

Nato kills Afghan kids, loses three soldiers

AFP, Kabul

Three US soldiers were killed Friday in attacks in Afghanistan, Nato said, as Afghan authorities accused international forces of killing six children during an air assault on Taliban positions.

Amid a surge in military deaths, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said it lost three soldiers in two separate Taliban-style bomb attacks -- two were killed in the country's east, while one died in the south.

The insurgency, dragging towards its tenth year, is concentrated in the eastern and southern border belts of the country.

In eastern Kunar province, a mountainous region known to be a Taliban stronghold, a police commander told AFP that six children were killed in an air raid aimed at quelling a Taliban attack.

Provincial police chief Khalilullah Ziayee said a group of children were collecting scrap metal on the mountain when Nato aircraft dropped bombs to disperse Taliban fighters attacking a nearby base.

"In the bombardment six children, aged six to 12, were killed. Another child was injured," the police commander said.

China silent on reported visit by North Korea's Kim

REUTERS, Changchun

China kept silent yesterday about a reported visit by North Korea's secretive leader, Kim Jong-il, that analysts say appears intended to line up Beijing behind his dynastic succession plans.

Coinciding with the unconfirmed trip, former US President Jimmy Carter left Pyongyang on Friday with an American, Aijalon Mahli Gomes, who was arrested in January and sentenced to eight years of hard labor for illegally entering North Korea.

There was no indication that Carter met Kim. State media in the North said number two leader Kim Yong-nam had told Carter that Pyongyang was committed to denuclearizing the peninsula and resuming stalled talks on its nuclear disarmament.



PHOTO: AFP
The aftermath of a fire that gutted a sprawling shantytown at the bay of Navotas, Manila yesterday leaving around 200 homes damaged and 300 families homeless. Inset, A man sits amid the remnants of his home.

Concession clears way for Australia truce talks

AFP, Sydney

Australia's conservatives yesterday agreed to a key demand from minority lawmakers central to determining who will take power, after the closest elections in decades left the nation in political deadlock.

Tony Abbott, head of the Liberal/National coalition, agreed to hand over his policies for scrutiny by the Treasury in a bid to woo the four independents and Greens member of parliament Adam Bandt who will decide whether he should take power.

Abbott put the "kingmaking" MPs offside this week by rejecting their request that public officials do a feasibility study of his election promises, with one warning him he was "dicing with death".

Both he and Prime Minister Julia Gillard failed to secure the 76 seats needed for an outright majority, and neither side can form government without winning over at least some of the minority lawmakers.

Abbott achieved a remarkable weekend comeback at the polls to come within a whisker of claiming office, and he offered an olive branch Friday by agreeing to submit his plans.

The agreement means that negotiations can continue into next week, as the last postal and provisional votes are counted.

Abbott currently holds 73 seats to Gillard's 72, but Bandt is widely expected to side with the prime minister, bringing them to a 73-seat dead heat.

A straight-talking, fitness fanatic better known for his brief swimsuits than diplomatic skills, Abbott declared his backdown a "win" because he had managed to secure a ban on his plans being released to Gillard or her deputy.

Lanka scraps visa on arrival for most foreigners

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has scrapped visa on arrival for all nationals except those from the Maldives and Singapore, an official said yesterday, in a move which could damage the country's revived tourist industry.

"The existing visa regime of granting landing endorsements on arrival for tourists will be withdrawn with effect from the 30th of September 2010," said Controller General of Immigration WAC Perera.

Perera said that visitors from Singapore and the Maldives, which grant Sri Lankan passport holders visa on arrival, would be exempted.

Sri Lanka has granted foreign tourists a 30-day visa on arrival since the 1970s as part of a move to promote tourism, which was badly affected by the island's 37-year ethnic conflict.

Plants can send SOS signal to insects

BBC ONLINE

Plants can summon insects to their aid to avoid being munched to death by caterpillars, scientists have found.

Leafy tobacco plants have evolved a "chemical SOS" that attracts predatory insects that eat the attackers.

In the journal *Science*, researchers revealed that the caterpillars' saliva activates this signal.

The modified signal causes *Geocoris* insects, which feed on the caterpillar larvae and eggs, to swoop in - rescuing the plant and gaining a meal.

