

Musharraf warns of enemy plot to destabilise country

Pak FM in US to discuss nuclear security

ISLAMABAD, June 16 : Military ruler General Pervez Musharraf today warned that enemies of Pakistan were trying to destabilise the country by fanning sectarianism that has claimed hundreds of lives in the past few years, reports AFP.

"Pakistan is passing through a critical stage of its history and is a victim of sectarianism and hatred," Musharraf told a gathering of Islamic scholars here to mark the birthday of Prophet Mohammad (SM).

"We should understand the designs of the enemy and put aside our personal differences to forge national unity," he said.

Some 300 people have died in sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shiites in the past three years, mostly in the populous Punjab province over differences on religious rites.

The violence between the majority Sunni and minority Shiite communities has claimed about a dozen lives since general Musharraf took power in a military coup in October.

The killing of top Sunni scholar Maulana Yusuf Ludhianvi in Karachi last month provoked countrywide condemnation.

Officials accuse agents from rival neighbour India of involvement in the unrest.

Musharraf said anti-Pakistan elements were exploiting the situation to destabilise the country.

Musharraf, a moderate Muslim who calls for tolerance, urged people to follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and respect the rights of others.

"We should seek guidance from the life and teachings of

the last of all prophets," he said.

Another AFP report says: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar arrived Wednesday in Washington for the most in-depth discussions on nuclear security with the United States since the military seized power in Islamabad last year.

Sattar is due to meet Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and other senior members of administration during his two-day visit.

The White House has described South Asia as the "most dangerous place in the world" after India and then its bitter regional rival Pakistan raised the stakes in their long conflict by conducting rival nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

President Bill Clinton raised nuclear security and other issues in a lightening visit to Pakistan during his South Asia tour earlier this year.

responsibility and restraint" now that it was a declared nuclear power.

Issues on the table include the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which Pakistan and India have so far refused to sign, as well as a proposed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty and a multilateral moratorium on the production of fissile material.

Pakistan and the United States have held eight rounds of a security dialogue, but this week's consultations will be the first since October's coup in Pakistan led by General Pervez Musharraf, who overthrew the government of then premier Nawaz Sharif.

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Pakistani Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf (R) talks with visiting Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (C) during the welcome ceremony at the presidential palace in Islamabad Friday. Wahid, who flew in from Iran, held talks with General Musharraf and President Rafiq Tarar (R) yesterday.

— AFP photo

Reunification fever sweeps S Korea

SEOUL, June 16 : President Kim Dae-Jung held a meeting of South Korean ministers today to order action after his historic summit in Pyongyang, as reunification hopes mounted in the country, reports AFP.

Kim ordered a special cabinet meeting after his talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il which produced a landmark accord on easing five decades of tensions, with both sides ordering a halt to propaganda attacks against each other.

On his triumphant return to Seoul on Thursday, the president declared that reunification between the Cold War enemies was now possible.

Kim said, "We Koreans are at the start of a new era. When I was in Pyongyang I realised that Pyongyang is our land: The people of Pyongyang are our people."

The two sides have different

formulas for reunification. The North wants an immediate federation, while the South has proposed a more gradual confederation. They agreed to independently seek common ground in their two approaches towards a single Korea.

Many foreign governments and politicians in the South have demanded more detail on the accords made.

But fired by the summit, a new spirit of friendship for the North -- which has been a sworn enemy since the division of the peninsula in 1945 and the 1950-53 Korean War -- has now swept the country.

The military authorities and provincial governments in South Korea are drastically changing ceremonies and events to mark the 50th anniversary of the start of the Korean War on June 25.

Clinton dismissed a suggestion that the Palestinian-Israeli track of the peace process was in danger of collapse. "No, I think it's an important moment, and we just have to keep working on it," Clinton said.

However, after his meeting with Clinton, Arafat had harsh words for the Israeli prime minister.

"Barak until now doesn't have the will to reach a just and comprehensive settlement to achieve peace in the region," Arafat told reporters.

US determined to push ME peace forward

WASHINGTON, June 16 : The United States has decided to keep pushing forward the Middle East peace process despite existing tension between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, US officials said, reports AFP.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will return to the Middle East before the end of the month to see whether a summit between Arafat and Barak and US President Bill Clinton is needed to speed up the peace process.

