



UN is considering extension to commission probing Benazir killing.



Ban says that rich, poor nations should stop pointing fingers over climate targets.



Fidel Castro says Obama's smile & Afro-American 'face' hide US' evil intentions.

# International

## kiosk Gilani reshuffles portfolios

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani on Tuesday changed portfolios of five ministers, thus starting the process to form a "clean team", reports our correspondent. "The portfolios of five federal ministers have been changed," a government official said. Prime Minister Gilani these days is finalising a team which he will keep for the rest of his tenure. He plans to sack the inefficient and corrupt ministers. According to a notification issued by the government, ministries for investment and planning have been abolished.

## US-Indian gets 12-yr jail term

Washington: An Indian American has been sentenced to 12-years in prison by a Texas court and ordered to pay \$68 million in restitution for his involvement in an elaborate rogue Internet pharmacy scheme.

Rakesh Jyoti Saran, 47, of Arlington, Texas, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit health-care fraud and other federal offences; two counts of mail fraud; and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, the FBI said. Saran, who is the last defendant to be sentenced in this case, has been in federal custody since May 2009.

## US prison to get Gitmo detainees

Washington: Taking an important step on the thorny path to closing the US detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the White House said that the government will acquire an underutilized state prison in rural Illinois to be the new home for a limited number of terrorist suspects held at Guantanamo.

Officials from the White House confirmed that President Barack Obama had directed the government to acquire Thomson Correctional Center in Thomson, Ill., a town near the Mississippi River about 150 miles from Chicago. A Durbin aide said the facility would house federal inmates and no more than 100 detainees from Guantanamo.

# 22 killed in Pak suicide attack

SHAFQAT ALI

DC | ISLAMABAD

Dec. 15: At least 22 people were killed and over 55 injured in a suicide attack on the house of a senior politician in Pakistan's Dera Ghazi Khan district on Tuesday, officials said.

"At least 22 people were killed and more than 55 injured when an explosive-laden car hit the house of PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) leader Zulfiqar Khosa. Some of the injured are serious and the death toll may rise," a police official said. Deputy inspector general of police Mubarak Athar said that according to initial reports a suicide bomber hit his car to the residential complex of Zulfiqar Khosa, adviser to Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif, damaging the entrance gate and buildings adjacent to his house.

"Injured and dead bodies are being shifted to District Headquarter Hospitals," he added. Mr Zulfiqar Khosa told reporters that his family members are safe as they were out of town, adding, he is not sure whether he was the target of the bomber or not. Meanwhile, on Tuesday, militants torched two



Debris at the site of a car bomb attack in Dera Ghazi Khan on Tuesday. — Reuters

Nato tankers in Quetta. According to the police, the tankers carrying fuel for Nato forces in Afghanistan were set ablaze on the outskirts of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province.

The local police and paramilitary officials claimed involvement of the drivers and cleaners in the incident,

who burnt the tankers after selling the oil. The tankers were heading towards Chaman town near Afghanistan border.

Also on Tuesday, four militants were killed in security forces operation in Halai area of Malakand.

"During the search operation in Koza Banday the

forces also detained more than 100 suspects," a security official said.

"The troops on a tip off presence of the militants at a hillock of Halai, cordoned off the hill. The militants opened fierce firing at the forces and four of them were killed in counter attack," he added.

## snippets

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has at least six foreign accounts with over \$13,113,000 in them, in addition to another \$46,343,353 in the name of companies owned by Mr Zardari, the Supreme Court was told on Tuesday. The NAB report showed there are at least six foreign bank accounts maintained by President Zardari and his slain wife Benazir Bhutto.

General David Petraeus, head of US Centcom, says that he does not see any military coup in Pakistan or any threat to President Asif Ali Zardari. "I don't think the Army is destabilising President Zardari. I am positive that the Pak military does not nurture any notion of this kind," he said. "I have seen no indication that General Kayani is seeking such a notion. Whenever we have talked to them they say they are committed to democratically elected government," he added.

## Rebuffing US, Pak balks at terror war

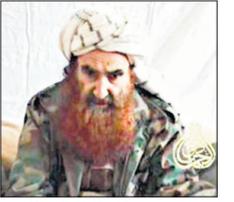
JANE PERLEZ

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Islamabad, Dec. 15: Demands by the US for Pakistan to crack down on the strongest Taliban warrior in Afghanistan, Siraj Haqqani, whose fighters pose the biggest threat to American forces, have been rebuffed by the Pakistani military, according to Pakistani military officials and diplomats.

The Obama administration wants Pakistan to turn on Haqqani, a longtime asset of Pakistan's spy agency who uses the tribal area of North Waziristan as his sanctuary. But, the officials said, Pakistan views the entreaties as contrary to its interests in Afghanistan beyond the timetable of President Obama's surge, which envisions reducing American forces beginning in mid-2011.

