

Movement for Sharif's release soon: Kulsoom

KARACHI, June 4: Kulsoom Nawaz, wife of imprisoned former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif, has said she will soon begin a public mobilisation campaign for the release of her husband, reports AFP.

"I will go to every corner of the country to mobilise the people," she told AFP in a telephone interview late on Saturday.

Kulsoom said the movement would be launched from the southern Sindh province, of which Karachi is the capital, although no date had been set.

"I will be at the forefront of the movement which will be different from previous political agitations in the country. No buses will be burnt and no one will be hurt," Kulsoom said.

A Pakistani high court on Friday admitted a state appeal demanding that a life term

given to Sharif on charges of hijacking and terrorism by an anti-terrorism court in April be replaced with the death penalty.

On the same day, the prime minister was formally charged in a corruption case by an accountability court in the 16th century Attock Fort, where he is being detained, for alleged asset concealment and tax evasion.

"I don't expect justice from these courts," Kulsoom said.

Sharif has accused General Pervez Musharraf, who ousted him in a military coup in October, of waging a personal vendetta against him.

Musharraf has denied the charge, claiming he is not a vindictive man. "I have no personal vendetta against anyone," he said on Wednesday.

The 49-year-old Kulsoom said she had found her husband in good spirits after visiting

him in Attock Fort jail.

Sharif told the accountability court that he was ready to spend the rest of his life in jail and "even be hanged".

Sources within Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) party say they are divided over whether to launch a movement for the release of the deposed prime minister.

"I will be meeting the party leaders soon to chalk out the strategy," Kulsoom said.

"They (the regime) are under-estimating me."

Dissenting voices in the PML are against any confrontation with the army-led government, the sources said.

Mian Mohammad Azhar, a former governor in Punjab, is a leading figure in the anti-Sharif camp in the PML, still headed by the former prime minister.



Camilla Parker Bowles

A historic encounter

LONDON, June 4: Britain's Queen Elizabeth met the long-time lover of her son Prince Charles at a lunch party on Saturday in what royal watchers portrayed as an historic encounter, reports Reuters.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said the Queen and Camilla Parker Bowles were among 100 guests at a party Charles threw to celebrate the 60th birthday of ex-King Constantine of Greece.

British media said it was the first time the Queen had met Camilla since she and Charles, the heir to the throne, made their public debut together last year.

The News of the World, the tabloid newspaper which broke that story of Saturday's meeting on its website, said Charles and Camilla now effectively had the green light to get married.

Palace sources were unable to say when the Queen last met Parker Bowles, a divorcee like Charles, but said she had known her for many years.

"It is a reasonable assumption that they have met in the past," one source said.

Charles has had to tread gingerly since his marriage to Princess Diana ended in 1996 with admissions of adultery on both sides.

After Diana's death the following year in a Paris car crash, Camilla slowly emerged into the limelight as his "consort".

Lanka buying Israeli weapons to boost battle against LTTE

COLOMBO, June 4: Sri Lanka is buying Israeli gunboats and aircraft and introducing other modern weapon systems to boost its battle against ethnic Tamil rebels, press reports here said today, reports AFP.

Gunboats built with guided missiles were being purchased for the Sri Lankan navy, which is also upgrading its current fleet of Israeli-built Dvora class gun boats, the state-run Sunday Observer newspaper said.

"Some of the navy's fast attack craft are equipped with computer guided weapons systems," the Observer said. "This includes video-aided automatic targeting capability. The navy now plans to provide such computerised, accurate weapons systems for the whole fleet of Dvora craft."

Sri Lanka earlier last month decided to buy six Kfir ground attack aircraft from Israel to add to the air force's fleet of five Kfir jets.

The privately run Sunday island newspaper said the military was obtaining "two powerful weapons systems" to boost its fire power against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Tiger rebels mounted a major offensive aimed at taking the northern peninsula of Jaffna in April, but last week the government announced it had been able to stop the rebel's "rolling onslaught".

Military sources said the army had introduced multi-barrel rocket launchers for the first time in their fight against the LTTE.

The government last month said it was planning to spend an additional 175 million dollars to buy new weapons to resist the rebel offensive in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

Eight killed in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, June 4: At least eight people including five soldiers have been killed in gunbattles in India's restive state of Jammu and Kashmir since Saturday afternoon, a defence official said, reports Reuters.

