

Call me a dog, but not a Pakistani

Says a Baloch refugee
TIMES OF INDIA ONLINE

When 25-year-old Mazdak Dilshad Baloch arrived in India a few months ago, he raised the suspicion of immigration authorities at the New Delhi airport. Mazdak had a Canadian passport which showed the place of birth as Quetta in Pakistan. Mazdak, one of the few Baloch refugees in New Delhi told ET: "I was at pain explaining to the immigration authority that I was not a Pakistani. Call me a dog, but not a Pakistani. I am a Baloch. Because of my place of birth, I faced a lot of harassment."

The story of Mazdak is similar to thousands of Baloch who have sought asylum in different parts of the world after being hounded by the Pakistan army. Mazdak's father was abducted, mother harassed and properties damaged. The family had to seek asylum in Canada where they reside now. Mazdak and his wife are in India to create awareness about the Baloch freedom movement. They are happy that for the first time in 70 years of their struggle New Delhi has lend open support to their struggle.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue in his Independence Day speech and pledged to bring the issue to world's attention. "They want Balochs to accept Pakistan nationhood or else they kill us. They have committed genocide in our country," a distraught Mazdak told ET.

"There is no education, there are no jobs. A common Balochi can find only menial job," he added. Islamabad has appointed Pakistani Muslims in all important positions in Balochistan. Its army has created a mess in the entire region," he said. When asked about Pakistan's allegations on the involvement of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in Balochistan, Mazdak said, "Islamabad wants to deflect the blame and blame India's RAW."



Residents flee a site after an air strike on the rebel-held besieged town of Douma, eastern Damascus suburb of Ghouta, Syria, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Syria defies US warning

Warplanes keep flying over Kurdish flashpoint city a day after US fighters scramble to protect its advisors on the ground

AGENCIES
Syrian government warplanes were in the air again yesterday over the flashpoint northeastern city of Hasakeh, despite a US warning against new strikes that might endanger its military advisers.

In another escalation of the five-year war, regime planes this week bombed positions held by US-backed Kurdish forces in the city fighting the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group. The unprecedented strikes prompted the US-led coalition to scramble aircraft to protect its special operations forces helping the Kurdish fighters, warning the regime not to put the advisers on the ground at risk. It was apparently the first time the coalition scrambled jets in response to regime action, and possibly the closest call yet in terms of Syrian forces wounding American or coalition advisers.

The flare up came as Turkey yesterday said it will take a more active role in addressing the conflict in Syria in the next six months to prevent the war-torn country being divided along ethnic lines. "Turkey we will be more active in the Syria issue in the coming six months as a regional player. This means to not allow Syria to be divided on any ethnic base, for Turkey this is crucial," Turkish Prime Binali Yildirim said. Syria's more than five-year conflict has taken on an ethnic dimension,

with Kurdish groups carving out their own regions, and periodically battling groups from Syria's Arab majority whose priority is to overthrow Assad.

Turkey fears the strengthening of Kurdish militant groups in Syria will further embolden its own Kurdish insurgency, which flared anew following the collapse of a ceasefire between militants and the state last year.

Turkey's downing of a Russian jet late last year.

Around two-thirds of Hasakeh is controlled by Kurdish forces, while the rest is held by pro-government militia.

Washington regards the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) as the most effective fighting force against IS in Syria and has provided



Turkey to take more active role on Syria in next 6 months. PHOTO: REUTERS

A rocket is being launched from a Russian warship in the Mediterranean Sea targeting Syria Islamists, according to the ministry.

Thursday's government raids were the first time the regime bombed Kurdish positions from the air. On Friday Syrian Kurdish authorities evacuated thousands of civilians from Kurdish areas of Hasaka following Syrian government air strikes, the Kurdish YPG militia said.

It came a week after Turkey and Russia, Assad's strongest military backer, repaired ties following

them with air support as well as the military advisers.

In the central province of Homs, 20 civilians including at least five children died overnight in suspected regime air raids and artillery fire on a cluster of towns and villages, the Observatory said yesterday.

More than 290,000 people have been killed since the conflict erupted in March 2011.

'US to send team to Turkey' for Gulen probe

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

The US Department of Justice will dispatch a team to Turkey in the coming days to pursue allegations by the Turkish government of criminal activity by Fethullah Gulen, according to a US media report.

If true, the move, first reported on Friday by Bloomberg News citing a US administration official, would mark the first sign of progress in Turkey's attempts to have the Pennsylvania-based Turkish-born religious leader extradited.

The government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has accused Gulen's network of being behind a coup attempt last month, a charge he has strenuously denied.

"Sooner or later, the US will make a choice. Either Turkey or FETO," Erdogan said last week, referring to Gulen.

US officials have said that even if the justice department decides extradition is warranted, a court case and possible appeals could take years.

In another development on Friday, officials in Azerbaijan said they had arrested four men over suspected ties to Gulen.

