

## PAKISTAN PM PUSHES NEW PEACE TALKS WITH TALEBAN

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif yesterday said he is trying to revive peace talks with the Taliban after the latest round was derailed by untimely news of the death of leader Mullah Omar. Islamabad organized the first set of direct peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in July, but another round was abandoned after the announcement of the cleric's death.

Since then the insurgents have unleashed a wave of violence, including seizing the northern

Afghan provincial capital Kunduz in their most spectacular victory since being toppled from power in 2001. "We are now trying to resume the (peace) process and pray to God to crown our efforts with success," Sharif said in televised remarks to the media from the eastern city of Lahore.

"The news of Mullah Omar should not have been broken just before the start of the second round of talks," Pakistan has historically supported the Taliban insurgents and many Afghans accuse it

of nurturing militant sanctuaries on its soil in the hope of maintaining influence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's deputy army chief this week said Pakistan's military had helped the Taliban to capture Kunduz and Pakistani generals had escaped the city wearing burqas—a claim they denied.

News of Mullah Omar's death created a rift among the Islamist insurgents, after they admitted that the death of the talismanic one-eyed group founder had been kept secret for two years.

Mullah Akhtar Mansour has now become the

new head of the insurgent movement, but several members of its top leadership including his predecessor's family initially rejected him.

The rumours of Mullah Omar's ill-health and even demise had regularly surfaced in the past, but Sharif questioned the timing of the announcement in July so close to talks aimed at brokering a ceasefire. "I don't know who broke this news and why it was done so just two days before the start of the second round, is still a mystery," he said. — AFP

## GHANI APPOINTS PANEL TO PROBE KUNDUZ AIRSTRIKE

**KABUL:** Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani has appointed a commission to investigate a US airstrike in northern Kunduz city that destroyed a hospital and killed at least 22 people, his spokesman said yesterday. The five-man team would leave soon for Kunduz to look into the cause of the Oct. 3 airstrike on a trauma center run by the international charity Doctors Without Borders, Ghani's deputy spokesman Zafar Hashemi said.

The team would be led by the former head of the national intelligence agency Amrullah Saleh, he said, and would report to the president. The airstrike was requested by Afghan ground forces, according to the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, Gen. John F. Campbell, but mistakenly hit the hospital.

The bombing continued for about an hour and destroyed the hospital's main building. President Barack Obama apologized and the US military is investigating. The hospital has been abandoned.

Doctors Without Borders said that 12 staff members and 10 patients, all of them Afghans, were killed. Many more are still missing though all internationals have been accounted for.

Ghani met with representatives of Doctors Without Borders on Friday, his office said.

He told the group's general director Christopher Stokes and Afghanistan representative Guilhem Molinie that he had ordered Afghan security forces to ensure the protection of humanitarian organizations, a statement said. It made no mention of a call by Doctors Without Borders for an independent probe of the incident, specifically by the Swiss-based International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission - which is made up of diplomats, legal experts, doctors and some former military

officials from nine European countries, including Britain and Russia. It was created after the Gulf War in 1991, and has never deployed a fact-finding mission.

Stokes said earlier that Doctors Without Borders - a Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization that provides medical aid in conflict zones - is awaiting responses to letters sent Tuesday to 76 countries that signed the additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions, asking to mobilize the 15-member commission. For the IHFFC to be mobilized, a single country would have to call for the fact-finding mission, and the US and Afghanistan - which are not signatories - must also give their consent.

Meanwhile, the situation in Kunduz remains tenuous, as government troops continue to battle to clear remnants of the Taliban from pockets within the city and its outskirts.

Sarwar Hussaini, spokesman for the provincial police chief, said three areas of the city had been retaken overnight, though a gas station in Seh Darak had been hit by a rocket and destroyed. Hussaini said he did not know which side was responsible.

