

RAJYA SABHA POLLS
Close battle for 18 seats in 5 states

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Polling for 18 Rajya Sabha seats in five states began yesterday to decide the fate of Union minister Anand Sharma, LJP supremo Ram Vilas Paswan, legal luminary Ram Jethmalani, former BJP chief M Venkaiah Naidu and liquor baron Vijay Mallya among others.

The BJP is faced with opposition within its ranks in Rajasthan over the candidature of Jethmalani for having defended Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru. The party has herded its legislators in a hotel to keep the flock together.

The decision of CPI(M) to abstain from voting in Rajasthan seems to have favoured the chances of two BJP candidates as an aspirant would now require 40 votes instead of earlier 41 to sail through.

Under the circumstances, the BJP with its 79 members and one JD (U) MLA would not require vote from outside if all of them back Jethmalani and the other nominee V P Singh. Besides, keeping its MLAs in the hotel, BJP has also issued a whip.

Pakistan 'funds' UN blacklisted group

BBC ONLINE

Pakistan's Punjab province government gave about \$1m (£674,000) last year to institutions linked to a charity on a UN terror blacklist, it has emerged.

The charity, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, denies accusations that it is a front for the Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group.

Punjab officials say the funds were humanitarian in nature and were not given directly to the charity.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa and four senior Lashkar-e-Taiba leaders were added to a UN sanctions list in December 2008.

They were accused of having links to al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The move by the UN Security Council came shortly after attacks on the Indian city of Mumbai (Bombay), for which Lashkar-e-Taiba was blamed.

It is the first time that the authorities in Pakistan have formally admitted allocating money to institutions linked to Jamaat-ud-Dawa, BBC correspondents say.

The government has long been under international pressure to crack down on militants or groups suspected of supporting them. There was no immediate response from the government in Islamabad.

'HUMANITARIAN' News that schools and hospitals run by Jamaat-ud-Dawa have received Pakistan state help is unlikely to go down well with the Indian or US governments.

Funding details came to light when the Punjab provincial government published spending figures for 2009-10.

"At least 80 million rupees [\$940,000] have been allocated for the institutions [linked to Jamaat-ud-Dawa] during the current fiscal year," Rana Sanaullah, a senior Punjab minister, told the BBC.

However, he maintained that the institutions - which include two schools and a hospital - were no longer attached to Jamaat-ud-Dawa.

"The government has taken control of the schools and appointed an administrator to run each of them."

He said the UN had been notified as the issue was a humanitarian one.

"There was a boys' school with 400 students, a girls' high school with 350 students and a hospital which addressed the needs of the entire area in question."

"If we had closed down the institutions it would have aggravated the sentiments of the people and made them sympathise with [Jamaat-ud-Dawa]."

CHARITY 'ASTONISHED' When asked why the Punjab government had allotted money in the budget for institutions it managed, a spokesman for Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Hafiz Abdur Rehman, said: "The truth is that we are ourselves astonished at this."

He said the institutions in question were now being managed by the charity.

"When restrictions were initially imposed upon us, the Punjab government did appoint an administrator but it was neither liked nor accepted by our people."

Latest attacks kill 12 Indian Maoists

AFP, Kolkata

Indian security forces killed 12 Maoists, including three women, in the latest of a series of raids against rebel strongholds in the east of country, officials said yesterday.

The government launched a major offensive last year to tackle the worsening left-wing insurgency, but since then the Maoists have hit back with bloody strikes including the massacre of 76 policemen in April.

The latest rebel deaths occurred late Wednesday when commandos and paramilitary special forces acting on a tip-off targeted about 45 Maoists gathered in a village in the Midnapore district of West Bengal state.

"This was a major success. We found eight bodies and we have information that four more bodies were carried away by the Maoists, while many more were injured," director general of police Bhupinder Singh told reporters in Kolkata.

"When the Maoists opened fire, the forces retaliated," he said.

40 Pak troops captured by Taliban

BBC ONLINE

The Afghan Taliban says it has captured dozens of Pakistani soldiers after attacking their checkpoint in a cross-border raid.

