



AFGHANISTAN



PAKISTAN



INDIA

The Cat's Paw in Nimroz

Kanchan Lakshman

Research Fellow, Institute for Conflict Management; Assistant Editor, *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict & Resolution*

Two Indian nationals, M.P. Singh and C. Govindaswamy, personnel of the Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation (BRO), were killed and seven persons, including five BRO personnel, sustained injuries in a suicide-bomber attack in the southwest province of Nimroz in Afghanistan on April 12, 2008. The BRO team was working on a highway project, when the vehicle-borne suicide bomber struck, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson disclosed at New Delhi. An unconfirmed report from Herat in Afghanistan indicated that the Taliban had claimed responsibility for the attack.

Since 2002, the Taliban has demanded the departure of all Indian personnel working on various projects with the Afghan people and Government for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country. The **Taliban** and **al Qaeda** have targeted Indians in Afghanistan before. In the first-ever suicide attack on Indians in the country, two Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) soldiers were killed and five others injured in the Razai village of Nimroz province on January 3, 2008. In April 2006, Indian national, K. Suryanarayana, working with a Gulf-based company, was abducted and later killed by Taliban militants, allegedly on orders from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Earlier, Ramankutty Maniyappan, a 36-year old BRO employee, was abducted on November 19, 2005, and his decapitated body was found on a road between Zaranj, capital of Nimroz, and an area called Ghor Ghor, four days later. Following his abduction, Taliban spokesperson Qari Yusuf Ahmadi had claimed that they had given the BRO an ultimatum to leave Afghanistan within 48 hours, failing which they would behead Maniyappan.

There are approximately 3,000-4,000 Indian nationals working on several reconstruction projects across Afghanistan. The principal projects include, among others:

- Construction of a 220 KV Double Circuit Transmission Line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 KV sub-station at Kabul under the North-East Power System project to bring power from neighbouring countries to Kabul (USD 111 million);
- Humanitarian food assistance of one million tons of wheat in the form of high protein biscuits distributed to 1.4 million schoolchildren every day under the School Feeding Programme, administered through the World Food Programme (USD 100 million);
- Construction of a 218 kilometre road from Zaranj to Delaram to facilitate movement of goods and commodities from Afghanistan to Iranian border (USD 175 million – approval for an additional USD 91 million is being sought);
- Reconstruction and completion of Salma Dam Power Project (42 MW) in Herat province (USD 116 million – approval for additional USD 36 million is being sought);
- Construction of Afghan Parliament (USD 83 million);
- Reconstruction of Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul in various phases, including reconstruction of surgical ward/polyclinic/diagnostic centre (USD 6.7 million);
- Reconstruction of Habibia School (USD 5.1 million);
- Digging of 26 tube wells in North West Afghanistan (USD 1.2 million);
- Gifting of vehicles (400 buses, 200 mini-buses, 105 municipality and 285 army vehicles) (USD 25 million);

- Setting up of 5 toilet-cum-public sanitation complexes in Kabul (USD 0.9 million);
- Telephone exchanges in 11 provinces connecting to Kabul (USD 11.1 million);
- Expansion of National TV network by providing an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provincial capitals, contributing towards greater integration of the country (USD 6.8 million).

The present level of India's assistance to Afghanistan is USD 750 million, making it the 5th largest bilateral donor after the US, UK, Japan and Germany. According to the Indian Embassy at Kabul, of the total pledge of USD 750 million between 2002 and 2009, the fully committed amount is USD 758.21 million and cumulative disbursement up to 2006-07 has been US \$ 278.94 million. This is higher than the disbursement rates of most other countries. The budgetary estimate for 2007-08 is US \$ 105.04 million.

There are an estimated 400 Indians working on the strategic 218-kilometre road in southwestern Afghanistan, which will link the main Kandahar-Herat highway to the Iran border, where the April 12 suicide attack occurred. Along with local Afghans, an ITBP contingent provides protection to the Indians working on the road project, which has immense strategic significance for Afghanistan. A November 2007 report in *The Hindu* indicated nearly 10 previous attacks on BRO personnel had forced India to increase the strength of the ITBP contingent from 38 to 388 on this road project.