Four soldiers were also injured in the two separate gunbattles in Poonch district, 256 km (160 miles) to the north of Jammu, the official told Reuters on Sunday.

"The encounters took place on late Saturday afternoon and lasted for several hours," he added.

Three separatists including a leader of the Hizb-ul-Mujahadeen group, Abu Jaffer, were killed in the encounters, the official said. The militant group is fighting for Kashmir's merger with neighbouring Pakistan.

India, which controls 45 per cent of the disputed Kashmir region, accuses Pakistan of arming and training Kashmiri separatists and sending in foreign Islamic mercenaries from Afghanistan and elsewhere, a charge Islamabad denies.

More than 30,000 people have been killed in separatist violence in the Himalayan region since 1990.

Putin, Clinton try to bridge missile dispute

MOSCOW, June 4: Bill Clinton began talks with Vladimir Putin today, as the US and Russian leaders sought to bridge a deep divide over plans by Washington for a nuclear missile shield that are furiously opposed by Moscow, reports AFP.

The meeting got underway at around 1:15 p.m. (1515 BST) in the glittering surroundings of the Kremlin, in the first summit between the two presidents, the Interfax news agency said.

The discussions were joined by US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, Washington's pointman on Russian affairs, and Putin's chief foreign policy aide, Sergei Prikhodko.

Other top Russian and US government officials were to participate in the meeting later.

Despite low expectations for the summit, the two presidents will sign a handful of accords, notably on the disposal of 34 tonnes each of weapons-grade plutonium and the creation of a joint missile launch early warning control centre.

Clinton spent most of the morning huddled with the US delegation at his hotel, devoting his time to preparing for the talks before taking a short tour of central Moscow including the Christ the Saviour cathedral.

Saturday evening, the two leaders held a first round of discussions during an informal dinner.

The summit has been overshadowed by a bitter dispute over US plans for a national missile defence (NMD) system which Washington insists it needs to protect the United States from "rogue states" such as Iraq and North Korea.

Clinton is set to decide this summer on whether to build a limited 60 billion dollar (63 billion euro) missile defence shield in breach of the landmark 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), the cornerstone of arms control accords.

Fearing NMD will threaten its own nuclear deterrent and spark a new arms race Russia can ill afford, Moscow has privately linked ABM revision to deep cuts in nuclear arsenals.

But with US presidential



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) shakes hands with his US counterpart Bill Clinton during their meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow on Saturday. — AFP photo

elections looming this November, Clinton has declined to override the Pentagon's objections, heightening Russian fears that Washington will build the system regardless of Moscow's security concerns.

On Friday Putin, who has vowed to tear up all arms control deals if that happens, mooted a vague plan for a joint nuclear defence shield.

But White House aides travelling with the US president said Putin's proposal had already been put forward in essence by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and only covered defence against tactical nuclear missiles.

The offer was "not a substitute for a national missile defence," said one US official.

Clinton is expected to tell former KGB spy Putin that Washington wants to forge closer ties, help Russia build a stronger democracy and will keep the door open on NATO membership.

But he will also urge a political solution to Moscow's 10-month crackdown in breakaway Chechnya and raise concerns over press freedom in the wake of an armed police raid on Russia's leading private media group, Media-MOST.

After a joint press conference, Clinton will field questions on Echo Moscow radio, owned by Media-MOST. US officials deny any significance in the choice.

Clinton began his three-day summit with Putin on Saturday with an informal soiree in the Russian president's private Kremlin apartments, that wound up with a jazz concert.

Russia's legendary Oleg Lundstrem jazz orchestra provided the music, band leader Lundstrem offering to jam with the saxophone-playing US president. The show's presenter, Aleksei Batatchev, said Clinton declined the offer because of "the late hour."

UN peacekeepers strengthen positions in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, June 4: UN peacekeepers consolidated their positions in Sierra Leone on Saturday after retaking a key crossroads in their first advance against rebels since civil war resumed last month, reports Reuters.

UN officials said Indian troops had dug in defensively at Rogberti, 87 km (54 miles) from Freetown, which they captured on Friday after using heavy machineguns against rebels firing antitank grenades.

