

Manmohan orders to change Kashmir strategy

AP, New Delhi

Security forces in Kashmir need to find non-lethal means of controlling violent mobs to prevent more deaths in the unrest roiling the Indian-ruled region, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday in rare remarks directly questioning government tactics.

Violence related to near-daily protests against Indian control of Kashmir has led to the deaths of at least 64 people over the last two months, mostly civilians. The protesters have set official buildings and vehicles ablaze, and government forces have fired guns and tear gas to contain the unrest.

Speaking to police chiefs from around India, Singh noted that militant activities have declined in Kashmir, but maintaining public order there has become a serious concern and a challenge for the government.

"We cannot have an approach of one size fits



all," Singh said. Public agitation has to be dealt with "with non-lethal, yet effective and more focused, measures," he said.

Civil rights activists have accused Indian paramilitary soldiers and police of using a heavy-handed approach, and each death caused by security forces sparks further clashes with rock-throwing demonstrators.

Singh has made at least two recent appeals for calm, telling the people of Kashmir his government is ready to hold talks to resolve their problems.

Rule by Hindu-majority India is widely opposed in the majority Muslim region, which separatists want to become independent or merge with Pakistan.

In his speech to police chiefs, Singh dwelt on a slew of problems faced by police and security forces in the country, including threats by separatists and Maoist rebels, commonly known as Naxalites.

Pak Taliban's kill 8 police in Afghan north

REUTERS, Kunduz

Taliban rebels killed eight Afghan police officers Thursday in northern Kunduz, an official said, stepping up strikes in what was once a relatively secure part of Afghanistan.

The attack happened just before dawn when the police were asleep, Kunduz Governor Mohammad Omar told reporters. One policeman was wounded and one managed to escape, he said, lowering his earlier death toll of nine.

Residents said there were some casualties among civilians, but details were not immediately available.

The Taliban, largely active in their traditional bastion of support in the south and east, have increased attacks in recent months in some areas of the north despite the presence of around 150,000 foreign forces in the country.

Kunduz has been the focus of attacks in the north and insurgents are increasingly using it as a base to launch attacks elsewhere in the region.

Scientists create liver cells from human skin

AFP, Washington

British scientists have grown liver cells out of stem cells from human skin, boosting hopes that healthy cells can be transplanted into organs to repair damage from diseases like cirrhosis and cancer, according to new findings.

Cambridge University researchers took skin biopsies from seven patients suffering from various hereditary liver diseases, and from three healthy patients, "reprogramming" the skin samples into stem cells, which can effectively become any tissue in the body.

For the first time, such cells were used to mimic a range of liver diseases, according to the findings published in Wednesday's Journal of Clinical Investigation.

Growing liver cells in a laboratory is particularly difficult.

By replicating such cells in diseased livers, and replicating the healthy cells from a control group, researchers can not only determine precisely what is happening in the diseased cell, but also test the effectiveness of new therapies to treat diseases.

Principal investigator of the research Ludovic Vallier, of the MRC Centre for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine at Cambridge, described the work as "an

important step towards delivering the clinical promises of stem cells."

Such genetic engineering could lead to targeted and personalized therapies and, once diseased cells are treated, could eventually enable the transplant of healthy liver cells into a patient's damaged liver.

The process could be used to create similar models for use in other organs, the study's authors said, although more research is needed.

The success comes as a debate swirls in the United States on research involving human embryonic stem cells, after a US judge Monday blocked federal funding for stem cell research.

Christian organisations had argued that federal funding would go for research that involved destroying human embryos, which they said violated a 1996 law.

Many scientists see embryonic stem cells as essential for medical research as they have a unique ability to become virtually any cell in the body.

"Given the shortage of donor organs -- the liver in this case -- the development of alternatives is urgent," said the findings' lead author, Tamir Rashid of Cambridge University.

Francis Ford Coppola to receive lifetime Oscar

BBC ONLINE

Godfather director Francis Ford Coppola is to receive a lifetime achievement Oscar later this year.

It will be the sixth Academy Award for the 71-year-old -- four of them were for his films about the fictional Italian American Corleone crime family.

Honorary awards will also be given to French director Jean-Luc Godard, actor Eli Wallach and film historian Kevin Brownlow.

