

Afghan offensive could take weeks

Six Nato soldiers killed while 7 Afghan cops die in friendly fire

AFP, Marjah/Kabul/Kunduz

A senior British commander has warned it could take weeks to wrest control of the Afghan town of Marjah because of determined Taliban resistance...

The commander of Nato forces in southern Afghanistan, Major General Nick Carter, cautioned against "triumphalism" in Marjah...

The troops engaged in Operation Mushtarak (Together) would need another 25 to 30 days just to secure the Taliban stronghold, said Carter.

triumphalism just yet," he said.

The offensive is being watched as the first major test of US President Barack Obama's strategy to end eight years of war by driving out the hardline militia and reasserting government control.

Nato said four of its soldiers were killed on Thursday during the operation, three of them by mines and one by gunfire.

Carter's assessment and the news of fresh allied deaths stood in marked contrast to US pronouncements.

The incident occurred when a joint

patrol by the Afghan Army and police and Nato forces came under Taliban attack in the Imam Sahib district...

Nato said it was investigating the strike, which could add to distress following repeated warnings by President Hamid Karzai about civilian deaths.

Nato reported Friday the deaths of two more troops in a major offensive in southern Afghanistan, bringing to six the total killed in one day's fighting.

The nationalities of the two soldiers were not given, according to policy, in a brief statement by Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

"Two Isaf service members died yesterday during Operation Mushtarak in southern Afghanistan," it said, referring to a showcase offensive in a poppy-growing region of Helmand province that began a week ago.



Afghan police wait to depart for Marjah from Shorabak camp near the British Camp Bastian in Helmand province's Nad-e Ali yesterday. On a barren military base in southern Afghanistan, the new Afghan Army is taking its place at the frontline of the battle against the Taliban.



Slum residents of Maharashtra state's Mumbai gather in New Delhi and shout slogans against the Congress-lead United Progressive Alliance government and its Chairman Sonia Gandhi during a protest rally. The rally demanded that the national government rehouse slum residents having their homes razed by multinational corporations in Mumbai, the commercial and financial capital of India.

US missile kill Taliban leader's brother

AP, Islamabad

The brother of senior Afghan Taliban commander Siraj Haqqani has been killed in a US missile strike in north-western Pakistan...

The death was the latest in a string of blows to militants operating in Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, including the capture in recent weeks of the Taliban's No. 2 leader...

Mohammed Haqqani and three other close associates of Siraj Haqqani were killed when missiles struck a house on Thursday night in the Dande Darpa Khel area of North Waziristan...

authorised to speak publicly to the media.

The officials said the attack was apparently aimed at Siraj Haqqani, a top Taliban commander with suspected close ties to al-Qaeda who is accused of masterminding ambushes of American troops in Afghanistan...

The Haqqani network is an autonomous militant group that nonetheless has ties to al-Qaeda and technically pledges allegiance to Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Omar.

The US considers the network one of the biggest threats to its operations in Afghanistan, and has pressed Pakistan to move against the Haqqanis in their sanctuary in North Waziristan...

Pak agency detects graft worth Rs 2 trillion

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan's Law Minister Babar Awan yesterday said that the National Accountability Bureau has so far detected the corruption worth rupees two trillion since its establishment.

The bureau also arrested 1,470 people accused in those corruption cases. Awan informed the National Assembly that those arrested included politicians, bureaucrats and other officials.

The minister did not elaborate how much money the bureau had recovered in all those cases, The Dawn reports.

In a written reply, the minister revealed that 108 cases were withdrawn against the public office holders under the National Reconciliation Ordinance.

'Indo-Pak talks should go on despite provocations'

Both nations must bridge gap, says Zardari

ANI, Vasco-da-gama

Defence Minister AK Antony has said the forthcoming foreign secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan should continue despite there being certain issues and provocations.

Replying to a question during a press conference on the sidelines of the induction ceremony of the MiG-29K fighter aircrafts in the Indian Navy here, Antony said it is a considerate move by the Indian government to hold talks with Pakistan.

"There is nothing wrong in the talks. It will take place. It was a considerate decision by the government to restart the process. In spite of many provocations, let their be talks. Its too early to talk about it," Antony said.

When asked if he feels that Pakistan is serious for the talks and the dismantling the terror hot beds situated on its soils, he said there is no denying that there are terror camps in the country.

"Why the question of sincerity arises. There are terror camps in Pakistan. The terrorist are still active in Pakistan. This is our main concern," Antony said.

tion of the first squadron of JF-17 Thunder combat jets, which has been jointly developed with China, by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), the Defence Minister said the Indian government is also pledged to provide whatever equipments our armed forces require.

"I can assure you that our forces are dedicated and well trained to protect every inch of the country," he added.

"We are gradually getting the equipments needed with regard to the present development," he added.

Antony said India is expanding defence ties with several other countries, including the US, but it would not affect its old and 'trusted' partnership with Russia.

In Islamabad, Pak President Asif Ali Zardari said on Thursday that Pakistan and India should bridge the gap and return to the negotiating table to resolve of their bilateral issues meaningfully and ensure regional prosperity and peace.

UN envoy slams Myanmar for refusing Suu Kyi meet

AFP, Yangon

A UN envoy said yesterday he "deeply regretted" that Myanmar's ruling junta had refused to let him meet detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi ahead of elections promised later this year.

