



A US marine with 1/3 Charlie Company battles Taliban as plumes of smoke from marine artillery shells billow in the background in the North East of Marjah on Friday. An Afghan army commander said Saturday that 20 Taliban militants were killed in the first hours of a combined assault on a militant stronghold in southern Afghanistan.

PHOTO: AFP

Assault on Taliban in S Afghanistan begins

3 US soldiers, 20 militants killed

AFP, Marjah

Thousands of US-led troops backed by helicopters stormed a Taliban stronghold in southern Afghanistan on Saturday in the first major test of President Barack Obama's new surge policy.

US Marines led the charge on Marjah, a town of 80,000 in the central Helmand River valley controlled for years by militants and drug traffickers.

US, British and Afghan soldiers dropped into Marjah from helicopters before dawn, immediately coming under fire and claiming their first Taliban victims within hours, Afghan army and Marines officers said.

Operation Mushtarak ("together" in Dari), as the assault involving 15,000 troops is known, aims to clear the area of Taliban and reestablish Afghan sovereignty and civil services, Helmand Governor Mohammad Gulab Mangal said.

At least 20 Taliban fighters had been killed in the first hours of the assault, said General Sher Mohammad Zazai, commander of Afghan troops taking part in the operation.

"So far, we have killed 20 armed opposition fighters. Eleven others have been detained," he said, adding they were killed in separate

engagements.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) said three US soldiers died after being struck by an IED in southern Afghanistan, but a spokesman said he could provide no details of whether they were part of the Marjah attack.

Defence Minister Abdul Raheem Wardak said the operation was making painstaking progress because the area had been laced with deadly improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which can be almost impossible to detect. "The area has been heavily mined, that's why we are moving so slowly," Wardak told reporters in Kabul.

Mushtarak is the first major assault on a Taliban stronghold since Obama announced in December that he was sending an additional 30,000 soldiers to Afghanistan in 2010.

The US and Nato already have 113,000 troops in the country battling the insurgents. Nato has pledged another 10,000, bringing the total to more than 150,000 by August.

Mushtarak puts into practice the new US-led counter-insurgency strategy combining the military objective of eradicating the Taliban with the need to replace their brand of harsh control with the civilian authority of Kabul.

US issues travel alert for its citizens in S Asia

ANI, Islamabad

The United States has issued a travel warning regarding the threat to American establishments and citizens in South and Central Asia.

The US State Department said that extremist groups like al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their other offshoots may target US national and facilities using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne explosives, and rocket attacks.

Militants could also resort to assassination, carjacking, or kidnappings, the warning said.

"The presence of al-Qaeda, Taliban elements, indigenous sectarian groups, and other terror organisations, many of which are on the US Government's list of foreign terror organisations, poses a potential danger to American citizens in the region," The Nation quoted the travel alert, as saying.

News in Brief

US official visits Swat valley

AFP, Washington

US national security advisor General James Jones visited the front lines of Pakistan's battle against Islamic militants when he paid a trip to northwestern Swat valley, officials said Friday.

Jones, who was returning from his trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan on Friday, "had the opportunity to travel to the Swat valley and elsewhere in North West Frontier Province," National Security Council spokesman Mike Hammer said in a statement.

Shah Rukh calls for peace

AFP, Berlin

Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan tried to calm a row in India linked to the premiere Friday of his new movie about the treatment of Muslims after the September 11 attacks amid threats of violent protests.

Activists from the ultra-nationalist Shiv Sena party said they would disrupt the film's release in India because of recent comments by Khan regretting the absence of Pakistani cricketers in the Indian Premier League (IPL) tournament.

The 44-year-old Muslim actor, who was at the Berlin Film Festival for the red-carpet gala premiere of "My Name is Khan", said he had been distressed by the threats from right-wing Hindus.

Love for sale in Nigerian church

AFP, Lagos

A Nigerian pentecostal church yesterday announced that it was charging a fee of 2,000 naira (13 dollars, eight euros) for connecting would-be lovers on Valentine's Day.

The House of God Fellowship Church, located near a Lagos prison, is charging the fee to defray the cost of a seminar, marriage counselling, music and entertainment during the love event, spokesman Michael Uchebuaku told AFP.