This ambitious project, funded and executed by India, will provide Afghanistan a shorter route to the sea, via the Iranian port of Chabahar, than is currently available through Pakistan. Iran, India and Afghanistan had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in January 2003, to improve Afghanistan's access to the coast. Under this agreement, Iran is building a new transit route to connect Milak in the southeast of the country to Zaranj in Afghanistan, and has already completed an important bridge over the Helmand River. On its part, India is building a new road connecting Zaranj to Delaram, which is on the main Herat-Kandahar road. The road is expected to become operational by December 2008, a full year behind schedule. These projects will shorten the transit distance between Chabahar and Delaram by over 600 kilometres. According to the MoU, Afghan goods will have duty-free access to the Iranian port and the trade from Afghanistan will have to pay no more than what is applied to Iranian traders for using Iranian territory for transit purposes. India is to enjoy similar benefits as Afghanistan at Chabahar port and for transit. Furthermore, India and Iran have also agreed to build a railroad from Chabahar to the Iranian Central Railway Station, thus creating a link to the Karachi-Tehran Railway line, which goes further westwards. While Afghanistan gains superior access to realize its trade potential, India will be able to prevail over hurdles posed by Pakistan in refusing to allow the transit of Indian goods *en route* to Afghanistan. Furthermore, India would be able to obtain quicker access to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

The Zaranj-Delaram project, consequently, has direct ramifications for the three participating countries, and impacts on Pakistan by default. Afghanistan, the host country that is still a long way away from recovery, continues to be a playground for competing foreign policy agendas and the 'new great game' that is evidently being played out on its soil.

The Taliban detests India's proximity with the Hamid Karzai regime and leaders of the erstwhile Northern Alliance. The Taliban/al Qaeda combine and the transnational *jihadi* groups headquartered in Pakistan have consequently and continuously targeted Indian nationals and interests since India began reconstruction operations in Afghanistan, particularly in southern Afghanistan and in the Herat area bordering Iran. Reconstruction efforts and the unfortunate consequence of violence play out amidst the reality of the limited control exercised by the Hamid Karzai Government over southern and eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban, al Qaeda and an assortment of tribal elders and warlords, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, have *de facto* control over this region, and some of these entities either operate from their safe sanctuaries within Pakistan or directly secure support from the establishment in Islamabad.

The attack against the Indian workers at in Nimroz comes within the context of spiraling violence in the country. Afghanistan, arguably the 'forgotten frontier' of the Global War on Terror, witnessed a substantial increase in violence during 2007, which claimed at least 8,000 lives, the highest death toll for any year since 2001. Armed conflicts between the Taliban, on the one hand, and Afghan and international forces, on the other, left over at least 1,500 civilians dead, according to a UN report in March 2008. Insurgency-related violence "reached unprecedented levels in 2007 with an average of 566 incidents recorded per month, and 160 'actual suicide attacks' throughout the year", according to the report. Writing in the March 2008 Report, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated, further, "The Taliban and related armed groups and the drug economy represent fundamental threats to still fragile political, economic and social institutions... Despite tactical successes by national and international military forces, the anti-Government elements are far from defeated". Afghanistan's

recovery from the forces of radical Islam is expected to be a long haul, much more than what was imagined even in 2007. Major General David Rodriguez, head of the US-led coalition force, indicated, in February 2008, that it will take "a few years" to defeat the Taliban-led insurgency. Reports indicate that "questions are increasingly being asked concerning the viability and prospects for the ultimate success of the 40-nation ISAF and parallel US military deployments."