Pakistani security sources confirm some troops are missing.

The Taliban says it is holding up to 40 Pakistani troops after its raid in the Mohmand tribal area on Monday.

Afghan officials said eight soldiers had been handed over to the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, but Pakistan's army said it had no knowledge of this.

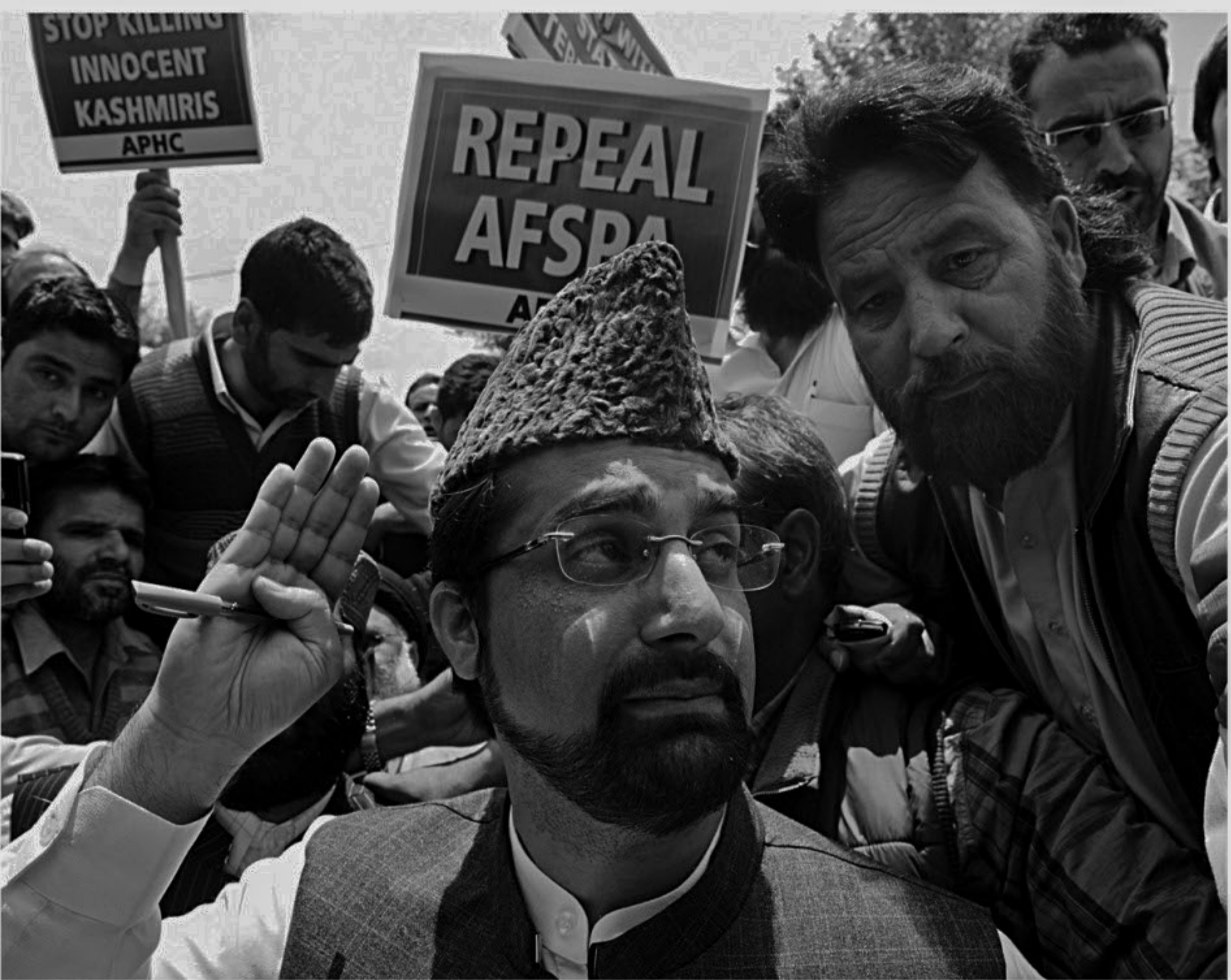
The BBC's M Ilyas Khan says that while attacks by the Taliban on border check posts are relatively routine, it is unusual for Pakistani soldiers to be held by the militants in Afghanistan.

