

## Democracy losing ground: UN

### Pakistan scores badly in human development ranking

AP, AFP, Manila

The wave of democracy-building that swept the world in the previous two decades has stalled, with some countries slipping into authoritarian rule and political conflict, according to a U.N. report released Wednesday.

The United Nations Development Program report, "Deepening democracy in a fragmented world," said the world is more democratic in terms of the 140 countries that hold multi-party elections than any time in history, but only 82 of countries out of a total of nearly 200 examined are considered full democracies.

It called the level of global inequality "grotesque," with the income of the world's richest 5 percent 114 times higher than of the poorest 5 percent.

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States cast new light on these divisions, returning strategic military alliances to the center of national policy-making and inspiring heated debates on the danger of compromising human rights for national security," the report said.

"Around the world, there is a growing sense that democ-

cracy has not delivered development such as more jobs, schools, health care for ordinary people," added Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, the report's chief author.

Fukuda-Parr said politicians have used the pain of transition to justify authoritarianism at the expense of human rights.

Of the 81 countries that embraced democracy in the last two decades of the 20th century, only 47 are considered full democracies today, the report said.

"Many others do not seem to be in transition or have lapsed back into authoritarianism or conflict, as in Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone," it said. "Myanmar and Pakistan have returned to military form of government. Failed states, like Afghanistan and Somalia, have become breeding grounds for extremism and violent conflict."

The trend appeared strongest in the sub-Saharan region, with national armies intervening in political affairs in varying degrees in one in four countries since 1989.

Deepening democracy around the world would be vital in the battle against social injustice, providing a bulwark against terrorism, the report said. It added that recent research showed established democracies are less prone to civil war than non-democratic regimes, and even countries that have embraced

democracy only recently are more likely to cope with political upheaval.

AFP adds: Military-ruled Pakistan maintained its low ranking on a UN global development index released Wednesday, which concluded that non-democratic regimes fail to deliver economic growth and stability.

Pakistan ranked 138 out of 173 countries assessed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for its annual Human Development Index, which measures life expectancy, adult literacy, education, and income per person.

The Islamic republic of 145 million held the same ranking in 1999, the year in which army chief General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the civilian government in a bloodless coup. He declared himself president last year.

Musharraf has repeatedly argued that the 11 years of democracy that preceded his overthrow brought economic ruin to Pakistan, and insisted that his military regime was necessary to restore economic growth and stability.

According to the index, Pakistan has made headway in tackling undernourishment, but is far behind in reducing infant mortality rates.



PHOTO: AFP

Local residents dig the site where the houses swept by the landslide that kill 16 people at Matatirtha, about 15 km west of Kathmandu on Tuesday. At least 80 people have been killed since July 21 in flooding triggered by heavy monsoon rain in 45 of Nepal's 75 districts.

## World slams Israeli raid

### Hamas calls on all cells to unleash 'sea of blood'

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel braced Wednesday for revenge attacks as its leadership tried to back away from its deadly air strike in Gaza City that triggered a barrage of condemnation from around the world.

Security forces were placed on full alert after the Israeli bombing raid which killed the military chief of the Palestinian radical Islamic group Hamas, his bodyguard and 13 civilians in Gaza late Monday.

Hamas and all the other hardline Palestinian factions swore they would make Israel pay in kind for the attack, which counted nine children among the dead as a guided bomb reportedly weighing one tonne was dropped on a crowded residential area of Gaza City.

And in the face of withering international criticism, including a

rare rebuke from its top ally Washington, Israel tried to play down the political fall-out from the raid.

Finance Minister Silvan Shalom said that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was not informed of the risk to civilians in the raid, which blew apart the Jewish state's most wanted man Salah Shehade, head of Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades.

The raid was unanimously condemned by the international community, although Sharon said it was "one of the most successful operations" to have been carried out by Israel's military.

"It is inconceivable that the prime minister, the defence minister and the chief of staff would have given the green light to an operation knowing that innocent civilians would be hit," Shalom told army radio.

Sharon and his defence minister, Binyamin Ben Eliezer, both personally approved the attack.

"The operation which targeted Shehade had moreover been postponed several times precisely to avoid innocent civilians being hit," said Shalom, a member of Israel's security cabinet.

He said Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was likewise unaware of the danger to civilians.

But President Moshe Katsav said the political leadership must take responsibility for the raid, which he described as a "mishap."

He stressed however that there was "no reason to hang anybody for what happened."

International criticism of Israel's raid, denounced by Washington as "heavy-handed" and by London as "unacceptable and counterproductive," was all the more pointed as it came at a time when

hopes for progress in peace talks had been on the rise.

Meanwhile, the radical Palestinian Islamic group Hamas on Wednesday called on all its cells of operatives in the Palestinian territories and Israel to prepare to unleash a "sea of blood" against Israel, the group's armed wing said.

"We call on all our groups within the 1948 borders to be ready to hit the Zionists (Israelis) at any place and at any time," the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades said in a statement, referring to the borders existing before the establishment of an Israeli state.