Dan Rath, director of communications and advocacy at Kabul's Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, emphasized further that, within a troubled nation, the situation in south Afghanistan "is by far the most difficult." In a statement released on April 8, 2008, the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that insurgent attacks were spreading to areas in the country's east and west, which were previously relatively stable, forcing 13,000 to flee their homes, just since January 2008. The US National Intelligence Director, Michael McConnell, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2008 that the "resurgent Taliban controls 10 percent to 11 percent of the country and Karzai's Government controls 30 percent to 31 percent. The majority of Afghanistan's population and territory remains under local tribal control." Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, told the committee at the same hearing that "Pakistani military operations in the (region) have not fundamentally damaged al-Qaida's position. ... The tribal areas remain largely ungovernable and, as such, they will continue to provide vital sanctuary to al-Qaida, the Taliban and regional extremism more broadly."

Meanwhile, the Taliban has announced the beginning of a new offensive in Afghanistan, threatening "painful strikes" on enemy soldiers. Mullah Bradar Akhund, 'deputy emir' of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, on March 27, 2008, stated that the Taliban would launch "new types of operations" across Afghanistan. The dangers of anarchy across wide areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border go well beyond the confines of the region, and are seen to be sourced in Pakistan to a far greater extent than in the debilitated state of Afghanistan. An April 14, 2008, report indicated that US President George W Bush had stated, in a Television interview, that "if another September 11 style attack is being planned, it probably is being plotted in Pakistan and not Afghanistan." President Bush expressed the opinion that, if the plotters had been located in Afghanistan, they would have been "routed out" by the US-NATO forces by now. He described the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (**FATA**), along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, as one of the most dangerous areas in the world today, where "Al Qaeda has established safe havens and is plotting attacks against the United States."

The Taliban have regrouped rather well, although they may still be incapable of sustaining an Iraq-type insurgency. This is particularly the case in the Afghan countryside, especially in provinces dominated by the Pashtuns along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Islamabad has evidently allowed the Taliban to regroup on Pakistani territory and to launch attacks across the border. Despite selective military operations, there is no indication that Pakistan is about to cut the Taliban's lifeline on its soil.

Despite the steadily worsening situation in Afghanistan and the direct attacks against Indian projects and workers, there is no indication that India intends to dilute its presence or commitment to projects in Afghanistan. Indeed, there are strong efforts to further consolidate India-Afghanistan relations beyond the present commitment, which is primarily related to reconstruction and development efforts. There is, for instance, a proposal for the Indian Army to train the Afghan National Army in counter-insurgency operations. Afghanistan's Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak met with his Indian counterpart A. K. Antony in the Indian capital, New Delhi, on April 10, 2008, to discuss bilateral military cooperation, including the counter-insurgency assistance. While India would remain "actively engaged" in the reconstruction exercise in Afghanistan in the foreseeable future, the next step of military cooperation would unambiguously threaten Pakistan's attempts to secure dominance and recover strategic depth in Afghanistan.

Though Pakistan is currently wracked by multiple internal convulsions that have, in some measure, undermined its capacities of power projection into Afghanistan, it remains the case that it shares strategic goals with the Taliban in this theatre. The Taliban and the transnational *jihadi* groups headquartered in Pakistan's tribal areas remain the principal instrumentalities of Islamabad's response to India's deepening co-operation with Afghanistan – notwithstanding evidence of some radical Islamist activity now being redirected towards Islamabad. Pakistan's prospective strategies envisage an augmented share of power for the Taliban at Kabul, in the proximate future, and a return to the *status quo ante* of a Taliban regime, in the medium term. Preventing the stabilization of the Karzai is an integral element of this broad strategic vision. This orientation is also seen to constitute an existential imperative for Islamabad, since a strong and stable regime at Kabul would immediately put the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan into question, and further destabilize North Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province (**NWFP**). Pakistan's covert assistance to the Taliban in Afghanistan, and its efforts to recover 'strategic depth' in that country through this proxy, will inevitably continue, though its scale

may be calibrated to ensure that it does not provoke US ire and reprisals.



