

## Five killed in Kashmir fighting

AFP, Srinagar

Four suspected Muslim rebels and a soldier died in fresh gun battles in the south of revolt-hit Indian Kashmir where fighting has raged for days, police said yesterday.

So far 17 rebels and four soldiers have died in gun battles in Rajouri district, which borders Pakistan-administered Kashmir, since Indian troops backed by police launched an operation last Tuesday against the militants.

The latest killings came late Friday when insurgents made an offer to surrender but then opened fire when troops moved in to arrest them, killing a soldier, a police spokesman said.

"The soldiers returned the fire, killing four militants," he said, adding that the anti-rebel operation in the forested area was continuing.

Police said the heavily armed rebels had recently crossed into Indian Kashmir from the Pakistani zone of the disputed region.



An Indian census official (R) writes down details of the family of anti Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (L) while his wife Gulcharan Kaur (C) looks on at their residence in New Delhi on Saturday, as they take part in the opening stages of the 2011 census. Indian officials have begun the task of collecting national population information across India's 650,000 villages and 7,000 towns and cities to record the chaotic nation's teeming billion-plus population.



## Indian minister calls academic robes barbaric colonial legacy

AFP, New Delhi

India's outspoken environment minister Jairam Ramesh pulled off his academic gown and cap at a university graduation ceremony, calling them a "barbaric" colonial legacy, a report said yesterday.

Ramesh drew cheers in the central city of Bhopal as he discarded the robes and mortarboard Friday and addressed students in his trademark Indian loose cotton attire of long white shirt and pyjamas, the Times of India reported.

## 13 killed in clashes in Somalia

AP, Mogadishu

Eyewitnesses and medical workers say at least 13 people were killed in overnight fighting in Somalia's capital.

Ambulance service chief Ali Muse says he saw five dead in south Mogadishu after fighting erupted early yesterday. He says ambulances have taken 25 wounded people to hospitals around Mogadishu. Two other eyewitnesses say they saw eight dead, including women and children.

The latest round of fighting began Friday and follows a lull of about two weeks. Military officials said Friday's clashes started when insurgents attacked government soldiers.

Islamic insurgents control much of Mogadishu and have been trying to topple the fragile government for three years.

Somalia has not had an effective government for 18 years.

## Israel warns of new Gaza assault

Ahmadinejad warns Israel against launching attack

AFP, Jerusalem/Teheran

Israel on Friday threatened wide scale military action against the Gaza Strip after launching a string of air strikes in response to rocket fire from the Hamas-run Palestinian enclave.

Meanwhile, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday warned Israel against launching a fresh assault on the Gaza Strip, saying such action would bring it "closer to certain death."

However, the United States urged restraint on both sides, saying there was no military solution to the conflict.

"They are looking for an excuse to attack Gaza. I want to tell the Zionists and their backers that enough crime has been committed already," Ahmadinejad said in a speech broadcast live on state television.

"The new adventure will not save you, but will bring you closer to certain death," said Ahmadinejad, who has drawn international condemnation for repeatedly saying the Jewish state is doomed to be wiped off the map.

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom warned of a new offensive on the coastal territory unless militant rocket attacks ceased.

"If this rocket fire against Israel does not stop, it seems we will have to raise the level of our activity and step up our actions against Hamas," Shalom told public radio.

"We won't allow frightened children to again be raised in bomb shelters and so, in the end, it will force us to launch another military operation."

"I hope we can avoid it, but it is one of the options we have, and if we don't have a choice, we will use it in the near future," he said.

Three Palestinian children -- aged two, four and 11 -- were hit by flying glass in one of six overnight raids, said Moawiya Hassanein, head of the Palestinian emergency services in Gaza.

There were no other reports of casualties.

The head of the Islamist Hamas movement's government in the Gaza Strip, Ismail Haniya, blamed the Jewish state for the increase in tensions.

## Germans mistakenly kill 5 Afghan soldiers

AFP, Kabul

German soldiers called in as reinforcements following a Taliban ambush mistakenly killed five Afghan government soldiers, officials said yesterday.

A German armoured personnel carrier was en route late Friday to reinforce troops who had been engaged in a fierce battle with Taliban fighters since the morning at Chahar Dara near the city of Kunduz.

They opened fire at a civilian car, which approached their patrol, killing five Afghan soldiers who were inside, German military officials said.

Afghan defence ministry spokesman, General Mohammad Zahir Azimi confirmed the incident but said six soldiers lost their lives. The ministry "condemns" the "incident," it said in statement.

## Gunmen kill 25 Sunni in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen in army uniforms swooped on a village south of Baghdad, stormed three houses and massacred 25 people from families linked to an anti-Qaeda militia before dawn yesterday, Iraqi officials said.