It said "students" of the Brigades' leader Salah Shehade, killed in an Israeli air strike late Monday that also cost the lives of 14 other people, fired the group's homemade Qassam rockets at Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip overnight.

## Abducted girl freed self in US

AP, Philadelphia

A 7-year-old kidnapped girl escaped from an abandoned rowhouse Tuesday night by chewing through duct tape binding her arms and legs, smashing a window and then calling to nearby playing children for help, police said.

One of the children rode a bike from the building where Erica Pratt was being held down the street to alert officers who were on patrol, Lt. Michael Chitwood said. The girl had been abducted, kicking and screaming, from in front of her home Monday evening and held for ransom.

Police were searching for two suspects late Tuesday. Chitwood said Erica had only minor injuries.

While being held in a police officer's arms, Erica waved to television cameras and beamed a wide smile as she was returned to her grandmother's home.

## US, Pakistan closer to resuming full military dialogue

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani and US defence officials concluded talks Wednesday on resuming military dialogue after a four-year suspension over Pakistan's nuclear tests.

US air force Colonel Jeffery Paulk and senior Pakistani defence officials met for two days in Rawalpindi near the capital Islamabad, the Pakistani defence ministry said in a statement.

The officials were planning higher-level discussions in a formal bilateral forum known as the Defence Consultative Group (DCG) later this year, it said.

The DCG last met in Washington in 1997. The following year the United States suspended economic and defence ties after Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in a tit-for-tat exchange with India.

"This meeting is very significant and marks the real resumption of defence cooperation between the United States and Pakistan," a Pakistani military official told AFP.

The steps toward a resumption of dialogue come a week after the Pentagon signalled it was ready to resume military sales to Pakistan after a 12-year suspension.

Defence hardware sales were halted under military and economic sanctions imposed by Washington in October 1990 when it was unable to certify that Pakistan did not have nuclear explosives.

The Pentagon announced last week that it was planning to sell six heavy-duty C-130 aircraft to Pakistan in a deal worth 75 million dollars. Congress has until mid-August to approve the sale.

The defence ministry said Paulk and his Pakistani counterparts

briefed each other on issues of common interest and finalised the agenda for the upcoming DCG meeting, for which no firm date was announced.

Defence Secretary Hamid Nawaz Khan told Paulk that the restoration of full military dialogue was important to help the United States understand and meet Pakistan's defence needs for the sake of regional "peace and prosperity."

Khan urged Washington to consider releasing withheld defence items, resume equipment sales and training, and restart military-to-military cooperation.

The decision to reactivate the DCG was made while President Pervez Musharraf was in Washington in February, military spokesman Major General Rashid Qureshi said.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian policeman (R) posts low in front of an angry mob in Ranchi on Wednesday. Police fired several rounds in the air to quell pro and anti-domicile supporters locked in clashes at Dhuruya and Nasara, in the outskirts of the state capital Ranchi.

## India to carry out another test of Agni

PTI, New Delhi

India will carry out one more test of the 700-km short range Agni missile prior to its production and induction into the Armed forces, Defence Minister George Fernandes told the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Asserting that development work of the shorter range Agni-I missile had been completed, Fernandes, in a written reply, said that Government proposed to go ahead with one more test of the missile before its induction.

Asked whether the Government proposed to conduct more missile tests in view of series of tests by Pakistan recently, Fernandes said, "Design, development and test flights of missile systems is a continuous process based on strategic requirements of the Indian armed forces and security requirements of the nation."

The shorter range Agni-1 missile was successfully test-fired in January this year and Government has already announced that the 2,500 kms medium range Agni missile had entered serial production with two army missile units already set up to be equipped with these strategic missile.

In his answer Fernandes touched upon the development of entire range of missiles being produced by the DRDO saying that development work on Ground to Air Trishul and Akash missiles as well as the fourth Generation Nag anti-tank missile was expected to be completed by December 2003 and December 2004.

After this, the Minister said these missiles would be ready for user trials, serial production and induction.

## 'Omar in Afghanistan'

AP, Washington

Al-Qaida's leaders have all but abandoned their former stronghold of Afghanistan, leaving Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar and his followers to deal with the U.S. forces hunting them, Bush administration officials say.

Many of al-Qaida's surviving leaders relocated to Pakistan, and others went elsewhere in the world, officials said Tuesday.

Osama bin Laden himself remains a mystery. The U.S. government does not know whether he is alive or dead and has little evidence suggesting either possibility.

About a dozen of bin Laden's chief lieutenants have been killed or captured, but more than half have escaped. Officials have identified between 15 and 20 more as their "most wanted" members of the group's leadership who are still at large.

Most of the recent captures of al-Qaida figures have been outside of

Afghanistan. In recent months, U.S. officials acknowledged the capture of two: operations chief Abu Zubaydah in March in Pakistan, and operational planner Abu Zubair al-Halili in June in Morocco.

