

# The World

## Musharraf to attend ECO summit in Iran

ISLAMABAD, June 8: Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf will leave for Iran on Friday to attend a summit of the 10-nation Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), a foreign office statement said, reports AFP.

The two-day summit, opening on Saturday, will discuss proposals for the expansion of trade and communications among its member states.

The ECO membership comprises Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

Afghanistan is also a member, but most ECO states recognise former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was ousted from Kabul by the Taliban militia in 1996.

The foreign office statement said the total of intra-regional trade at present, amounting to 4.5 billion dollars, was a "small fraction" of the global exports of the ECO countries.

"The potential for increase in commercial and economic interaction among ECO countries is considerable," it added.

In a bid to increase intra-ECO trade, a ministerial meeting of the organisation held in Islamabad in April finalised a transit-trade framework agreement.

Musharraf will leave Iran for a two-day visit to Oman on Sunday, the statement said, adding that he would hold talks with Sultan Qaboos on bilateral relations and other matters of mutual interest.

During his stay Pakistan and Oman will also sign a maritime boundary agreement, it said.

Pakistan and Oman have traditionally enjoyed "close and fraternal relations rooted in shared religious, cultural and historical affinities," the statement noted.

## Speight's supporters beat up police officer

SUVA, Fiji, June 8: In another sign of rising tension among Fijian coup leader George Speight's supporters, a police officer was savagely beaten Thursday and briefly detained at parliament where gunmen are holding 31 hostages, reports AP.

While many of the 300 people still camped inside the parliamentary compound three weeks after six gunmen stormed it and took Fiji's government hostage are calm and peaceful, a group of about 40 young men remain on a knife edge and apparently liable to explode into violence at the least provocation.

The victim of Thursday's beating, an ethnic Fijian policeman, visited parliament to pick up a taxi stolen last week, Speight said.

For unknown reasons, the officer was attacked by dozens of Speight's supporters who kicked and punched him even as he lay on the ground. After the beating, rebels hosed the victim's blood off the road where he fell.

The officer was then detained for about an hour until an unarmed army major negotiated his release with rebels. A police spokesman could not be reached for comment.

A former Fijian lawmaker who visited the hostages Thursday told the country's TV network that they were tired and homesick but were being well looked after.

"They were very tired," George Shiu Rau said. "They were very well — very well kept, very well fed."

The incident came the day after Speight warned the military of serious reprisals if soldiers shoot at his gunmen.

## Anti-US protest 21 leftist students arrested in Seoul

SEOUL, June 8: Police on Thursday arrested 21 leftist students who staged an illegal anti-American street demonstration in Seoul, reports AP.

Chanting "Yankee go home," the students tried to march to the US Embassy in central Seoul. They were stopped by police about 50 meters (yards) from the embassy compound.

South Korean law bans protest rallies or demonstrations within 100 meters (yards) from foreign diplomatic missions.

The students demanded the withdrawal of 37,000 American troops stationed in South Korea under a defense treaty.

Anti-US protests have increased since May when a US Air Force fighter jet dropped six bombs on the Koon-Ni Range near the west coast village of Mae Hyang, 50 miles southwest of Seoul.

Villagers claimed that six people were slightly injured and walls were cracked and windows shattered by the impact. They demanded relocation of the range which has been a constant source of friction.

But last week, the US and South Korean militaries said the impact from the bombing was limited and did not cause any injuries or property damage and reconfirmed their plans to maintain the range.

Leftists seized on the case to mount anti-US protests. More than 100 students were detained last month for trying to march to the US Embassy and 22 of them were arrested, including three who jumped over the embassy wall.

## Lankan police detain 15 after suicide bombing

COLOMBO, June 8: Police detained 15 men today as suspects in a suicide bombing that killed a Cabinet minister and 20 others in a suburb of the capital.

Sri Lanka's president urged people to refrain from retaliatory attacks on the Tamil minority, reports AP.

The government blamed Wednesday's bombing on separatist rebels fighting for a homeland for the Tamil minority, and mobs in the neighbourhood threw stones at Tamil-owned shops in revenge.

The 15 suspects were taken at dawn from apartments and houses near the site of the bombing and were being interrogated, said a police official at the local station, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Their anxious relatives hovered outside the station in the Ratmalana industrial area.

A nighttime curfew was imposed after mobs attacked Tamil shops in the district, 15 kilometres from the centre of Colombo. There were no reports of injuries.

About half of the 60 people wounded in Wednesday's bombing were still being treated Thursday, said Dr. W.G. Guanawadene, the director of Kalubowila Hospital. The slain Cabinet minister's widow, Shyama, remained in critical condition with internal injuries, he said.

The police official at the local station said the bomber was a man, although in the past women have cut their hair and posed as men in suicide bombings.