NEPAL

Rumblings of a Tectonic Shift

Prasanta Kumar Pradhan

Research Associate, Institute for Conflict Management

Belying predictions of widespread violence and disruption, Nepal's landmark Constituent Assembly (CA) elections on April 10, passed off almost peacefully throughout the country. With 55 political parties contesting the polls for the 601-member CA, and around 10.5 million voters, almost 60 per cent of registered voters, turning out to cast their votes amidst threats from some disgruntled armed outfits, the initial anxiety was running high across the country.

While counting is expected to continue for some days to come, with ballot boxes being transported across tenuous roads and tracks from remote polling centres, initial results suggest a Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (**CPN-M**) juggernaut building into at least a clear majority in the CA, and consequently a defining power in the hands of the former rebels in relation to the character and content of the new Constitution. At the time of writing, the Maoists had already won 97 of the 171 seats where counting was complete, and were leading in 16 of 40 seats where counting was ongoing. The Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), which had been tipped as the leader in pre-election predictions, was trailing in third place, with just 23 seats, and a lead in 9; while Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's Nepali Congress (NC) had secured 28 seats, and was leading in 5.

240 of the 601 CA members are being elected by the direct vote which is presently being counted, while 335 will be elected by the nationwide distribution of votes on a Proportional Representation (PR) basis. The remaining 26 members will be nominated by the new Cabinet. While there were 3,970 candidates in the fray for the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) election, there were 5,701 candidates in the PR category, including one half of women candidates, nearly two thousand Madhesi, over 600 *Dalits* (lower caste Hindus), over 2,000 *Janajatis* (indigenous nationalities), nearly 200 from backward regions and over 1,700 from other groups.

The armed Terai groups and the Maoists [including the Young Communist League (**YCL**)] were thought to be the primary security threats to a free and fair conduct of the polls. However, apart from a few untoward incidents, the election remained largely peaceful. Immediately after the voting was over on April 10, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Bhoj Raj Pokharel had announced that the polls were conducted peacefully and that repolling was only to be held at 33 polling stations. With some complaints trickling in later, this number was eventually raised to 60 polling booths in 16 constituencies across 10 Districts.

Defying prophecies of chaos and violence, the Government managed to conduct polls in the Terai region. While disruption by the Terai armed groups was almost entirely prevented, it was the Maoists who were reportedly involved in a number of incidents of booth capturing and other disruptive activities. Maoist disruptive activities were reported from Districts including Chitwan, Saptari, Siraha, Mahottari, Arghakhanchi, Lalitpur, Dolakha, Baglung, Sunsari, Bajhang, Rukum, Gorkha, Sindhupalchowk and Ramechhap.

Nevertheless, the Terai region did not witness any large scale election-related violence, primarily owing to the Government's antecedent Eight Point Agreement with the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF), the biggest political alliance in the region, on February 28, 2008. All important leaders of the UDMF including, Hridayesh Tripathy, Mahanta Thakur and Upendra Yadav contested the polls. Other disgruntled armed groups were successfully contained by the Security Forces (SFs) during the elections, with the exception of two booths of the Trikaul VDC in the Saptari District, which is the birthplace of Jaya Krishna Goit, the leader of the All Terai Liberation Front (ATLF), earlier known as Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha – Goit (**JTMM-G**). Election officer Yogendra Prasad Shah disclosed that no political agents and voters came to the booth as a result of threats and fear.

Pre-poll electioneering had, however, witnessed large scale violence among the supporters, principally, of the three major political parties: the NC, the CPN-UML and the CPN-Maoist. The Maoists had, clearly, been at the forefront of such confrontations. Such incidents included barring candidates and supporters from visiting constituencies or addressing rallies, targeting the candidates and clashes between supporters. Worried about the deteriorating law and order situation, CEC Bhoj Raj Pokharel, on March 31, 2008, had summoned the top leaders of three major political parties in the Government and exhorted them to adhere strictly to the Election

Code of Conduct.

