

## Hillary raises graft probes with Karzai

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "put down a marker" this week to Afghan President Hamid Karzai about the importance of Western-backed anti-corruption bodies, a senior US official said Friday.

The official said Clinton discussed with Karzai the latest developments in which the Afghan president ordered a hand-picked team to review the work of the bodies and fix what are seen in Kabul as shortcomings.

"She did talk about the work of the Major Crimes Task Force and the special investigations unit," when she spoke Tuesday with Karzai during a routine telephone call, the official told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

"She did put down a marker that these units will be an important manifestation of the Afghan government's commitment to fighting corruption," the official said.

## Six Americans among 10 killed in Afghanistan

### Taliban claims responsibility

BBC ONLINE

Eight foreigners and two Afghans have been found shot dead next to abandoned vehicles in the north-eastern Afghan province of Badakhshan, officials say.

The dead foreigners are believed to be six Americans, one Briton and a German, who worked for an international charity providing eye care and medical help.

Their vehicles were discovered a day after contact was lost with them.

Local police said robbery might have been the motive. However, the Taliban have said they were behind the attack.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said bibles translated into Dari had been found.

"Yesterday at around 0800 (0330 GMT), one of our patrols confronted a group of foreigners. They were Christian missionaries and we killed them all," he told the AFP news agency.

He later told the Associated Press they were "spying for the Americans".

The team was working for a Christian charity, the International Assistance Mission (IAM). Its executive director, Dirk Frans, denied the medics and their Afghan interpreters were missionaries.

"That is a lie. That is not true at all. IAM is a Christian organisation, we have always been that," he told the BBC.

"We have worked in Afghanistan since 1966 - under the king, the communists, the Russians, the Mujahideen and the Taliban. They have known us as a Christian agency, but we certainly do not distribute bibles."

An IAM spokesman earlier said it was still awaiting formal identification of the victims, but that their families had been informed.

The bodies are expected to be returned to Kabul over the weekend.

The US embassy in Kabul said it had reason to believe that several American citizens were among the deceased.

"We cannot confirm any details at this point, but are actively working with local authorities and others to learn more about the identities and nationalities of these individuals," it said in a statement.

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office told the BBC it, too, was aware of the reports that bodies had been found in northern Afghanistan and was "urgently looking into this".

Badakhshan, a mainly ethnic Tajik region bordering Tajikistan, is one of the few Afghan provinces not to have been controlled by the Taliban before the US-led invasion of 2001.

## US suspends new adoptions from Nepal

AFP, Washington

The United States said Friday it has suspended of new US adoptions of Nepalese children, citing flaws in the system used to determine that the children had been abandoned.

The State Department and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a joint statement they have "decided to suspend adjudication of new adoption petitions and related visa issuance for children" listed as abandoned.

Rosemary Macray, a State Department spokeswoman, told AFP all cases are effectively frozen as "all of the Nepali children that we have seen being matched with US families by the government of Nepal have been reported to be abandoned."

The joint statement said US officials checking abandonment cases often found documents to be "unreliable," citing examples where data on children's birth certificates "has been changed or fabricated."

## Mutilated Afghan girl in US for new nose

BBC ONLINE

The Afghan girl featured on a controversial Time magazine cover is in the US to have her nose rebuilt.

Aisha told Time her nose and ears had been cut off - with the approval of a Taliban commander - by her abusive husband as punishment for her abusive husband.

The front cover generated debate over the headline "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan" and the use of the photo itself.

Her surgery is being done by the Grossman Burn Foundation in California.

The foundation campaigns on the issue of violence against women as well as doing free plastic surgery work.

Aisha, whose surname has not been revealed, will meet surgeon Peter Grossman next week to discuss the reconstruction of her nose.

The 18-year-old was reportedly given away by her family in childhood as a "blood debt" and was subsequently married to a Taliban fighter.

His family abused her and she ran away but was recaptured and mutilated by her husband.

Women for Afghan Women has been



using Aisha's case to illustrate the fear of what will happen if US, British and other international forces leave prematurely. The Afghan-American group helps to run the shelter which took Aisha in.

## Kashmir flood toll rises to 132

### Rescuers hope for survivors

AFP, Srinagar

Rescuers struggled to find survivors yesterday after devastating floods caused by freak rains killed at least 132 people in a remote part of Indian Kashmir popular for adventure sports.

Scores remained missing as heavy rainfall Saturday briefly disrupted rescue efforts and raised fears of more flooding, with several villages in the stark Himalayan border region still cut off.

"The death toll has gone up to 132 and scores are still missing," a senior police official said, asking not to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

At least 400 people were reported injured in the floods, which struck without warning Friday in the region, which shares a sensitive border with China and has a large Indian military presence.

Thousands more were left homeless in the disaster, which came as India's neighbour Pakistan was swamped by its worst floods in 80 years.

Shops in a newly built market in Leh, the main town in the majority Buddhist Ladakh area, were transformed into temporary mortuaries where rescuers laid out bodies.



Anti clockwise (from top left): A Pakistani navy official evacuates a girl to safer areas from a submerged village of Soomra Panhwar yesterday. A Kashmiri local man helps an elder to cross a road swept away by floods on the Leh-Srinagar highway at Kargil (India), which got washed away by flash floods. Pakistani flood survivors rush towards an army helicopter distributing food bags in Lal Pir yesterday.

## PAKISTAN FLOOD

# Sindh province on red alert; 15m affected

AFP, Durrani Mehar

Pakistan raced to evacuate families threatened with fresh floods as heavy rains worsened the disaster in its second week, with up to 15 million people already affected.