The awards will be given out at a ceremony in Los Angeles in November.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science said Coppola's Irving Thalberg Memorial Award was given to "a creative producer whose body of work reflects a consistently high quality of motion picture production".

UN reviews security after Pak Taliban threat

BBC ONLINE

The UN says it is reviewing security measures for its aid workers in Pakistan, after a warning of new threats from the Pakistani Taliban.

A US official said the militant group was planning to attack foreigners delivering aid to millions of people affected by the floods.

There have been no such attacks since the floods began.

It has now been four weeks since the start of the flooding, described as the region's worst humanitarian crisis.

The UN says more than 17 million people have been affected by the floods, and about 1.2 million homes have been destroyed, leaving five million people homeless.

As floods sweep down from the north, water has breached one embankment in the Kot Almo area in Sindh province, threatening thousands of people in the southern Thatta district to flee from their homes.

About 400,000 people have been told to evacuate the towns of Sujawal, Mir Pur Batoro and Daro.

"Evacuation in those areas is ongoing but we have issued another warning for the remaining people to leave as well," Saleh Farooqi, director general of the National Disaster Management Agency's Sindh office, told the Reuters news agency.

'PLANS TO ATTACK' The militant group Tehrik-e Taliban "plans to conduct attacks against foreigners participating in the ongoing flood relief operations in Pakistan", a US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the BBC.

The official said the US government also believed "federal and provincial ministers" may be at risk, but gave no further details of the source of the information.

A spokesman for the World Health Organization told the BBC that aid work in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan was already being affected by security concerns.

"Now with this threat it means either we have to downsize the operation - which means less access to the affectees - otherwise we have to take more mitigation measures in order to reduce the security risk, which means more resources," Ahmed Farah Shadoul said.

Land protests bring Delhi to standstill

AFP, New Delhi

Thousands of farmers protested in New Delhi yesterday over forced land acquisitions for a new road in a demonstration that highlights the difficulties of building infrastructure in India.

The farmers, most in traditional white dress, gathered near the national parliament in the early afternoon to listen to speeches from the leaders of the movement.

They came from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh to protest against what they see as a land grab to build a new highway between Agra, home to the Taj Mahal, and New Delhi.

Farmers in the district of Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh have been demonstrating for three weeks to demand higher compensation for their land adjacent to the proposed Yamuna Expressway, resulting in frequent clashes with police.



Relatives react upon the arrival of the bodies of two Spanish policemen and an interpreter killed in Afghanistan yesterday in Madrid. The coffins arrived in a Spanish air force plane at the military base of Torrejon outside Madrid.



PHOTO: AFP

A portrait of Mother Teresa reading "The joy of loving" is displayed above the entrance of Palazzo Valentini, headquarters of the Province of Rome, announces the celebrations of Mother Teresa's 100th birth anniversary, in downtown Rome yesterday. Mother Teresa began her missionary work with the poor in Kolkata in 1948 and the teeming east Indian metropolis remained her base until her death in September 1997.

Mother Teresa remembered, 100 years on from birth

AFP, Kolkata

Nuns, priests and slum-dwellers held a solemn mass in Kolkata on Thursday to mark the birth centenary of Mother Teresa, known as the "Saint of the Gutters" for her work with the city's sick and dying.

Outside India, the anniversary was also celebrated in Mother Teresa's birthplace in Macedonia, and in the country of her parents, Albania.

The Kolkata mass, presided over by Cardinal Telesphore Placidus Toppo of Ranchi, was celebrated at the headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity -- the order of nuns that Mother Teresa founded in the eastern Indian city 60 years ago.

A message from Pope Benedict XVI was read out at the two-hour service, which drew around 1,000 people, including scores of residents from the city's slums, which have always been the focus of the order's work.

India, Afghanistan vow to fight terrorism

AFP, New Delhi

India and Afghanistan on Wednesday wound up two days of talks during a visit to New Delhi by Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmai Rassoul, saying they would work together to combat terrorism in the region.

Rassoul met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and held talks with his Indian counterpart SM Krishna on issues ranging from trade to the scourge of terrorism, a joint statement released after the talks said.

"They agreed that terrorism is the main threat undermining peace and stability in the region and reiterated their resolve to effectively combat and defeating it," it said.

Rassoul and Krishna also discussed the possibility of transforming war-torn Afghanistan into a springboard for trade between central and south Asia, the statement added.

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