

Blast kills 3 near Pak press club

AFP, PTI, Peshawar / Islamabad

A suicide bomber yesterday attacked a Pakistan journalists' club, killing three people in the first assault on media offices blamed on Islamist militants in the troubled country.

Strapped with explosives, the man walked up to the gate of the press club in the north-western city of Peshawar, where he blew himself up as police stopped him entering the building, officials said.

In two separate operations, Pakistani troops killed six militants and captured 17 more during operations against the Taliban in the north-western Swat valley and the restive Waziristan tribal region, authorities said on Monday.

Four militants were killed in a gun battle that erupted while security forces were conducting a search and clearance operation near Totakan in Swat, the military said.

Fourteen suspects were apprehended during operations in different places in the valley, including Kanju, Tutan, Bandai and Kabal.

Two militants were killed and three more captured when troops cleared several rebel compounds in Shakai sector of South Waziristan tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

Attacks on civilian targets are escalating in the north-western city of Peshawar of 2.5 million people on the edge of Pakistan's tribal belt on the Afghan border that Washington calls the chief sanctuary of al-Qaeda and the most dangerous place on Earth.

"I was coming out of the canteen when I suddenly heard a huge blast. Smoke engulfed the building immediately and when I reached the spot, I saw human organs littered on the ground," said television journalist Nisar Mohammad Khan.

The force of the explosion blew out the windows at the press club, damaged the guard hut and ripped through nearby vehicles, said witnesses.

"He was stopped by police deployed outside. When the police official started searching him, the attacker blew himself up," Peshawar police chief Liaquat Ali told reporters at the scene.

Taliban militants, who are powerful in northwest Pakistan, threatened media in Peshawar, said the president of the press club, Shamim Shahid.

"We beefed up security after the threats and people coming to the club were properly checked," he said.

India 'foils Kashmir infiltration attempt'

BBC ONLINE

Indian security forces say they have foiled an attempt by militants to infiltrate the international border in Indian-administered Kashmir.

A Border Security Force (BSF) officer said the militants had fired on Indian positions from the Pakistani side.

Security forces were carrying out search operations in the Kangra area where the incident took place, he said.

About 30,000 troops have been withdrawn from Indian-administered Kashmir as rebel attacks decrease.

The incident happened in the Kangra area, about 45km (28 miles) south-west of Jammu city, on Monday night.

Security forces returned fire and the exchange continued till early Tuesday, BSF Deputy Inspector General JB Sangwan said.

"It appeared that a group of militants attempted to sneak into the Indian side which

we have foiled effectively," he said.

One BSF soldier was killed and two were injured in fire on a post on the Line of Control (LoC) on Saturday.

The LoC separates Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir.

A senior BSF official was killed in an explosion in the same area last month when he had gone there to investigate reports about infiltration by suspected militants from across the border.

Last week, Indian Defence Minister AK Antony said that about 30,000 troops had been withdrawn from Indian-administered Kashmir as attacks by separatists had decreased.

He said there had already been a significant reduction over the past two years and the government was willing to further reduce forces in the future.

However, an army official said the number of soldiers deployed along the Line of Control would not be cut.

'US forces operated covert raid in Pakistan'

ANI, London

Special US forces have reportedly carried out multiple secret raids on the al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan's lawless tribal regions along the Afghan border, a former Nato official has disclosed.

According to the official, the covert raids, only one of which has been previously reported, occurred between 2003 and 2008.

He said the US administration had never informed Islamabad about the operation, which involved helicopter-borne elite commandos who sneaked inside Pakistan's territory at night.

UN presses Sri Lanka over LTTE killings

BBC ONLINE

The Sri Lankan government says the UN has asked it to explain allegations that Tamil Tiger rebel leaders were executed as they tried to surrender.

The president's office said it was studying the request and would take any action necessary.

The claims - rejected by the government - were first made in a Sri Lankan newspaper and attributed to Sri Lankan ex-military chief Gen Sarath Fonseka.

Gen Fonseka has since said his remarks were misunderstood.

The general, a candidate in next month's presidential election, has said he was only repeating what he had been told by journalists who had been at the scene.

However, government officials have accused Gen Fonseka of "betrayal".

After the war's bloody end in May, some

diplomats alleged that the army summarily killed a group of surrendering people led by senior Tiger rebels.

But the Sri Lankan government has said they were in fact shot by other rebel fighters.

The UN's request came from its special reporter on extrajudicial killings, Philip Alston.

The statement from President Mahinda Rajapaksa's office said the UN "has asked the government to provide explanations with regard to the circumstances of the death of three senior LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] cadres and their families at the last stages of military operations to defeat the LTTE in May this year".

The Sri Lanka's government crushing military victory ended the Tigers' quarter-century war to create a separate state for ethnic minority Tamils.

The UN estimates that up to 7,000 civilians died in the final stages of the war, although the government disputes the figures.

Nobody is untouchable in politics: BJP

PTI, Ranchi

Expressing confidence on getting an absolute majority in the Jharkhand Assembly polls, the BJP yesterday said that 'nobody is untouchable' as it would not rule out the possibility of looking for allies if it fails to get majority in the results tomorrow.

"Nobody is untouchable in politics," said BJP president Raghuvir Das said here.