Authorities in southern Sindh province have warned that a major deluge could hit impoverished river communities in the fertile basin, where they said up to three million people had already been affected and one million evacuated.

Those uprooted from their homes have been moved to temporary relief shelters in government buildings, schools and tents, but many families living in low-lying areas along the swollen Indus river were resisting evacuation.

"There are some areas where people are still reluctant to leave their homes and belongings. We are compelling them to evacuate because there is massive danger to their lives," said irrigation minister Jam Saifullah Dharejo.

"The water flow in some places along the river is exceptionally high and intermittent rains continue," he added.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has appealed for immediate international help to cope with the country's worst ever floods, which have already devastated provinces in the country's northwest and centre.

"I would ask the international community to support and help Pakistan alleviate the sufferings of flood-affected people," Gilani said in a televised address to the nation on Friday night.

"Pakistan has been hit by worst floods of its history," he said.

Countries including the US, Britain and China have pledged tens of millions of dollars in aid for victims of the nearly two-week-old

disaster. Floods across the largely impoverished, insurgency-hit country have swept away entire villages and killed at least 1,600 people, according to UN estimates.

Bedraggled women, children and elderly men were deposited on the banks of the Indus by rescue boats criss-crossing a giant lake dotted by treets in the village of Durrani Mehar in northern Sindh.

The meteorological office has warned that at least two more days of rain are expected. A red alert is in place in Sindh, where forecasters warned of an "imminent" and "extreme" flood threat.

Torrential rains were also forecast in north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where the head of flood relief operations, Major General Ghayoor Mehmood, has said some 1,400 people have been killed, with 213 still missing.

Flooding has spread to Indian-held Kashmir, where at least 115 people have died, while large parts of Pakistan's Punjab are also under water.

"The scale of the needs is absolutely daunting," Melissa Fleming, a spokeswoman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said Friday.

More than 252,000 homes are thought to have been damaged or destroyed across Pakistan and 1.38 million acres (558,000 hectares) of crop land flooded, and it could take weeks before electricity is fully restored.

Authorities in Sindh said assessments of the damage to agriculture were in progress after farmers saw their livelihoods washed away.

"Our cattle died and the cotton crop (was) destroyed," said Mohammad Bakhsh, 50, a resident of Qasim Ghot village.

## KASHMIR VIOLENCE

# Geelani rejects talks offer

IANS, Srinagar

The offer of "quiet dialogue" by union Home Minister P. Chidambaram has not gone down too well with separatist leaders in Jammu and Kashmir with hardline leader Syed Ali Geelani rejecting it saying it was an attempt to "discredit him" as he had not softened his stand.

The pro-azadi Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) has termed the talks offer 'sheer hypocrisy' as 'talks and killings can't go together'. Opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti has said the centre should take some 'tangible measures' to restore confidence before initiating any talks.

Speaking to some media persons here late Friday evening, Geelani, chairman of the break-away Hurriyat group, said: 'I won't participate in

any dialogue process unless India accepts Kashmir as a disputed territory, withdraws its troops from the Valley and helps implement the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir.'

Geelani said there had been no change in his stand and accused New Delhi of trying to create confusion among the masses by extending the talks offer to him.

"I strongly reject the talks offer by the Indian home minister. It is a conspiracy to discredit me and an attempt to suppress the ongoing agitation for the right to self-determination," he said.

He also said there was no question of softening his stand on Kashmir as was being projected in a 'wrong way by New Delhi'.

The central government, in order to win the hearts and minds of the people of Kashmir, had Friday said it would resume dialogue and asked the separatists including Geelani to join the effort.

## UK lifts Lanka travel advice restrictions

BBC ONLINE

A security assessment carried out by the British High Commission in Sri Lanka has concluded that the whole country is now safe for travellers.

It is the first time in about 30 years that travel restriction advice has been completely lifted.

The British government had previously warned against travelling to northern areas, principally because of the danger of unexploded mines.

The Sri Lankan army defeated Tamil Tiger rebels in May last year.

## Son defends Zardari Europe trip

AFP, BBC ONLINE, London

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari yesterday vehemently defended his father President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to Europe despite the flooding disaster affecting up to 15 million people at home in Pakistan.

Opening a donation point at the Pakistani High Commission in London, the 21-year-old insisted his father was raising much-needed funds.

"He's doing the best he can and what he thinks is best to

help the people of Pakistan," the Oxford University history graduate said.

"His personal presence in Pakistan would not be able to raise this much money," he said, adding that multi-million dollar donations had been made by France, Britain and Abu Dhabi.

The Gulf emirate had "also promised to come and help the rehabilitation after the floods have gone, after the media have gone, and after people are not paying attention," he said.

"If he thought he could be more useful in Pakistan, I'm sure he would be there."

Zardari has been criticised in Pakistan and by some in the British Pakistani community for carrying on his visit.

Bhutto Zardari's mother is Benazir Bhutto, the murdered former Pakistani premier. He became co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party alongside his father after her assassination in 2007.

He has said that he intended to continue his academic and political education and was considering studying law.



Demonstrators protest outside the International Convention Centre in central Birmingham yesterday as President Zardari speaks to supporters during a visit to England. Zardari has faced criticism for leaving Pakistan to promote his son's political campaign while the country faces a national crisis due to severe flooding.

go into politics, Bhutto Zardari said he was focused on completing his education "as my mother wished."

President Zardari was on Saturday due to speak at an event in Birmingham in central England, Britain's second city.

ADULT CONVERSATIONS International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell

defended Zardari's visit, which he said had served to highlight the disaster and help raise international relief funds.

"He is drumming up support internationally for the huge relief effort that is going to be required now in Pakistan and is going to be returning very soon."

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Bilawal Bhutto