

LHC dismisses petition against US drone attacks

ANI, Lahore The Lahore High Court (LHC) has dismissed a petition against US drone attacks in Pakistan...

The petition was moved by Sardar Zaheer Ahmad, in which he requested that the Pakistan government should be directed to submit the report.

Fake degree holders should get lashes Says Pak ex-law minister

ANI, Islamabad Former Pakistan law minister Sher Afgan Niazi has said that a member of parliament holding a fake degree not only faces disqualification...

Niazi said that under the Hadood laws, the offenders are liable to be punished under Qadaf Had because of their being non-truthful or being liars.



Indian policeman use slingshots during clashes with Kashmiri protestors in Srinagar yesterday. Thousands of Indian troops enforced a strict curfew in parts of Kashmir on June 30...

Nepal's Maoists search for coalition partners

AP, Katmandu

Nepal's communist former rebels reached out to other political parties yesterday to form a new coalition government...

"We want to end the political deadlock as soon as possible and will be talking to other parties to reach an agreement," said Baburam Bhattarai...

The party said it established a three-member committee headed by its leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal...

The other main parties have agreed to hold talks, but it was unclear whether they would be interested in a Maoist-led government.

President Rambaran Yadav asked all parties to reach an agreement and form a new government by July 7.

Afghan kids being used by Taliban

Reveals report

IANS, Kabul

Children as young as five years old are being used by the Taliban to lay bombs and carry weapons...

In the past five months, the number of child insurgents has increased almost five-fold in the town of Sangin in Helmand province...

According to military intelligence sources, there are about 12 children being routinely used in the Sangin area just to plant bombs.

The Taliban have resorted to the tactic because they know that British troops are unlikely to fire at children planting IEDs.

New Afghan war commander vows to spare civilians

AFP, Brussels/ Kabul

US General David Petraeus, the new Afghan war commander, pledged yesterday to give his forces the firepower to fight the Taliban but insisted that sparing civilian lives remained his priority.

Petraeus admitted nevertheless that troops were unhappy with the rules of engagement, which limit air strikes and artillery and mortar fire to prevent civilian casualties.

"There are concerns among the ranks of some of our troops on the ground that some of the processes have become a bit too bureaucratic," he told reporters before briefing allies at Nato headquarters in Brussels.

Instead, he said he would "look very hard at how the rules and the tactical directive are implemented and to ensure that there is even implementation across all units instead of perhaps some unevenness that has crept in some."

Barack Obama for disparaging remarks he made about administration officials in a magazine article.

Petraeus said he supported the tactics, which are part of a troop surge strategy launched by the United States in a bid to beat back a resurgent Taliban insurgency.

"In a counter-insurgency the human terrain is the decisive terrain and therefore you must do everything humanly possible to protect the population and indeed again to reduce the loss of innocent civilian life," he said.

He said there had been a 50 percent reduction in the loss of civilian lives in the past 12 weeks compared to the same period last year.

30 TALIBAN IN AFGHAN GUN BATTLE Nato forces in Afghanistan said yesterday they had killed at least 31 Taliban fighters and captured a rebel chieftain after a raid on an insurgent hide-out in the southern province of Helmand.

Troops called in air support during running gun battles in the province's troubled Baghran district, which erupted after rebels attacked soldiers moving in on the compound with machine guns and rockets, it said.

Vengeful new militant group emerges in Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities now believe a dangerous new militant group, out to avenge a deadly army assault on a mosque in Islamabad three years ago, has carried out several major bombings in the capital previously blamed on the Taliban.

The emergence of the Ghazi Force was part of the outrage among many deeply religious Pakistani Muslims over the July 2007 attack by security forces against the Lal Masjid, or Red Mosque, a stronghold of Islamic militants.

The fierce attack, in which scores of young, heavily armed religious students died, inspired a new generation of militants. These Pakistanis have turned against a government they felt has betrayed them and, to their dismay, backed the US role in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The brief but bloody history of the Ghazi Force illustrates the unintended results of Pakistan's policy of promoting Islamic extremists to fight India in the disputed area of Kashmir. That policy which Pakistan denies it pursues now threatens regional stability as the US and Pakistan's other Western partners pour billions of dollars into the country to stop the rise of Islamic militancy.

The new group is made up of relatives of students who died in the Red Mosque assault. It is named after the students' leader, Maulana Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who was also killed. The mosque's adjacent religious school, or madrassa, had been a sanctuary for militants opposed to Pakistan's support of the US-run war in Afghanistan.

Sri Lanka could lose trade concessions in EU spat

REUTERS, Brussels

The European Commission on Wednesday rejected Sri Lankan accusations that a letter it sent urging the south Asian country to comply with conditions tied to a trade concession agreement was politically motivated.

The European Union's executive wrote to Colombo on June 17, requesting the government fully comply with and implement provisions of international human rights agreements and the United Nations convention against torture.

For more than a year Sri Lanka has defied Western pressure over accountability for potential war crimes and human rights violations in the last stages of its quarter-century war with the separatist Tamil Tigers, which it won in May 2009.

"The Commission would be grateful to receive from your government, by July 1, a letter containing a firm undertaking to address by the end of the year, the principle outstanding issues," said the letter, seen by Reuters.

