

Avalanche kills 35 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kunduz
An avalanche struck a remote mountainous area of northern Afghanistan two weeks ago, killing 35 people and burying homes beneath the snow, a provincial official said yesterday.

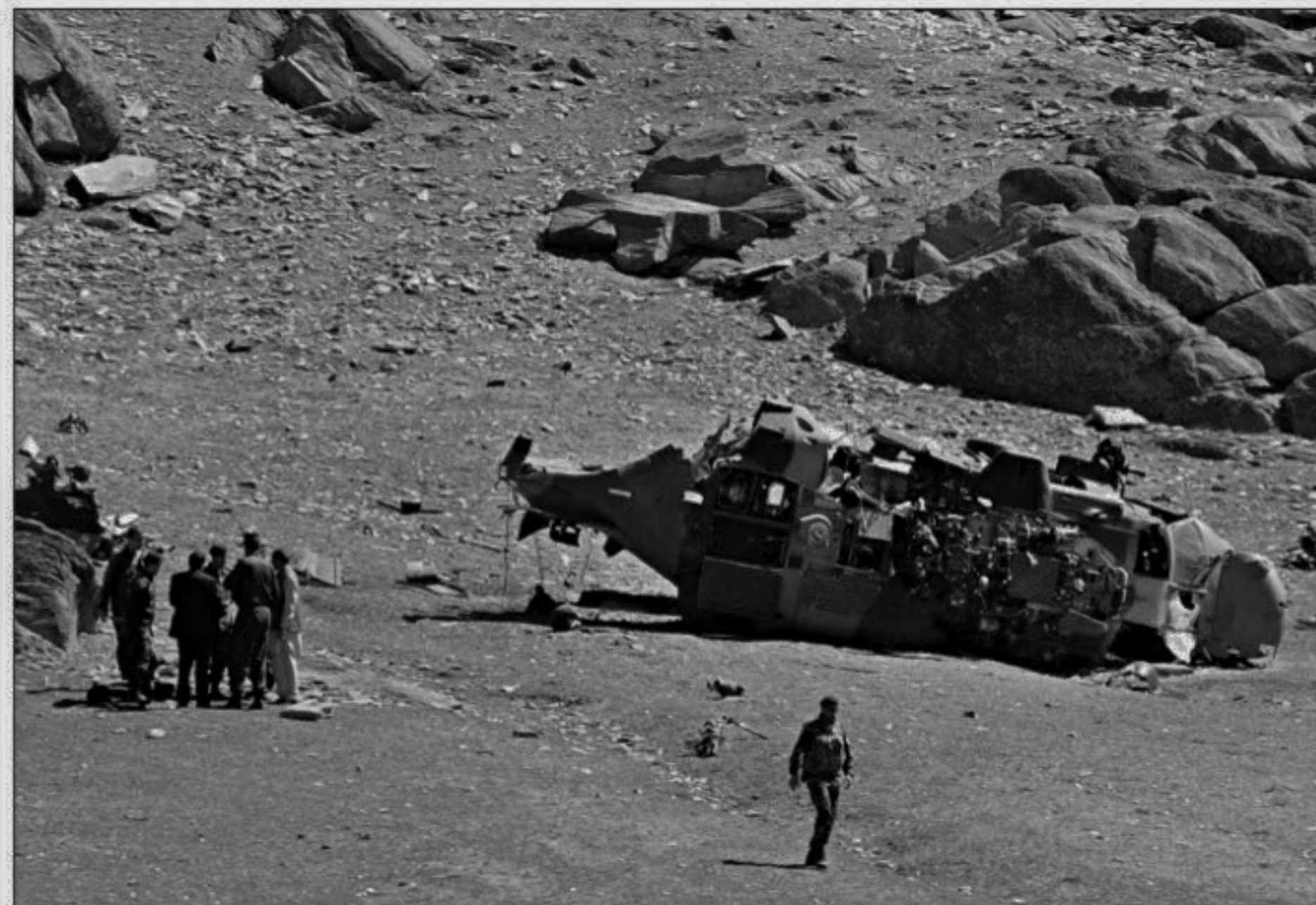
The disaster struck in Badakhshan province in the far north, but harsh weather and the remoteness of the province bordering China, Pakistan and Tajikistan meant local officials had to travel for weeks to seek help.

"An avalanche swept through five civilian houses in Arghanj Khowa district killing 35 people including men, women and children," said Marouf Rasikh, the spokesman for northern Badakhshan province.

"Two representatives of the district got to the provincial capital after travelling for 13 days on snow-blocked roads and they informed us of the incident last night," he added.

