

Indian Maoists offer talks with govt

Attack police camp soon after truce offer, 1 dead

AP, INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi/ Kolkata

A top Maoist guerrilla leader in India has offered a cease-fire and talks with the government if it calls off a crackdown against the rebels.

The offer made late Monday by Kishenji, a senior Maoist leader in eastern India, came days after the rebels killed 24 police in a brazen attack on a security camp in West Bengal state.

"Our revolutionary violence will stay on hold for as long as state terror is put on hold," Kishenji said in a statement to NDTV in the eastern state of Orissa.

That would require the government to halt its Operation Green Hunt offensive aimed at flushing the militants out of their forest hide-outs from Thursday until May 7.

In a press statement, Home Minister P Chidambaram said he wants the rebels to provide "a short, simple statement" before responding to their offer.

Meanwhile, a group of armed Maoists attacked a camp housing security personnel from various forces in West Bengal's West Midnapore district late Monday night, just hours after their leader Koteswar Rao alias Kishenji offered a 72-day conditional ceasefire to the government.

One suspected Maoist was killed in the gunfight, police said.

According to police officials, Maoists attacked the camp housing state police and Central Reserve Paramilitary Force (CRPF) troops at Katapahari in the district around 10.30 pm.



Members of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) hold placards during a protest against the killing of a Sikh in Pakistan, near the Pakistan Embassy in New Delhi on Tuesday.

1000TH US SOLDIER DIES Blast kills eight in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A bomb strapped to a bicycle exploded near a busy bus terminal in Afghanistan, killing eight people yesterday as the death toll of US troops in the Afghan war surpassed the grim milestone of 1,000.

The attack took place in Lashkar Gah, capital of Helmand province where a massive US-led military offensive against the Taliban entered a tenth day and US defence chiefs said progress was slower than expected.

Sixteen people were also injured in the blast, the interior ministry said.

The Helmand assault by 15,000 US troops, dubbed Operation Mushtarak -- meaning "together" in the Dari Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan -- aims to push the Taliban out of the Marjah and Nad Ali areas under their control.

But the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, said in Washington progress against Taliban fighters in the target areas was "steady if perhaps a bit slower than anticipated".

Commanders have said it could take another month to bring the areas under total control, though civilian police have already been deployed.

"Afghan and combined forces continue to encounter small but determined pockets of resistance, often from bunkers or other fortified positions," Nato said in an operational update.

IEDs, improvised explosive devices, posed the main challenge, it said, adding "a new patrol base is operational" and "a new police base is being built in southeast Marjah", referring to the main Marjah bazaar.

Three killed in Kashmir gunfight

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Srinagar

Two men of the counter-insurgency force Rashtriya Rifles and a militant were killed in a gunfight between security personnel and separatist guerrillas in Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore town, police said yesterday. Four people including three troopers were injured.

A captain and a trooper were killed and so was a militant in the hours-long gunfight that was still going on when reports last came in.

A senior police officer told IANS that personnel of Rashtriya Rifles, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Special Operations Group (SOG) of the local police surrounded two houses in Chinkipora locality of Sopore town, 54 km from here, early morning following information about presence of militants inside.

"The holed-up militants were asked to surrender upon which they resorted to heavy automatic gunfire at the surrounding security men.

Nato commander takes apology direct to Afghans

AP, Kabul

The commander of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan took his apology for a weekend air strike that killed civilians directly to the Afghan people yesterday, with a video in which he pledged to work to regain their trust as Nato continues a mass offensive against the Taliban in the south.

US Marines and Afghan ground troops pushing from the north and south of the insurgent stronghold of Marjah finally linked up after more than a week, creating a direct route across the town that allows convoys to supply ammunition and reinforcements.

In the video, translated into the Afghan languages of Dari and Pashto on a Nato Web site, a stern Gen Stanley McChrystal apologizes for the strike in central Uruzgan province that Afghan officials say killed at least 21 people.

Sunday's attack by Nato jets on a convoy of cars was the deadliest attack on civilians in six months and prompted a sharp rebuke from the Afghan government. It comes as Nato is struggling to win public backing for a major military offensive against the Taliban in the south with a strategy that involves taking all precautions possible to protect civilians.

Pakistan nets top Taliban leader

Arrest shows mysterious shift in Islamabad's policy: NYT

AP, ANI, Islamabad

A top Afghan Taliban leader has been captured in Pakistan in what would be the fourth detention in recent weeks of senior members of the insurgent group, US media reported yesterday.

Mullah Abdul Kabir, a member of the militia's ruling council, was picked up several days ago in Nowshera district in Pakistan's northwest, according to reports in The New York Times and Washington Post that cited unnamed Pakistani security officials.

