

6 Nato troops killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Six Nato soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan in one of their deadliest days this year as the US commander led calls for swift governance following a major offensive against the Taliban.

The military deaths bring to 107 the number of foreign soldiers who have died in Afghanistan so far this year, according to an AFP count.

More than double the number of foreign troops perished during the first two months of this year compared to the same period in 2009, as thousands more soldiers pour into Afghanistan as part of a strategy to end the war.

One of the six Nato troops killed was a British soldier, who was shot dead in southern Afghanistan, but nationalities of the other five were not released.

Bomb attacks killed another 10 Afghans Monday in southern Afghanistan, where Nato commanders are concentrating a US-led surge that will bring the overall number of foreign troops in Afghanistan to 150,000 by August.



PHOTO: AFP
Activists from India's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) hold images of Chairperson of the UPA govt Sonia Gandhi and PM Manmohan Singh during a protest rally against the budget price rises of petrol, diesel and essential commodities on Tuesday.

Pakistan seizes key Taliban, Qaeda base

AFP, Damadola

Pakistan's army said yesterday it had captured a key Taliban and al-Qaeda complex dug into rocky mountains close to the Afghan border after killing 75 local and foreign militants.

Commanders gave journalists a guided tour of the bastion, which one general said numbered 156 caves developed over five to seven years, and carved into sheer rock within clear view of the snow-capped peaks in eastern Afghanistan.

The visit follows Pakistan's latest offensive against Islamist militants in its semi-autonomous tribal badlands, launched under US pressure to eliminate Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked groups who attack Western troops in Afghanistan.

Major General Tariq Khan accompanied journalists to the warren of caves in the area of Damadola that he said served as a key militant headquarters until troops overran the complex in an offensive launched in

January.

"There were Egyptians, Uzbeks, Chechens and Afghans killed in the operation," he told reporters.

Journalists saw bedding such as pillows and mattresses, which suggested inhabitants had camped out for significant periods.

"The first Pakistan army uniformed soldiers have arrived in Damadola after recent operation and the Pakistan flag has been raised for the first time since (independence in) 1947," said Khan.

Damadola, in the Bajaur tribal region, was the scene of a 2006 US drone strike that targeted al-Qaeda number two Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who managed to escape.

A highly secretive US drone war targeting top-tier al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in the tribal belt has killed more than 800 people since August 2008, a key weapon in the US-led war to defeat al-Qaeda and win the war in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan bans live coverage of Taliban attacks

AP, Kabul

Afghanistan's intelligence service has announced a ban on live media coverage of insurgent attacks, saying that such broadcasts bolster the cause of militants.

The ban came three days after Taliban militants struck at hotels in the heart of Kabul with suicide attackers and a car bomb, killing 16 people half of them foreigners in an assault that showed the militants remain a potent force.

The National Directorate of Security told representatives of The Associated Press and other news organizations about the ban during individual meetings Monday at its heavily secured compound. It cited Article 7 of Afghanistan's national security law.

Saeed Ansari, a spokesman for the directorate, did not disclose specific details about how the ban would be imposed, but said there would be punitive measures taken against journalists who did not comply. He did not elaborate on what steps the directorate would take against news organizations if they violated the ban.

During the meeting, the AP argued that the ban would make it difficult to provide the public with up-to-date information about insurgent attacks in Afghanistan.

"We believe broad, pre-emptive bans on coverage are inconsistent with a democratic society," John Daniszewski, AP senior managing editor for international news, said in New York. "Experience shows there are many ways to cover important breaking stories without interfering with police or security operations."

Pak CEC dismisses plea challenging Zardari's eligibility

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Hamid Ali Mirza has dismissed an application challenging President Asif Ali Zardari's eligibility to contest the presidential election in light of the Supreme Court's detailed verdict on the controversial amnesty law, the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO).

"In the circumstances, as no prima facie case has been made out by the petitioner his petition, being not maintainable, is dismissed," Mirza said in his judgement.