Rasikh told AFP that the area was covered in about three metres (ten feet) of snow, hampering any rescue efforts and attempts to bury the dead.

"Snow closes roads and leaves many villages isolated every winter in Badakhshan province," he said. "An emergency committee is meeting here tomorrow with the Nato forces to see if we can offer any help via air and helicopters."



Turkish soldiers gather at the site of a Nato helicopter crash on the outskirts of Wardak city in Wardak province on Tuesday. The helicopter crashed with Turkish soldiers on board, but the military alliance denied that anyone had been killed.

Suu Kyi against party joining polls

AFP, AP, Yangon

Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi said yesterday she will "never accept" her party registering for elections this year because laws governing the polls are unjust, according to her lawyer.

Myanmar's highest court yesterday refused to accept a lawsuit by Aung San Suu Kyi's political party seeking to revoke laws that bar the detained leader and other opposition members from taking part in the country's first election in two decades.

Lawyer Kyi Win said the Supreme Court refused to accept the lawsuit, saying it did not have power to handle such a case.

It was unclear what steps if any the party would next take in its efforts to quash five election-related laws the ruling military enacted earlier this month that set out

rules for this year's vote. One law prohibits anyone convicted of a crime from being a member of a political party and instructs parties to expel convicted members or face de-registration.

The lawsuit was largely symbolic since Myanmar's courts invariably adhere to the junta's policies, especially on political matters.

Under rules laid down by the ruling junta, the detained democracy icon faces exclusion from her National League for Democracy (NLD) if it registers for the polls, because parties with serving prisoners in their ranks will be dissolved.

Suu Kyi "says she will never accept registration under unjust law, but her personal opinion is not to give orders nor instructions to the NLD," her lawyer Nyan Win said after visiting the Nobel peace laureate.

UN envoy backs talks with Afghan militants

AP, Kabul

The new UN mission chief in Afghanistan said yesterday that he backs the Afghan government's peace talks with a major Taliban-linked militant group.

"The talks are helpful and should be supported," said Staffan de Mistura, who added that he is confident that Afghan President Hamid Karzai was working to reform the election process so that parliamentary elections in September will not be a repeat of last year's fraud-stained presidential ballot.

In meetings with the Karzai government during his first week on the job, de Mistura said he was given strong assurances that a "major and constructive reshuffle" of the Afghan-run election commission was imminent. He said Karzai told him that the UN would choose the international members of the Electoral Complaints Commission, which oversees the Afghan elections and rules on the validity of votes cast.

The makeup of both commissions was widely contested in the presidential ballot that led to Karzai's re-election.

"Let's be frank," de Mistura said. "We are not in Switzerland. We are in Afghanistan so the elections are likely to be still imperfect, not perfect. But they need to be credible and inclusive for the sake of Afghans feeling that they are really part of it."

Indian Maoists blast tracks to derail train

Protest against crackdown in six states

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kolkata/Bhubaneswar/Patna

Maoists targeted railways - the nation's lifeline - blasting tracks to derail the Rajdhani Express and throw train services haywire in vast parts of eastern India on the second and final day of a shutdown in six states yesterday.

The Maoists have called the protest in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh besides three districts of Maharashtra - Bhandara, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli - to oppose a sweeping crackdown on them.

The guerrillas also killed a policeman and a Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader besides abducting four traders.

The Bhubaneswar-New Delhi Rajdhani Express derailed after the rebels blasted a rail

track in Bihar's Gaya district late Monday, leading to the cancellation of three trains and diversion of 17, police said.

Eight coaches, including the engine, went off the tracks between Paraiya and Kasta stations on the Gaya-Mughalsarai section, about 100 km from Patna.

'Maoists blew up three to four feet of railway track,' Inspector General of Police SK Bhardwaj told IANS over the phone from the accident site.

According to railway sources, three trains, including the Patna-Ranchi Janshatabdi, were cancelled.

Seventeen trains, including the New Delhi-Howrah Rajdhani Express, were diverted from Mughalsarai to Patna.

A pamphlet left at the site by the Maoists claimed responsibility for the incident.

Pak govt petitions against reopening of Swiss cases

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan government has filed a review petition in the Supreme Court against the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) verdict to reopen the Swiss cases against President Asif Ali Zardari, saying that doing so would be tantamount to a trial of former premier Benazir Bhutto's grave.

"An order to reopen cases abroad would be tantamount to putting Benazir Bhutto's grave on trial, which is against all norms of justice, decency, morality and the law," the petition said while adding that the apex court had made several mistakes by declaring the NRO 'unconstitutional.'



Sri Lankan Buddhist monks join Democratic National Alliance supporters protesting in Colombo on Tuesday demanding the release of former army chief Sarath Fonseka, who attempted to unseat the president in January elections.