Most of the leadership has been maintaining a low profile to avoid detection, said a U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

U.S. counterterrorism officials say chief among their most wanted al-Qaida are top bin Laden deputy Ayman al-Zawahri, financial chief Shaikh Saïd al-Sharif and operational planner Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, suspected mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks and the April 11 bombing of a Tunisian synagogue.

American troops hoped early this month that they were on the trail of one-eyed Taliban spiritual leader Omar, who, like most others from the routed fundamentalist regime, remained in his home country, defence officials said Tuesday.



Jackie Chan new globe trotter

AFP, Los Angeles

Hong Kong action film hero Jackie Chan is to star in a Hollywood remake of the classic globe-trotting adventure "Around the World in Eighty Days," the studio said Tuesday.

Martial arts stunt star Chan, 48—who made his name in Tinseltown on such pictures as "Rush Hour" with Chris Tucker and "Shanghai Noon" with Owen Wilson, says he is looking forward to becoming Jules Verne's classic hero.

## No change in Pak polls dates: Musharraf

PTI, Islamabad

Brushing aside speculations, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said general elections would be held on schedule in October and political parties would be allowed to campaign at "suitable time."

"The dates will not be changed at any cost... Reports about postponement of elections are baseless," he told five delegations of political parties who visited him yesterday.

"The government would ensure that elections are held in a free, fair and transparent manner," he said.

Musharraf claimed his government was sincerely trying to move towards a sustainable democracy.

"It appears a consensus has emerged on a number of proposed amendments while some sections have reservations on a few proposals," he claimed.

Musharraf told the politicians that the basic structure of 1973 Constitution would not be changed.

"Amendment would be made after getting proper feedback from the people and the politicians," he said.

Musharraf said the National reconstruction Bureau is consider-

ing a proposal to restore reserved seats for minorities in the National Assembly.

The politicians expressed their reservations on the proposed constitutional packages and told him that the responsibility of amending the Constitution should be left for the elected Parliament.

Meanwhile, rejecting India's demand to term Pakistan a 'terrorist state' yet again, US has hailed President Musharraf for taking steps to curb cross-border terrorism and providing active support in the war against the Al-Qaeda.

## Advani faces opposition ire over riot-torn Gujarat

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna provoked angry scenes in parliament on Wednesday when he said the situation in riot-torn Gujarat state was conducive for fresh elections.

"I can only say that the government of India is committed to holding free and fair elections in which everyone participates," Advani told irate opposition members in the upper house of parliament during a debate.

He also rejected opposition demands for the imposition of

federal rule in Gujarat before elections are held there.

In a heated encounter, opposition members launched a scathing attack on the ruling Hindu nationalists in New Delhi and Gujarat for "playing politics with riot victims".

More than 1,000 people have died in Gujarat since February 27, most of them Muslims, in riots which erupted after a Muslim mob torched a train killing 58 Hindu pilgrims in Gujarat's Godhra town.

The opposition parties also demanded the removal of state Chief Minister Narendra Modi for "failing" to stop bloody sectarian

riots and instead dissolving his government last week to pave the way for fresh elections.

Intermittent violence in the state still continues, although only isolated incidents have occurred in the past month. The Hindu nationalist BJP party, which rules the state government, was accused by opposition parties of complicity in the rioting.

Advani, however, told the agitated members that the situation in the state was now normal and conducive to holding elections.

## US House approves funds for anti-terror campaign

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives late Tuesday approved 28.9 billion dollars in emergency spending for the war on terror, including a new aid package for Israel to help it prevent new suicide bombings.

The bill, passed by lawmakers 397-32 after a brief debate, also contains a strict ban on US cooperation with the International Criminal Court set up by the United Nations to prosecute genocide and other crimes against humanity.

The supplement budget request has already been reconciled with the Senate in a conference and is largely expected to be approved there.

Half of the money -- 14.5 billion dollars -- will go to the Department of Defence.

Another 3.8 billion dollars will be spent on bolstering security at the nation's airports, 5.5 billion dollars on helping New York recover after the September 11 attacks, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation will be given an additional 175 million dollars for its counter-

terrorism activities.

With suicide bombings still ravaging Israel, it gives the Jewish state 200 million dollars in additional assistance to combat international terrorism.

Residents of the West Bank and Gaza will receive 50 million dollars in humanitarian aid, but the legislation strictly prohibits assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

The bill includes a 110-million-dollar aid package for countries of the former Soviet Union, primarily Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which have allowed the United States to use their bases in the war in Afghanistan.

But at the same time, it restricts US participation in international peacekeeping missions unless US servicemen are exempted from the jurisdiction of the tribunal.

The administration of President George W. Bush has withdrawn the US signature from an international accord which set up the court, arguing member nations had practically no tools to control it.



PHOTO: AFP

A dredging vessel spewed sands imported from Indonesia fills the seabed off western Singapore on Wednesday. The coastline of land-starved Singapore is always evolving as the tiny Southeast Asian state continues with major land reclamation projects.