

Eight killed in Afghan quake

AFP, Kabul

Eight people were killed yesterday when a 5.3-magnitude earthquake hit a remote area of central Afghanistan, disaster management officials said.

The quake, which struck at 00:58 (2028 GMT Sunday), was centred around 190 kilometres (120 miles) northwest of Kabul at a relatively shallow depth of 10 kilometres, the US Geological Survey said.

Northern Afghanistan and Pakistan are frequently hit by earthquakes, especially around the Hindu Kush range near the collision of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Noor Badshah Kuhlistani, the head of the operational centre at the national disaster management office in Kabul, said the quake's epicentre was about 125 kilometres east of Mazar-i-Sharif, capital of Balkh province bordering Uzbekistan.

Pakistan president signs bill stripping his powers

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday signed into law sweeping constitutional reforms that strip him of key powers in a move to bolster parliamentary democracy weakened by military rule.

The amendment rolls back decades of meddling by military rulers and removes the head of state's power to sack the prime minister, appoint heads of the armed forces, unilaterally declare emergency rule and dissolve parliament.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani will assume executive power in a move that could help ease simmering political instability in the nuclear-armed country on the front line of the US-led war on Al-Qaeda and Islamist extremism.

A grinning Zardari signed the amendment at a ceremony attended by Gilani and popular opposition leader Nawaz Sharif -- a sign of the rare cross-party support for the bill in the fractious and bitter world of Pakistani politics.

"It is my hope that the doors of dictatorship are closed forever," he said after signing the 18th amendment to Pakistan's 1973 parliamentary constitution.

"We have reason to feel proud... pro-



vincial rights and parliament's sovereignty have been restored," he told dignitaries gathered at his offices.

Gilani also hailed the signing of the bill as a "momentous occasion" and praised beleaguered Zardari's "magnanimity".

"It is an unprecedented event in the political history of Pakistan that a leader has willingly transferred power in such a smooth process," he said.

"(The) passing of the 18th Constitutional Amendment Bill is indeed a historic success of parliamentary democ-

racy and supremacy of parliament."

The lower and upper houses of parliament this month approved the 102-clause bill. The amendment was an election promise of Zardari, whose popularity has been battered by graft controversies, Islamist violence and economic woes.

The package removes many of the sweeping powers amassed by military dictators Pervez Musharraf and Zia ul-Haq, although the army remains a powerful force in Pakistan. No senior military officials attended Monday's ceremony.

Raza Rabbani, a senator and chairman of the constitutional reforms committee, said the 1973 charter "had been mutilated by successive dictators who sought to perpetuate themselves in power".

The bill also abolishes a clause barring the election of a prime minister for more than two terms. This would allow the popular Sharif, who was toppled by Musharraf in 1999, to become prime minister again.

The amendments will effectively make Zardari a titular head of state who can only formally appoint heads of the armed forces, dissolve the national assembly and appoint provincial governors on the advice of the prime minister.

Bombs at market, school kill 24 in Peshawar

AFP, Peshawar, Pakistan

At least 24 people including a child and police officials were killed yesterday in bombings hours apart at a high school and a crowded market in the Pakistani city of Peshawar, officials said.

The attacks take the number of people killed in bombings in northwest Pakistan to 73 in three days, after weekend suicide strikes bearing the hallmarks of Taliban militants left 49 people dead in the city of Kohat.

As dusk fell Monday at Peshawar's busy Qissa Khawani Bazaar, a suicide bomber walked into the crowd and detonated explosives, scattering shoes and human limbs on the street and destroying cars, witnesses said.

"Twenty-three people were killed including three police officials. At least 27 people have been admitted to the hospital," senior police official Imran Kishwar told AFP. Senior provincial minister Bashir Bilour confirmed the toll.

Bomb disposal squad chief Shafiq Malik told reporters that the blast was caused by a bomber wearing a suicide vest packed with steel pellets, ball-bearings and six to eight kilograms (13 to 17 pounds) of explosives.

"We have recovered the head and legs of the attacker," he said. Hardest hit were supporters of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), who were still crowded in the area after staging a protest against soaring inflation and crippling power shortages.

"We were burning tyres after the protest. We had set one tyre on fire when a deafening blast rocked the whole area," JeI party worker Saifullah said.

Mujibur Rehman, a book seller in the bazaar, told AFP: "I heard a huge blast soon after the crowd was dispersing. There was smoke everywhere and body parts were scattered on the ground."

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UN 'troubled' by Australia's treatment of asylum-seekers

AFP, Sydney

The United Nations said yesterday it was "deeply troubled" by Australia's treatment of asylum-seekers, as rights group Amnesty International condemned the reopening of a remote detention centre.

An influx of immigrants has prompted the government to freeze applications from Afghans and Sri Lankans and to reopen the Curtin Air Base, which was shut down in 2002 following riots, to accommodate them.

The United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said these measures were likely to have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of asylum-seekers, particularly those who had already endured torture or trauma.

"The combination of mandatory detention, suspension of asylum claims and the geographical isolation of detention facilities such as Curtin Air Force Base in Western Australia -- all without any effective judicial oversight -- is a deeply troubling set of factors," regional representative Richard Towle said.

Australia this month announced it would suspend asylum claims from Afghanistan for six months and from Sri Lanka for three months as it reassesses the improving security situations in the war-weary countries.

Indonesia court upholds blasphemy law

AP, Jakarta, Indonesia

Indonesia's constitutional court upheld a controversial blasphemy law yesterday that critics say limits religious freedom in the world's largest Muslim-majority country, ruling that the law is vital to religious harmony.

The 1965 law was challenged by a coalition of rights groups and civil society organizations. But it is supported by religious conservatives, including the radical Islamic Defenders Front, which had gathered at the court and threatened to protest if the judges didn't uphold it.

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Qualifications:

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Manager - Procurement & Logistics

Key Responsibilities:

Develop a complete procurement and logistics functions with due process and disciplines. Ensure due transparency over tender process and vendor management. Develop an efficient inventory management system

and maintain compliance to internal policies and procedures and fiscal regulations. Plan and forecast the purchase requirements of the user divisions and set sourcing strategy and also maintain relations with C&F and transport agencies. The candidate should have strong negotiation skills with relevant technical knowledge.

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