Nato chopper crash kills one Turkish soldier

AFP, Kabul

A Nato helicopter crashed in Afghanistan yesterday, killing one Turkish soldier and injuring three others, a provincial government spokesman told AFP.

"One Turkish soldier has been killed and three injured in the helicopter crash today," said Shahidullah Shahid, spokesman for the Wardak provincial government.

The injured were in a critical condition, he said, and had been evacuated by helicopter to the capital, Kabul.

The helicopter, operated by Nato member Turkey, crashed as it was landing at a Turkish base in Wardak province, south of Kabul.

The number of foreign troops killed in Afghanistan so far this year has risen to 131 with the death of a soldier in a Taliban-style bomb attack in the country's south, Nato said Tuesday.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) said the soldier was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) on Monday.

The soldier's nationality was not revealed, in line with Isaf policy, nor was the exact location of the incident.

Naxal movement founder Kanu Sanyal dead

IBNLIVE ONLINE, Siliguri

Kanu Sanyal, a founding member of the Naxal movement, was found dead at his residence in Sefullajote village, 25 km from here.

Sanyal, 78, was found hanging at his home, police said. He was suffering from old age related ailments.

The body has been sent for post-mortem, Inspector General of Police (North Bengal) KL Tamta said. Sanyal was a founder of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) formed in 1969.

Chilli as Indian army weapon!

AP, Gauhati

The Indian military has a new weapon against terrorism: the world's hottest chilli.

After conducting tests, the military has decided to use the thumb-sized "Bhut Jolokia," or "ghost chilli," to make tear gas-like hand grenades to immobilize suspects, defence officials said yesterday.

The bhut jolokia was accepted by Guinness World Records in 2007 as the world's spiciest chilli. It is grown and eaten in India's northeast for its taste, as a cure for stomach troubles and a way to fight the crippling summer heat.

It has more than 1,000,000 Scoville units, the scientific measurement of a chilli's spiciness. Classic Tabasco sauce ranges from 2,500 to 5,000 Scoville units, while jalapeno peppers measure anywhere from 2,500 to 8,000.

"The chilli grenade has been found fit for use after trials in Indian defence laboratories, a fact confirmed by scientists at the Defence Research and Development Organization," Col R Kalia, a defence spokesman in the north-eastern state of Assam, told The Associated Press.

Modi denies riot inquiry summons

BBC ONLINE

The chief minister of India's Gujarat state Narendra Modi has denied that he was summoned to appear before a probe into the 2002 riots on Sunday.

Mr Modi, who faces questions over the murder of Congress MP Ehsan Jafri, failed to appear before the inquiry.

More than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in the riots.

The Gujarat authorities have been criticised for not doing enough to prevent the violence. Mr Modi denies any wrongdoing.

BALUCH INSURGENCY Evidences depict India's involvement: Malik

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Interior Minister Rehman Malik has once again blamed India for fanning insurgency in Baluchistan, saying the federal government has 'undeniable' evidence that New Delhi was involved in nefarious activities in the region bordering Afghanistan.

Addressing the Senate, Malik said he would disclose the details regarding India's involvement to parliamentarians during an in-camera meeting and said militants were being provided arms and financial support from foreign countries.

Commenting on the issue of hundreds of missing Baluch people, Malik claimed that the list of missing persons has many 'dubious names', including some people who were in Afghanistan to receive militant training and others who were involved in anti-Pakistan activities in Dubai.

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FBCCI/GoB/IDCB/10/316 March 23, 2010

Invitation for Re-Tenders

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US undecided on India's access to Headley

AFP, New Delhi

The US has not yet decided whether to give India direct access to a man in custody who identified targets for the Mumbai 2008 attacks, the US ambassador in New Delhi said yesterday.

India has been clamouring for access to David Headley since he was arrested in Chicago in October and a refusal would likely strain relations and embarrass the government, which announced at the weekend that it had secured a deal.

US Ambassador to India Timothy J Roemer said the US was "committed to full information sharing in our counter-terror partnership" and had provided "substantial information" to India.

"However, no decision made on direct access for India to David Headley has been made," Roemer said.

Headley last week pleaded guilty to 12 charges of conspiring in the Mumbai terror attacks and has agreed to cooperate with US investigators. In return for his guilty plea, he is set to avoid the death penalty and extradition to India.

The Headley case has infuriated some in India where a number of commentators have highlighted how New Delhi agreed to give US investigators access to the man accused of being the only surviving gunman from the Mumbai attacks.

A team of Indian investigators travelled to the US after Headley's arrest but were denied direct access and India has been seeking it since.

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