"We have geared up for an absolute majority," Das said when asked whether the party would reach out to others if the NDA failed to muster majority.

The party could not get majority in the 2005 polls, prompting it to seek support of independent MLAs.

Bangladesh seizes global spotlight

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best possible outcome.

During a news briefing held at the ministry office the day after returning from Copenhagen, the state minister observed, "It cannot be said that Bangladesh is fully satisfied with the outcome of the conference.

"But it is more important that the world's major economies have agreed to work towards curbing global temperatures."

He commanded the prime minister's efforts saying, "A successful climate diplomacy has been achieved under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh has drawn the attention of the global community."

The state minister urged world leaders to reach a legally binding treaty during next year's COP-16, which will be held in Mexico.

Hasan Mahmud also took a swipe at the ex-prime minister and main opposition leader Khaleda Zia for what he described as a lack of knowledge about the government's approach to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

On December 17 Khaleda Zia held a press conference, "Lobbying for handouts [at Copenhagen] is below our national dignity".

Hasan rejected her comment outright by saying, "Her advisers did not properly enlighten her about the global climate conference and she did not study the issues."

He added, "There is no question that Bangladesh went to attend the Copenhagen to beg."

Hasan said it was established during the summit that Bangladesh is the country most vulnerable to climate change and that it will therefore request 15 per cent of the \$30 billion adaptation fund, which will become operational in January.

"We have boldly told the conference that we must receive compensation because we are not responsible for global warming," he said.

Hasan said he also expects further bilateral assistance from countries with whom Bangladesh has close ties.

The state minister said that the government could use the funds to set up a large number of cyclone shelter centres, to construct new coastal embankments and to repair 11,000 kilometres of embankments.

He gave the assurance that all the funds would be spent in a transparent manner.

Leading economist and environment specialist Dr Quazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmed also spoke during the briefing.

Maoists' nationwide shutdown in Nepal enters third day

AFP, Kathmandu

Three years after the end of Nepal's civil war, the Himalayan nation is in a state of political paralysis reflected in the blocked streets of the capital and empty parliament this week.

Tuesday is the third and final day of a nationwide strike by the opposition Maoists, which has led to violent clashes with police and caused widespread disruption to roads, schools and other public services.

The ultra-leftists won elections last year after they ended their 11-year "People's

Indians above other immigrants in US: Forbes

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

Pepsico chief executive Indra Nooyi inevitably tops the list of what Forbes calls "Eight Indian-flavoured CEOs" who lead US corporations with revenues of at least \$2 billion as the premier business magazine chronicles the rise of Indians in corporate ranks in America.

"The chief executive of Pepsico would be prominent no matter what. The fact that the current one - Indra Nooyi - is an Indian immigrant (and female, in case you've been living under a rock) makes her all the more noteworthy," it says.

"It's not a surprise that we're seeing Indians rise in corporate ranks," Forbes quotes Richard Herman, co-author of a book on migrants to the US, Immigrant, Inc., as saying in an article published Monday.

"Of all the immigrant groups coming in today, Indians are head-and-shoulders above others, and this is partly because of their English language skills and also the advanced education that many of them are bringing to the US."

Obama govt to pressure Myanmar on democratic reforms

AP, Washington

If talks with Myanmar over democratic reforms fail, the Obama administration could tie up large amounts of money that the country's ruling generals stash in international banks from the sale of natural gas.

So far the administration has been hesitant to go that route.

But pressuring banks to avoid doing business with Myanmar's leaders could be a powerful economic weapon one that already is being used elsewhere. It's an approach, for example, that has been used to try to push North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons ambitions.

Congress already has provided the power for the administration to go after the banks and some rights groups want President Barack Obama to use it right away, or at least if direct talks fail.

US officials have just started face-to-face negotiations and want to give them more time to show results. Imposing the banking sanctions would be expensive and time-consuming, and Myanmar isn't a top priority on a crowded foreign policy agenda that includes Afghanistan and Iran.

Still, the administration has warned of tougher action if engagement breaks down with Myanmar, also known as Burma. And the mere threat could add force to the US negotiating position.

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Corporate Office: Awal Centre, 17th Floor, 34, Kemal Ataturk Avenue Banani, Dhaka-1215
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01713-144314, 01713-144313, 01713-144330, 01713-144312
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MEMBER BHABAN 1st fl. 01713-144326



PHOTO: AFP

US stops aid to Nepal over human rights row

PTI, Kathmandu

The US has passed a law that denies financial aid to the Nepal government, amid stepped up pressure on the country's army to fulfil its human rights obligations, a news report has said.

US president Barack Obama has signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2010, which prohibits assistance to the Nepal Armed Forces till they fulfil their human rights obligations, myrepublica online, the website of Republica newspaper, has said.

The law, passed on December 16, states the Nepal army will be entitled to funds under the US Foreign Military Financing Programme only if it fulfils certain criteria including full cooperation on human rights violations, it said.

The US decision comes amid widespread pressure to arrest and hand over Nepal army Major Nirajan Basnet to the civilian administration to be tried at the district court for his alleged role in the torture and subsequent murder of a 15-year-old Nepalese girl Maina Sunar.

This comes even as, thousands of supporters of Nepal's Maoist former rebels demonstrated across the nascent republic on Monday, the second day of a strike that has highlighted the fragility of a three-year peace process.