Among the dead were 20 men and five women, an interior ministry official said, while a security spokesman blamed al-Qaeda and said that 17 people had been arrested in connection with the murders.

The victims were found with either broken arms or legs, indicating they were tortured, according to a medical official at Al-Yarmuk hospital in west Baghdad with knowledge of police reports of the killings.

The brutal killings come as Iraq's political parties negotiate to form a government, nearly a month after parliamentary elections. Security officials have warned that a protracted period of coalition building could give insurgents an opportunity to further destabilise Iraq.

"Men wearing uniforms and driving vehicles similar to those used by the army stormed three houses in the village of Sufia, in the region of Hour Rajab, and killed 25 people, including five women," said the interior ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A defence ministry official confirmed the details of the attack and the toll.

The interior ministry official said witnesses had told security forces the killers entered the village just before midnight Friday and had carried out the murders about two hours later.

They tied up their victims and shot them all either in the head or the chest in a rampage of violence, believed the worst against anti-Qaeda fighters since November 16 when 13 members of a tribe opposed to the jihadis were murdered west of Baghdad.

"Our information is that the killers were from al-Qaeda," said Major General Qassim Atta, spokesman for the Iraqi security force's Baghdad operations, who put the death toll at 24 -- 19 men and five women.



## My blood froze when Zardari became president

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Fatima Bhutto, niece of slain former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, says her "blood froze" on the day Asif Ali Zardari became the country's president and prompted her to send away her younger brother from the country fearing for his safety.

Zardari was accused of plotting the murder of Fatima's father Murtaza Bhutto but had been acquitted of the charge.

On 20 September, 2008, on the 12th anniversary of Papa's death, Asif Zardari took his oath as President of Pakistan.

## 'FOREIGNERS' ELECTION FRAUD Karzai expresses 'surprise'

AFP, Washington

The United States has rejected President Hamid Karzai's anti-foreigner outburst as "troubling" and "preposterous," prompting a hurried effort by the Afghan leader to make amends.

Officials said Karzai did not specifically apologize during a telephone conversation with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday, but expressed "surprise" at the furore over his claim that foreigners orchestrated election fraud.

The row came just a few days after President Barack Obama made an unannounced trip to Kabul to press Karzai on tackling corruption and to demand progress on good governance, as Washington's troop surge strategy unfolds against the Taliban.

The new confrontation will only raise doubts about the fragile relationship between the Obama administration and Karzai, whom Washington is forced to consider a partner despite distaste for his political record.

Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs called Karzai's comments "troubling" and "cause for real and genuine concern."

Gibbs noted the huge US military and political resources -- and sacrifices -- committed to Afghanistan.

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley meanwhile described Karzai's intervention as "preposterous."

US ambassador to Kabul Karl Eikenberry also met with Karzai in person to seek clarification on his comments on Thursday.

The Afghan leader then initiated the call to Hillary and expressed "surprise that his comments had created what he called a stir," a US official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Generally we were happy with the call and we're moving on," the official added.

Crowley called the conversation a "constructive" one as Washington and Kabul seek to defuse tense relations.

"President Karzai reaffirmed his commitment to the partnership between our two countries, and expressed his appreciation for the contributions and sacrifices of the international community," he said, adding that Karzai and Hillary "pledged to continue working together in a spirit of partnership."

But the Obama administration scrapped a planned Karzai visit to Washington last month after he gave himself full control over the electoral commission. In another snub to the United States, he then invited Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to visit Afghanistan.

The Afghan leader drew fierce global condemnation for his speech on Thursday.

## 'Obama committed to strengthening India ties'

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Washington

US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner is embarking on a trip to India with an assurance that President Barack Obama is deeply committed to strengthening relations with India with a deep appreciation of common challenges posed by issues like terrorism.

"I can tell you, I've sat with the president as he's met with the Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) at their principal meetings so far," he told select Indian media ahead of the visit discounting suggestions about public perception in India that the relationship was losing momentum under the Obama administration.

"I've watched him, listened to the president on this kind of stuff and I know he shares that kind of view very strongly," he said when asked about the sense of dismay in India about the level of US cooperation on issues like terrorism in the context of Mumbai terror attacks.

"I think there's certainly a deep commitment on the president's part to strengthen this relationship, a deep appreciation for the challenges India's facing and the common interest we're facing on these kinds of things."

"It would be helpful for me to be there and again try to do as much as I can to underscore the sense on the economic, financial side that we're working closely together on ways that we think are very responsive to these concerns," Geithner said.

On terrorism finance, "We have a lot of very productive, constructive things we've been able to do together on that front, we'll keep doing it," he said declining to give any detail.