The work was carried out by Silke Allmann of the Swammerdam Institute for Life Sciences in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Ian Baldwin of the Max Planck Institute for Chemical Ecology in Germany.

They discovered that when the plants were attacked by tobacco hornworm caterpillars, *Manduca sexta*, the caterpillar saliva caused a chemical change in "green leaf volatiles" - pungent chemicals that the plants produce.

The familiar smell of cut grass is generated by green leaf volatiles (GLVs).

The scientists studied the effect further by setting up a fake plant attack.

They glued caterpillar eggs onto two groups of tobacco plants, using cotton swabs to coat the eggs on one group of plants with the plant's own GLVs. The eggs on the other plants were treated with GLV mixed with caterpillar spit.

These plants "perfumed" with the plant chemical alone had only 8% of their eggs attacked, whereas plants perfumed with the plant and caterpillar-derived chemical mixture chemical lost almost a quarter of their eggs.

All of these missing eggs had been eaten by the *Geocoris* bugs, which were attracted by the chemicals.

The modified chemical seems to "betray" the location of the feeding caterpillar, the researchers concluded in their paper.

"Why the larvae would produce such an apparently [disadvantageous chemical] in their saliva remains to be determined."

US citizens freed in North Korea

BBC ONLINE

Former US President Jimmy Carter has secured the release of an American citizen detained in North Korea.

Aijalon Mahli Gomes, 31, was sentenced to eight years' hard labour in April, after being found guilty of illegally entering the country from China.

Mr Carter, who spent two days in Pyongyang, has now left with Mr Gomes.

North Korea's state media said officials told Mr Carter of Pyongyang's willingness to re-enter talks on its nuclear programme.

The North's Deputy Prime Minister Kim Yong-nam "expressed the Republic's commitment to denuclearise the Korean peninsula and resume the six-way talks," the North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Mr Carter is flying to Boston with Mr Gomes, where he will be reunited with his family later yesterday.

Mr Carter met senior North Korean officials after arriving in Pyongyang on Wednesday on what was described as "a private humanitarian trip".

On his arrival, Mr Carter was met by North Korea's nuclear negotiator, Kim Kye-gwan, KCNA said.

Later he held "cordial" talks with the country's deputy leader, Kim Yong-nam, the agency said.

Trapped Chile miners give video tour of confinement

BBC ONLINE

A newly-released video appears to show that 33 miners trapped deep underground in Chile are in good spirits.

The video was taken with a camera dropped down the narrow bore-hole that is the miners' lifeline to the surface.

The miners are mostly shirtless, bearded and thin but are "reasonably" healthy, Chile's health minister said.

They have been trapped since 5 August and were only discovered to be alive on Sunday. It could take as long as four months to rescue the men.

A shaft wide enough for the men to be lifted up must be drilled about 700m (765 yards) through the earth to the section of the San Jose mine where the men are trapped by a cave-in.

CIA pays many in Karzai admin: report

REUTERS, Washington

The CIA is making payments to a significant number of officials in Afghan President Hamid Karzai's administration, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

Citing current and former US officials, the paper said the payments were long-standing in many cases and intended to help the agency maintain a source of information within the Afghan government.

Some Karzai aides were CIA informants and others received payments to ensure their accessibility, the Post said, citing a US official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The CIA payments have continued despite concerns that the agency is backing corrupt officials, the report said.

The Post said CIA spokesman Paul Glimigiano disputed the official's characterization, saying, "This anonymous source appears driven by ignorance, malice or both."

Corruption and governance in Afghanistan are being scrutinized in Washington as US President Barack Obama plans a strategy review in December, a month after mid-term Congressional elections will be held and amid sagging support for the war.

The Washington Post also cited a former CIA official as saying that the CIA payments to Afghan officials were necessary because "the head of state is not going to tell you everything" and because Karzai often seems unaware of moves that members of his own government make.

