

Anwar criticises Mahathir for not appearing in court

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, June 7: Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim on Wednesday lashed out at Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for allegedly hiding behind court protection, as defense lawyers made a final bid to force the 74-year-old leader to testify in Anwar's sodomy trial, reports AP.

"Mahathir is bold enough to slander and include himself in a conspiracy against me but he's afraid to face me and give evidence in court," Anwar said in a handwritten statement to reporters. "Once again, it's clear that Dr Mahathir is taking cover behind the court."

In April, High Court Judge Arifin Jaka, who's currently presiding over the sodomy trial, ended a six-month effort by defense lawyers to subpoena Mahathir.

Arifin ruled that there was no evidence to support defense allegations that Mahathir masterminded a conspiracy to destroy Anwar's career. The Court of Appeals upheld the ruling earlier this week.

On Wednesday, Anwar said it was "regrettable" that the appellate court had issued its ruling without giving any reasons why Mahathir should be exempted from being summoned.

Suharto turns 79

JAKARTA, June 7: Once all powerful, but now a prisoner in his own home, Indonesia's ex-President Suharto turns 79 on Thursday, a sick and disgraced man desperately trying to fend off allegations of massive corruption, reports AP.

Suharto, who ruled with an iron fist for 32 years until riots forced him from office in 1998, has little to celebrate on his birthday.

Under house arrest for more than a week, Suharto Tuesday lost a 27 billion dollar defamation case he launched against US-based Time magazine for alleging that he amassed a fortune as president.

Moreover, family members and defense lawyers claim a series of strokes have left him weak and sometimes incoherent with dangerously high blood pressure and mental blackouts.

Through his attorneys, the old autocrat continually denies any wrongdoing and has challenged Indonesia's new reform-minded government to find concrete evidence against him.

Even so, for months he refused to cooperate with a state graft investigation on the grounds of ill health.

Fighting intensifies in Solomon Islands

100 killed, rebels claim

WELLINGTON, June 7: Fighting between rebel factions on the Solomon Islands intensified Wednesday, with one group using a stolen police gunboat to attack rivals gathered on a beach, official said, reports AP.

A rebel spokesman, Andrew Nori, said his side killed 100 armed foes, according to information he got from colleagues whom he said fired a machine gun from the gunboat directly into a crowd of people, as well as reports from others whom he said were about 100 metres (60 feet) away on the ground watching.

There was no immediate way to confirm Nori's claims of fatalities. A Solomon Islands government spokesman and New Zealand officials said there had been a gunboat attack in the morning, but they had no information about any deaths.

"It's true there was a shooting incident, and there might well have been casualties," said the Solomon Islands spokesman, Alfred Maesula.

Nori, who speaks for migrants from the nearby island of Malaita who are trying to remain on the main island of Guadalcanal despite an assault from indigenous rebels, said there had been about 300 to 400 armed men on the beach when the gunboat opened fire. He said about 100 of them went down.

"They were all militants," Nori told The Associated Press by telephone. "There were no civilians. They were all carrying weapons. They were not holding a picnic."

Information on the crisis has been difficult to verify because flights into the Solomon Islands have been cancelled since Monday and phone ser-

vices have been sporadic.

Earlier Wednesday, rebels who had seized the Solomon Islands prime minister at gunpoint on Monday dropped their demands that he resign.

The political fate of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu will be determined in a parliamentary session on June 15, where he will face a vote of no confidence, according to a joint statement signed and released by the government and Nori.

Ulufa'alu will no longer be followed by armed rebel guards, with normal police providing his security and he "is at liberty to move out of and into his residence and offices at will," the joint statement said. The deal will put the Solomon Islands closer to being "back into constitutional rule," New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff said.

"We already have permission from the United States to test the PAC-2 next year. We only have to sort out the details," said a military spokesman who spoke on customary anonymity.

He did not say when the United States had given its permission.

Taiwan's military has acquired 200 PAC-2 missiles, upgraded versions of the Patriots used by US forces during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Taiwan has test fired the missiles in the United States, but the military wants to observe how they work in Taiwan's subtropical climate.

Taiwan obtains US permission to test Patriot missiles

TAIPEI, June 7: Taiwan has obtained permission from the United States to test the US-built Patriot missiles in the island, the first time the missiles will be tested outside the United States, defense officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

The Patriots, designed to intercept incoming missiles, are an important part of Taiwan's defense against China's Dongfeng-31 — a nuclear-capable missile that can reach as far as the western United States.

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Indonesian student-protesters join forces to break down the gate of the attorney general's office in Jakarta during an anti-Suharto demonstration yesterday. Some 200 protesters rallied to demand that former president Suharto and his cronies be brought to trial for alleged corruption during his 32-year rule.

— AFP photo

US to work with Pakistan to fight terrorism

WASHINGTON, June 7: The United States pledged Tuesday to maintain a vigorous security dialogue with Pakistan after the Islamabad government rejected a report which branded the country a "safe haven" for terrorists, reports AFP.

The Congress-appointed National Commission on Terrorism accused Pakistan Monday of offering "transit and moral, political and diplomatic support to several groups engaged in terrorism."

State Department spokesman Philip Reeker told reporters here that the US was committed to working with Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups.

"I think we continue to have a vigorous discussion with Pakistan, both in Islamabad, through our embassy there and visits by high-level officials," he said.