Iran forms force for Arab states

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Iran has formed what it calls the Liberation Army whose units will be deployed in Arab countries, according to reports.

Currently, Iran is involved in multiple conflicts where Shia and Sunni Muslims are locked in a power struggle, notably Syria and Yemen.

Mohammad Ali Al Falaki, who heads the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said in an interview published on Friday by Al Mashriq news that Iran is fighting on three fronts: Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Iran "created the Liberation Army in Syria under the leadership of Qassem Soleimani", said Falaki, who leads forces in Syria.

Soleimani is the head of the Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force.

It was not clear how large the Liberation Army would be. "The forces that belong to this army are not Iranians only. In any place where there is a fight, we organise and supply the army from the people of the area," said Falaki.

With regard to Syria, he said: "It is not wise for our Iranian forces to be directly thrown into war in Syria. Therefore our role should be limited to train, supply, and prepare the Syrians to fight in their areas."

In January, Al Jazeera reported that Iran was recruiting tens of thousands of Afghan Shia fighters to step up the country's efforts in the Syrian war, offering them salaries to join the war on the side of the government of President Bashar al-Assad.



A tree each for a victim

Colombia to plant 8m trees for conflict victims

AFP, Mitu

Colombia launched an initiative on Friday to plant a tree for each of the more than eight million victims of the country's 50-year armed conflict.

President Juan Manuel Santos, whose government is negotiating peace agreements with the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), planted the first tree Friday near the southeastern city of Mitu.

Trees for the "Forests of Peace" project will be planted throughout the country, sponsored by people around the world via the NGO Saving the Amazon website, Santos said.

The plan is to "plant a number equal to that of the victims of armed conflict, in excess of eight million," he said.

"We will plant more than eight million trees in memory of the victims so that we will never again reproduce the atrocities of armed conflict that this war

has brought to us," he added, saying every tree will bear a victim's name.

"This forest of peace will be managed and controlled by indigenous communities, who know best how to do it," Santos said, while planting the first tree.

"Someone in Paris, New York, Bogota or here in Mitu can go on (the website) and fund a tree for \$20, and become the virtual owner," he added.

"We will give the world the opportunity to contribute to peace in Colombia, but at the same time the preservation of humanity and the planet in planting forests and preserving the environment," he said.

Colombia's territorial conflict, which began in 1964, has been the longest-running war in Latin America, involving leftist guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitaries, and has left at least 260,000 people dead, 45,000 missing and millions displaced.

NEWS IN brief

Turkish parliament okays Israel deal

AFP, Ankara

The Turkish parliament approved a deal to normalise ties with Israel after a six-year rift, before parliament was due to go into summer recess. Under the deal, Israel will pay Turkey \$20 million in compensation for a botched Israeli commando raid on a Gaza-bound Turkish aid ship in 2010 that left 10 Turks dead, state-run Anadolu news agency said.

Local Zika spreads to Miami Beach

AFP, Miami

Five new cases of Zika have been found in the tourist hotspot of Miami Beach, signaling the spread of local transmission of a virus blamed for birth defects, officials said Friday. Zika is spread by mosquitoes and sexual contact. Women who want to get pregnant, along with their partners, are urged to use mosquito spray and condoms or avoid sex altogether.

Philippines, rebels declare ceasefire

AFP, Manila

The Philippine government and communist guerrillas have agreed to ceasefires from today, both sides said, ahead of crucial peace talks next week to end one of Asia's longest insurgencies. Both sides said a break from the fighting will create a conducive environment at the negotiations next week in Norway, which are aimed at reaching a political settlement after 30 years of failed talks.

Afghan district falls to Taliban: officials

AFP, Kunduz

Taliban militants yesterday captured a district in northeastern Kunduz province, near the provincial capital where militants scored their biggest victory in 14 years last September.

The militants, waging a bloody insurgency to topple the Western-backed Kabul government, have intensified their attacks nationwide and tightened their grip on the besieged capital of Helmand province southwest of Kunduz in recent weeks.

Khan Abad district, which is around 30 kilometres east of Kunduz city, fell to Taliban after the militants launched a pre-dawn attack on the district centre, according to local officials.

"After several hours of fighting the militants overran the district," the district's governor Hayatullah Amir told AFP, adding that the provincial governor ignored their calls for reinforcements.

Khan Abad resident Abdul Satar told AFP hundreds had fled their homes amid the fighting.

The Taliban briefly captured northern Kunduz city in September last year, the first city to fall to the insurgents in their biggest victory in 14 years of war.

The militants were driven out almost two weeks later by Afghan forces backed by US aircraft and Nato soldiers, but it marked the first time since 2001 that the Taliban were able to take control of a major city in the country.

'What do you have to lose?'

Trump pleads for black votes amid flagging White House bid

AFP, New York

Donald Trump made a sustained pitch Friday to African American voters, who have overwhelmingly flocked to his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton, telling them: "what do you have to lose?"