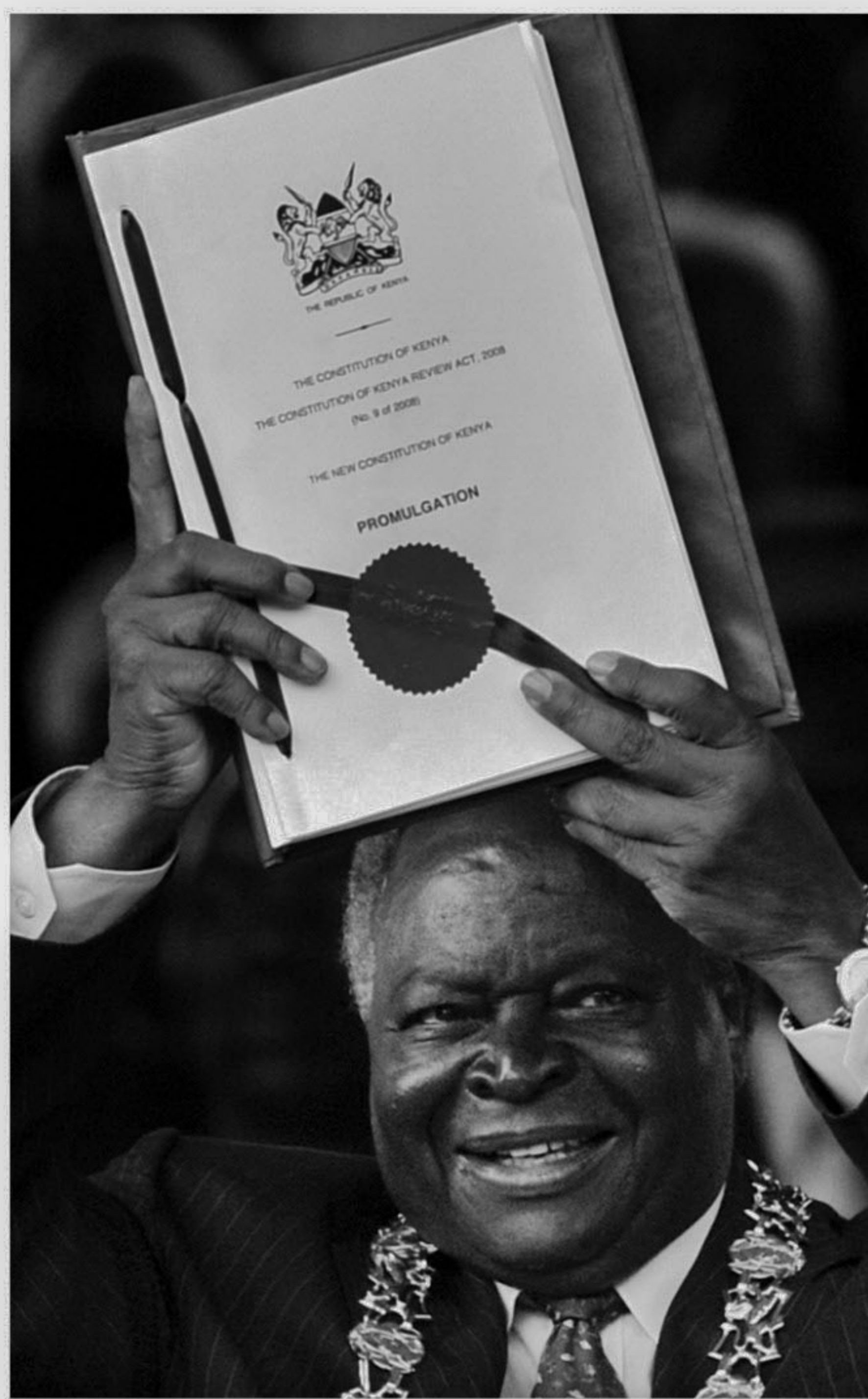


PHOTO: AFP
Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki lifts up Kenya's new constitution soon after promulgating it at the Uhuru Park grounds yesterday in Nairobi.

Kenya president ratifies new constitution

BBC ONLINE

Kenya has adopted a new constitution, more than three weeks after it was overwhelmingly approved in a national referendum.

Tens of thousands of people watched as President Mwai Kibaki signed the document into law at a large ceremony in the capital, Nairobi.

The debate over a new constitution has lasted 20 years.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was present at the event, despite being wanted for war crimes.