Obesity 'often set before age of two'

BBC ONLINE

The "tipping point" that sets children on the way to a lifetime of obesity often occurs before the age of two, say US researchers.

A study of more than 100 obese children and teenagers found more than half were overweight by 24 months and 90% were overweight by the age of five.

A quarter were overweight before they were five months old, the researchers reported in Clinical Pediatrics.

In the UK, around 27% of children are now overweight.

The children in the study - who had an average age of 12 - were all overweight or obese by the age of 10.

Kashmiris, Hurriyat Confce hail move for Indo-Pak talks

ANI, AP, Srinagar

The resumed dialogue between India and Pakistan has been hailed by locals in Jammu and Kashmir and separatist Hurriyat Conference.

India and Pakistan will resume foreign secretary-level talks in New Delhi on February 25.

The composite dialogue between the two nations came to grinding halt after the 26/11 attacks in which 166 lives were lost.

India blamed the attack on elements based in Pakistan and said that Islamabad would have to first bring the culprits to book.

"It is good and appreciable thing. Talks are necessary. Talks should be result-oriented and objective. Talks are important for the resolution of the issue of Kashmir and other bilateral issues between India and Pakistan," said Zafar Akbar Bhat, a senior leader of the moderate All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

While the resumption of formal dialogue between the two countries has fired the expectations of J-K residents, they are sceptical of the outcome.

"We are happy and we expecting some result out of the talks. If they are talking just for the sake of it or under the American pressure then

nothing positive will come out, there will be despondency," said Nissar Ahmad, a local resident.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and sending militants into Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Pakistan denies that, saying it only gives political support to what it calls a freedom movement.

Meanwhile a statement from Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani's office said Pakistan would raise "all core issues" at the talks and urge India to resolve them quickly.

It was a further sign that Pakistan wants talks between the two nations to resume from where they were when India put them on hold after the Mumbai attacks. That dialogue covered a broad range of issues and had been intended to lead toward a full normalization of relations.

"We want a meaningful engagement," Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi later told Aaj News TV. "We want a result-oriented dialogue."

Leaders of the two countries have met on the sidelines of international conferences since the attacks, but broad engagement with Pakistan remains a sensitive issue in New Delhi because of continuing suspicions that Islamabad has not done enough to rein in Muslim extremists operating in Pakistan.

Taliban blow up boys' school in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Taliban militants blew up a boys' high school in a tribal district of northwest Pakistan along the Afghan border on Saturday, an official said.

There were no casualties as the school in the village of Qamardin at Safi area of the Mohmand tribal district, 92 kilometres (57 miles) in northwest of Peshawar, was closed.

"The school was almost completely destroyed. Taliban planted explosives at five places and blew up most of the rooms," Maqsood Khan, a senior administrative official in the area told AFP by telephone.

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.



Indian members of Akhila Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) shout slogans as they burn an effigy of the Srikrishna Commission during their protest at Osmania University in Hyderabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Strike cripples Telangana

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

A day-long shutdown began in Hyderabad and nine other districts of Telangana region Saturday in response to a call by the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of students to protest the terms of reference of the Srikrishna panel on the issue of carving out a state of Telangana from Andhra Pradesh.

Shops and business establishments remained closed while state-owned Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation suspended bus services in the region.

Activists of Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took to the streets at several places, staging demonstrations and blocking vehicles. The protesters turned violent at some places in Warangal and Medak districts, damaging buses and attacking the offices of the Congress party, police said.

As a preventive measure, police arrested dozens of pro-Telangana leaders since Friday night.

Anticipating violent protests by students, police and paramilitary forces have been deployed at Osmania University campus here. The campus has been the nerve centre of the agitation for a separate state.



This picture taken on Thursday shows Pakistani women choosing Valentine's Day gifts at a shop in Peshawar. Hip young romantics in Pakistan's most dangerous city are buying chocolates and teddy bears, defying bomb attacks to seek solace in Valentine's Day.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani lovers brave bombs for Valentine's

AFP, Peshawar

Hip young romantics in Pakistan's most dangerous city are splashing out on text messages and teddy bears, defying Taliban bombers and conservative parents to find love this Valentine's Day.