The State Department and Barak's office announced Albright's latest trip to the region, as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators continued their talks here late into Thursday night.

"The purpose of her visit will be to determine whether a summit would be useful at this point or whether we need to continue negotiations," spokesman Richard Boucher said.

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This August 21, 1985 file photo shows Empress Nagako in the garden of the Imperial Mansion's garden in Nasu. The widow of the late Emperor Hirohito died yesterday at the age of 97.

— APF photo

Japan's empress Dowager dies

TOKYO, June 16 : Japan's Empress Dowager Nagako, the 97-year-old widow of the late emperor Hirohito, died today, an Imperial Household Agency official said, reports AFP.

The Empress Dowager passed away at 4:46 pm today at Fukiage-Omiya Gosho residence. Imperial Household Agency chief Sadamine Kamakura told a news conference at the palace.

The empress dowager slipped into a coma early in the morning after falling sick with breathing problems Wednesday night at her palace residence, officials said.

Attempt on Serb opposition leader

PODGORICA, Yugoslavia, June 16 : Serbian opposition leader Vuk Draskovic was shot and wounded in Montenegro by unknown assailants, in what was described by his party as the second attempt on his life in less than a year, reports AFP.

The 53-year-old was "slightly injured, grazed by two bullets" to the head in the attack late Thursday on his house in the Montenegrin coastal town of Budva, his advisor Ognjen Pribicic told AFP.

The house was riddled with bullets, "as it was hit by automatic weapons fire at 11:30 p.m. (3:30 BST), Pribicic said.

Draskovic, a long-time opponent of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, was rushed to a hospital in the nearby town of Kotor, but was later released and his injuries are not life threatening, medical sources there said.

Governor of Aceh sacked

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia, June 16 : The governor of Indonesia's rebellious Aceh province has been dismissed by President Abdurrahman Wahid following a vote of no-confidence, an official said here today.

Syamsuddin Mahmud will be replaced on June 21 by senior home affairs ministry official in Jakarta Ramli Ridwan who will act as caretaker governor, the governor's spokesman Teuku Pribat said.

The presidential decree on Mahmud's replacement was issued on June 7 by President Abdurrahman Wahid, he said.

Mahmud, a Belgian-trained economist and professor at the Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, is expected to be posted in Jakarta as deputy chairman of the National Development Planning Board (Bappenas).

Progress on truce talks in Solomon Islands

SYDNEY, June 16 : An uneasy stand-off held between warring factions in the Solomon Islands today and a top police official said progress was being made on a permanent ceasefire.

There has been good progress, efforts are being made from both sides on a permanent ceasefire," Assistant Police Commissioner Wilfred Akao told AFP.

Each side is studying each other's submissions to determine when a final ceasefire will come.

BRITISH AIRWAYS

ISLAMABAD, June 16 : A majority of Israelis believe Prime Minister Ehud Barak should fire the ministers belonging to the ultra-orthodox Shas party, which has created a crisis threatening to topple his government, according to a poll published today, reports AFP.

Fifty-nine percent of respondents to a Gallup poll carried out by the Hebrew-language Maariv newspaper said Barak should dump Shas, the second largest member of his ruling coalition with 17 parliamentary seats, after it voted with the opposition last week in favour of a motion calling for early elections.

The Shas had been demanding the government should pay to revamp its ailing education system and give it more control over its schools, as a price for its loyalty.

But another coalition member, the left-wing secular Meretz party, announced Thursday that it would walk out if Barak bowed to Shas' "blackmail" and agreed to transfer control of the party's schools from the education ministry, run by Meretz leader and Shas's bete noire Yossi Sarid.

"We will quit the government the moment that is done. The prime minister must halt the negotiations with Shas," said Trade and Industry Minister Ran Cohen of Meretz. The party has 10 MPs.

The results of the poll as published in Maariv did not give the percentage of people who supported keeping Shas or those who abstained, nor did it say how many were polled.

Similar polls have had 500 respondents, with a 4.5 percent margin of error.

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