India and Pakistan, but both countries should realise that all issues should be settled through talks.

"Pakistan wants good relations with all its neighbours, including India. However, the Mumbai attacks created a rift between India and Pakistan," he said, pointing towards cooperation between the two countries on anti-terrorism.

He added that only terrorists would benefit from the

stalled talks between Pakistan and India.

Gilani refused to say anything on the alleged Indian involvement in Balochistan, saying it was a sensitive issue and statements on it should be avoided.

"We cannot disclose our strategy but we have evidence [of Indian involvement] and will present it at an appropriate forum at a suitable time," he said.

Earlier Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has denied Islamabad's role in last year's Mumbai terror attacks, but claimed that his government has concrete evidence to prove Indian involvement in the ongoing terror activities in Pakistan.

"Now, it has been admitted globally that Pakistan was not

involved in the Mumbai terrorist attacks. We have concrete evidence regarding Indian involvement in terror activities in Pakistan," the Daily Times quoted Qureshi, as saying in an interview with an Arab TV channel.

Qureshi added that the Mumbai carnage was plotted by elements that wished to sabotage Indo-Pak relations. "Economic progress is vital to counter extremism in the region," he said.

Qureshi also urged the international community to press India to understand that there was no alternative to dialogue to establish sustainable peace in the region.

At least 170 people died in coordinated shooting and bomb attacks in Mumbai on November 26 last year.

## Taliban blow up girls' school in Pakistan

US mulls expanding drone strikes into Quetta

AFP, Peshawar

Taliban militants blew up a girls' school in Pakistan's Khyber district yesterday, officials said, as two soldiers and seven insurgents were killed in clashes in the northwest tribal belt.

The pre-dawn school attack took place in Saddokhel town in northwest Khyber tribal district, where militants detonated explosives planted around the building, destroying all five school rooms but causing no injuries.

"They are Taliban. They are the same people who do not want children to get an education," senior administration official Rahim Gul Khattak told AFP.

Islamist militants opposed to co-education have destroyed hundreds of schools, mostly for girls, in the northwest

of the country in recent years as they wage a fierce insurgency to enforce Sharia law.

Meanwhile, senior US officials are pushing to expand CIA drone strikes beyond Pakistan's tribal region and into a major city in an attempt to pressure the Pakistani government to pursue Taliban leaders based in the city of Quetta, The Los Angeles Times reported late Sunday.

The newspaper said the prospect of Predator aircraft strikes in Quetta signals a new US resolve to decapitate the Taliban. But it also risks rupturing Washington's relationship with Islamabad.

The concern has created tension among officials in the administration of President Barack Obama over whether unmanned aircraft strikes in a city of

850,000 are a realistic option, the paper said.

Proponents, including some military leaders, argue that attacking the Taliban in Quetta -- or at least threatening to do so -- is critical to the success of the revised war strategy President Obama unveiled last week, The Times said.

Pakistani troops launched an offensive in Khyber district in September to try and flush out both the Taliban and home-grown militant group Lashkar-e-Islam (Army of Islam), led by feared warlord Mangal Bagh.

The fabled Khyber tribal region is the main land bridge to neighbouring Afghanistan and is also close to the north-west provincial capital Peshawar, which has been hit by a series of suicide bombings in recent months.

Pak court stays deportation of Americans

AP, Lahore

A top Pakistani court yesterday ruled that five Americans being held on suspicion of terror links cannot be deported back to the US or any other country before judges review the case, an official said.

Pakistani police have alleged that the five young Muslim men wanted to join militants in Pakistan's north-west tribal areas before going to Afghanistan. The men are accused of using Facebook and YouTube sites to try to connect with extremist groups in Pakistan.

They have not been formally charged with any crime in Pakistan or produced in court. No deportation order is known to have been issued though officials from the US and Pakistan have said deportation back to America is likely.

## Political deadlock continues in Andhra Pradesh

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

The political deadlock in Andhra Pradesh over the proposed division of the state continued Monday with ministers and legislators from Telangana region holding a meeting after the state assembly was adjourned sine die amid uproar.

As the protests in Andhra and Rayalaseema continued for the fourth day against the central government's decision to initiate the process for formation of a Telangana state, Chief Minister K. Rosaiah and the central leadership of the

Congress stepped up their efforts to resolve the impasse.

In what is seen as some respite for Rosaiah's government, the ministers from Andhra and Rayalaseema regions Monday decided not to go ahead with their decision to resign.

Minister for municipal administration Anam Ramnarayan Reddy told reporters that the chief minister had conveyed to all the 20 ministers from the two regions that he would not accept their resignations.

The ministers who met Sunday evening had agreed to review their decision on the request of the chief minister.

## Secret doc exposes Iran's nuclear trigger

ANI, Washington

Confidential intelligence documents show that Iran is working on testing a key final component of a nuclear bomb.