On the day of the polls, a tight security blanket was thrown over the entire country. The Government began air patrols by helicopters from April 5 and deployed thousands of SF personnel nationwide, ahead of the polls. Around 56,000 Nepal Police personnel, 25,000 Armed Police Force (APF) personnel and 54,000 'temporary Police' were deployed to oversee security during the polls, but, as Inspector General of Police, Om Bikram Rana, clarified, it was not necessary to call out the Army to help with the arrangements. The border with India was sealed on April 10 to prevent the movement of criminals and other disruptive elements. As a preventive measure the Home Ministry also directed local Police administrations to prohibit the entry of people from other constituencies on polling day, apart from those carrying permits approved by the Election Commission, the Returning Officer or security agencies.

The election was conducted under the supervision of the United Nations and several other national and international observers. Ian Martin, the Chief of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) noted, "This has been Nepal's most observed election." Apart from 28 international organisations, there were 148 national level observer groups and 95 District level organisations accredited by the Government to observe the polls. UNMIN and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal (OHCHR) deployed teams across the country to assist in 'creating a free and fair atmosphere for the election'. In addition to the technical assistance provided to the Election Commission in all 75 Districts, UNMIN civil affairs teams and OHCHR human rights officers operated in mobile teams across 45 Districts. UNMIN arms monitors were present at all 28 Maoist Army Cantonment sites and operated mobile patrols from the five regional headquarters, visiting Nepal Army locations, and in Joint Monitoring Teams in communities near Cantonment sites.

The election was also observed by the media throughout the country. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) began nationwide monitoring through national and international missions, and local branches on the state of access to information, travel of media persons and security of media institutions and media persons. The International Mission comprised representatives from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Media Support, Internews Network, International Safety Institute, Open Society Institute and Nepali representatives. The purpose of the missions was to carry out field based media monitoring of the pre-poll, polling and vote counting processes in Kathmandu valley, Biratnagar, Nepalgunj and adjoining areas. Commentators, however, insist that the absence of manifest violence masked an insidious mix of "propaganda and street muscle" employed by the Maoists. Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of *Himal*, noted, "The Maoists promised the Earth to poor, marginalised people and also ran a country-wide campaign of fear and intimidation to win the elections."

Despite the tremendous achievement of a poll relatively free of overt violence, the elections raise some troubling questions on the reaction of the Maoists as results trickle in. Senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai had, of course, announced that the Maoists would launch a 'new revolution' if the Party lost the CA. Elsewhere, at an interaction with media persons in Kathmandu on March 14, Bhattarai had stated, "I think the decade-long conflict will not find its justification if we are defeated in the Constituent Assembly poll." At an election meeting in Kaski District on April 5, 2008, Bhattarai said that the Maoists would go in for "State Capture" if the results for the upcoming Constituent Assembly election did not favour his Party, adding "It will not take us more than ten minutes to capture the State." Such an eventuality has, of course, now receded in view of the early Maoist successes.

The fate of King Gyanendra and the 240-year old institution of monarchy, in any event, now appears to be sealed. In the past few months, the King has been stripped of all his powers and property by the Government. Even as hopes of conciliation diminished, the King had called for free and fair elections: "We call upon all adult citizens to exercise their democratic right in a free and fair environment." Earlier on April 5, Prachanda had warned the monarch of "strong punishment" if "he (the King) wants to resist the verdict of the masses". He added, however, "If he respects the wishes of the masses in the election then our masses will forgive him and he can live as a common citizen." The future of the monarchy is the first issue to be decided by the new CA. The Maoist intent remains fraught with menace. Maoist supreme, Pushpa Kamal Dahal *aka* Prachanda had clearly declared, on February 29, 2008: "We will capture the Constituent Assembly through elections in a new method and witness a miracle in one-and-a-half months." He did not elaborate what the "new method" was, but it is evident that it has succeeded in sufficient measure. If initial trends are sustained, the elections will have transferred the power to define the new Constitutions into the Maoist fold. With a significant – if not absolute – majority in the CA, and clear control of the Government, pushing through a radical, possibly totalitarian, agenda could quickly become a question of mere tactic and timing. The total seizure of state power, the long-held and unambiguous objective of the Maoists through war and 'peace', is tantalizingly close.