The demands, first made by senior American officials before President Obama's Afghanistan speech and repeated many times since, were renewed in a written message delivered in recent days by the United States embassy to the head of the Pakistani military, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, according to American officials. Gen. David H.



Sirajuddin Haqqani

Petraeus followed up on Monday during a visit to Islamabad. The demands have been accompanied by strong suggestions that if the Pakistanis cannot take care of the problem, including dismantling the Taliban leadership based in Quetta, Pakistan, then the Americans will by resorting to broader and more frequent drone strikes in Pakistan.

But the Pakistani leadership has greeted the refrain with public silence and private anger, according to officials familiar with the conversations, illustrating the widening gulf between the allies over the Afghan war. Former Pakistani military officers voice irritation with the Americans daily on television, part of a mounting grievance in Pakistan that the alliance with the US is too costly to bear.

## ● BERLUSCONI CURBS PUBLIC ACTIVITIES Silvio attacker sorry for 'cowardly' act

Rome, Dec. 15: An Italian man who broke Silvio Berlusconi's nose and teeth by striking him with a souvenir model has apologised to the Italian Prime Minister for his "cowardly and rash act", the attacker's lawyers said. Mr Berlusconi spent his second night in hospital on Tuesday after the Sunday attack by 42-year-old Massimo Tartaglia, who hurled a small replica of Milan's gothic cathedral at the Premier from close range while he signed autographs at the end of a rally. Tartaglia, who has a history of mental illness, acted alone and without any political or militant interests, his lawyers said late on Monday.

In a letter sent to Prime Minister Berlusconi, Massimo Tartaglia expressed his "heartfelt regret for a super-

official, cowardly and rash act in which he did not recognise himself", the statement said.

Allies of Silvio Berlusconi's have portrayed the attack as the fruit of a "climate of hate" swirling around the Italian Prime Minister, who frequently accuses "communist" magistrates, the media and leftists of a campaign to bring down his government.

A popular but divisive figure, Mr Berlusconi has for much of the year battled allegations of an improper relationship with a teenage model and parties with escorts and now faces the reopening of several trials against him. He is expected to remain in hospital for at least another day and is not likely to return to work for 10 days.

## Afghan blast leaves 8 dead, 40 hurt

Kabul, Dec. 15: A suicide car bomber struck a heavily guarded neighborhood Tuesday near the home of a former Afghan vice president and a hotel favored by Westerners, killing at least eight people and wounding nearly 40, officials said.

The Afghan Interior Ministry said the target of the bombing was unclear, but security officials at the scene said the bomber was going after the home of former first vice president, Ahmad Zia Massoud. He is the brother of legendary anti-Taliban hero, Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was killed by al-Qaida two days before the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

"Of course we were the target," said Shah Asmat, an aide to the former vice president. "Before, the Taliban killed Massoud. Now, they tried to kill his brother."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, during a speech he was delivering at a confer-



A survivor is rescued from the Kabul blast site. — AFP

ence on corruption, said two of Massoud's guards were among those killed in the explosion. In a statement released later, Karzai condemned the terrorist attack. He instructed government officials to thoroughly investigate the incident and identify those responsible.

"This terrorist attack, which killed and wounded innocent civilians, was an

attack on humanity and Islam," his statement said. Ministry of Interior spokesman Zemer Bashary said four men and four women died in the midmorning blast. He said about 40 others were wounded. "It was a suicide attack," Bashary said. "We are investigating. We don't know the target of the attack."

The midmorning blast, in

## Abbas sets terms for peace talks

Ramallah, Dec. 15: President Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday said the Palestinians would resume suspended peace talks with Israel if it halts settlement building and recognises pre-1967 borders as a basis for a Palestinian state.

Addressing a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's central council, Mr Abbas said he would not accept any return to violence against Israel.

"When Israel stops settlement activity for a specific period and when it recognises the borders we are calling for, and these are the legal borders, there would be nothing to prevent us from going to negotiations to complete what we agreed to at Annapolis," Mr Abbas told the PLO legislature.

## COP 15

## Black carbon deposits threaten 'third pole'

Washington, Dec. 15: Black soot deposited on Tibetan glaciers has contributed significantly to the retreat of the world's largest non-polar ice masses, a recent study led by Nasa scientists said.

According to the new research by scientists from Nasa and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, black carbon deposits on Himalayas are probably responsible for as much as half of the glacial melt, journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences reported.

The temperatures on the Tibetan Plateau — sometimes called earth's "third pole" — have warmed by 0.3°C per decade over the past 30 years, about twice the rate of observed global temperature increases.