"Over the longer term, the European Commission looks forward to addressing the full range of human rights issues with the government of Sri Lanka," it said.

The letter, signed by EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Trade Commissioner

Karel De Gucht, had urged Sri Lanka to lift wartime emergency laws that grant the government wide powers of arrest.

Sri Lankan officials rejected the request from the 27-nation EU, saying demands for accountability were fuelled by supporters of the Tamil Tigers.

"To suggest that any decision by the EU in respect of GSP+ (trade concessions) and Sri Lanka is politically motivated and to link it to the elections of this year is entirely false," said John Clancy, the European Commission's tradespokesman.

"The government of Sri Lanka is very well aware that this is a legal process that began several years ago and to suggest otherwise is simply misleading," he said.

DEADLINE LOOMS As the July 1 reply deadline looms, the European Union has warned that Sri Lanka risks losing access from Aug. 15 to its biggest export market if it fails to comply.

In February, EU states said they would temporarily withdraw preferential tariff benefits to Sri Lanka under the Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme because of concerns about Sri Lanka's human rights record.

The potential loss, worth about 100 million euros (\$122 million) annually in exports, would be a blow to Sri Lanka as the country is focused on resurrecting its \$42 billion economy.

No reason for Lankan anger at UN war panel

Says Ban

REUTERS, Kinshasa

There is no reason for the Sri Lankan government's angry reaction to the formation of a UN advisory panel on possible war crimes at the end of Sri Lanka's war against rebels, the UN chief said on Wednesday.

Last week UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon named a three-member panel whether war crimes were committed in the final months of Sri Lanka's war against the separatists Tamil Tigers, which it won in May 2009.

But Sri Lanka's government has rejected Ban's panel.

"There is no reason why (the) Sri Lankan government (is) reacting negatively to my proposal," Ban told Reuters in an interview in the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is celebrating 50 years of independence.

Taliban rule out negotiations with Nato

BBC ONLINE

The Taliban in Afghanistan have told the BBC that there is no question of their entering into any kind of negotiations with Nato forces.

It comes after US commanders and the British army chief of staff, Gen David Richards, suggested that it might be useful to talk to the Taliban.

The Taliban statement is uncompromising, almost contemptuous. They believe they are winning the war, and cannot see why they should help Nato by talking to them.

They assume, perhaps wrongly, that the Americans are in disarray after the sacking of the Nato commander Gen Stanley McChrystal last week, and regard any suggestion that they should enter negotiations with them as a sign of Nato's own weakness.

June, they point out, has seen the highest number of Nato deaths in Afghanistan: 102, an average of more than three a day.

'DIFFERENCES' Nowadays it is extremely hard for Westerners to meet Taliban leaders face to face, either in Afghanistan or in Pakistan.

But a trusted intermediary conveyed a series of questions to Zabihullah Mujahedd, the acknowledged spokesman for the Afghan Taliban leadership, and gave us his answers.

The text runs as follows: "We do not want to talk to anyone - not to [President Hamid] Karzai, nor to any foreigners - till the foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan".

Monsoon rains submerge hundreds of villages in Assam

REUTERS, New Delhi

Incessant monsoon rains have triggered major flooding in northeastern India, submerging hundreds of villages and forcing thousands of people to abandon their homes in search of higher ground, say officials and aid workers.

The heavy rains in the tea and oil-rich state of Assam have forced burgeoning rivers, including the mighty Brahmaputra, to burst their banks affecting 865,000 people in about 1,500 inundated villages.

Aid workers say 11 of Assam's 27 districts have been severely affected, including Kokrajhar, Lakhimpur, Baksa and Bongaigaon, and poor farming communities have been the worst-hit.

The fast-flowing waters have also eroded banks and dykes and swelling rivers are threatening to inundate other parts of the state, including parts of Dibrugarh, Assam's second largest city.

"People have been moving with whatever possessions they can take to safer areas. Most are currently in make-shift shelters with little help," said Mrinal Gohain, ActionAid's manager for India's northeast region.

"These communities, who rely on rice cultivation for their survival, will see 60 to 80 percent crop damage as a result of the irregular monsoon that we have had this year," he said, adding that Assam's pre-monsoon showers were 80 percent higher than normal this year.

Weather officials are forecasting more rainfall in the coming days. Government officials say water purification tablets, medicines and food are being distributed in some areas, but there are currently no plans to open relief camps until an on-going survey of the affected areas has been completed.



Vehicles are driven along a flooded street caused by heavy rains from hurricane Alex in Matamoros, in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas Wednesday. It strengthened into a Category 2 storm over the Gulf of Mexico and was due to hit northeastern Mexico very soon, the US National Hurricane Centre said.

Pakistan to train Afghan military officers

ANI, Kabul

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai has agreed to send some military officers to Pakistan for training.

According to the Washington Post, this is a significant policy shift, and signals a deepening relationship between the long-war neighbours.

The paper further says that the move should be seen as a victory for Pakistan, which seeks a major role in Afghanistan as officials in both countries become increasingly convinced that the US war effort there is faltering.

Afghan officials said Karzai has begun to see Pakistan as a necessary ally in ending the war through negotiation with the Taliban or on the battlefield.