NEWS BRIEFS

Weekly Fatalities: Major Conflicts in South Asia

April 7-13, 2008

| | Civilian | Security Force Personnel | Terrorist/Insurgent | Total |
|-------------------------|----------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| BANGLADESH | | | | |
| Left-wing Extremism | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| INDIA | | | | |
| Assam | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Jammu & Kashmir | 0 | 0 | 14 | 14 |
| Manipur | 2 | 0 | 7 | 9 |
| Left-wing Extremism | | | | |
| Andhra Pradesh | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bihar | 7 | 5 | 0 | 12 |
| Jharkhand | 9 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Orissa | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| West Bengal | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Total (INDIA) | 24 | 5 | 23 | 52 |
| NEPAL | 5 | 0 | 7 | 12 |
| PAKISTAN | | | | |
| Balochistan | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| FATA | 13 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| NWFP | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total (PAKISTAN) | 15 | 3 | 0 | 18 |
| SRI LANKA | 1 | 13 | 193 | 207 |

Provisional data compiled from English language media sources.



INDIA

Nine persons killed and two injured in Maoist attack in Jharkhand: Nine persons were killed and two others injured when Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) cadres fired on a vehicle and subsequently set it ablaze in the Semra Forest area under Palkot Police Station of Gumla District on April 8, 2008. Among the victims were Bhado Singh, a member of the Shanti Sena (Peace Force), a police-backed 'resistance force', and his family members. Singh and his family members were proceeding to Palkot from Bhagina village. *Times of India*, April 9, 2008.



NEPAL

60 percent voter turnout in Constituent Assembly election: Voting for the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections concluded on April 10 with approximately 60 per cent of the electorate exercising their franchise. Addressing a Press Conference after the voting ended, the Chief Election Commissioner, Bhoj Raj Pokharel, described the polls as a success and said, "The total turnout of the voters is estimated to be around 60 per cent. However, the EC (Election Commission) is yet to confirm it until the information from all the constituencies is received." Pokharel informed the media that polling has been suspended in 33 polling stations and said that the EC would soon decide the re-polling date for those stations. Voting was held peacefully in the Terai and eastern Districts, such as Morang, Sunsari, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat and Jhapa, while it has been postponed in nearly two dozen stations in Chitwan, Siraha, Saptari and Mahottari Districts. The EC has postponed polling in seven stations in the Saptari District. Three persons died — one of them an independent candidate — in election related violence across the country. Results for all the 240 constituencies are expected over the next 10 days.

As per reports available at 3PM NST on April 14, 2008, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist) had won 100 seats out of the 176 seats for which results had been declared in the direct voting to choose 240 members to the CA. The Nepali Congress had won 29 seats and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist had 24 seats. The Madheshi Janaadhikar Forum (MJF) had won 15 seats at that time. [Nepal News](#); [The Hindu](#); [Election Commission of Nepal](#), April 11-14, 2008.



PAKISTAN

Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba designated as 'Foreign Terrorist Organisations' by the US: The Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Pakistan-based terrorist groups, are among the 44 outfits designated as 'Foreign Terrorist Organisations' (FTO) by the US. Besides these, the Bangladesh-based Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami and Pakistan-based Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) are also in the FTO list issued by the Office of the Coordinator for Counter-terrorism of the US Department of State. "FTO designations play a critical role in our fight against terrorism and are effective means of curtailing support for terrorist activities and pressuring groups to get out of the terrorism business," a State Department statement said. Other designated groups in South Asia include the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in Pakistan. [Daily Excelsior](#), April 12, 2008.