"Our goal is to solve the terrorism problem in all of its aspects around the world in countries where we need to work to improve the situation regarding terrorism," he said, adding that talks had been going on with Pakistan on the issue for "many, many years."

Pakistan's Information Minister Javed Jabbar issued an immediate reposte to the report earlier Tuesday, telling

AFP in Islamabad that his government "categorically and totally" rejected its findings.

Jabbar, a key advisor to Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, said the accusations reflected inadequate study of the situation in Pakistan.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on Sunday said Washington was not considering sanctions against Pakistan.

Nations which fall into the "not cooperating fully" category face a US embargo on arms sales.

Despite its criticism, the commission, which was set up two years ago after bombings at US embassies in Africa, praised Pakistan for arresting and extraditing Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who masterminded the World Trade Centre bombing in New York in 1993.

Islamabad's cooperation was also "vital" in heading off terrorist attacks planned last year for the turn of the millennium, the report said.

The heavy rain, accompanied by occasional hailstorms, caused flooding and landslides in the province's Gulin and Xuyong counties, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Gulin county suffered the worst losses, with 26 people killed and six reported still missing.

On May 31, flooding killed 36 people and left thousands homeless, destroying 1,345 houses, Xinhua said.

NATO rejects AI charges on Kosovo

BRUSSELS, June 7: NATO rejected Tuesday as "baseless and ill-founded" allegations by Amnesty International that it violated the rules of war in the Kosovo conflict last year, reports AFP.

In a statement, it recalled UN war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte's remarks to the UN Security Council last week that she saw no basis for investigating NATO for its 78-day air war that forced Serbia out of Kosovo.

The allegations made in the Amnesty International report that NATO violated the laws of war in its conduct of the Kosovo air campaign last year are baseless and ill-founded," NATO secretary general George Robertson said.

"NATO scrupulously adhered to international law, including the law of war, throughout the conflict and made every effort to minimise civilian casualties," Lord Robertson added in a press statement.

He acknowledged that "in a few cases mistakes were made ... leading to civilian deaths or injuries." But he added: "Such incidents must be weighed against the atrocities that NATO's action stopped."

There was no immediate reaction from the martial law administration to the news which was widely expected.

On May 19, bankrupt businessman George Speight and a small military squad seized parliament and took 31 hostages, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, Fiji's first ethnic Indian leader, in an attempted coup.

Army commander Voreqe Bainimarama declared martial law 10 days later.

A delegation from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group -- which monitors human rights and democracy in the 54-member body -- will arrive here over the weekend.

It will include Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff who are due to fly Friday to Honiara in the Solomon Islands where another coup is underway.

Speight said he welcomed the delegation.

"My door is open to anybody from overseas," he said, adding he would explain why Fijians were unhappy in their own land.

But Speight ruled out any attempt by the Commonwealth to mediate in the crisis.

"This is a local issue that only Fijians can resolve. I do not recognise their (Commonwealth ministers) right to mediate," he was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile outside of Suva, in remote settlements along the Rewa River, ethnic Indians were unhappy in their own land.

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Nightly, houses are being burnt to the ground by roving gangs, shops are being looted and communities of Fiji-Indians are hiding in the darkness hoping they will not be found.

Israel-Palestinian talks to resume in US next week

JERUSALEM, June 7: Israeli-Palestinian peace talks will resume in the United States next week ahead of a summit between President Bill Clinton and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Tuesday, reports AP.

"I am very pleased that the Chairman (Arafat) is going to be able to be in Washington along with the negotiators," Albright told reporters after meeting Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah on the second day of a swing through the Middle East to advance efforts to clinch a peace deal by a mid-September deadline.

Senior Israeli and Palestinian negotiators accompanied by American mediators are expected Monday to begin about a week of talks aimed at forging an "end of conflict framework agreement" in an as-yet undecided location in the Washington area, a senior US official said.

Clinton, who has made peace in the Middle East a long-standing goal of his presidency, is keen to clinch a deal before his second and last term expires in seven months.

"We are at a moment of truth when it is necessary for us all to roll up our sleeves and work," Albright said after meeting Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, whom she saw immediately after Arafat.

Arafat is to meet Clinton at the White House on June 14.

"We are looking for every possible way to give these negotiations a push," the official told reporters after Albright met Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak for the second time in 24 hours to brief him on her talks with Arafat.

The official stressed however that the time was not yet ripe for a three-way summit between

Arafat, Barak and Clinton. "There's too much to do, we are not there yet," he said.

He noted that negotiators have yet to even begin tackling the future of Jerusalem, the most emotive issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which both sides claim as their capital.

Nevertheless, both remain intent on meeting on September 13 deadline for reaching a comprehensive deal, he said.

Albright said the Clinton-Arafat summit and the resumption of direct negotiations were a sign the peace process is "moving forward," but repeated calls for the two sides to act quickly.

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The study of 116,309 men and women in a San Francisco-area Kaiser health maintenance program was published in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

The participants were ages 30 to 89 and had not been diagnosed with heart disease when they were given chest X-rays during a checkup between 1964 and 1973. Their medical records were obtained for the ensuing years.

Those whose X-rays showed calcium deposits ran a 25 per cent higher risk of developing heart disease.

Women with the deposits faced a 50 per cent higher risk of having blood clot-related strokes. Among men, there was no increased stroke risk.

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