

DISASTERS UPDATE

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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

National

International

25 dead in blast, U.S. drone strike

The Hindu

KHAR (Pakistan): A suicide bomber killed 16 people on Saturday at a police checkpoint in a north-west Pakistani tribal area where the military had declared victory over the Taliban and Al-Qaeda last year.

Elsewhere in the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, suspected U.S. missiles killed nine alleged militants, officials said. Fourteen civilians and two police officers died in the suicide attack in the Bajur tribal region, while 20 people were wounded, said local government official Bakhsh Pacha. The attacker, on foot, struck a market area in the region's main town, Khar, he said.

The attack came a day after officials said security forces had killed 44 militants in three days of battles on the outskirts of Khar. Pakistan waged a major military offensive against Taliban and Al-Qaeda insurgents in Bajur in 2008, declaring victory over the militants by February 2009. But in recent weeks, clashes and now this latest suicide attack have signalled a deteriorating security situation in the area.

Overnight on Saturday, three suspected U.S. missiles hit a compound and a bunker in the Mohammad Khel area of North Waziristan, part of a surge of the drone-fired strikes, said intelligence officials. Two missiles in Saturday's attack hit the compound being used by the militants, killing seven of them, the intelligence officials said. The third killed two more insurgents in the bunker, they said.

Another such missile strike early this month targeted a meeting of militant commanders in an apparently unsuccessful attempt to kill Pakistani Taliban chief Hakimullah Mehsud. The Pakistani Taliban is believed to have played a role in the December 30 suicide

bombing of a remote CIA base in Afghanistan's eastern Khost province that killed seven of the agency's employees. Since the CIA was hit, the U.S. has carried out 13 suspected drone strikes in North and South Waziristan. — AP

Moderate quake hits China's Sichuan province

Agence France-Presse

Beijing, January 31, 2010

A moderate 5.2-magnitude quake hit the Chinese province of Sichuan on Sunday, the US Geological Survey said, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. The tremor struck at 5:37 am (2137 GMT Saturday) at a depth of 18 kilometres (11 miles) with an epicentre 36 kilometres (22 miles) southeast of the city of Suining in Sichuan, southern China, the USGS said.

An 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan in May 2008, leaving nearly 87,000 people dead or missing and more than five million others homeless. Chinese state media said last week that authorities would complete more than 90 percent of reconstruction in quake-devastated Sichuan province this year.

Jiang Jufeng, Sichuan's governor, was quoted as saying that even counties most ravaged would meet nearly all their reconstruction targets in 2010, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

***Compiled by
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