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Afghanistan

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says conditions still not conducive to Afghan elections next year; Afghan government completes public consultations process in Iran and Pakistan

In his latest report to the General Assembly and the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is saying that while the Bonn Process leading to next year’s Afghan elections was largely on track, the security environment was still not conducive to next year’s elections. Annan is urging the international community to address the threat of insecurity in the country for several years to come. He is warning that failure to do so would lead to consequences reaching far beyond Afghanistan’s borders. Annan has reiterated his call to expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond the capital Kabul to other key cities across the country saying that it is “both necessary and the best way to fill the security gap.” Separately, Manoel de Almeida e Silva told reporters at a press briefing today that Afghan officials have completed public consultations on the new constitution draft in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. Consultations on the new constitution have been underway since June. A first public draft of the new constitution is scheduled to be published in September in the Dari and Pashto languages and distributed nationwide. A constitutional Loya Jirga in October this year would mark the third and final stage of the formulation of the new constitution.

Afghanistan to launch much anticipated Defense Ministry reforms soon

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday that urgent reforms at the Afghan Defense Ministry would be launched over the next few days. Speaking to a symposium on national security sector reform organized by the United States Office of Military Cooperation, Karzai said that over the next few days Defense Minister Mohammad Qasim Fahim would announce reforms in the Defense Ministry aimed at strengthening the Afghan army. He added that these reforms would pave the way to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate some 100,000 militiamen. Karzai said although significant progress has been made in various sectors over the past two years, much remains to be done, especially in the security sector that deals with the defense of the country and has a direct impact on the Afghan people’s daily lives. International donors including the United Nations, Japan, and the US have been insisting that the Afghan government reform its ministries including the Tajik-dominated powerful Defense and Interior Ministries to reflect the country’s ethnic balance in order to provide more credibility to the Afghan government and build public trust vital for long lasting peace and stability. A UN-backed Disarmament, Demobilization and
Reintegration (DDR) plan aimed at disarming nearly 100,000 militias due to be launched earlier this month was postponed pending reforms in the Afghan Defense Ministry. An Afghan government that is ethnically balanced is seen as the best hope for the success of the DDR process and for long lasting peace in the war-ravaged country.


**China**

**Floods, heatwave kill at least 12 across China**

State media reported today that 6 people have died from landslides and floods and another 6 died of heatstroke across China. The People’s Daily reported that at least 6 mostly elderly people died from heat in Nanjiang city in Jiangsu province over the past few days, the People’s Daily reported. Additionally, the paper reported that the hospitals were packed with patients with heat-related ailments. “A lot of people have been admitted to hospital for sickness related to the heat. Emergency rooms are crowded with patients suffering from heatstroke. Doctors and nurses are very busy,” the paper’s website reported. Meanwhile, other parts of the country are still battling heavy rains and floods. Xinhua reported that at least 6 were killed and 5 others were reported missing in Lintan province in Gansu province from floods and landslides. The landslides followed heavy rains which destroyed several hundred houses and a 10 kilometer (6.2 mile) highway. More rains are forecast in the province. Rains in Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces in northern China are being blamed for rising levels of the Yellow River, China’s second largest after the Yangtze River. Provinces along the river have been warned to prepare for possible flooding. The Yellow River reportedly breached its banks in some areas yesterday and the Fugu Hydrological Station recorded water flow of 13,000 cubic meters per second, which was the reportedly the largest ever recorded according to the Yellow River Flood Control Headquarters.
India

