



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani security personnel are deployed in violence-affected areas in Karachi on Tuesday. Security officials say up to 48 political party workers have been killed in Karachi since last week, when the headless body of a worker from the city's main political party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), was discovered.

Resolution against US airport screening passed in Pakistan

ANI, Peshawar

The assembly of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province has passed an unanimous resolution, asking the federal government to tell Washington to immediately stop screening Pakistani citizens at US airports.

The Daily Times quoted Leader of Opposition Akram Khan Durani as saying that the screening process was a violation of human rights and that American officials were humiliating Pakistani citizens at their airports without any reason. "The screening of Pakistani citizens should be stopped forthwith," said Durani, who is also the parliamentary leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F).

2009 deadliest year for Afghan civilians: UN

AFP, Kabul

The number of civilians killed in the Afghan war jumped last year to 2,412, making 2009 the deadliest year for ordinary Afghans since the US-led invasion, the UN said yesterday.

The vast majority of the dead were killed in Taliban attacks, the UN's Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) said. By comparison, 2,118 civilians were killed in 2008.

"The intensification and spread of the armed conflict in Afghanistan continued to take a heavy toll on civilians throughout 2009," the report said.

Last year was also the deadliest for foreign forces fighting the Taliban, with 520 troop deaths, up from 295 for the year before, as the insurgency has escalated and spread from the southern provinces where it began soon after the Taliban regime was

overthrown in the 2001 invasion.

The UN report said 70 percent of last year's civilian deaths, or 1,681, were in insurgent attacks, while pro-government forces including Nato and US troops were responsible for 25 percent, or 596 civilian deaths last year.

Another 135 civilians were killed in violence not attributable to the conflicting parties, it said.

"2009 was the worst year in recent times for civilians affected by the armed conflict," the report said, adding: "UNAMA HR (human rights) recorded the highest number of civilian casualties since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001."

Civilian deaths caused by Western troops fell 28 percent last year compared to the year before, it said, attributing the drop to measures taken specifically to

protect civilians.

Commander of the foreign forces in Afghanistan, US General Stanley McChrystal, has made minimising civilian deaths and injuries a central tenet of his counter-insurgency strategy, and has ordered reduced air strikes as one way of achieving this objective. The UN report said the change in Nato forces' command structure, "specific steps to minimize civilian casualties" and "a new tactical directive" by the force contributed to the reduction in non-combatant deaths.

Civilian casualties are a source of tension between the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai and the international forces fighting the insurgency.

Karzai uses the issue to press home his authority, draw support for his unpopular government while criticising the tactics of the foreign forces.

8 Pak pupils killed as train slams into school bus

AFP, Multan

At least nine people, eight of them children, were killed and 18 others injured on Wednesday when a passenger train hit a bus packed with school children in central Pakistan, officials said.

The crash took place at an unmanned crossing with no barrier near Mian Channun town, about 100km east of the central city of Multan in Punjab province, which was enveloped in fog at the time.

"The Lahore-bound Jaffer Express collided with a school van, killing nine people including two girls and the driver and wounding 18 others," senior police official Kamran Khan told AFP.

Mushtaq Ahmad, a senior doctor at the government's main hospital in Mian Channun, said the bodies of seven children and the driver reached his hospital while 18 other people were

being treated for injuries.

Officials said the parents of the eighth dead child may have taken the body home for burial.

The primary school children were all aged around eight to 10 years old, and were on their way to class when the accident happened.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani ordered an inquiry into the "tragic" incident.

"The prime minister expressed deep grief and concern over the tragic road accident in which several school children lost their lives," a statement issued by his office said.

Gilani also asked state-owned Pakistan Railways to "ensure proper vigilance at their unmanned crossings, particularly during times of fog."

Pakistan has one of the world's worst records for fatal rail and road accidents, blamed on poor infrastructure, badly maintained vehicles and roads, and reckless driving.

Lanka election violence escalates after killing

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police yesterday broke up clashes between political activists as violence linked to looming presidential polls escalated after gunmen shot dead an opposition party worker.

Tear-gas was fired to disperse thousands of party workers in the eastern town of Polonnaruwa, local officials said by telephone.

