

AFGHAN TALEBAN'S DISPUTE RESOLVED

PESHAWAR: The Afghan Taliban has said that a major dispute undermining the movement has been resolved, after relatives of the militant group's late leader, Mullah Omar, pledged support for his appointed successor Mullah Mansour. The relatives could not be contacted directly, but a close aide to Omar's son confirmed that the agreement had been celebrated at a secret ceremony after Mansour accepted a list of eight demands.

"Mullah Mansour accepted all these demands," the aide said, asking not to be named. The conditions included restructuring the leadership council and ruling by consensus.

The Taliban's official spokesman, representing Mullah Mansour, confirmed that the changes would be implemented.

"Mullah Mansour and his associates promised them that only the Shura (leadership council) would have the power to make decisions, rather than individuals," the spokesman said. The Taliban announced the death of Mullah Omar in July, more than two years after his demise, derailing a fledgling peace process with Kabul and raising the spectre of a split within the group that is fighting to topple the Afghan government and restore hardline Islamist rule.

The Taliban said concealing the leader's death had been necessary to preserve unity at a time when NATO forces were preparing for the 2014 withdrawal from Afghanistan, and swiftly appointed his longtime deputy Mullah Mansour as successor. "We intend to protect and keep this movement united," the Taliban said in the statement published late on Tuesday on its website, which is controlled by Mullah Mansour's supporters. It quoted Omar's younger brother, Mullah Abdul Manan, and the founder's son, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, as declaring their intention to support Mansour.

"Both of them said the Islamic Emirate is their collective home where all of them would like to work together," the statement added. The Taliban was ousted by a US-led military coalition in 2011. They are waging an increasingly violent insurgency against the foreign-backed government, leading to record civilian casualties estimated by the UN at about 5,000 in the first six months of the year. Thousands of Afghans are fleeing the country for Europe, swelling what has been called the greatest refugee crisis since World War Two. — Reuters

PROTEST SHUTS KASHMIR AFTER MYSTERIOUS KILLINGS OF MEN

SRINAGAR: Kashmir largely shut down yesterday after separatists called a strike in protest at the killing of three men whose bullet-riddled bodies were discovered in an orchard two days earlier. Police say the deceased were local militants who were killed due to rivalry between different rebel factions in the conflict-stricken region, but separatist leaders say they died in police custody.

Shops and schools were closed and university exams cancelled as workers went on strike yesterday, while hundreds of police and paramilitary troops patrolled the main city of Srinagar and other major towns. Separatist leaders opposed to Indian rule were detained by police or confined to their homes to prevent them from leading demonstrations. "We are investigating the killings, but it seems these are a result of group rivalry among the militants," K Rajendra, director general of police for Indian-administered Kashmir, told AFP.

On Monday villagers at Dangerpora, 35

kilometers north of Srinagar, discovered the bodies of the three men in their early twenties with multiple bullet wounds and apparent torture marks. Police later identified them as local militants who had joined a splinter faction of Kashmir's largest rebel group, Hizbul Mujahideen, months earlier—a claim denied by the group. "This outfit does not exist. The trio were active members of the Hizbul Mujahideen and were killed in custody," the group's top commander Syed Sallahudin said in a statement published in local newspapers Tuesday.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947, with both countries administering the territory in part but claiming it in full. Hizbul Mujahideen along with several other rebel groups has battled for decades against Indian forces, seeking either independence or merger with Pakistan. The conflict has left tens of thousands dead, mostly civilians. — AFP



Chettikulam: In this file picture taken on April 29, 2009 Displaced Sri Lankan Tamil civilians watch as unseen French and British Foreign Ministers, Bernard Kouchner and David Miliband arrive at Kadirgamh camp. — AFP

UN CALLS INTERNATIONAL JUDGES IN SRI LANKA WAR CRIMES COURT

'PURELY DOMESTIC COURT PROCEDURE WILL NOT SUCCEED'

GENEVA: The United Nations yesterday detailed horrific abuses committed in Sri Lanka's civil war, including the disappearance of tens of thousands of people, and said the country needed international help to probe war crimes and enable reconciliation.

"A purely domestic court procedure will simply not succeed in overcoming the widespread and justifiable suspicions fuelled by decades of violations, malpractice and broken promises," UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein told reporters in Geneva. The country, he said, needed international assistance to address the "horrific level of violations and abuses" during and following Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war, revealed in a long-awaited report. The report identified patterns of grave violations "strongly indicating that war crimes and crimes against humanity" had been committed by both sides.

Among other abuses, it found that tens of thousands of Sri Lankans remained missing after decades of conflict, suggesting enforced disappearances had been part of a systematic policy. Sri Lanka's new unity government has promised dramatic reforms to achieve accountability for alleged atrocities during the war with the Tamil Tiger guerrillas, which ended in 2009 and killed at least 100,000 people.

Sri Lanka 'not ready'

The government, which is planning various measures to ensure reconciliation including the creation of a truth commission, had been hoping to win UN backing for a domestic probe. But while acknowledging the positive steps taken by the new government, yesterday's report concluded that "Sri Lanka's criminal justice system is not yet ready or equipped" to conduct an independent and credible investigation.

Instead, it urged the country to establish a "hybrid special court", including international judges, prosecutors, lawyers and investigators, to



GENEVA: United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein arrives for a press conference on Sri Lanka yesterday at the United Nations Office. — AFP

probe war-related abuses. Sri Lanka's foreign ministry said it had taken note of the findings, and said it was encouraged by the "recognition of the efforts of the new government" and said it would "take all possible measures to ensure non-recurrence" of conflict. Zeid said the change in tone from the new government provided hope that "truly fundamental change" was possible.