NWFP Government forms committee for dialogue with militants in Swat: The North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Government launched a fresh peace process for the violence-hit Swat District on April 8, 2008, by constituting a Ministerial Committee to initiate dialogue with different groups of militants. Provincial Information Minister Sardar Hussain Babak said that the Provincial Cabinet in its first meeting had decided to reactivate the *jirga* system to resolve the issue of militancy through peaceful means. Babak said the Committee, comprising two senior Ministers and some other Cabinet Members from the Malakand region, had been tasked to work out a mechanism for the proposed *jirga*. Elected representatives, notables and ulema (religious scholars) from the region would be inducted into the *jirga*, he said, adding that the NWFP Government was launching a comprehensive dialogue process from the Swat District. The Minister said the Committee would put up its recommendations to the Cabinet within two weeks. Senior ministers Rahimdad Khan and Bashir Ahmad Bilour would head the Committee. [Dawn](#), April 9, 2008.

Balochistan Assembly demands end to military operations in the province: The Balochistan Assembly, in its inaugural session on April 7, 2008, unanimously adopted a resolution calling for an immediate end to military operations in the province. The resolution also called for the release of Balochistan National Party (Mengal faction) chief Akhtar Mengal and all detained political activists, and the rehabilitation of Balochistan's internally displaced people. The House also passed a resolution unanimously calling for an UN-led investigation into former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination. A resolution moved by 12 Legislators demanded a judicial inquiry into the murder of former Balochistan Governor Nawab Akbar Bugti and former Member of Provincial Assembly Balaach Marri. Another related resolution called for an UN-supervised probe into their murders, and demanded that Bugti's body be handed over to his family. The fourth resolution demanded the abolition of the Police and restoration of the Levies Force. [Daily Times](#), April 2, 2008.

Banned Jihadi groups to move Supreme Court for restoration, says Lashkar-e-Toiba chief: All the religious outfits which were banned by General Pervez Musharraf during his military rule would approach the Supreme Court

of Pakistan and seek restoration, the chief of the proscribed Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) group said on April 7, 2008. "The ban was a step that the retired General took only to please America and now it is abundantly clear that people have rejected his policies," said Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the LeT (now known as Jama'at-ud-Da'awa) chief. He criticised President Musharraf's Kashmir policy and alleged that the 'U-turn' taken by the Musharraf Government on Kashmir had badly damaged the cause of the Kashmiris' 'freedom struggle'. The Kashmiri leadership and the Kashmiri people are disappointed because of the previous Government's Kashmir policy and they have lost their trust and support, he stated. All the options that General Musharraf had been offering on the Kashmir issue have not been responded to by India, he said. [The News](#), April 8, 2008.



SRI LANKA

193 LTTE militants and 13 soldiers killed during the week: 193 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants and 13 soldiers were killed in separate incidents between April 6 and April 12, 2008. Among the major incidents, at least 21 LTTE militants were killed and nine others injured by the troops during clashes between the two sides in the Kallikulam area of Vavuniya District on April 6. Further, on April 12, the troops extended their Defence Line in the areas north of Giant Tank, north Kathankulam, south east of Adampan and Periyakulam in the Mannar District, after fierce clashes with the LTTE. At least 66 militants were killed while over 50 others sustained injuries in the clashes. 10 soldiers were also killed and 20 others were wounded in the incident. [Sri Lanka Army](#), April 7-13, 2008.

Norway does not support formation of an independent Tamil State in Sri Lanka, says Norwegian envoy: does not support the formation of an independent Tamil State in Sri Lanka, Norway's special envoy to Colombo, Jon Hanssen-Bauer, told the United National Party Member of Parliament (MP) Jayalath Jayawardene and two leading Sinhalese Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka, on the sidelines of an international conference that ended in Oslo on April 11, 2008. "Norway will not support the establishment of Tamil Eelam," the MP quoted Hanssen-Bauer as saying. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan Cabinet Minister Arumugam Thondaman, who also attended the meeting, separately quoted Hanssen-Bauer as telling him that Norway would not be able to play the role of a peace facilitator as long as fighting raged in the island nation. "How can we do that when war is going on?" the Norwegian envoy inquired, according to the Minister. [IANS](#), April 12-13, 2008.

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