"The rebels were present when we went through and there was an exchange of fire, which indicates they are still in the area," David Wimhurst, UNAMSIL's spokesman in

Sierra Leone, told Reuters.

The peacekeepers have promised a vigorous response to any attack on Rogberti, close to a position where four Zambian UN soldiers were killed trying to defend it when rebels defied a peace accord to advance a month ago.

The news from Rogberti was a morale boost not only for the crisis-hit UN mission, but for residents of the capital Freetown, afraid the departure of British troops this month would expose them to rebel atrocities.

"This is very encouraging news. This is what UNAMSIL is supposed to be doing, protecting us," said driver Abu Bundu.

In Monrovia, Liberian President Charles Taylor said on Saturday his country had promised to send troops to Sierra Leone as part of the peacekeeping force.

But he told reporters: "The situation in Sierra Leone calls for peace and a ceasefire... The quantity of troops deployed in Sierra Leone is not the issue. What is important is confidence."

Taylor was for long considered a key backer of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone and is a close friend of their captured leader Foday Sankoh.

BRIEFLY

World IPI congress in India:

After a gap of 35 years, India will host the world congress of the International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of editors and media executives devoted to the freedom of the press, in January next, PTI reports from New Delhi.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will inaugurate the three-day congress in New Delhi on January 27, which will also be addressed by the Dalai Lama and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. The last time India hosted the world congress of IPI was in 1966. This year's congress was held in April at Boston, USA, where US Vice-President Al Gore was among the speakers.

Plane crash kills 6 in France:

Six people died Saturday when their plane crashed in Thury-en-Vallée, in northern France, killing all aboard, police and emergency workers said, AFP reports from Beauvais, France.

The plane, a Piper PA-46, was traveling from the English channel island of Jersey to Allendorf in Germany, police said. The cause of the crash was not immediately known, although there was a violent storm in the area at the time. Experts were to examine the debris spread over the crash site.

Six killed in Bihar:

Six lower-caste Hindu labourers were killed and three others seriously wounded by unidentified gunmen in the lawless eastern Indian state of Bihar, a police official said Sunday, AFP reports from Patna.

"Six labourers were killed and three are seriously injured," said Bihar police chief K.K. Jacob. "The attackers opened (with) indiscriminate fire." The attack took place late Saturday at Rajubigha, some 140 km east of the provincial capital, he said.

Suspected rebels kidnap female doctor in Philippines

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, June 4: Suspected Muslim rebels have kidnapped a female doctor, apparently to treat guerrillas wounded in recent fierce fighting with government troops, officials said Sunday, reports AP.

The doctor, Epifania Asistre, was abducted by heavily armed men Saturday night from her clinic in Parang in southern Maguindanao province, army spokesman Capt. Noel Detoyato said. The area is near the headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Camp Abubakar.

Government troops have overrun more than a dozen MILF camps in the past month, and many rebels, including commanders, are believed to have been injured, Detoyato said.

"We believe they have abducted the doctor to treat wounded guerrillas," Detoyato said.

'No breakthrough in Pakistan HR situation'

NEW DELHI, June 4: Noted human rights activist of Pakistan Asma Jahangir has said there is no important breakthrough regarding human rights in the country and the honour killings continue unabated, reports PTI.

No, I do not think there is any change except oratory. And even amongst some measures that General Pervez Musharraf announced which were already there, he back-tracked, Asma was quoted by a newspaper in Pakistan as saying.

She said even in recent human rights report of Pakistan at least 1,000 incidents of honour killings were reported.

About the measures of Gen Musharraf, she said I really feel hesitant and I am concerned about the fact that the military government has made people think that there is no link between human rights and democratic developments.

On one hand they have actually destroyed an institution. So they are very sure on violating human rights. There is not a single measure that the general has taken to change the law. In fact it is just the same, Asma said.

Stating that human rights commission of Pakistan had to play a greater role in absence of a democratic institutions, Asma, who is also the special rapporteur of the UN, said so, when we talk about human rights and we have judiciary that has taken of loyalty to the army, where there is no parliament, where there is torture but not reported, where people are in arbitrary detention, there of course we have much more role today than we did even previously because at least state institutions were there to share the burden.

