

New death sparks protests in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Thousands of people poured on to the streets of central Kashmir summer capital Srinagar yesterday after another protester died, taking the toll of two months of violence to 64, police said.

The teenager who died in a Srinagar hospital on Wednesday had been admitted on Monday. Witnesses said he had been beaten by federal paramilitary forces during a protest against Indian rule.

Police said they were investigating the death that brought hundreds of locals out on the streets of Srinagar's Soura district chanting slogans.

"More and more people are joining them," a resident Farooq Ahmed told AFP over the telephone.

An AFP photographer said police fired several warning shots in the air to disperse the protesters who were carrying the corpse.

The scenic Kashmir region has been under rolling curfews to contain deadly protests that were sparked by the killing June 11 of a teenage



student in the Srinagar by a police tear-gas shell.

Most parts of Srinagar were under strict curfew on Wednesday after Muslim separatists opposed to Indian rule in the region called upon the residents to hold anti-India protests across the region.

In Pampore town, 15 kilometres (nine miles), south of Srinagar, a young protester was wounded Wednesday when security forces opened fire to quell a demonstration, police said.

Muslim militants have fought a 20-year insurgency in Indian Kashmir

against rule from New Delhi.

The mountainous region, held in part by Pakistan and India but claimed in full by both, has been the cause of two of the three wars the countries have fought since independence from Britain more than half a century ago.

Relatives of Kashmiri boy Umar Qayoom, 13, who died in a hospital yesterday, mourn at his funeral in Srinagar. Thousands of people poured on to the streets of Indian Kashmir's summer capital after he died, taking the toll of two months of violence to 64. Witnesses said he had been beaten by federal paramilitary forces during a protest.

PHOTO: AFP

AFGHAN PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

Record number of women to contest

ANI, Kabul

A record number of female candidates will stand in Afghanistan's parliament elections next month, regardless of the everyday prejudice and death threats from the Taliban.

Poll monitors said women candidates are finding it difficult to campaign outside a few areas, as objections from conservative hardliners is at a high level.

"With voting billed for 18 September, Kabul's streets have been plastered in posters and billboards, many of which show the faces of would-be female MPs in the capital, the number of whom has more than doubled since 2005. However, many of the posters do not stay up long, or get defaced with slashes of bright red ink," reports The Guardian.

"I have told my team that we just have to expect this sort of thing. I cannot run in Herat, because the people say they will not stand a singer woman like me," said a female candidate Fareda Tarana, whose expensive posters had been torn down on Kabul's busy airport road.

Tarana, who came eighth in Afghan Star - the country's Pop Idol in 2005 has been

reportedly receiving ten calls everyday from men raising objections to her candidature as an MP.

The calls are in fact more serious for candidates like Najila Angira, who got a call from a Wardak Taliban commander saying he would kill her.

"He had read my biography, which said I lived outside of Afghanistan during the Taliban time and said 'Why are you saying bad things about the Taliban?' said Angira, adding that the Taliban time is finished.

The situation is reported to be worse in more dangerous provinces outside Kabul.

"A female candidate in isolated Ghor province was forced to abandon her campaign and flee to Kabul. The women candidates were "inundated" with late-night threatening calls both from insurgents, political rivals and even some ordinary people," said the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (Fefa) in a recent report.

"Women's campaigns were barely visible in the most insecure provinces in the south and south-east of the country, and female candidates complained of government indifference to their security concerns," the Fefa added in its report.

US makes aid warning against Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan will have to demonstrate it can spend relief funds transparently and well if it wants more help in rebuilding after its massive floods, the US aid chief said, as the United Nations appealed urgently for more helicopters to ferry aid to around 800,000 stranded people.

America has been the most generous contributor to the flood aid, rushing in emergency assistance to support a vital ally in the war against al-Qaeda and Taliban. But rebuilding homes, roads, livelihoods and vital infrastructure will cost billions of dollars, and there are questions over who will pay.

The Pakistan government says about \$800 million in emergency aid has been committed or pledged so far. But there are concerns internationally about how the money will be spent by the government, which has a reputation for inefficiency and corruption.