About 3,000 opposition supporters destroyed a ruling party office in the town after posters of their favoured presidential candidate, Sarath Fonseka, were destroyed overnight, a police official said.

"It was a mini-war between rival groups," said the official, who declined to be named. At

least five people were seriously wounded in the clashes.

The violence came as the government vowed to step up security in the run up to the January 26 election at which President Mahinda Rajapakse is seeking re-election.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe accused Rajapakse's People's Alliance of inciting violence and using intimidation to swing voters.

"People linked to the government were behind yesterday's killing," Wickremesinghe told reporters in Colombo.

Opposition activist Kusuma Kurupparachchi, 60, was gunned down Tuesday as she was travelling in a bus to attend Fonseka's election rally in the southern town of Hungama.



PHOTO: AFP

Disabled Sri Lankan soldiers demonstrate in support of presidential candidate and their former Army Commander General Sarath Fonseka in Colombo yesterday.

Two US soldiers among 7 killed in Afghan violence

AFP, Kabul

Two US soldiers and five Afghans were killed in bomb blasts in Afghanistan yesterday, as the UN reported the deadliest year yet for war-weary civilians caught in a spiralling Taliban-led insurgency.

Also Wednesday, a suicide truck bomb rocked a southern Afghan town, injuring several people, a day after nine people died as violence erupted at a protest against an alleged desecration of the Koran by foreign forces, police said.

The two US soldiers assigned to the Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) were killed in a home-made bomb explosion in eastern Afghanistan, the force said, without giving the exact location.

"Two Isaf service members from the United States were killed today as a result of an IED (improvised explosive device) strike in eastern Afghanistan," the force said in a statement.

The deaths took to 17 the number of foreign forces killed in Afghanistan since the start of the year, according to an AFP tally based on that kept by



PHOTO: AFP

Loomba Trust president Cherie Blair and Indian actress Preity Zinta pose for a picture during a press conference in New Delhi yesterday. The Loomba Trust educates 3,000 children of poor widows across India and has been supported by former

Protest over burning of Quran

9 die as troops open fire on demo in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

Nine people were killed when shooting broke out during a mass demonstration in a provincial Afghan town over the alleged burning of a Quran by foreign troops, police said yesterday.

The violence erupted on Tuesday in the Garmsir district of the southern province of Helmand over rumours that Nato-led forces had defiled a copy of the Muslim holy book during a military operation, local residents and police said.

Nato said it had no information confirming the civilian

US admits drone attacks intensified in Pakistan

ANI, Washington

US Central Command Chief, General David Petraeus, has acknowledged that there has been an increase in drone attacks on suspected militant targets in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) in Pakistan, since the suicide attack at a US base in Khost Province of Afghanistan last week.

The seventh drone attack since the suicide bombing came on Saturday in North Waziristan, part of the tribal area and a region where Washington is pressing Pakistan to launch an offensive.

North Waziristan is a refuge for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, as well as for the Haqqani network, which is considered the most dangerous Afghan insurgent group.

The Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda all have claimed responsibility for the Khost bombing, which

killed seven CIA operatives, including the chief of the base, an officer of Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate and the Afghan base security chief at the base.

Petraeus also commented on a video, which shows the triple agent suicide bomber of Jordanian descent, Balawi, sitting beside the former Pakistan Tehrik-i-Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud. Balawi claims that he blew himself up to avenge the death of Mehsud in a US drone attack.

"Baitullah Mehsud and his organisation carried out horrific attacks inside Pakistan, and that is what I think should concern the Pakistanis, as certainly it concerns us," The Dawn quoted Petraeus, as saying.

"There will be loss of innocent life in war, but we have got to make sure that we minimise it and that we try to avoid it just about at all costs," he added.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Civil Service Commission (গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার). It lists various posts like Assistant Commissioner, District In-charge, and District Officer, along with their respective salaries and conditions of service.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Computer Council (বাংলাদেশ কম্পিউটার কাউন্সিল). It promotes a Diploma and Post-Graduate Diploma in ICT courses, detailing the curriculum, duration, and contact information for the council.

Advertisement for Commercial Bank of Ceylon PLC. It features the headline 'START YOUR CAREER WITH US...' and details the Graduate Trainees scheme, including requirements, benefits, and application procedures.