It's taken four years and the prospect of never seeing her again, for Mohammad Asif to pluck up the courage to approach the object of his affections, a fellow engineering student in northwest city Peshawar.

Destined to graduate and look for a job in a city where bomb attacks have closed businesses and emptied markets, Asif realises it's now or never.

"After four years of studies, my classmates are dispersing and I finally want to express my love for a girl I've liked for the past four years, but never said anything," gushes the 21-year-old.

"I've bought a card and chocolates to give her, so she knows that I love her. This is the day to disclose your hidden feelings," he said. For Shama Aamir, who bought scent, chocolates and a love heart for her husband, Valentine's Day is a ray of sunshine in a miserable life.

"Some people cannot express their love and Valentine's Day provides them a good opportunity. It's a positive thing in this gloomy atmosphere and bombings," the 32-year-old told AFP.

Rajapakse dismisses concern over rival's arrest

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president said yesterday there was no reason for concern over the arrest and detention of ex-army chief and defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka.

President Mahinda Rajapakse has promised "due process" will be followed in dealing with Fonseka, the president's website said.

Fonseka was arrested Monday by military police after allegations he was involved in a conspiracy against the government.

"The president has assured opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe that there was no reason for any concern over General (ret'd) Sarath Fonseka who is in detention," the president's website said.

It quoted the president as saying that "no one was above the law" and said Fonseka's candidacy in the January 26 presidential polls had nothing to do with his arrest.

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court said Friday it would hear a petition submitted by Fonseka's wife calling for his arrest to be ruled illegal and ordered the state to allow the former army chief family visits and medicines.

JS boost for judiciary

FROM PAGE 16

Basic salary of the chief justice of India is Rs11 lakh, Rs 1,99,875 in Pakistan and Rs 70,000 in Sri Lanka along with various allowances.

According to the House body recommendations, basic salary of a judge of Appellate Division of the SC should be raised to Tk 90,000 from Tk 29,000 now, domestic aide allowance to Tk 8,000 from Tk 1,125, entertainment allowance to Tk 5,000 from Tk 975, and they should also get judicial allowance of Tk 20,000 a month.

The sub-committee proposed that basic salary of a judge of High Court Division of the SC should be raised to Tk 80,000 from Tk 27,000, entertainment allowance to Tk 5,000 from Tk 650 and domestic aide allowance to Tk 5,000 from Tk 1,000. Besides, each of them should get judicial allowance of Tk 18,000 per month.

It mentioned that there are now eight judges in the Appellate Division and 78 in the HC Division, and additional Tk8.18 crore a year will be needed to increase their salaries as recommended.

The House body proposed increasing the basic salary of a district judge and a judicial official of equivalent rank to Tk40,000 from Tk 29,000, additional district judge to Tk35,000 from Tk 25,750, joint

district judge to Tk 32,000 from Tk 22, 250, senior assistant judge to Tk25,000 from Tk 18,500, assistant judge who got selection grade to Tk 20,000 from Tk 15,000, and assistant judge to Tk 16,000 from Tk 11,000.

In addition, the sub-committee recommended introduction of judicial allowance for judges of the subordinate courts. Each of them should get judicial allowance equivalent to 50 percent of their basic salaries.

A district judge, chief judicial magistrate and chief metropolitan magistrate should be entitled to entertainment allowance of Tk 1,000 per month, and each of the judicial officials from district judge to assistant judge to domestic aide allowance of Tk 1,000 a month, it said in its report.

An additional Tk 22 crore a year will be required to increase salaries and other allowances of the judges and officials of subordinate courts.

Basic salary of a district judge in Pakistan is Rs 1,20,000 and Rs 50,160 in Sri Lanka, and that of an additional district judge in Pakistan is Rs 78,000 and Rs 46,165 in Sri Lanka. Basic salary of a joint district judge in Pakistan is Rs 48,000 and Rs 39,865 in Sri Lanka, the sub-committee report mentioned.

LAND WANTED

www.hamidgroup.org



at any prime location of **DHAKA & CHITTAGONG CITY**

landowners' are requested to contact directly:

0173 0044 833
0173 0044 812
0173 0044 811
8651141, 8651142, 8651143
land@hamidgroup.org

Hamid Real Estate Construction Limited
Founder Member **REHAB**
Membership No: 004