New field research and ongoing quantitative modelling suggests that soot's warming influence on Tibetan glaciers could rival that of greenhouse gases as the black carbon absorbs incoming solar radiation and can speed glacial melting when deposited on snow in sufficient quantities. "Tibet's glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate," added a researcher.

# US-China impasse looms over talks

Copenhagen, Dec. 15: A showdown between the world's two largest polluters loomed over the UN climate talks on Tuesday as China accused the United States and other rich nations of backsliding on their commitments to fight global warming.

The 27-nation European Union, meanwhile, called on both the US and China to increase their commitments on emissions cuts. World leaders started arriving in Copenhagen, kicking the two-week conference into high gear in its quest to deliver a deal to curb emissions of the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Key issues remain, however, and the conference so far has been marked by sharp disagreements between China and the United States and deep divisions between rich and poor nations. China and other developing countries are resisting US-led attempts to make their cuts in emissions growth binding and open to international scrutiny rather than voluntary.

China, the world's largest polluter, is grouped with developing nations at the talks but the US doesn't consider China a nation in need of climate change aid.

In Beijing, China accused developed countries on Tuesday of trying to escape their obligations to help



Environmental activists from Climate No Borders run with a stolen balloon during a demonstration in Copenhagen on Tuesday. — AFP

poor nations fight climate change. "We still maintain that developed countries have the obligation to provide financial support," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said, adding that was "the key condition for the success of the Copenhagen conference."

US President Barack Obama and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao are among more than 110 world leaders expected in Copenhagen this week.

The US has offered 3-4 per cent cut in emissions by

2020 from 1990 levels. China has pledged to cut "carbon intensity", a measure of carbon dioxide emissions per unit of production, by 40-45 per cent by 2020, compared with 2005 levels. But neither offer impressed the EU.

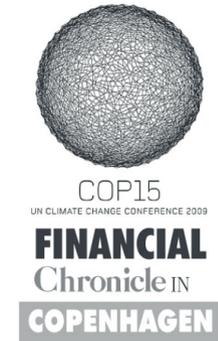
"We expect them both to raise ambition level," said EU environment spokesman Andreas Carlgen. "Otherwise we won't be able to reach the 2 degree target."

Scientists have warned that commitments to cut or slow emissions so far fall

short of what is needed to keep global temperature increases below 2°C above preindustrial levels and head off the worst of global warming.

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe was among the first heads of state to touch down in the Danish capital, avoiding a travel ban imposed by Western nations because he was attending to a UN conference.

Mr Mugabe was to address the conference on Wednesday. "The meeting may be



taking place on Danish soil but we're playing by UN rules and these rules mean that all the world leaders can meet," Danish Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen told reporters.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown was also expected later on Tuesday, a day earlier than planned to help push the talks forward.

The UN conference's working groups were finishing up two years of work on Tuesday and drawing up their final recommendations on such issues as deforestation, technology transfers and the registration of plans by developing countries to control their emissions.

Drafts on those issues showed some narrowing of gaps but left many disputes to be decided by environment ministers, which ultimately may go up to the heads of state.

## Copenhagen diary

The 'big people' in suits may have nothing to show at the end of their two weeks in Copenhagen, but the 'little people', the common citizens of Planet Earth are queuing up expectantly. Some 45,000 people have applied to attend the COP 15 conference, three times more than the venue can hold.

An overwhelming number of them actually turned up earlier this week, causing congestion in the area outside the UN venue. The Danish police had a tough time controlling them.

Several thousands of them waited outside in freezing temperatures, unable to enter the venue. It is unprecedented at COP events, but considering that the Danes are well organised with everything else in their perfect little towns, this chaos has become a blot on their clean copy book of organisational skills. Somehow, though, the conductors on the trains are able to check that every passenger on the crowded trains has a ticket or pass. If not, the penalty is 22 Euros.

If you are planning to visit Copenhagen any time, be assured that the system here works perfectly. Hey, after all, most train conductors are women!

A stunning 'UN Climate Wall' of 10 HP flat-screen monitors greets people as they walk past the entrance to COP15. The computers are carefully watched over by a pair of HP engineers from Denmark.

They are all touchscreens, with a large rotating Combat Climate Change globe on them. You can browse on them and look for a country story on climate change you would like to listen to. Put on the snazzy headphones and you can listen in to the whole video. On the Indian site, there is a video of Lakshmi, a young girl who faced the devastating tsunami in Chennai. The wall is meant to bring the voices of the people to the world leaders, says Christensen one of the HP engineers.

It's part of a 'Seal the Deal' campaign by the UNEP. — Marianne de Nazareth