Health experts say mystery disease in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashta is ‘rare virus’
According to the Associated Press today, scientists from India’s National Institute of Virology today said that some of the 273 children who recently died from a mysterious disease in southern Andhra Pradesh and western Maharashta states were infected from a ‘rare virus’ spread by sand flies. They said others may have died from a second virus that could be in the same family as Japanese encephalitis. About 165 children died in Andhra Pradesh while 108 died in Maharashta in recent months. The disease had puzzled health experts because although it had the same symptoms as Japanese encephalitis, the disease progressed much faster than normal, leading quickly from fever and vomiting to coma and death. Dr. AC Mishra, director of the National Institute of Virology, said it is “very much confirmed beyond doubt” that the Andhra Pradesh outbreak is caused by the Chandipura virus, named after the area in which it was discovered in northern Maharashta state in 1965. Chandipura belongs to the same virus family as rabies, but is only distantly related. However, Mishra said it was not certain if the Maharashta outbreak was also caused by the same virus. Mishra said his team is still trying to identify the second virus which they say is definitely not Japanese encephalitis. “It spreads at a fast speed and can kill the patient in 4 to 16 hours,” said Mishra. However, Dr. Sampat Krishnan of WHO said the young victims may be dying quickly because of their malnourished state and poor, rural backgrounds. He added that currently, many once-dormant diseases are reemerging. No vaccine or anti-viral medication is available for the diseases, which are treated by reducing fever and providing adequate fluids.

Four civilians, 2 rebels killed as villagers protest alleged custodial death
One government employee was reportedly shot dead in his home last night near Kokernag town, 44 miles (70km) south of Srinagar city in Indian-controlled Kashmir (IcK). In addition, a former militant was reportedly killed when unidentified gunmen shot him in his home in Shopian area. The incidents are the latest in a series of fatal attacks on civilians in their homes in IcK. In the past week alone, at least 8 civilians have been reported killed in similar attacks in IcK. In addition, police also recovered the body of a civilian in Budgam district who residents say was arrested earlier by Indian troops. A large number of local residents reportedly held a protest demonstration, claiming the victim was allegedly killed under torture in army custody. In the past month alone, at least 2 similar deaths and subsequent demonstrations have been reported in IcK. A third elderly civilian was also reportedly shot dead in a separate incident in Budgam by security forces who claim that the victim had fired on them. Finally, two suspected militants were reportedly killed in separate clashes in Budgam and Kupwara districts.
http://www.kashmirtimes.com/first8.htm
http://www.kashmirtimes.com/first1.htm
Myanmar refugees flee Mizoram state
According to the Press Times of India today, about 2,000 illegal Myanmar nationals have reportedly fled the northeastern state of Mizoram for Myanmar, following the July 17 rape of a local girl, allegedly by a Myanmar national. The incident reportedly triggered a wave of xenophobia against the illegals from neighboring Myanmar. A hotel owned by the family of the suspect was reportedly ransacked by local people and led to a protest in the streets. The Myanmar nationals left through the Mizoram-Myanmar border hamlet of Zkohawthaw as an unofficial deadline set by local vigilante groups for them to leave ended today. Police say that heavy vehicles were being used to transport them over the Tiau River back to Myanmar. Meanwhile, leftist rebels in the nearby state of Orissa reportedly attacked a police station, hours after a rebel ambush and a landmine blast killed 10 policeman yesterday. No one was reported injured in the attack on the police station, which occurred in Malkangiri district.

Nepal

Nepal rebels agree to peace talks
Chief rebel leader Prachanda has agreed to resume stalled peace talks, hours before a deadline the Maoists set for today expired. Prachanda said that he has agreed to a third round of talks to create a completely favorable atmosphere for talks. The government has welcomed the Maoist decision positively. Our party has decided to sit for the third round of talks and directed the (Maoist) negotiators to make arrangements for the same," Prachanda said in a statement. The government takes the Maoist decision positively," Chief government negotiator and Information and Communications Minister Kamal Thapa told reporters. Earlier this week, the government released 3 rebel leaders and provided information on missing rebels, which were part of key rebel demands for resuming the talks. However, the government rejected demands for the restriction of army movements and the scrapping of an anti-terrorism pact with the US. No date has yet been set for the next round, but the government said it would confer with the rebels to decide when. Thapa says that the next round will focus on Maoist wishes for an election to an assembly to prepare a new constitution that Maoists say should abolish the monarchy. However, the government has insisted that a multi-party democracy should be set up and any agreement should be reached within the framework of the constitutional monarchy.