While Pakistan's motive behind the recent arrests of top Taliban leaders Mullah Kabir and Mullah Baradar remains unclear, the shift in Islamabad's policy towards the Taliban is apparent, US military experts have said.

"This indicates Baradar was not a one off or an accident but a turning point in Pakistan's policy toward the Taliban," the New York Times quoted Bruce Riedel, a researcher at Brookings Institution and a former CIA official, as saying. "We still need to see how far it goes, but for

Obama and Nato this is the best possible news. If the safe haven is closing then the Taliban are in trouble," he added.

For years, Pakistani military and intelligence leaders have supported the Taliban, even as Pakistan's leaders claimed to be allies of the United States.

The Pakistani interest in the Taliban has always been as a means to influence events inside Afghanistan, particularly if the Americans leave.

Pakistani officials declined to confirm the arrest reports to The Associated Press. If confirmed, the arrest would be a further sign that Pakistan is turning away from its old strategy of allowing Afghan Taliban leaders safe haven in the country something that could have far-reaching implications for the US-led war in Afghanistan.

Last week, Pakistani and American officials said the No 2 Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, had been caught some 10 days earlier in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi.

Lanka's SC refuses to free Fonseka

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court refused yesterday to order the release of detained opposition leader and former army chief Sarath Fonseka as it deliberates a petition challenging his arrest by the military.

Fonseka, 59, has been held at a naval detention centre since his arrest on February 8, sparking international condemnation and violent protests two weeks after he was trounced in presidential polls by President Mahinda Rajapakse.

"The request for interim relief by way of his release was rejected but the court said immediate family and lawyers can visit him," a court official said.

A further hearing has been scheduled for April 26.



Anoma Fonseka (R), wife of former Sri Lankan army chief and detained presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka, leaves a court in Colombo on Tuesday. Sri Lanka's Supreme Court refused to release Fonseka as it deliberates a petition challenging his arrest by the military.

'You watch too much Bond'

AFP, Brussels

Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman on Monday made light of accusations that the Jewish state was involved in the murder of a top Hamas official in Dubai, likening the assassination to a James Bond movie plot.

"You see too many James Bond movies," Lieberman told journalists in Brussels, when asked whether the Israeli secret service Mossad was involved in the assassination of Hamas commander Mahmud al-Mabhuh.

The comment was made after the Israel's top diplomat held talks with EU parliament president Jerzy Buzek, one of several European officials Lieberman met during a visit to Brussels which coincided with a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

His visit was arranged before the outset of the furore over the Hamas official's murder, and the use of European passports by the killers. Lieberman also met up with British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, Irish counterpart Micheal Martin and EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton among others.

Ehud Barak heads for US for talks on Iran

AFP, Jerusalem/Washington

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak was to travel to the United States for talks on curbing Iran's nuclear programme and reviving the Middle East peace process, military radio said.

Meanwhile, the top US military officer warned on Monday that any strike against Iran would not be "decisive" in countering Tehran's nuclear program.

Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he supported using diplomatic and economic pressure against Iran and repeated his view that military action could carry "unintended consequences."

"No strike, however effective, will be in and of itself decisive," Mullen told a press conference after recently returning from a visit to the Middle East.

TURK MOSQUES BLOW UP Prosecutors interrogate 51 officers

AP, Ankara

Prosecutors yesterday interrogated 51 Turkish military commanders, including former Air Force and Navy chiefs, over alleged plans to destabilize the country by blowing up mosques to trigger a coup and topple the Islamic-rooted government.

It was the highest profile crackdown ever on the Turkish military, which has ousted four governments since 1960. For decades Turkey's senior officers, self-appointed guardians of the country's secular tradition, called the shots.

But the balance of power in this EU-candidate country appeared to have shifted Monday as police rounded up the 51 military commanders, following the gathering of wiretap evidence and discovery of an alleged secret coup plan, dubbed "the sledgehammer."

5 dead, 60 buried in Indonesian landslide

AP, Jakarta

A rain-triggered landslide yesterday at a tea plantation on Indonesia's main island of Java killed at least five workers and buried 60 others, police said.

No heavy earth-moving equipment was available in the area, so villagers were digging through tons of dislodged mud with farm tools and their bare hands to search for survivors, police Chief Lt Col Imron Yusli said.

The landslide occurred at a tea plantation near the mountainous village of Tenjoljaya in the Ciwidey district after days of heavy rain, he said.

Yunus said more than 60 people remained under the mud and debris, which covered at least 50 houses near the Perkebunan Teh Dewata tea plantation.

Yunus said five bodies had been pulled from the mud.

Iran captures top Sunni Jundallah militant

AFP, Tehran

Iran said it arrested yesterday top Sunni militant leader Abdolmalek Rigi, the alleged mastermind of several deadly bombings who reportedly operated from neighbouring Pakistan.

Rigi, Iran's most wanted fugitive and head of the rebel Jundallah (Soldiers of God), was captured by forces in an apparent covert operation about which authorities have only given a few sketchy details.

One official said the shadowy leader, who is believed to be in his 30s, was caught outside Iranian territory before being transferred to the Islamic republic.

Another said Rigi was detained on board a passenger jet as it was flying over the Gulf en route via Pakistan to an unnamed Arab country.

Iran, which has been hunting for Rigi for several years, often claimed he had links with intelligence services of Pakistan, Britain and the United States.

S Sudan clashes kill 28

AFP, Juba

At least 28 people have been killed in the latest outbreak of clashes in south Sudan's Lakes state, a military spokesman said yesterday.

More than 35 civilians and soldiers were wounded in the clashes between tribes and which also pitted tribes against the military since Thursday in the state's Cuelebit area, Major General Kuol Diem Kuol told AFP.

"On the side of the civilians, there were more than 21 killed in the clashes and more than 30 are wounded," said Kuol of the southern Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA).

"There are seven SPLA killed, including two officers, and seven wounded in action," he added.

Fighting began after the Gok Dinka people were attacked by rival Rek Dinka, with the Gok Dinka then trying to break into a weapons store in Cuelebit to retrieve guns collected in a disarmament campaign, he said.

Scores of children killed in Yemen unrest

AFP, Sanaa

One hundred and eighty-seven children have been killed since August in the conflict in north Yemen, a report by the local SEYAJ children's rights organisation and the UN Children's Fund said on Monday.

The report also accused both north Yemen Shia rebels and a pro-government militia of using child soldiers.

Seventy-one percent of the 187 were killed in the fighting, while the remainder died from lack of food or medical services, the report said.

The most recent round of a six-year conflict between the rebels, also known as Huthis, and

government forces began on August 11, when the government launched an all-out offensive aiming to crush the uprising.

Saudi Arabia joined the fray on November 4, after accusing the rebels of killing a border guard and occupying two villages inside its territory.

The fighting has centred on the northern Saada and Amran provinces.

The report said there were child soldiers on both sides of the conflict -- 402 who fought for the Huthis, and 282 who fought for a pro-government militia.

However, it also noted that the actual number of child soldiers was probably much higher.

China studies long-term impact of tainted milk

AP, Beijing

More than one in 10 children sickened by tainted milk still were suffering from kidney problems six months afterward, Chinese researchers have found, raising concerns about the long-term effects of China's massive food safety scandal.

At least six children died and nearly 300,000 children fell ill two years ago after consuming infant formula deliberately watered down with the industrial chemical melamine in order to fool inspectors testing for protein.

Researchers from Peking University's Institute of Reproductive and Child Health found that while most children in a rural Chinese area who became ill after drinking tainted milk had recovered, 12 percent still had kidney problems six months later. The report was published Monday in the

Canadian Medical Association Journal.

"The potential for long-term complications after exposure to melamine remains a serious concern," the report said. "Our results suggest a need for further follow-up of affected children to evaluate the possible long-term impact on health, including renal function."

The researchers conducted ultrasound screenings of 7,933 children under 3 years of age living in rural areas near the headquarters of Sanlu Group Co., the dairy at the centre of the scandal, in the northern city of Shijiazhuang, in September 2008.

The initial screening found that 48 children suffered from kidney stones or swollen kidneys, the report said. The researchers monitored most of these children at intervals of one, three and six months and found that "renal abnormalities" remained in 12 percent of the children.

DIFFERENT BITES

SNAKE SERUM A hit in UK for beauty treatment

ANI, New York

A snake venom that claims to reduce fine lines and wrinkles has become the latest beauty craze in the UK.

The new Glamoxo Snake Serum from Rodial was said to be working its charm on the ladies with apparent waitlists of more than 10,000 women.

The so-called "Botox in a bottle", costing 160 dollars a pop, apparently made wrinkles less noticeable after 90 seconds, with a 52 per cent reduction in 28 days in trials, the New York Daily News reported.

Dalai Lama loves China!

ANI, Washington

Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has said he still loves China, despite concerns about Beijing's 'cultural suppression' of his homeland.

When asked if he loves the Chinese, the Dalai Lama said: Certainly. We have to practice that. Sometimes you see some of these hardliners' sort of policy, brutal policy, sometimes I get some irritation for short moment.

Chavez, 'Be a man!'

AFP, Bogota

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez nearly stormed out of a Latin American summit Monday during a shouting match with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, who told him to "be a man" and face the music, officials said.

The clash took place during a private meeting of heads of state, on the sidelines of a two-day summit of Latin American and Caribbean nations in Cancun, Mexico, a Colombian diplomat told AFP by telephone, asking that he not be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Uribe complained to Chavez about a trade embargo Venezuela has imposed on Colombia, upset the Venezuelan president.

Prince William to marry Kate Middleton

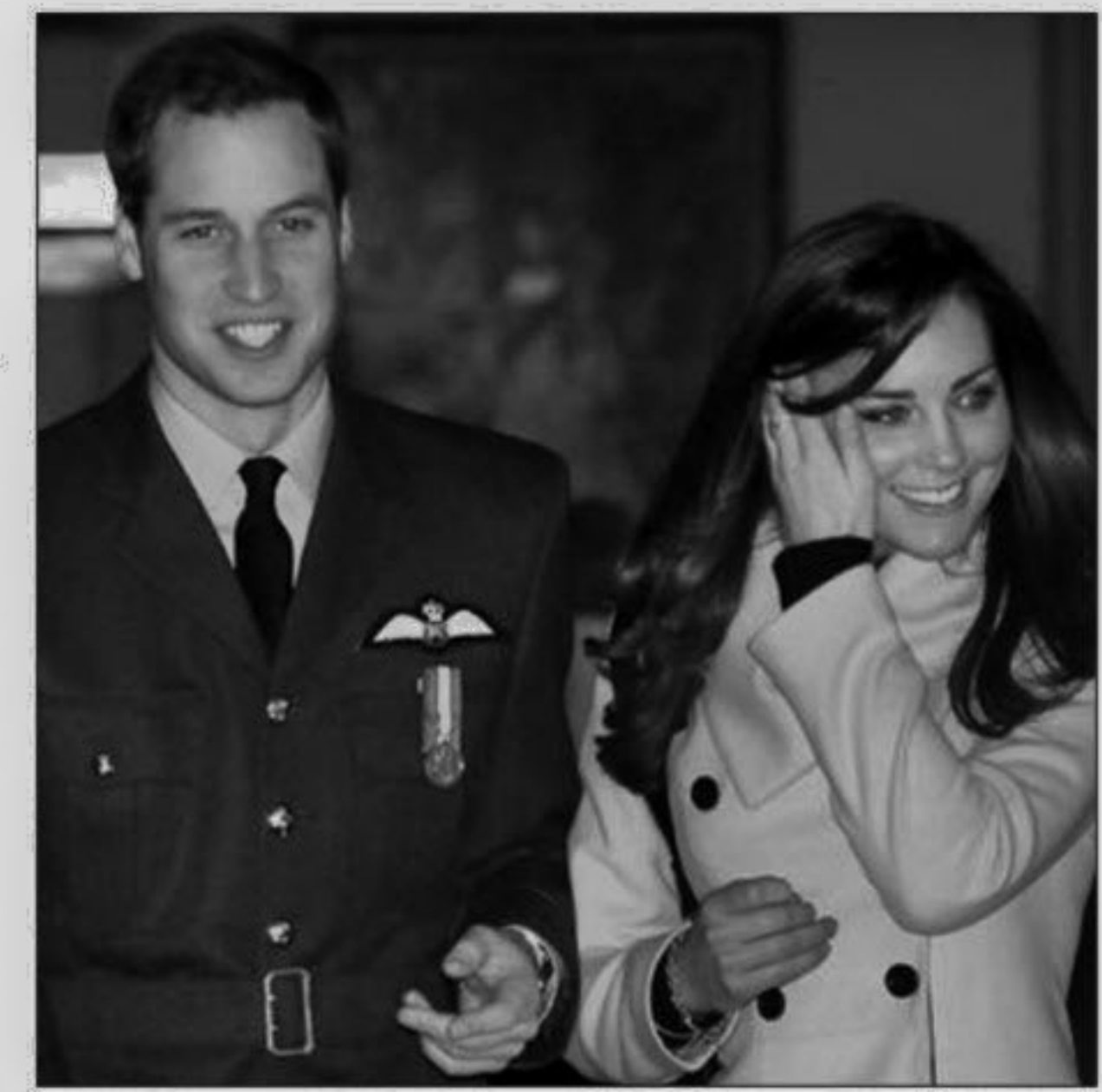
ANI, London

Prince William has fuelled interest in his marriage after declaring he hopes to exchange vows with girlfriend Kate Middleton in a while.

The second in line to the British throne dropped the hint during his visit to a new training and rehabilitation centre for blind ex-service personnel.

The 27-year-old was quizzed by Simon Brown, a blinded serviceman, if he would receive an invitation to any royal wedding.

"You will have to wait a while yet," The Telegraph quoted the Prince as saying.



Prince William and Kate Middleton