Rajiv Shah, administrator of the US Agency for International Development, said the United States would continue to urge nations to donate.

"We are going to work at it, but these are



PHOTO: AFP

A boy displaced by floods cries near a makeshift camp in Nowshera yesterday.

tough economic times around the world and it will require a demonstration of real transparency and accountability and that resources spent in Pakistan get results," he said in an interview with The Associated Press late Tuesday.

The floods began almost a month ago with the onset of the monsoon and have ravaged a massive swath of the country, from the mountainous north through to its agricultural heartland. More than 8 million people are in need of emergency assistance.

Some of the routes along which trucks carrying supplies to US and Nato troops in neighbouring Afghanistan travel have also been affected by the floods. A spokesman for international forces in Afghanistan said supplies had been slowed down but there had been no impact on operations.

The United Nations said some 800,000 people had been cut off by the floods and were only accessible by air, a measure of the scale of the disaster. It said 40 more heavy-lift helicopters were urgently needed.

The US military has dispatched 19 choppers so far.

Zardari under vitriolic attack from US, UK media

ANI, Washington

Under attack from various quarters in the country for his government's slow response to the catastrophic floods, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari's apparent failure to handle the crisis has also earned him criticism from the US media.

Both print and electronic media in America have launched a scorching attack on Zardari, blasting him for taking a trip to France and Britain when the massive floods were unfolding, and described him as an ineffectual leader.

Though Zardari, through his column in The Wall Street Journal last week, had tried to justify his foreign trip, but even that has not stopped columnists and analysts from slamming the President.

"Pakistan's cataclysmic floods have left the government of President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad isolated and despised by the public. The government's response to the inundations has been feeble and inept," prominent columnist, Eric Margolis, wrote in The Huffington Post.

"Most of the rescue operations were conducted by the military, which still remains popular. Expect accusations that aid money is being stolen by corrupt government officials," Margolis added.

He pointed out that people of Pakistan are furious with Zardari for enjoying a foreign trip while his countrymen were struggling to wade through the raging flood waters.

"Pakistanis were furious at Zardari for swanning around Europe while over a third of the nation was drowning, Pakistan's parliament has stripped Zardari, whose popularity is at minus zero, of most of his important powers, handing them over to the amiable but weak prime minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, another compliant US ally," the columnist said.

DIAMOND THEFT India wants Dubai to extradite 4

AP, New Delhi

India has asked the United Arab Emirates to extradite four Mexican and Venezuelan suspects in the Brazil theft of 300 diamonds worth more than \$1.4 million at a major jewellery show, police said yesterday.

Security footage showed the theft taking place late Monday at the India International Jewellery Show, but authorities zeroed in on the suspects three men and one woman after they had left on a flight from Mumbai where the show was held.

The footage showed the men kept workers at the stall busy as the woman put a box containing the diamonds into her bag, police said.

In Dubai, a police official said the arrests followed the Interpol alert for the suspects, who were taken into custody moments after an Emirates flight from Mumbai landed. The official spoke on condition of anonymity under standing rules for briefing the media.

Afghan deadline giving enemy sustenance US general warns

BBC ONLINE

A senior US general has warned President Barack Obama's deadline to begin pulling troops out of Afghanistan is encouraging the Taliban.

US General James Conway, head of the US Marine Corps, said the deadline was "giving our enemy sustenance".

Gen Conway warned that US forces in southern Afghanistan will likely have to stay in place for several years.

His comments are likely to fuel debate over US strategy in Afghanistan and Mr Obama's July 2011 withdrawal date.

US administration officials say privately they are not surprised to hear the comments from the general, who, correspondents say, has typical US Marine Corps bluntness - and is also about to retire.

'INTERCEPTED COMMUNICATIONS'

Gen Conway, who just returned from Afghanistan, said he is concerned the date may signal to the Taliban that the US was preparing to wind down the war.

"In some ways we think right now it's probably giving our enemy sustenance. We think that he may be saying to himself, in fact we've intercepted communications that say, 'Hey, we only have to hold out for so long,'" Gen Conway told a Pentagon news conference.