According to The Times, which accessed the documents related to Iran's most sensitive military nuclear project, found a four-year plan to test a neutron initiator, the component of a nuclear bomb that triggers an explosion.

Foreign intelligence agen-

cies date them to early 2007, four years after Iran was thought to have suspended its weapons programme.

An Asian intelligence source last week confirmed that his country also believed that weapons work was being carried out as recently as 2007 - specifically, work on a neutron initiator.

The technical document describes the use of a neutron source, uranium deuteride, which independent experts confirm has no possible civilian or military use other than

in a nuclear weapon.

Uranium deuteride is the material used in Pakistan's bomb, from where Iran obtained its blueprint.

"Although Iran might claim that this work is for civil purposes, there is no civil application," said David Albright, a physicist and president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

The institute has analysed hundreds of pages of documents related to the Iranian programme.

## Afghanistan war decision toughest of presidency Says Obama

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama said Sunday that his decision to pour 30,000 more US troops into the war in Afghanistan was the most difficult of his presidency so far.

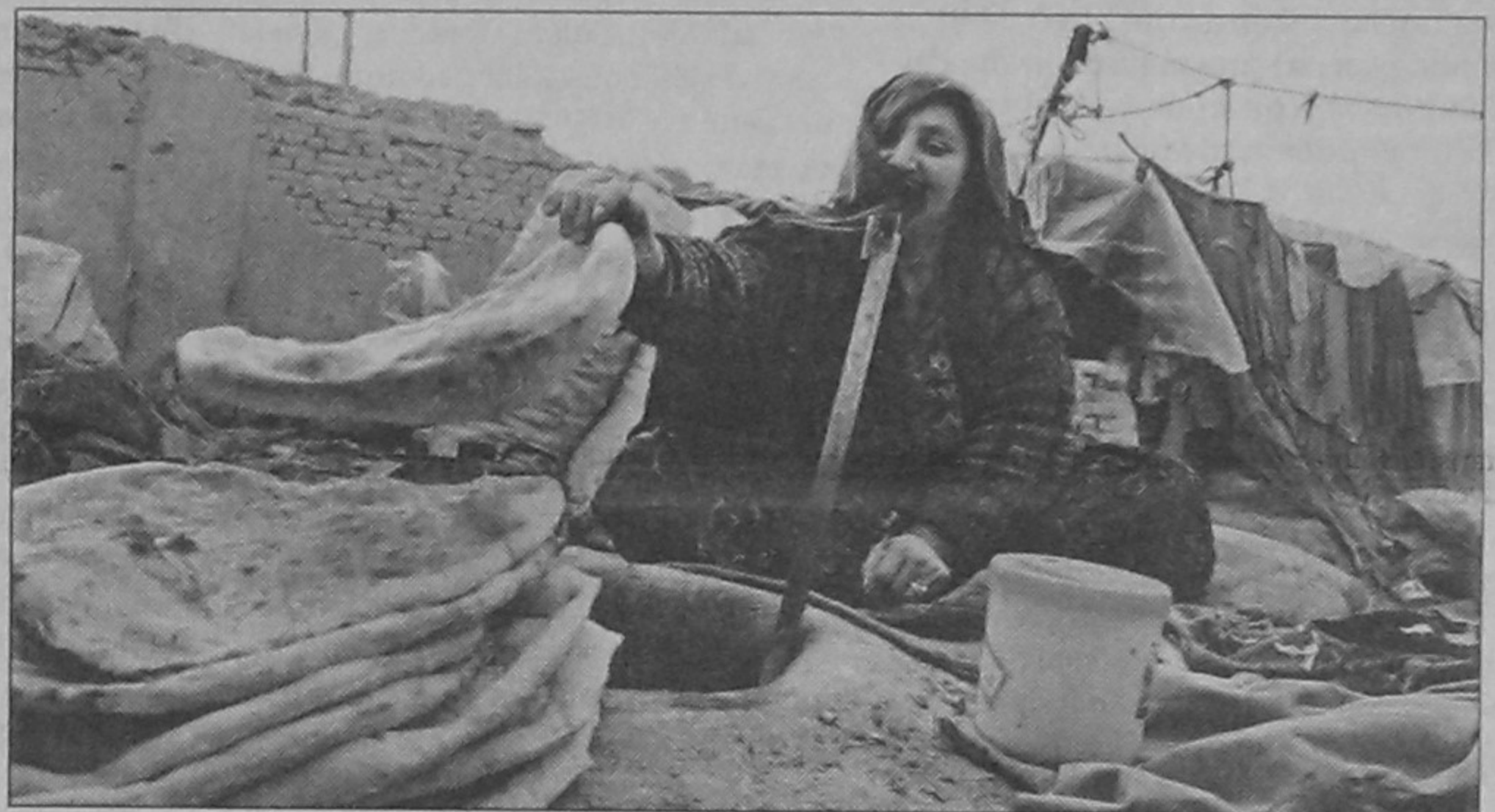
Acknowledging his move to escalate the conflict flew in the face of a war-weary public, Obama said it would be clear within a year whether the surge was working but left the door open to adjusting his approach if necessary.