Vetting process needed

But he warned that "years of denials and cover-ups, ... stalled investigations and reprisals against the family members of victims" had taken their toll. The report had initially been scheduled to be published in March, but Zeid had recommended a six-month delay to give the country's new govern-

ment a chance to cooperate with investigators.

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena came to power in January promising reconciliation and accountability for alleged atrocities committed by troops under the command of then-president Mahinda Rajapakse. During his decade in power, Rajapakse resisted Western pressure to investigate allegations that his troops killed up to 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians in the final months of the conflict in 2009.

yesterday's report, which looked specifically at the period between 2002 and 2011, described widespread illegal killings by both sides and a deliberate policy by Sri Lankan security forces to use rape and sexual violence as torture against both women and men.



SRINAGAR: Kashmiri Muslim walks during a one-day strike called by separatists. — AFP

NEPALESE POLICE SHOOTING KILLS FOUR INCLUDING CHILD

KATHMANDU: A four-year-old boy was among four people killed late Tuesday when police in Nepal opened fire on a crowd of people demonstrating against a new national constitution due to be introduced this week. Police said they opened fire after protesters threw petrol bombs and stones at security forces, attacked police vehicles and vandalised a local police station in the southern district of Rupandehi.

"Four people were killed when police were forced to fire as the crowd became threatening," district police chief Rajendra Dhakal told AFP by phone. "Unfortunately, among them was a four-year-old boy." More than 40 people have died in fierce clashes between police and protesters in Nepal's southern plains that erupted after the main political parties reached a historic deal on a new constitu-

tion, under pressure to work together following a devastating earthquake in April.

They include 11 police and the 18-month-old son of a police officer shot dead when protesters opened fire outside his home. Lawmakers began voting on the charter on Sunday and it is scheduled to be formally brought into being by the president on September 20. But plans in the bill to divide the Himalayan nation into seven provinces have met with fierce opposition from some minority groups who say the new borders will leave them under-represented in the national parliament. Nepal began working on a new national constitution in 2008, two years after the end of a decade-long Maoist insurgency that left an estimated 16,000 people dead and brought down the 240-year-old Hindu monarchy. — AFP



SILIGURI: Indian Nepali Hindu devotees wear red and dance as they pay homage to Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, during the Tej festival at the Durgagari Temple in Siliguri yesterday. The three-day long Tej festival, celebrated by Hindu women in Nepal and some parts of India, is observed by married women with fasting during the day and praying for long lives for their husbands, while unmarried women wish for handsome husbands and happy conjugal lives. — AFP

INDIA'S ACID ATTACK VICTIMS FACE LONG WAIT FOR JUSTICE

LONDON: India has one of the highest rates of acid violence in the world, yet a backlog of criminal cases means it can take up to a decade for courts to reach a judgment and most victims receive no compensation, legal experts said yesterday.

Globally, there are as many as 1,500 recorded acid attacks each year with more than 1,000 cases estimated to occur in India alone. However, many attacks go unreported because victims are too afraid of reprisals to come forward, they said in a report. The majority of victims are women, attacked over domestic or land disputes, a rejected marriage proposal or spurned sexual advances, the report said.

Attackers frequently target the head and face to maim, disfigure and blind, said Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI), which commissioned the report. Victims are left with lifelong physical and psychological scars. Despite the severity of the crime, acid remains easily available in India where it is used in manufacturing and the processing of cotton and rubber, despite a 2013 Supreme Court order to curb sales.

"Acid is still very, very easily available and a liter of acid can be purchased for as little as 50 pence (\$0.75) and can be bought in most towns and villages in India," ASTI Executive Director Jaf Shah told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. India made acid attacks a specific criminal offence in 2013, and the Supreme Court this year ruled that victims should receive free medical treatment and minimum compensation of 300,000 rupees (\$4,500).

Analyzing 55 cases of acid violence in India, the report, based on research done in 2014, found that on average it takes between five and 10 years for a legal case to be concluded. "This is in itself pretty astonishing, and damning in

terms of how the judiciary and investigation procedures work in dealing with acid attack cases in India," Shah said. Compensation was awarded in only nine cases, and ranging from 50,000 rupees (\$750) to 5 million rupees (\$75,000).

Choking with cases

The study facilitated by the pro bono legal service of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, TrustLaw, examines laws relating to acid violence in Britain, Cambodia, Colombia and India. Besides India, the highest rates of acid attacks are in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Colombia, Pakistan, Nepal and Uganda.

Poongkulal Balasubramanian, pro bono coordinator at J. Sagar Associates, which compiled the study, said problems in India prosecuting acid violence cases were related to a creaking justice system rather than the nature of the crime. "They are problems which all any large jurisdiction or country with a large population, which is choking with the amount of cases," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"The fact that these cases are prosecuted through the same system means they end up suffering from the same kind of delays and poor investigation." The solution is for more courts to be set up, particularly courts specializing in violence against women, combined with stronger witness protection programs, Balasubramanian said. Faster justice would also lessen the chance of evidence being tampered with and out-of-court deals struck between victim and the accused, she added. The report recommended that countries should consider adopting a system used in Britain, which allows victims to sue for compensation independent of the criminal prosecution system. — Reuters