## Iraq, Afghan wars biggest since WWII

Says US general

AFP, Washington

The US military's draw down in Iraq and build-up in Afghanistan represents the biggest movement of troops and equipment since World War II, a top general said Friday.

"This is the largest operation, that we've been able to determine, since the build-up for World War II," said Lieutenant General William Webster, who oversees the effort as head of the Third Army.

Webster described a mammoth logistical task in moving 30,000 troops, more than 5,000 vehicles and tons of supplies to Afghanistan, while pulling out equipment and tens of thousands of forces from Iraq -- all by a September deadline.

About 2.8 million pieces of equipment are being withdrawn from Iraq as part of a gradual US draw down underway, and the army has to decide what items can be shifted to Afghanistan, shipped back to the United States or left behind in Iraq, Webster said.

"We began, actually, last June moving equipment out of Iraq, and we're sorting it out here in Kuwait," he said by video link from a US base there.

"Some of it goes into Afghanistan; some of it goes back to the army to be reset back in the

depots and then returned to our soldiers who are training back in" the United States, he said.

The combined draw down in Iraq and surge in Afghanistan has been dubbed "Nickel II," the general said.

The codename plays off the Third Army's role in World War II, when General Patton ordered a dramatic turnabout to attack the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge. Patton called his operation "Nickel."

"So when we looked at that operation historically and the size of it, we realized that we were many times greater than that and over a much longer duration," he said.

While troops and weaponry are transported to Afghanistan by air, tonnes of supplies are ferried over land and sea, either through Pakistan's port at Karachi and over the Khyber Pass or via Central Asian roads and rail lines into northern Afghanistan.

The US-led force has relied heavily on the Pakistan route, despite repeated attacks on the Khyber road by Taliban militants in the restive tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan.

But now about half of all materiel is coming through the "northern distribution network," Webster said.



Indian Left-wing activists are detained by police in Hyderabad on Saturday, as they attempted to organise a rally in the wake of recent communal violence in the southern Indian city.

## SWISS CASE REOPENING

## You have to cross 'my dead body' to get documents

Says law minister

ANI, Islamabad

"Over my dead body", this is what Pakistan's Law Minister Dr Babar Awan told Attorney General Anwar Mansoor Khan when the latter asked him to hand over documents related to Swiss money laundering cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

According to sources, all important documents and letters sent to the Swiss officials asking them to reopen the corruption cases against Zardari are being held up by Awan, and he has refused to hand them over to Khan despite several notices.

It may be noted that Khan had resigned from his post on Friday citing the 'non-cooperative' attitude of Awan.

Khan pointed out that since he assumed the office of Attorney General, the Law Minister and Law Ministry did not cooperate with him, and that he apprised President Asif Ali Zardari of this issue but the latter could not address his concerns, The News reports.

Khan blamed Awan and his ministry for the snag behind attempts in completing legal procedures for sending letters to Swiss authorities for reopening of cases involving Zardari.



PHOTO: AFP  
Palestinian children paint during an event marking Orphan's Day in Gaza City on Saturday.

## Protesters rally to oust Thai govt

AP, Bangkok

Thousands of anti-government protesters launched their fourth weekend demonstration in the Thai capital yesterday, groping for tactics that have yet to force the prime minister to dissolve Parliament and call new elections.

The mainly poor, rural Thais that make up the so-called Red Shirts were concentrating their Saturday protests in the heart of commercial Bangkok, studded with glitzy shopping malls and upscale hotels. They previously have failed to oust the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva through both mass peaceful marches and talks with government leaders.

Jatuporn Prompan, a protest leader, said the demonstration would continue through Monday.

"Today's another day when commoners will declare war to bring democracy to the country. There is no end until we win this battle," he said as marchers made their way toward the shopping zone, beating drums and chanting "Dissolve Parliament."

Department stores, normally bursting with weekend shoppers, as well as office buildings were closed for security reasons as some 10,000 protesters gathered in area, according to Metropolitan Police spokesman Piya Utayo. He said the total number of demonstrators, including those in other parts of the city and on the move, peaked at nearly 55,000.

Protesters swarmed around a Porsche car, angrily smashing its windows after its driver bulldozed a line of stationary motorcycles the group had parked. His motive was not known.

## MUMBAI ATTACK CASE Pak court adjourns till April 17

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Pakistani anti-terror court conducting the trial of seven Mumbai attacks suspects, including LeT's Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, yesterday adjourned proceedings till April 17 after the prosecution sought time to challenge certain court orders in the High Court and Supreme Court.

During yesterday's proceedings at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi where judge Malik Mohd Akram Awan is hearing the case for security reasons, the prosecution said it needed "maximum" time to challenge a Lahore High Court order that the trial of the seven suspects could not be separated from that of Aijmal Kasab and Fahim Ansari who are currently in the custody of Indian authorities.