The newly crowned Nobel laureate told CBS that attend-

ing ceremonies for fallen soldiers returning home in flag-draped coffins and visiting scarred veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had deeply marked him.

"There is nothing more profound. And it is a solemn obligation on the part of me as commander in chief to get those decisions right," he said.

Just days before he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and after months of deliberations, Obama unveiled his new Afghan strategy in a speech to cadets at the prestigious West Point military academy.



An internally displaced Afghan woman bakes bread by her mud house in a refugee camp in Kabul yesterday. Despite billions of dollars of aid, the recent fraud-tainted election highlighted the massive levels of official corruption in Afghanistan.

## Lanka accuses Gen Fonseka of 'betrayal'

BBC ONLINE

The Sri Lankan government has accused former army chief General Sarath Fonseka of betraying the nation after he made new accusations against it.

He alleged that the defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, had ordered the killing of Tamil Tiger rebel leaders as they were trying to surrender last May.

The Sri Lankan government said they were in fact shot by other rebel fighters.

It says it is considering taking legal action against the general.

Gen Fonseka is standing against the incumbent Mahinda Rajapaksa in next month's presidential election.

The Human Rights Minister, Mahinda Samarasinghe, described Gen Fonseka's allegation as a "betrayal based on the untruth" and the biggest such betrayal in Sri Lanka's history.



Palestinian girls wave their national flags bearing the Fatah party's logo during a demonstration against an attack on a mosque in the West Bank village of Kfar Yasuf near Nablus on Sunday. Assaultants vandalised the mosque overnight on December 11, spraying hate messages in Hebrew and burning the Qurans in an attack blamed on hardline Jewish settlers angered by a temporary moratorium on settlement construction.

## UN-backed Congo troops killing civilians

AP, Johannesburg

A UN-backed Congolese military operation to oust rebels from eastern Congo has caused more civilian casualties than damage to rebels, with more than 1,400 people deliberately killed over a nine-month period, human rights groups said yesterday.

Human Rights Watch said it had documented "vicious and widespread" attacks against civilians by soldiers and rebels between January and September. Soldiers being fed and supplied with ammunition by the United Nations have killed civilians, gang-raped girls and cut the heads off some young men they accuse of being rebels or supporting the enemy groups said.

"For every rebel combatant disarmed, one civilian has been killed, seven women and girls have been raped, six houses have been burned and destroyed and 900 people have been forced to flee their homes," British-based organization Oxfam said.

## Blair sycophancy blamed for British involvement in Iraq war

ANI, London

Former British prime minister Tony Blair's "sycophancy" towards Washington and the failure of the governing class to speak the truth were cited as key factors for Britain's involvement in the second Gulf War against Iraq in 2003.

A former prosecutions chief, Sir Ken Macdonald, told the Lord Chilcot Inquiry that Blair indulged and engaged in an "alarming subterfuge" with George Bush, and then misled and cajoled the British people into a war they did not want.

"Blair's fundamental flaw was his sycophancy towards those in power. Perhaps this seems odd in a man who drank so much of that mind-altering brew at home. But Washington turned his head and he couldn't resist the stage or the glam-

our that it gave him," The Times quoted Macdonald, as saying.

In his most savage comment, he writes that the heart-rending sacrifices made by British forces would become the stuff of poetry and song in future years. But none of that would sprinkle any starlight on Blair.

"On the contrary it is entirely the work of warriors cast carelessly into death's way by a Prime Minister lost in self-aggrandisement and a governing class too closed to speak truth to power," he says.

Sir Ken's intervention comes after Blair's declaration in a BBC interview that he would have favoured removing Saddam Hussein regardless of whether he had possessed weapons of mass destruction.

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## Trio of planets found orbiting Sun-like star might harbour life

ANI, Edinburgh

Astronomers have discovered three new planets orbiting a nearby star that is almost identical to the Sun, which raises the possibility of the planets harbouring life.

According to a report in The Scotsman, the planets, whose masses range from 5.3 to 24.9 times that of the Earth, form a mini-solar system circling the star 61 Virginis, which is 27.8 light years away and can be seen with the naked eye.

61 Virginis lies in the constellation of Virgo, visible from both hemispheres. It has 0.96 of the Sun's mass and is only slightly less bright.

Its family of planets were discovered by British, Australian and US astronomers using the Anglo-Australian Telescope in New South Wales, Australia, and the Keck Telescope in Hawaii.