The Republican presidential nominee, who languishes in the polls both nationwide and in virtually every battleground state, faces an uphill battle to broaden his support base if he is to avoid a Democratic landslide in November.

"No group in America has been more harmed by Hillary Clinton's policies than African Americans," Trump told a rally in Dimondale, Michigan.

"If Hillary Clinton's goal was to inflict pain on the African American community, she could not have done a better job. It's a disgrace," he added.

He told the crowd that he was asking for the vote of "every single African American citizen in this country who wants to see a better future."

"Look how much African American communities have suffered under Democratic control. To those I say the following: what do you have to lose by trying something new like Trump?" he said.



The New York billionaire, whose controversial run for the presidency has attracted white supremacists, alienated immigrants and done little to win over minorities, said blacks were living in poverty facing disproportionately high unemployment rates and without good schools.

"Your schools are no good, you're living in poverty... What the hell do you have to lose?" Trump repeated.

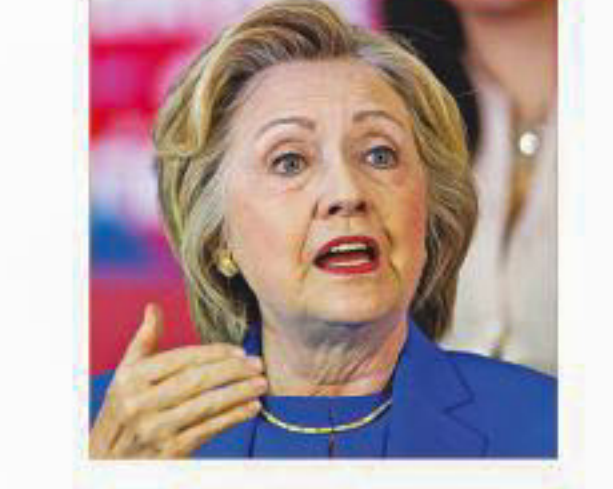
African Americans voted overwhelmingly in favor of outgoing Democratic President Barack Obama and Clinton's husband, former president Bill Clinton.

In 2012, Republican nominee Mitt Romney won only six percent of the black vote.

Trump also sought to reboot his flagging presidential bid, dismissing his tainted campaign chairman.

The resignation of the seasoned Republican strategist Paul Manafort -- under fire for his pro-Kremlin ties and role in a Ukrainian corruption scandal -- represents the Republican nominee's latest effort to get back on track after weeks of crisis.

Trump shocked many on Thursday by expressing "regret" for past mistakes, and began airing his first television ads on Friday in a desperate attempt to chip into Democratic rival Hillary Clinton's yawning lead in the polls.



EMAIL CONTROVERSY 'Clinton need not give sworn testimony'

REUTERS, New York

Democratic Party presidential candidate Hillary Clinton does not need to give sworn testimony in a lawsuit brought by a conservative watchdog group over her use of an unauthorized private email system while she was US secretary of state, a judge ruled on Friday.

Clinton must instead respond in writing within 30 days to questions submitted by Judicial Watch, a group that has long been critical of her conduct and which is suing the Department of State over Clinton-era records.

Judge Emmet Sullivan's ruling in US District Court in Washington is likely to be a relief to Democrats, who did not welcome the prospect of Clinton having to submit to hours of questioning by lawyers in the middle of her campaign for the Nov 8 election against Republican Party candidate Donald Trump.

Clinton, who served as the country's top diplomat from 2009 to 2013, has apologized for her decision to use the unorthodox email set-up, which had the effect of shielding her communications from public-records laws until the arrangement came to light last year.

Voters have said in opinion polls that the email server issue contributes to impressions that Clinton is untrustworthy.



Mayor of London Sadiq Khan travelling with passengers on a tube train during the launch of London's Night Tube, yesterday. The Night Tube -- a new service that will see the Victoria and Central lines run all night on Fridays and Saturdays was launched overnight Friday. It is expected the night tube will transport about 200,000 people between now and the end of the year. PHOTO: REUTERS

OFFENSIVE ON NAGALAND SEPARATISTS India launches 'surgical strike inside Myanmar'

TNN, New Delhi

A major gunbattle took place between Indian Army troops and suspected National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) militants along the India-Myanmar border, in the Mon district of Nagaland, on Friday.

Unconfirmed media reports said at least 30 Indian paratroopers had conducted a "surgical strike" inside Myanmar, and quoted the NSCN-K as claiming that it had killed "five to six" commandos. However, Army sources rejected the reports and said the gunbattle took place inside Indian territory.

The fierce encounter took place near Throilu village in Mon district on "our side of the border" at about 5:30am, said Army sources. "Our troops had laid an ambush along a known infiltration route. After the ensuing firefight, the militants fled back into Myanmar. They left some weapons behind. There were no casualties on our side," said a source.

In June last year, days after militants had killed 18 Army soldiers, Indian special forces had conducted a surgical military strike across the Myanmar border to inflict "significant casualties" on the groups behind that ambush, NSCN (K) and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL).