

Pak court defers decision on challenge to jurisdiction

KARACHI, Dec 21 : An anti-terrorism court today reserved a decision on a defence application challenging its jurisdiction to hear the case against deposed Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif, reports AFP.

Judge Shabbir Ahmed adjourned the proceedings until January 12 when he would give his verdict on the issue.

Prosecutor Raja Qureshi presented to the court an interior ministry document dated December 19 which he said empowered the court to try the case.

He said the court had jurisdiction to try Sharif and others accused on charges of waging war against Pakistan and other offences against the state.

The defence application moved Monday said that since the accusations were offences against the state the original complaint had to be brought by the central or a provincial government.

But the original accusation

Key witness gives evidence against Sharif in treason case

against Sharif was made by an army colonel in the weeks after General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a coup on October 12.

Sharif, his brother Shahbaz, and five other officials are expected to be charged with treason, hijacking, kidnapping, criminal conspiracy, attempted murder and collecting arms to wage war against Pakistan.

They face the death penalty if convicted.

During Tuesday's hearing the prosecutor pleaded that the case be heard on day-to-day basis.

The judge said he would follow the procedure and practice of a high court.

Responding to a defence request, the judge allowed family members to meet the accused for three hours on the two days

next month of Eid festival marking the end of holy month of Ramadan.

"The treatment being meted out to us is shameful," Sharif said during the proceedings.

"We can live without meeting our family members. I and my brother do not wish to meet our family members. We can live without them, we do not want any favours from them [prosecution]."

Meanwhile, a key witness has given evidence against deposed Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif in his treason and conspiracy to murder case, according to his statement seen by AFP today.

Amirullah Chaudhary, the former head of Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority, was originally accused alongside Sharif.

In his statement Chaudhary says Sharif clearly told him not to let the aircraft land in Pakistan.

and other senior officials but agreed to give evidence against Sharif in return for a pardon.

Sharif was ousted in October by army chief General Pervez Musharraf.

The former premier and six others are expected to be charged with treason, criminal conspiracy and hijacking among other offences and face the death penalty if convicted.

The case against them relates to the night of the coup, when Sharif is accused of preventing the landing in Karachi of a Pakistan International Airlines flight carrying Musharraf and nearly 200 other passengers from Sri Lanka.

The plane only landed after the army seized control of the airport. Within hours Musharraf had assumed sweeping powers and detained Sharif.

In his statement Chaudhary says Sharif clearly told him not to let the aircraft land in Pakistan.

Pakistan has no plans for war: Musharraf

Islamabad is ready to help resolve row over Laden

KARACHI, Dec 21 : Pakistan will maintain a deterrence but has no plans for war or to expand its territory, the country's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf said today, reports AFP.

"The only viable option is to remove the temptation from the minds of potential aggressors by maintaining a credible deterrence," Musharraf said, in an apparent reference to arch-rival India.

Pakistan openly became a nuclear power last year after conducting nuclear tests following similar blasts in India.

Musharraf, the army chief who seized power in a coup in October, has pledged to maintain that nuclear deterrence.

The general was speaking at the induction of a new French-built Agosta 90-B submarine into the Pakistan fleet.

Pakistan and France signed a contract for three Agosta submarines under a technology transfer contract in 1994, and the first arrived this month.

Agosta 90-B submarines are conventionally powered attack subs used against other subs and surface vessels, as well as for intelligence-gathering and special missions, such as commando transfers.

Meanwhile, Pakistan is ready to help resolve the row between the United States and Afghanistan over indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden, Pakistan's interior minister told

"It is originally a matter between the US and Afghanistan. They should hold negotiations with Afghanistan, but if they think we could resolve the issue then we will extend whatever support we can," Moinudeen Haider said in an interview late Monday.

Haider said Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a coup in October, was committed to putting an end to terrorism as a "priority."

He said Islamabad was trying to stop the flow from Afghanistan of fundamentalist Islamists intent on terrorism against the West.

"We are trying our best to stop such people from crossing the borders into Afghanistan and not should such people come into Pakistan," Haider said.

Bin Laden has been charged in the United States with the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August last year in which 224 people died.

But the Taliban refuse to hand over Bin Laden, saying that would breach their traditional cultural obligations to a guest.

The United Nations slapped financial and aviation sanctions on the Taliban last month in another effort to win the extradition of Bin Laden.

Indian officials in US for talks ahead of planned Clinton visit

NEW DELHI, Dec 21 : Senior Indian officials are in Washington for talks ahead of US President Bill Clinton's expected visit to India early next year, a foreign ministry spokesman said today, reports AFP.

"It is a functional official level contact which evolves from the larger dialogue taking place between the Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott," spokesman RS Jassal said.

"They cover a huge canvas of issues. Nine rounds have already been held so far. These official level talks are routine," Jassal told AFP.

He said Islamabad was trying to stop the flow from Afghanistan of fundamentalist Islamists intent on terrorism against the West.

"We are trying our best to stop such people from crossing the borders into Afghanistan and not should such people come into Pakistan," Haider said.

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The British High Commission (embassy) in Islamabad's strongest supporter and one of the few countries that recognise the religious militia as rulers in Afghanistan.

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