The judgement further said that the petitioner has failed to produce any finding by a competent court of law to prove Zardari was a convict.

Author denies writing article that triggered riots in India

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Normalcy returned to Shimoga and Hassan towns in southern Indian state of Karnataka, hit by violence during protests by Muslims over publication of an article in a daily purportedly written by exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, while she denies writing the article yesterday.

Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa said, "those who take the law into their hands will be strictly dealt with".

Yeddyurappa told the state legislature that cases have been booked against the daily which carried the article and 103 people taken into custody in the two cities, where 33 persons and 25 policemen were injured in the violence in which 74 shops and 50 vehicles were damaged.

Two persons were killed, including one in police firing in Shimoga, Yeddyurappa's home town, during the protest against Karnataka publication of an article purportedly penned by Taslima, published in a Kannada daily in its Sunday edition. Hassan was also affected by the violence yesterday.

Meanwhile, the exiled Bangladeshi writer today claimed the publication of an article purportedly written by her in a Karnataka newspaper was "a deliberate attempt to malign" her and to "misuse" her writings to create disturbance in society.

She said in a statement emailed to this correspondent that she had never written any article for a newspaper in Karnataka where publication of her purported write-up against burqa system triggered violent protests in Shimoga and Hassan towns of the southern Indian state ruled by Bharatiya Janata Party.

Lanka extends emergency rule ahead of vote

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president has used his executive powers to extend a state of emergency that gives sweeping authority to police and troops ahead of next month's parliamentary polls, an official said yesterday.

The president on Monday night signed a proclamation extending the tough laws by a further month, an official who declined to be named said.

The move also leads to the automatic re-instatement of the parliament, which was dissolved last month to clear the way for elections just two months ahead of schedule.

"The parliament now stands re-convened until the elections are conducted on April 8 and the new assembly holds its first sittings on April 22," the official said.

Pak Islamic scholar to issue fatwa against suicide bombing

ANI, London

Describing al-Qaeda as an 'old evil with a new name', influential Pakistani scholar Dr Tahir ul-Qadri has said he would soon issue a 'fatwa' against terrorism and suicide bombing.

Qadri said the al-Qaeda has not been sufficiently challenged and that his global ruling against terrorism completely dismantles the banned terror organisation's violent ideology.

In his 600-page ruling, Qadri said Islam forbids the massacre of innocent citizens and suicide bombings.

The fatwa also challenges the religious motivations of would-be suicide bombers who are inspired by promises of an afterlife, The BBC reports.

The famous Muslim scholar developed his document last year as a response to the sudden increase in suicide bombings across Pakistan.

The fatwa, which would be promoted in Britain by Qadri's organisation, Minhaj ul-Quran International, would cover global issues in an attempt to get its theological arguments taken up by Muslims in western nations.

Termining the fatwa as 'hard hitting', Minhaj ul-Quran International's spokesperson Shahid Mursaleen said the ruling would inject doubt into the minds of potential suicide bombers.

"Extremist groups based in Britain recruit the youth by brainwashing them that they will with certainty be rewarded in the next life. Dr Qadri's fatwa has removed this key intellectual actor from their minds," Mursaleen said.

Hitler's letter up for auction

ANI, London

A letter penned by Adolf Hitler wishing for a "truly cordial relationship" between Britain and Germany is expected to fetch 12,000 pounds at an auction in London.

The one-page letter, written in 1931 and addressed to Sefton Delmer, a British journalist, will invite bidding at a Bonhams manuscripts sale on March 23.

"I hope...that out of this crisis a new readiness will grow up in Britain to submit the past 12 years to a reappraisal." The Telegraph quoted Hitler as saying in the letter.

"I should be happy, if as a result of this, the unhappy war-psychosis could be overcome on such a scale as to permit the realisation of the truly cordial relationship between the British and the German peoples so eagerly desired by myself and my movement."

The sound of silence: an end to noise

AFP, Hanover

It has happened to almost everyone. You are sitting on a train or a bus and someone right next to you is annoyingly shouting into his or her mobile phone.