Vajpayee says Pakistan must stop cross-border terrorism to restart dialogue

SHIMLA, June 4: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday said the onus of resuming the stalled Indo-Pak talks was on Pakistan and it must stop cross-border terrorism to create a conducive atmosphere to restart the dialogue process, reports PTI.

Islamabad must stop cross-border terrorism and other hostilities to create a congenial atmosphere for resumption of the dialogue, he told a largely attended public meeting at Revlon, headquarters of the tribal districts of Lahul and Spiti.

Accusing Islamabad of reversing the process of friendship initiated by New Delhi, Vajpayee said India wanted peace with Pakistan and he had himself gone to Lahore with a message of peace and friendship but Pakistan betrayed us with the Kargil intrusion and indulged in indiscriminate killing for our soldiers.

He cautioned Pakistan against a repetition of Kargil-type misadventure and declared that India was strong enough to repulse any intrusion into its territory.

India could have crossed the Line of Control but it believed in maintaining the sanctity of LOC and exercised utmost restraint while evicting Pakistani intruders from Kargil, the Prime Minister said.

189 nations meet today on women's issues

UNITED NATIONS, June 4: Five years ago, the biggest global gathering of women in history helped spur 189 countries to adopt an ambitious plan to achieve equality of the sexes. Still very far from that goal, the same nations meet Monday to try to agree on an accelerated road map toward equality for women, reports AP.

But the Vatican and a group of Islamic countries are objecting to the same proposals they did in Beijing in 1995 — including legal and reproductive rights for women, adolescent sex education and the definition of the family — as well as some new ones.

"It's becoming very, very clear that there are a few countries that are trying to stand in the way of progress," said Linda Tarr-Whelan, the US ambassador to the Commission on the Status of Women.

Tarr-Whelan pointed to Algeria, Sudan, Libya, Iran and to a lesser extent the Vatican, saying there has been a "backlash" against the progress that has been made since Beijing.

"These are folks who like it the way they have it and are trying to slow the whole process down," she said.

The final document outlining initiatives to spur implementation of the 150-page Beijing platform was supposed to have been completed this past week. But the ideological divide over a range of issues was likely to keep negotiators working through much of the five-day conference to try to reach consensus before it ends Friday.

At the same time, delegates are celebrating the first successes after Beijing.

The Beijing platform runs the gamut from promoting women's inheritance rights to condemning rape in wartime and alleviating the increasing poverty of women. For the first time, a UN document declared that women have the right to decide freely all matters related to their sexuality and childbearing.



A plainclothes policeman stands guard on the Tiananmen rostrum overlooking Tiananmen Square in Beijing yesterday. Chinese authorities have blocked activists from commemorating the anniversary of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen massacre, detaining at least nine people for marking the event. — AFP photo

Crackdown in China marks Tiananmen anniversary

BEIJING, June 4: Chinese authorities arrested at least nine activists in a crackdown on the commemoration of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen massacre, a human rights group and witnesses said today, reports AFP.

But 50 dissidents in four cities began a 24-hour hunger strike to remember the victims and to demand the government re-evaluate the incident, which it calls a "counter-revolutionary rebellion," a Hong Kong human rights group said.

Eleven years after the bloody suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Chinese leadership refuses to allow its citizens to mark an event seen as one of the most tragic chapters in modern Chinese history.

Police arrested three Christian activists in Beijing who had planned to gather to commemorate the victims, the Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy said.

A group of ten dissidents in the northern city of Xian were prevented from holding a similar gathering Saturday night as police stood guard outside their homes, the centre said. One of them has been detained.

Three other activists, one from Beijing and two from the northeastern province of Liaoning, were detained for writing a letter to Chinese authorities requesting their re-examine the incident.

In addition, an AFP reporter saw two young men taken into custody at the politically-sensitive campus of Beijing University Saturday night when they lit candles to remember the victims.

Plainclothes campus security officials rushed over and blew out the candles seconds after the men's act on the steps of the school auditorium.

Police snatched away the candles and took the students to the campus security office for questioning.

A crowd of about 30 people had gathered near the auditorium, responding to a message on the campus bulletin board calling students to meet there at 8 p.m. to mark the anniversary.