The government banned public officials from providing information to the press in February.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga appealed for calm Thursday, saying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were trying to "inflame communal passions by provoking the people."

"I appeal to all Sri Lankans to consider this earnestly and act with patience to maintain peace at this hour," Kumaratunga said.

"We want peace back in the region. To achieve that the state governments must adopt a sincere approach towards finding out a peaceful solution to the region's insurgency problem," Suren Baruah, a relative of a separatist militant leader from Assam, said.

The seven regional governments have vowed to jointly combat militancy and mount pressure on New Delhi to aid peace talks with the rebels.

The protesters marched through the streets of major towns in the seven troubled states, holding anti-militancy posters and banners, shouting peace slogans and singing patriotic songs.

"All the chief ministers of the region decided last month during a meeting to hold a peace march through the region on June 8," E.R. Mawlong, chief minister of Meghalaya state, said.

"The aim is to send a message to the insurgents that the people in general do not approve any form of violence and want peace."

More than 50,000 people have died in India's northeast since the country's independence in 1947, due to a range of separatist campaigns for independent homelands waged by different ethnic peoples and tribes.

The aim of the march is to mobilise public opinion against all forms of militant violence and to help build an atmosphere where the rebels can come back and join the mainstream," Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, chief minister of Assam, the most prominent of the region's states, told AFP.

The march was held simultaneously in all the region's provinces.

The participants, including children, pledged to fight terrorism and restore peace in the state.

Indian boy scouts display placards during a peace march in the Assamese capital Guwahati yesterday. At least one million people across India's seven northeastern states took to the streets to protest against lingering separatist violence in the region.

— AFP photo

## Australia evacuates foreigners from Solomon Islands

WELLINGTON, June 8: Fearful that rebel combat in the Solomon Islands could intensify, the Australian navy sent a ship to Guadalcanal on Thursday and began evacuating hundreds of nervous foreigners, officials said, reports AP.

Some 200 people had boarded the Australian landing ship by early evening, with another 200 ready to go, said New Zealand High Commissioner Nick Hurley in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands.

Australian Defence Minister John Moore said there are 700 Australians in the Solomon Islands but the HMAS Tobruk could take up to 800 people if that many wanted to flee the further deterioration of the security situation in and around Honiara.

Goff, who has been closely watching the situation, said it was unclear whether a rebel negotiator, lawyer Andrew Nori, had reneged on the deal signed a day earlier, or whether rebel leaders had lost control of their gunmen.

Nori's rebels used a stolen police gunboat on Wednesday to attack native Guadalcanal militants, from a group called the Isatabu Freedom Movement, on beaches near the capital's airport, officials have said.

The broadcaster's Web site

then escalated a conflict that has gone on for 18 months.

The heaviest fighting this week has been near the international airport east of Honiara, where groups of rebel forces have exchanged gunfire and one side used a stolen police gunboat on Wednesday to attack its enemies on the shore.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff said that despite an agreement on Wednesday to resolve the Solomon Islands government crisis, the nation's prime minister, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, was under house arrest Thursday.

Goff said Thursday night he had been incorrect earlier in the day when he said another top official, Governor-General Sir John Lati, was also under house arrest.

Goff said he and other ministers from Commonwealth countries hoped to visit the Solomon Islands soon for a firsthand look at the situation, although the airport remains closed.

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## BRIEFLY

**Gandhi's grandson new envoy to Lanka:** India yesterday named a grandson of its independence hero, Mahatma Gandhi, as its new envoy to Sri Lanka and said the emissary was experienced with the situation in the war-torn region, reports from New Delhi.

The appointment of Gopal Krishna Gandhi as Indian High Commissioner in Colombo is the first political appointment to such a post in recent years, foreign ministry spokesman RS Jassal here said.

Gandhi, who would replace India's chief diplomat Shiv Shankar Menon shortly in Colombo, served as an assistant high commissioner in the Indian consulate in Sri Lanka's central Kandy district in 1978-82.

**Ex-Serb commander killed:** Former Bosnian Serb paramilitary commander Ljubisa Savic "Mauzer" was shot dead late on Wednesday in the eastern town of Bijeljina, Bosnian radio reported Thursday. Reuters reports from Sarajevo.

Savic, commander of the Panthers paramilitary unit in the 1992-95 Bosnian war, was in his car when shots were fired from another vehicle at around 9 PM local time (0100 BST), the radio quoted local police as saying. Savic was one of the founders in 1990 of the hardline Serb Democratic Party (SDS) of former Bosnian Serb leader and indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic.

## 17 Russian troops killed in Chechen suicide attack

MOSCOW, June 8: At least 17 Russian soldiers were killed Wednesday when two women drove a truck packed with high explosives into an army base in Chechnya, in the first Chechen suicide bomb attack, a rebel spokesman said, reports AFP.