Kunduz resident Abdullah, who gave only one name, said that people were still leaving the city for safety. He said he had seen grocers emptying their shops of food to take home, fearing ongoing scarcities. The World Food Program said it was feeding thousands of people in camps in other cities in the north, and that "additional wheat is being milled in anticipation of increased needs in the coming days."

Food and water are still not getting through in adequate quantities, and the city remained without electricity, residents said. "The whole city is empty of people," Abdullah said. "Residents are still not feeling safe." — AP



**JAMMU:** Protestors shout slogans during a shutdown in Jammu yesterday. Life in Jammu was affected by a protest shutdown called against cow slaughter and against an independent state lawmaker for hosting a party where he served beef. — AP

## INDIAN POLICE ARREST 21 AFTER COW 'SLAUGHTER' VIOLENCE

### MODI'S REFORM PUSH FACES CRUNCH TEST IN BIHAR VOTE

**NEW DELHI:** Indian police have arrested 21 men after a mob thrashed two Muslims suspected of slaughtering a cow and set fire to some dozen shops, officials and reports said yesterday.

The incident was reported from northern Uttar Pradesh state, where a mob recently murdered a 50-year-old Muslim man for supposedly eating beef—a taboo imposed by Hindu hardliners in certain pockets of the country.

"A rumor spread (on Friday) that a cow has been slaughtered, after which some people beat up the men and resorted to arson," Chandrapal Singh, a senior administrative officer of Mainpuri district, told AFP. Singh said a post-mortem of the cow showed it had been dead for a while owing to some ailment and the men were only removing its skin when they were attacked by the mob.

The incident adds to a raging row over what is seen as rising intolerance towards Muslims and other religious minorities since Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi stormed to power last year.

On Thursday, Modi appealed for religious unity, saying the nation would only prosper "when Hindus and Muslims unite and fight" against poverty, instead of against each other.

The Times of India yesterday said some 500 people armed with bamboo sticks and iron rods had set fire to shops belonging to Muslims before police dispersed the mob using tear gas. The two men who were beaten up by the mob had sustained serious injuries and were recuperating in a hospital, the daily said. Cows are considered sacred by most Hindus in officially secular India, although millions of Muslims and other minorities do eat beef. Religious minorities have recently spoken of their fear of erosion of rights in the world's biggest democracy and called on Modi to rein in Hindu hardliners.

#### Crucial test

Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces a crucial test tomorrow when Bihar, one of India's largest and poorest states, begins voting in polls that could have major consequences for his troubled reform drive. Modi has mounted a no-holds

barred campaign, promising Biharis billions of dollars for development in a state where many of its 104 million people still vote along caste lines.

He is up against an unlikely alliance of two powerful local leaders, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his predecessor Lalu Prasad Yadav, who has served time in prison for corruption.

Their rivalry goes back decades, but both men who command widespread support among the lower castes have put their differences aside to thwart Modi, highlighting the premier's polarizing nature.

Voting begins on October 12 and runs in five phases, with the results due on November 8. Modi himself has been at the forefront of his party's campaign, addressing a host of rallies, including one on Friday near the town of Aurangabad attended by about 10,000 people.

This 21st century election will show where Bihar stands not only on the map of India, but also on the map of the world," Modi told the crowds.

He accused the opposition of failing to better the state's fortunes in their combined six decades in power, citing high youth employment and poor power infrastructure. Two-thirds of Biharis lack access to electricity, according to the World Bank. "I'm supporting Modi because he wants to develop Bihar," said Sonu Jaiswal, 37, as she watched Modi in a giant field.

"We're 100 percent sure the Modi government will win." But analysts say the outcome is too close to call. And as criticism mounts that Modi's pledge to transform the economy is running out of steam, observers say a defeat for his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will heighten the sense of declining momentum.

#### 'Huge rivalry'

Sanjay Kumar, of the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, said there was a widespread fear within the party that defeat could signal "the beginning of an end of the BJP government," even though the next general election is not until 2019.