Tomas Ojea Quintana spoke out after meeting government officials on the fifth and final day of a trip that was focused on inspecting the human rights situation in Myanmar ahead of the first polls in two decades.

"I deeply regretted that my special request to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was not granted," Quintana told reporters at Yangon international airport before flying to Bangkok. Daw is a Burmese-language term of respect.

"I am disappointed that even this time I was unable to

meet her at this crucial time in this election year, the first national election in 20 years," said Quintana, making his third trip to Myanmar.

Myanmar's ruling generals have promised elections later this year but have not yet set a date or issued any election laws, fuelling claims that the vote is a sham aimed at legitimising the junta's grip on power.

Nobel Peace laureate Suu Kyi has been in detention for 14 of the last 20 years. She had her house arrest extended by 18 months in August after a bizarre incident in which an American man swan to her lakeside home.

"I specially requested to meet with Daw Aung Suu Kyi in advance of my mission. Nonetheless this meeting did not take place. I am disappointed," added Quintana, who was appointed as envoy in 2008.

Lankan opposition coalition splits

AP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's opposition coalition said yesterday it has split after its defeated presidential candidate was detained on allegations of sedition, further strengthening President Mahinda Rajapaksa ahead of April 8 parliamentary polls.

Opposition official Vijitha Herath said the coalition of four main parties and several smaller groups broke up after its biggest partner, the United National Party, decided to go it alone in the upcoming elections.

The split will weaken opposition prospects of checking Rajapaksa's power by taking control of Parliament after his re-election as president last month. Rajapaksa's ruling coalition controlled 128 seats in the 225-member legislature

before it was dissolved earlier this month for the elections.

Herath said other opposition parties are now planning to form a new front with defeated presidential candidate Gen. Sarath Fonseka.

The military arrested Fonseka nearly two weeks after his election defeat. Though charges against him have not yet been specified, government officials have alleged various offenses from plotting to overthrow the government while in military service to taking kickbacks on arms deals.

Opposition parties describe Fonseka's arrest as punishment for daring to challenge Rajapaksa. Fonseka has accused the president of election fraud and has petitioned the Supreme Court to declare the presidential election void.

Pak civilian govt must learn to perform Says Musharraf

ANI, London

Former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf is of the view that democratically-elected governments in his country have been failing to perform the objectives of government, offering good governance, and ensuring the well-being of the people.

If these aren't being achieved, governments, whether democratic or military, must be changed, the Dawn quoted him, as saying at recent lecture at Chatham House here.

Compared with civilians, Musharraf said the military possessed "better trained minds, and better administrative capacity, and conceded that civilian government must learn to perform.

Service-seekers

FROM PAGE 1

organisation. The 200 volunteers did not get any salary. They survived mainly on "tips" from service seekers. But there are allegations that they had sometimes realised money from service seekers putting them under pressure.

Car owner Altaf Hossain could not get his turn at a counter on the second consecutive day, January 12. He stood in line from early morning till 3:00pm for two days but the counter closed before he reached it. He required his car to be tested for roadworthiness.

Mirpur BRTA sources said only 18 people run around 12 counters where about 1,200 service seekers queue up every day and a good number of them return without receiving any service.

A high official there said around 750 fitness cases, 120 licence issuing, 150 licence renewals, 125 learner's licence issuing, 70 road-permit issuing and renewals, 175 vehicle registrations, and 80 ownership changes used to be dealt with earlier. But now due to manpower crisis around 400 people can receive their services. At least five to seven staff is

needed to smoothly run each of the licence, fitness, registration and ownership-change counters but now they are having to do with just one person at each counter. This is causing resentment among service seekers.

Sources say the BRTA has an organogram of 291 people, stationed across the country.

A high-ranking official at the BRTA said the government approved a new organogram with 573 positions for BRTA around six months ago but steps are yet to be made for recruiting the new manpower.

In this situation, the BRTA has to run some of its counters with class-IV employees, who are not qualified for or entitled to do such jobs.

The official said BRTA authorities did not pay the 200 volunteers but allowed them to take tips from service seekers. They misused the opportunity and forced service seekers to pay them money.

BRTA Director Tapan Kumar Sarker said, "We wrote to the ministry concerned about engaging some people on no-work-no-payment basis as recruitment was taking time. We are yet to hear from the ministry."



Anoma Fonseka, wife of former Sri Lankan Army chief and defeated opposition presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka, takes part in a Hindu religious act in Colombo yesterday praying for the release of her husband. The former Army chief is currently under detention for plotting to overthrow the government, a charge denied by him.

Lanka to release all child soldiers by May

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka said yesterday it plans to release all detained Tamil Tiger child soldiers by the end of May and re-unite them with their families.

Government forces defeated the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May last year, ending their 37-year fight for a Tamil homeland in the north of the country.

Over 500 child soldiers surrendered to the army and were produced before a court before being enlisted in a one-year rehabilitation programme.

"Their training programme ends on May 22nd and we are taking steps to release all of them to their families," National Child Protection Chairman, Jagath Wellawatte said.

He said families could apply to the court to enable their children to remain in government care, allowing them to continue schooling or vocational training if they desired.

Advertisement for Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd. (PGCB) regarding a bid extension for a 230 kV Maniknagar GIS substation. Includes contact information and terms of the bid.

Advertisement for Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd. (PGCB) regarding a bid extension for a 230 kV Maniknagar GIS substation. Includes a detailed table of bid items and terms of the bid.