The terrorist strike, on a Russian base in Alkhan-Yurt west of Grozny, would mark a deadly switch in rebel tactics after more than nine months of fighting in the breakaway republic.

"Around 2:00 pm two women, including the cousin of warlord Arbi Barayev, Khala Barayeva, smashed a lorry packed with TNT into the Russian base in Alkhan-Yurt, senior rebel spokesman Movladi Udgov said.

The two women were killed as well as at least 17 Russian soldiers, said Udgov, who was speaking by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"I am going to my death, in

## World leaders mourn Obuchi

TOKYO, June 8: World dignitaries joined an emotion-laden service today for former Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi, but also took time to grapple over an historic Korean summit next week, reports AFP.

Six thousand people, including US President Bill Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, packed a Tokyo hall for the emotional farewell to Obuchi, who died May 14 at the age of 62.

The former Japanese leader was felled by a stroke while still in office and slipped into a coma for six weeks before his death.

"Our country's future is still uncertain," said Mori, who faces elections on June 25.

"We have lost you but we will join forces and remember what you told the people; constructive optimism with a solid will, in other words ... thinking of a glass as being half full, not half empty."

"You were a good husband and father of three as you thought much of your family," Mori said of his friend and predecessor.

Obuchi's 59-year-old widow Chizuko wept.

She earlier accompanied her 29-year-old son Go as he carried the former prime minister's ashes into the packed Nippon Budokan sports hall, surrounded by a 600-strong honour guard and guarded by 10,000 police.

Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako also attended.

But on the sidelines of the service, the diplomatic agenda was heavy, with the June 12-14 summit between North and South Korea.

During a reception for world leaders, Howard and Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid were to try to mend relations, frayed when Australia led a multinational peace force to East Timor.

South Korea vying for attention with coups on two Pacific islands.

In half-hour talks with Mori, the US president said the Korean summit was extremely important, according to a Japanese foreign ministry official who was present at the meeting.

North Korea's attempts to normalise relations with South Korea and other countries were important, Clinton was quoted as saying by the official, who spoke in Japanese.

Japan's prime minister said the Korean summit was also important for Japan and urged close contact between Tokyo, Seoul and Washington in aligning North Korea policy.

Mori also met with the South Korean leader.

The Japanese prime minister welcomed the heightened diplomatic profile taken by North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il, who made a secret May 29-31 visit to Beijing ahead of the summit.

Mori was to meet after the service with members of the South Pacific Forum, which groups South Pacific island nations along with Australia and New Zealand.

Australia's Prime Minister John Howard, besides joining the South Pacific Forum talks, planned to meet Indonesia's leader for their first summit since the East Timor crisis.

During a reception for world leaders, Howard and Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid were to try to mend relations, frayed when Australia led a multinational peace force to East Timor.

— AFP photo

Go Obuchi (C), holding an urn containing his father's ashes, and Obuchi's widow Chizuko (L) follow Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (bottom R) as they leave the funeral of former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in Tokyo yesterday. Obuchi died on May 14 after suffering a massive stroke.

— AFP photo

China to hold non-proliferation talks in July

BEIJING, June 8: China confirmed Thursday it would hold weapons non-proliferation talks with the United States in July, formally ending a ban imposed after US planes bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade last year, reports AFP.

And a Western diplomatic source told AFP that US Defense Secretary William Cohen was expected in Beijing next month for his first visit since the May 7, 1999 incident during NATO's bombing campaign in Serbia.

The embassy bombing killed three Chinese citizens, injured 20 others and deeply soured Sino-US relations.

Zhang Qiyue, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed a statement by a senior US State Department official this week that the disarmament talks would be held next month.

However, Zhang said the specific timing and agenda were still under discussion.

I think for China and the United States there have been exchange of views (and) I think to conduct exchange of views on this particular issue is useful," she told a regular press briefing.

China suspended talks over security, human rights and bilateral trade after the bombing.

## Burglary at Madonna's home

LONDON, June 8: Pop star Madonna's luxury home in London was burgled while she was celebrating the premier of her new film, the Sun newspaper said today, reports Reuters.

Pregnant Madonna, who had dinner with her boyfriend British film director Guy Ritchie and actor Rupert Everett after the showing of "The Next Best Thing," returned home in the early hours of Wednesday to find police at her door step.

But the mass-circulation Sun said nothing had been stolen.

Officers told the 41-year-old American superstar that thieves had forced their way through the front gate of her two million pound (\$3 million) mansion, but failed to gain entry to the house.

The thieves, however, managed to break into her gardener's quarters where they stole a bag with a credit card.

A bag was stolen from the premises which contained a credit card, wallet and some keys," police told the Sun.

Last month Ritchie, 31, was arrested on suspicion of assaulting a man outside Madonna's home in Kensington.

## Familiar tensions rise at global women's meeting