A Taliban spokesman told the BBC that it was in fact holding Pakistani troops on both sides of the border after Monday's attack.

It said 30 soldiers were being held in Afghanistan and 10 in Pakistan.

The Taliban says it captured the soldiers after over-running the checkpoint.

Local officials in the Mohmand area confirmed to the BBC that about 40 soldiers were unaccounted for.



Chairman of The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (C) gestures as he speaks before his arrest in Srinagar yesterday, while enroute to the United Nations Military Observer Group of India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) Office in the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

E-voting just easy

FROM PAGE 1

attention of many voters as it was an entirely new experience for them and the process was quick and hassle-free.

"I have voted several times before, but this system is very convenient," Redu Mian said after casting his vote at Dr Khastagir Government Girls High School.

Redu who had never attended school, said he did not need anybody's help and could understand how to cast vote by pressing buttons.

"First I pressed three buttons by identifying the symbols - one for mayor, one for councillor and the other for women councillor and then sealed my votes by pressing the final button," he said.

Arati Chowdhury, a domestic help, also appreciated the e-voting system after casting her ballot at Kusum Kumari Girls High School. "I did not find the process difficult at all," she said.

No voter was seen at the Government National Primary School and

Regional Public Administration Training center in ward-21.

"The whole process was complete within only two hours after the voters arrived as four votes can be cast per minute using EVM," said Kamal Hossain, assistant presiding officer at Government National Primary School centre.

Dr Mohammad Nurul Alam, presiding officer of RPATC Centre said 1165 votes out of 2234 were cast by 1:00pm.

Assistant Returning Officer Dulal Talukder told The Daily Star at 1:45pm that no problem was reported concerning the new technology.

"The technology is helping the voters to cast their votes faster. It will also save time to count votes after completion of the polling and there will be no risk of cancellation of votes," Dulal said.

Earlier on June 11 and 12, a mock polling was held at Jamal Khan to help voters get acquainted with EVM.

Jute genome decoded

FROM PAGE 16

"We could win this market if we can make a variety that will grow all the year round," she said.

On the initiatives of the research, Matia Chowdhury said she herself talked with the prime minister to take the research project in hand and she nodded it.

The minister added the government is considering reopening a number of jute mills that have been shut.

Dr Alam, the principal researcher, however, laid special emphasis on Bangladesh's securing patent over the jute genome sequencing saying, "We'll be fully successful the day when we'll obtain the intellectual property rights on this genome sequencing."

"We're at a competitive stage in pursuing the jute genome sequencing project as others are trying too. But this much I can say we're ahead of others by at least three to five months," said Dr Alam.

Asked exactly when the team finished the research and how much money was spent, he did not want to comment on the issue.

People are curious to know details of the research, he said, adding "but I cannot reply to so many questions now for the sake of greater interest of our country."

"The way the young and talented group of researchers worked within limited resources, it was unprecedented," Dr Alam said.

Researchers from Dhaka University, Bangladesh Jute Research Institute and software company DataSoft in collaboration with the Centre for Chemical Biology, University of Science, Malaysia and University of Hawaii, USA have decoded the genome.

Genomes of 14 plants have so far been decoded, of which Dr Alam contributed to decoding three.

With the successful sequencing of jute genome, Bangladesh becomes only the second country after Malaysia, among the developing nations, to achieve such a feat.

"The way the whole team kept the project secret is unprecedented. It was very essential," he said.

Prof Hasina Khan of Dhaka University, Dr Kamal Uddin, director general of Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI), Mahub Zaman, director of DataSoft, Nuh Alam Lenin, the press and publication secretary of Awami League, who initially coordinated the research team, and other officials from BJRI and Ministry of Agriculture were present.

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