"I honestly think it will be a few years before conditions on the ground are such that turnover will be possible for us," he said of Marines in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

The BBC's Nick Childs says the statements made by the general highlight the manner in which American political and military leaders continue to differ about how fast security can be handed over to the Afghan authorities.

General Conway said that Afghan units "somewhere" may be able to take the lead in security, but not in the south, which the general called the "birthplace" of the Taliban insurgency.

Indian parliament debates civil nuclear bill

BBC ONLINE

India's parliament has begun debating a controversial draft law aimed at opening up its civilian nuclear power industry to private investment.

The long-delayed bill will enable foreign firms to build reactors to supply India's atomic energy market, worth an estimated \$150bn (£97bn).

The cabinet approved the plan last week amid wrangling with the opposition.

The bill sets out liabilities of firms in case of accidents, and puts in place a framework for compensation claims.

Correspondents say they expect parliament to pass the bill.

The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill was introduced in parliament on Wednesday by junior science and technology minister Prithviraj Chavan.

Suu Kyi asks supporters to boycott polls

IANS, Yangon

Myanmar's pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has urged her supporters not to vote in this year's general election, opposition sources said yesterday.

Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) party have boycotted the general election scheduled Nov 7 to protest regulations passed by Myanmar's junta that seemed designed to bar the Nobel laureate and her followers from the polls.

The regulations ban anyone currently serving prison terms from membership of political parties seeking to contest the polls.

Suu Kyi is serving an 18-month house detention term which is expected to expire in late November, after the election.

NLD spokesman Nyan Win met with Suu Kyi Tuesday to seek her views on the pending polls.

Nyan Win told a press conference that when asked whom her supporters should vote for at the polls, Suu Kyi answered: 'It is clear. Do not vote.'

Although the NLD has chosen not to contest the polls, a breakaway faction, called the National Democratic Force, has entered the race. Their leaders were hoping for backing from Suu Kyi, sources said.

About 40 parties have been allowed to contest the polls, which few expect to be free and fair as promised by the junta. Parties complain that they have been given insufficient time to prepare and the registration fee, at \$500 per candidate, is onerous in a country where the per capita income is less than \$600 a year.

Australian PM contenders promise no early polls

AP, Canberra

The contenders to become Australia's next prime minister each promised yesterday to govern for a full term if three key independent lawmakers support their competing parties to form an administration after inconclusive elections.

The independents are likely to decide whether Julia Gillard's Labor Party or opposition leader Tony Abbott's Liberal Party-led coalition forms a government after elections failed to give any party a majority in the 150-seat House of Representatives for the first time in 70 years.

Independents Rob Oakeshott, Tony Windsor and Bob Katter opened negotiations with the two leaders on Wednesday and presented each with wish lists including a demand for a pledge to govern for the full three years. A prime minister might be tempted to call early elections as soon as opinion polls showed a chance of winning a majority.

Julia qualified her pledge, saying that a by-election due to a government lawmaker becoming sick could be enough to bring down a minority administration.

"If I was the incoming prime minister, out of this process, to the extent that I could control it, my guarantee to go full term is unequivocal," Julia told reporters.

Conservative opposition leader Abbott said he told the independents "there would be no election prior to August 2013, should I become prime minister."

The independents say their top demand is for details of how much the competing election promises would cost the nation in areas including telecommunications, health and education.

Julia said she was inclined to release what costings were available, and was seeking advice from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. But as caretaker prime minister, she would also need Abbott's authority to release such budget information. Abbott said he wanted to see Julia's advice before agreeing.

Abbott has not agreed to the independents' request that he submit his election promises to the Treasury Department to be officially costed. But he said the independents were welcome to see calculations by a private accounting firm commissioned by his party.



The German Navy's tall ship "Gorch Fock" (front) arrives for the "Sail 2010" sailing festival yesterday in Bremerhaven, northern Germany. According to the organisers, more than 200 ships from 15 nations participate in the maritime festival running from August 25 to 29.

PHOTO: AFP