At least 29 die from landslides
At least 29 people were killed in several districts across Nepal from landslides triggered by heavy rains, state radio reported. Another 31 people were also reported missing while an unknown number of houses were destroyed. A total of another 7 were killed in two other districts. A total of 22 people were killed in Manakamana village and another 7 were killed in Hetaunda village in Gorkha district (located 85 kilometers or 53 miles west of Kathmandu).
Kathmandu). In Chitwan district, 22 people were reported missing in several villages while nine others were reported missing in different areas of Nawalparasi district, located west of Kathmandu. The state-radio reported that “Royal Nepal Army and police teams dispatched from Kathmandu are already carrying on relief operations in the landslide-affected areas.” Landslides also reportedly blocked a major highway connecting Kathmandu to other parts of the country. Agence France-Presse says that landslides during the summer months occur as a result of monsoon rains and snow melting in the Himalayas.

http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/e9b47269e0452a23c1256d74004713e4?OpenDocument

Department of Social Welfare says number of displaced has dropped; Talks expected next week, monitors will be led by Malaysia

Zorahayda Taha, regional chief Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in Central Mindanao, reportedly said that almost all evacuees displaced by the MILF conflict that broke out in North Cotabato province in February have returned home. According to DWSD records, as of July 25, only 60 families remain in Pikit’s evacuation center, down from 164 two days earlier. The number of those staying with relatives has also gone down to 410. As of July 23, the number of returnees has reached about 40,000 people. However, Taha’s office reportedly had no records for neighboring Maguindanao province, which is part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). At the height of the conflict between the MILF and the Philippine military earlier this year, it was estimated that 200,000 civilians were reportedly displaced across northern and central Mindanao region as fighting spread from North Cotabato to neighboring Maguindanao and nearby Zamboanga and Lanao provinces. According to Taha, about 60 million pesos (US$1 million) has been donated for the IDPs (internally displaced persons), mostly by the DSWD, NGOs and LGUs (local government units). A ceasefire was called by the MILF in June and a mutual temporary ceasefire in July 18 has largely put a halt to the fighting. Philippine government representatives are scheduled to meet with MILF representatives next week to revive stalled peace talks. Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas Ople said that a team from the Malaysian government will be dispatched to monitor the talks. Malaysia is also expected to head a peace monitoring made up of representatives from Bahrain, Brunei, Bangladesh and Libya.

http://asia.news.yahoo.com/030731/kyodo/d7skg3800.html
South Asia

Rains in South Asia continue to wreak havoc in Pakistan; At least 29 killed in Nepal landslides, 30 in Afghanistan, 8 in Bangladesh along with earthquake

Robert McKerrow, head of the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for South Asia, said that heavy flooding that has hit South Asia this year is “moderate” compared to 1998’s disaster, and has provided respite to drought-hit areas. However “in the northeastern area of India and Bangladesh and the foothills of Nepal, we’re seeing a reasonably serious situation developing,” he said. In northeast India, the NGO Church’s Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) has assisted 5,000 families in Assam, 2,000 in Bihar and 1,000 in West Bengal states. The NGO Lutheran World Federation’s World Service (LWS) said that 18 relief camps in Goalpura district in worst-hit Assam needed more food, medicine as well as drinking water supplies. Boats are reportedly the main form of transportation and communication in many parts of the state. In Nepal, officials said today at least 29 villagers were reportedly killed when several landslides struck and swept away hundreds of homes and farms. About 50 rescuers are currently conducting operations as bad weather is hampering helicopter rescue. In Bangladesh, at least 6 people were reportedly killed in landslides in southeastern Cox’s Bazar district. The Khaleej Times also reported that an additional 2 people were killed when an earthquake measuring 5.09 on the Richter Scale struck a remote village near the Myanmar border in the same district. Meanwhile the official Afghan Bakhtar news agency reported today that 30 people were killed by a massive landslide in Panjshir Valley, northeast of the capital Kabul, following weeks of heavy rains. In Pakistan, Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Jamali is currently supervising rescue and relief operations in the southern province of Sindh, where more than 100 people have been killed in heavy rains. UN Resident Coordinator,
Onder Yucer today announced that US$100,000 will be donated to the Sindh province for relief efforts.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/south_asia/3113055.stm
http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/4f34c9097993f2749256d740019eb05?OpenDocument
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