Human Rights Watch earlier called on the Kenyan authorities to either "arrest him or bar him entry" if he were to attend.

Kenya has ratified the statute requiring it to co-operate with the International Criminal Court, which has issued an arrest warrant for Mr Bashir.

However, last month the African Union instructed its members - which include Kenya - not to apprehend Mr Bashir.

'HUGE CHEER'
The constitution is expected to bring significant changes.

Some have billed it as the most important political event in Kenya's history since it gained independence from Britain in 1963.

The large crowd gathered in Nairobi's main Uhuru park to watch their leader promulgate the new document, amid gun salutes and a grand parade.

After Mr Kibaki signed his name, he held the document up and there was a huge cheer from the audience.

The new constitution will bring a more decentralised political system, which will limit the president's powers and replace corrupt provincial governments with local counties.

It will also create a second chamber of parliament - the Senate - and set up a land commission to settle ownership disputes and review past abuses.

It is hoped that the changes will help bring an end to the tribal differences that have brought violence to the country in the past.

'OPTIMISM'
The BBC's East Africa correspondent, Peter Grete, says the debate for a new constitution ebbed and flowed with each new political crisis until the elections of 2007, which were followed by the worst ethnic violence Kenya has yet seen.

In the wake of the violence, everyone acknowledged that something fundamental had to change if the country was to avoid yet more trouble, our correspondent says.

"The historic journey that we began over 20 years ago is now coming to a happy end," Mr Kibaki said earlier this month after the results of the referendum were announced on 5 August.

"There will be challenges along the way. But it is important that we look forward with renewed optimism to better days ahead."

Our correspondent says that the previous constitution allowed politicians to exploit tribal divisions, left courts weak, and concentrated power in the president's hands.

While many Kenyans say that this is just a start - and that things could still go very wrong - most believe it is a fundamentally better document than the last.

President Kibaki won a landslide victory in 2002 promising to change the constitution within 100 days of taking office. In 2005, he held a referendum but it failed to pass.

The previous constitution was negotiated with the British in the early 1960s.

AFP reports, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton urged Kenya to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and hand him over to an international court to face genocide charges.

Kenya, however, defended its invitation to Omar al-Bashir to attend its constitution celebrations despite his indictment by the International Criminal Court for genocide and war crimes.

"President Bashir was here today because he was invited by the government," Foreign Affairs Minister Moses Wetangula told reporters.

"There are no apologies to make about anybody we invited to this function because I am sure we are enhancing peace and security and stability of this region more than anything else," Wetangula added.

However, Deputy Defence Minister David Musila said, "Kenya has brought shame to itself by allowing President Bashir to visit the country. If he is still in the country he should be arrested immediately and handed to the ICC."

Kenya, as a signatory to the treaty which set up the ICC, is obliged to cooperate with the court and arrest Bashir.

The Sudanese leader was invited to witness Kenya's adoption of a constitution hugely endorsed in a referendum earlier this month.

Criminal

FROM PAGE 1

Farmgate areas using Sweden Aslam's name. Local sources said Chanchal and Sweden Aslam's brother used to control the gang of Sweden Aslam since he landed in jail in 1998.

Chanchal's family members, however, claimed he was a trader at Purba Tejturi Bazar in Farmgate area.

"He is the owner of Janata Builders, and also a first class contractor," Manager of Janata Builders Md Mintu said.

"A group of plainclothes men, who introduced themselves as law enforcers, came at his [Chanchal's] Dhanmudi residence at around 12:30am and took him away in a microbus.

"In the morning we learned that he is dead," Mintu said.

Rab-2 officials said one of their patrol teams signalled the car Chanchal was riding, but he did not stop and went into the side lane instead.

The team then followed the car and at one stage cordoned it. Chanchal fired twice at the Rab personnel prompting them to fire back. Later they recovered the bullet-hit body of Chanchal, Rab officials said.

Rab men also recovered a foreign pistol loaded with four bullets.

Dhaka Medical College morgue sources said they have found eight bullet wounds to Chanchal's body.

Omar Faruk, officer-in-charge of Tejgaon Industrial Area Police Station told The Daily Star that they recovered the car Chanchal was riding with marks of bullets from the spot.