The crowd watched anxiously as the two men were led away. Many people followed them to the security office, but were told to leave. It was not clear whether the detained men were students.

Despite the heavy surveillance, dissidents and activists refused to let the anniversary go unnoticed.

Fifty dissidents, many of whom participated in the 1989 demonstrations and had served prison sentences, went on a hunger strike beginning at midnight.

Chen Wei, 31, said he has been refusing food every anniversary since 1992, because he could not forget what happened to his fellow demonstrators.

Zheng Baohe, one of the Xian dissidents who tried to gather Saturday night, was placed under house arrest.

Draft accord reached to end Fiji crisis: Coup leader

SUVA, June 4: A draft accord has been reached to end Fiji's political crisis, the rebel leader holding 31 politicians hostage since May 19 said today, reports Reuters.

Nationalist George Speight spent nine hours at the headquarters of Fiji's military rulers today, trying to thrash out a deal to free the hostages and return the country to civilian rule.

"I don't want to put any specific timeframes on (the accord) except to say that we are well on the way now given the fact that all the initial barriers of concern between the parties have been broken down," Speight told reporters.

Speight, who took hostage Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chudhry and most of his government,

told reporters the talks would resume on Monday morning.

The military rulers, who took power on May 29 when President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara stepped aside, said earlier they saw one sticking point remaining — when the military should return the South Pacific island nation to civilian control.

Speight said, at the completion of the day's talks, that he now saw a role for non-indigenous Fijians in running the country.

However, he maintained his policy of having only indigenous Fijians in the planned interim government, which will draft a new constitution and prepare the country for elections.

The talks were scheduled to resume on Monday at 9:00 a.m. both parties said.

The military took power after the looting of central Suva on the first day of the coup and the shooting dead of a policeman and the ransacking of Fiji TV on May 28.

Both sides have agreed that the chief would appoint the president, a role they had in the 1997 multi-racial constitution that the military scrapped last week in a concession to Speight.

Speight has proposed his own chief — Ratu Jope Seniloli — as president and wants his supporters to play an important role in the interim government that would write a new constitution and call elections.

The military has expressed reluctance to have any of Speight's group in government.

Bomb explodes outside Manila's int'l airport

MANILA, June 4: Officials tightened security further at Manila's international airport after a bomb exploded early Sunday outside the arrival area, badly damaging a public toilet but causing no injuries, reports AP.

The explosion, the fifth in the capital area in recent weeks, dug a crater in the sidewalk outside the women's toilet and ripped apart its walls.

"Admittedly, it was a strong bomb," said airport General Manager Col. Antonio Gana.

The explosion occurred in an area some distance from the main terminal where passengers are met by relatives or wait for taxis. The homemade bomb was apparently dropped from a

car passing along a road on an upper level, Gana said.

There were no signs of shrapnel, indicating that the bomb was not designed to kill or injure large numbers of people, he said.

Investigators also found no trigger mechanism or electrical wiring, he said.

Departing passengers waited in long lines to be inspected Sunday as security at the airport was further tightened.

Police distributed a sketch of a male suspect estimated to be between age 24 and 29.

Two women in the area wearing Muslim clothes were interrogated for several hours but explained they were waiting for a passenger arriving from the Middle East, police said.



Indonesian policemen collect flags of the Aceh separatist movement after they removed them from private flagpoles at residential homes in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh, on the third day of a three-month truce between the government and rebels in Aceh yesterday. Separatism in oil and gas-rich Aceh, a staunchly Muslim province of 4.6 million people on the northern tip of Sumatra island, has been fuelled by Jakarta's failure to ensure the province benefits from its resources and by years of harsh military repression aimed at wiping out rebellion. — AFP photo

'Iran masterminded Lockerbie bombing'

WASHINGTON, June 4: An Iranian defector says he has evidence that Iran planned and financed the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103, which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people, reports AP.

The defector, who says he is Ahmad Behbahani, coordinator of Iran's terrorism operations for a decade or more, told the CBS News TV programme "60 Minutes" that he has documents to prove his claims, during an interview scheduled to air in the United States on Sunday.

The CIA is debriefing Behbahani, now in protective custody in Turkey, according to CBS.