**HERAT:** Afghan women sell secondhand clothes on the roadside in Herat yesterday. — AFP

## THE DALAI LAMA SAYS BUDDHIST CULTURE MOST IMPORTANT TO HIM

**DHARMSALA, India:** The Dalai Lama said yesterday he considered it most important to preserve the Buddhist culture that has helped the Tibetan people live together even in exile. "Our values have helped us Tibetans live together as a people," the 80-year-old spiritual leader said at his first public event after returning last week from a medical check-up in the US. "So after coming into exile, I have considered it most important to preserve this rich and profound culture that we have."

Many Tibetans fear that their culture may not endure for long and may weaken after the Dalai Lama is gone. Carrying white silk scarves, dozens of school children in traditional Tibetan costumes welcomed the Dalai Lama to the event, the 10th anniversary of the opening of a Tibetan school in Dharmasala, the Tibetan government-in-exile's headquarters in northern India.

He also said he regretted that some people were using religion to harm others and said he advocated education of secular values.

Last week, the Dalai Lama said he had had a thorough medical checkup at the renowned Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, USA, and was in "excellent condition." Though advised rest by doctors, the Dalai Lama got out of his car and walked nearly 100 meters (yards) to the school.

His followers lined the path with incense sticks and flowers. The Dalai Lama sat on a chair on a raised platform while others settled on cushions on the floor in a show of respect to him. The Dalai Lama fled across the Himalayas into India after a failed uprising in Tibet in 1959. Beijing accuses him of seeking to separate Tibet from China. But the Dalai Lama says he simply wants a high degree of autonomy under Chinese rule. — AP



**DHARMSALA:** Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama greets children gathered to welcome him upon arrival at a Tibetan school, his first public function after his return last week from Minnesota in the United States where he had a thorough medical checkup, in Dharmasala, yesterday. — AP

## SON OF CHINESE RIGHTS LAWYER DETAINED IN MYANMAR

**BEIJING:** The teenage son of a prominent human rights lawyer being held in China has been detained in Myanmar, a family friend said yesterday, adding that Chinese police were responsible.

Men who appeared to be police took 16-year-old Bao Zhuoxuan away from a guesthouse in a town close to the border on Tuesday as he was trying to escape China, family friend Zhou Fengsuo said. "The (Chinese) government is using him as a hostage," Zhou said, adding he did not know the whereabouts of the teen and two men who had been looking after him.

Chinese security agents "are kidnapping their own citizen basically, the only reason is to use him against his parents, which is just so shameful," he added. Police in Inner Mongolia, where Bao was reportedly staying with family before his escape attempt, said they "had not heard" of his alleged detention. Chinese officials confiscated Bao's passport in July, when both his parents were detained in a sweeping crackdown on lawyers who had taken on cases the government deemed subversive.

Beijing does not tolerate organized dissent

and often denies passports to political activists, as well as members of ethnic minorities. But some still manage to escape via China's relatively porous borders with Southeast Asia. Mong La, the town where Bao was taken, is in the north of Myanmar where rebel groups have for years been in conflict with the government.

Two men helping the teenager, Tang Zhishun and Xing Qingxian, were also detained in the town, Zhou said, citing the owner of the guesthouse where they had stayed.

Tang and Xing's homes in China were later searched, suggesting that "Chinese police apparently have synchronised actions with the police in Burma," Zhou added.

Zhou lives in San Francisco and said he had planned to meet Bao in Thailand before bringing him to the US to seek asylum. Chinese police detained Bao's mother Wang Yu, an outspoken human rights lawyer, in July and later accused her of "subverting state power," according to her attorneys.

His father Bao Longjun has also been held for months along with around a dozen other



**HONG KONG:** Wang Yu, the lawyer of late Chinese human rights activist Cao Shunli, posing during an interview in Hong Kong. — AFP

activists labelled as a "criminal gang" by state media.

Chinese security officials sometimes punish the family of dissidents it says have broken the law. Liu Xia, wife of jailed writer Liu Xiaobo, was kept under house arrest for years after her husband was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010. — AFP