But those days could soon be past with "silent sounds", a new technology unveiled at the CeBIT fair on Tuesday that transforms lip movements into a computer-generated voice for the listener at the other end of the phone.

The device, developed by the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), uses electromyography, monitoring tiny muscular movements that occur when we speak and converting them into electrical pulses that can then be turned into speech, with a sound uttered.

"We currently use electrodes which are glued to the skin. In the future, such electrodes might for example be incorporated into cell phones," said Michael Wand, from the KIT.

MPO listing to start soon

FROM PAGE 167 since it will require a huge amount of money."

He however said his ministry took some suggestions into consideration. Pay scales of headmasters of junior schools, assistant headmasters of secondary schools and superintends of Dakhil madrasas have been increased.

Nahid said they have received 4,000 applications directly and another 1,410 online seeking inclusion in the MPO list. Steps in this regard will be taken gradually after scrutiny of the applications.

He mentioned that 26,340 educational institutions are now on the MPO list. These include 2,386 colleges, 15,515 secondary schools, 7,344

madrasas and 1,095 technical institutes. And 4,693 educational institutions are out of the list.

About the terminal examinations for class-VIII students, Nahid said the examinations will be held in the first week of November with uniform question papers, replacing the junior scholarship system.

He said poor and brilliant students sitting for SSC and HSC examinations from next year will get government financial support to pay their examination fees.

On education policy, the minister said they have almost completed the process, and the policy will soon be placed before the cabinet.

Telecoms plan unveiled

FROM PAGE 1

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of Concept Paper on 'Digital Bangladesh: Plan of Connecting People' at a city hotel, the PM urged the country's scientists, technological experts and engineers to turn Bangladesh self-sufficient in using technologies rather than depending on foreign countries and agencies.

Prime Minister's son, eminent computer scientist Sajeeb Wazed Joy, presented the theme paper of the function presenting and suggesting the priority tasks to turn Bangladesh into a true digital country.

Pushing a button of a computer, the premier opened the technical part of the agenda, aimed at breaking the digital divide between the advanced world and a developing country like Bangladesh.

Hasina disclosed that Community e-Centre will be set up in all upazilas of the country. Already, five upazilas have got Community e-Centre and 128 upazilas computer labs.

She said in line with government's commitment to provide quality health services to the mass people, the government will give computers, web-cam and internet facilities to all hospitals of the country.

Besides, e-centre for Rural Community will be set up at 8,500 post offices of the country to ensure proper management of the postal services.

Moreover, the government is making arrangement to provide videoconferencing facility between PM's office and the cabinet division, deputy commissioners of 64 districts and 7 divisional headquarters.

The government is also constructing necessary infrastructures to set up Hi-tech Park in Gazipur and install country's

own satellite to strengthen local telecommunications system, she informed.

Hasina said it is not possible to implement all the development programmes by the government alone and urged all concerned to help the government turn Bangladesh into a digital, modern country by 2021.

"I strongly hope joint ventures under public-private partnerships will fulfil our dream of building a digital Bangladesh," she said.

Hasina mentioned that the ICT Policy 2009 has already been approved and the ICT ACT 2009 formulated, which will expedite the country's ICT industry's growth and joint efforts of public and private sectors.

The PM said some 1,500 laptops have been distributed to various educational institutions while computer labs equipped with internet facilities will be set up gradually.

"Our children are working successfully in various international institutions. If they are given necessary facilities, they will make tremendous contribution to the effort for turning Bangladesh into a technology-based modern country," she told.

Post and Telecommunications Ministry arranged the function with its Minister Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju in the chair. International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Secretary-General Dr Hamadou I Toure addressed the function as special guest.

Post and Telecommunications Secretary Sunil Kanti Bose and BTRC Chairman Maj Gen (rtd) Zia Ahmed also addressed the function.

French rescuers search for missing eight

AFP, Paris

Rescuers searched flooded houses on the western France coast yesterday for eight people still missing three days after a storm, which killed least 61 people in Europe.

Engineers also struggled to restore power for tens of thousands of homes.

French civil defence teams said 51 people were dead and eight missing after the storm, dubbed "Xynthia", unleashed gale force winds and torrential rains on Sunday, destroying roads and houses along France's Atlantic coast.

At least five people also died in Germany, three in Spain, one in Portugal and one in Belgium.

France's fiercest storm since 1999 made landfall early on Sunday, churning up eight-metre (26-foot) waves, surprising coastal residents in their beds and sending them scrambling onto rooftops.

Wind reached hurricane-force speeds of 150 kilometres per hour (93 mph).

Teams of rescuers have since been wading through the thigh-deep waters and taking to boats to reach flooded houses, mostly in the Vendee and Charente regions of western France.

French electricity distributor EDF said in a statement that 49,700 homes remained without electricity and it had 5,000 staff out working to restore power.

Landslide kills 40 in Uganda

AFP, Kampala

At least 40 people were killed and several others reported missing after a landslide buried houses in eastern Uganda overnight, a minister said yesterday.

"Over 40 bodies have been recovered but we are told many are still missing. We have brought reinforcement and rescuers to the place," Musa Eweru, State Minister for Disaster Preparedness, told AFP.

The landslide in a mountainous region near the eastern town of Mbale was triggered by heavy rains that have deluged the area in the past week, Eweru said.



PHOTO: AFP

Yemen onlookers gather at the scene of a blast after dynamite stored in an apartment block in the south Yemen town of Taiz exploded early on Tuesday, bringing down the building and killing at least 10 people, according to a medical person.

Blast kills 10 in S Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Ten people, including two children, were killed and 15 others wounded in a pre-dawn explosion in a residential area of the southern Yemeni town of Taiz, the defence ministry said yesterday.

The blast struck at 5 am (0200 GMT) in a building where fireworks and carbon products were stored, said the ministry's news website, 26sep.net, citing a security source.

The blast destroyed the building, caused a nearby building to collapse and damaged a third, the website said.

Apart from the two children, six women and

two men were killed in the explosion, it said, adding that two of the wounded were treated and discharged from a local hospital.

Rescue workers were trying to find survivors in the rubble.

Earlier, a medical source told AFP that dynamite, not fireworks, had destroyed the building, which housed six flats, and that 12 people were killed and an unspecified number wounded.

Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, is facing economic and political crises, including over 30 percent unemployment, an ongoing fight against al-Qaeda militants and frequent separatist demonstrations in the south.

'Israel must keep Jordan Valley'

AP, Jerusalem

Israel's prime minister says he won't pull out of a key part of the West Bank even if there's a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Benjamin Netanyahu was referring to the Jordan River Valley along the eastern border of the West Bank. Palestinians claim all of the West Bank as part of their future state.

Netanyahu's pronouncement comes as the US is pushing hard to restart peace talks. Palestinians hesitate to negotiate because of Netanyahu's hard-line attitudes and Israeli settlement construction.

Netanyahu told a Palestinian committee Tuesday that the Jordan Valley's strategic importance makes it impossible for Israel to withdraw, according to a meeting participant who spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting was closed.

Heavy rains cause flooding in UAE

AFP, Dubai

Heavy rains in the Gulf desert state of the United Arab Emirates caused flooding, traffic jams, car accidents and school closures yesterday, after four weather-related deaths at the weekend.

Some residents of the emirate of Sharjah were trapped in their homes by high waters, an AFP photographer reported. Cars were almost completely submerged on some roads.

Sharjah residents waded through the water with rolled-up pants, while trucks looked like barges as they ploughed through the flooded streets.

Gulf News reported on its website that a major thoroughfare, the Dubai-Sharjah sector of the Emirates Road bypass, was closed due to the flooding.

Traffic on Dubai's main Sheikh Zayed Road slowed to a crawl, with several accidents sighted. Many secondary roads in the city were flooded due to lack of drainage facilities.