

Arafat admits mistakes by officials

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat admitted yesterday that unacceptable mistakes had been made by his Palestinian Authority, as he pledged his full backing to his premier Ahmed Qorei's efforts to tackle the security chaos in the occupied territories.

In a much anticipated keynote speech to members of the Palestinian parliament, the 75-year-old also accused Israel of trying to sabotage his government and of wrecking the peace process with its continued settlement activity and its building of the West Bank separation barrier.

"Some unacceptable mistakes have been made by our institutions and some have abused their positions and violated the trust that has been placed in them," Arafat said.

Mass demonstrations were held both within the Gaza Strip and the West

Bank last month in protest at the rampant corruption in the Palestinian Authority, representing arguably the biggest challenge to his authority since his return from exile a decade earlier.

The protests also came amid a general collapse in security, which included an unprecedented spate of kidnappings and arson attacks on government buildings.

Arafat admitted that "no real efforts have been made to enforce law and order".

"More efforts and support should be made for the security of the people and this is the responsibility of the security organisations," he added.

Qorei submitted his resignation last month after the kidnappings but he later retracted his move after lengthy mediation efforts involving other senior officials and deputies.

With Qorei sitting alongside Arafat in the headquarters known as the

PALESTINIAN MPS SAY
He must act on admissions of failure

AFP, Ramallah

Senior Palestinians called on veteran leader Yasser Arafat to follow his rare admission of failure by his government in the speech with concrete measures to empower his prime minister.

"This speech has very important headlines and we thank Arafat for it, but all the Palestinian institutions could not implement anything without Arafat's signature," said parliament speaker Rawhi Fattuh.

"For that," he said, addressing Arafat directly, "we need from you some formal decisions with your signature about issues you raised in the speech."

A 14-member committee of MPs which has been pushing Arafat to crack down on corruption and implement reforms in the security services was due to meet the 75-year-old later Wednesday.

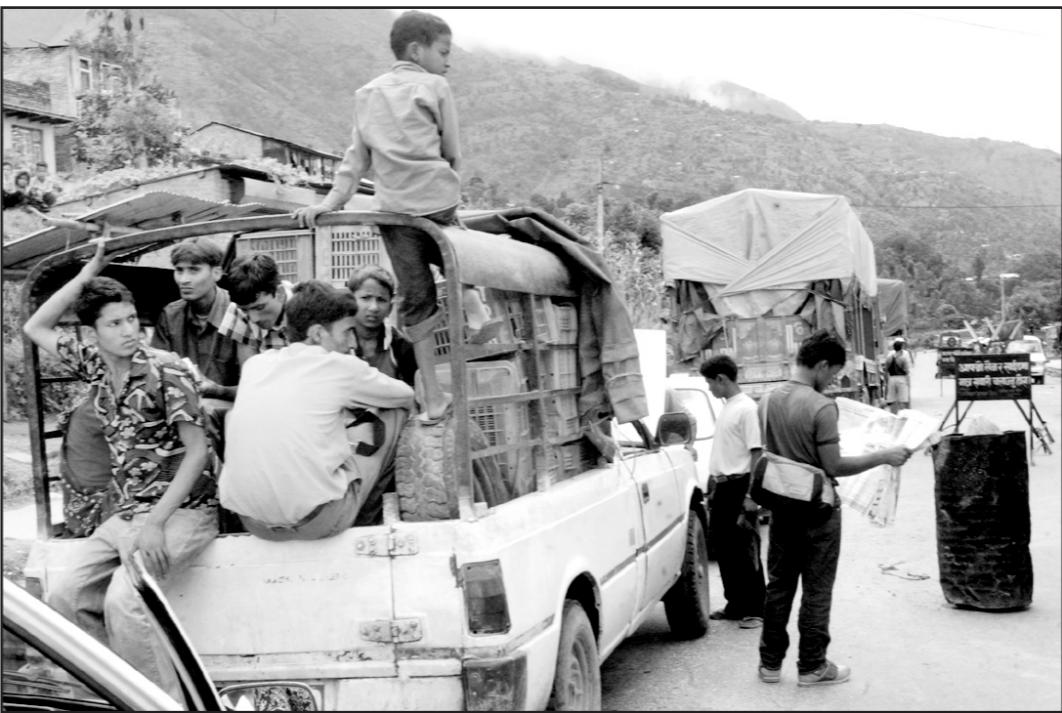


PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese travellers sit at a roadblock at Khanikhola, some 28 kms west of Kathmandu yesterday, a day after a threatened Maoist rebel shutdown of the Himalayan kingdom's top companies. Maoist rebels cut off routes Wednesday to Nepal's capital Kathmandu in their first blockade of the city since they launched their insurgency to overthrow the constitutional monarchy eight years ago.

Seventeen dead in Iran road carnage

AFP, Tehran

Seventeen people were killed and 20 injured when a truck collided with a bus in southeastern Iran, state media said yesterday.

The accident occurred late Tuesday evening 55 kilometres (35 miles) from Zahedan on the road to Zabol in Sistan-Baluchestan province.

The injured truck driver said that the accident happened after he swerved to avoid a car and his trailer hit the bus.

Iran's roads are considered to be among the most dangerous in the world, with some 100,000 road accident deaths in the last five years.

On June 24, about 90 people died in the same province when a fuel truck lost control and crashed into a police station, with the explosion engulfing other trucks, cars and buses.

Iraqi working for German TV found dead in Baghdad

AP, Baghdad

Mahmoud Hamid Abbas, a local producer for the station, was found dead on Sunday near the volatile city of Fallujah, said chief producer Jorg Christ.

Abbas had traveled to Fallujah to gather Iraqi opinions about the Iraqi National Conference, which got underway on Sunday to establish a 100-member council that will act as a watchdog over the interim government until elections in January.

Christ said Abbas phoned ZDF's Baghdad office on Sunday from Fallujah to say he would be back soon, but was not heard from again. It was not known how Abbas was killed, or why, Christ said. Family members identified the body of Abbas, who was a native of Fallujah, Christ said.

MALDIVES CRISIS

Govt says emergency declared because of coup attempt

AFP, Male

The government of the Indian Ocean archipelago, the Maldives, said yesterday it declared a state of emergency last week because pro-democracy activists had tried to stage a coup.

Government spokesman Ahmed Shaheed said a mob tried last Friday to oust President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who has ruled Asia's most expensive tourist destination since 1978, and is the region's longest serving leader.

"The chief government spokesman, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, said the mob had attempted to overthrow the democratically elected government in the Maldives," Gayoom's official website said.

The government declared the state of emergency Friday after demonstrators took to the streets to demand the release of political prisoners and greater democracy.

The website said seven members of parliament, who were to meet Monday to discuss a new constitution for the nation of some 330,000 Sunni Muslims, were detained after Friday's pro-democracy rallies.

Annan demands Suu Kyi's release

BBC NEWS ONLINE

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has called for Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to be freed from house arrest.

He said the Burmese government's reforms would not be credible without the involvement of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

He called for "substantive dialogue" between all parties. He released a statement after Aung San Suu Kyi's party failed in an attempt to win her release.

A spokesman for the NLD said the legal bid failed because officials refused to sign a document presented to the court.

The government of Burma - called Myanmar by its ruling military junta - last month adjourned a national convention meant to draw up a new constitution as a first step to the restoration of democracy.

It had promised to welcome all religious and political parties into the

Pakistan offers bounties for infos on al-Qaeda

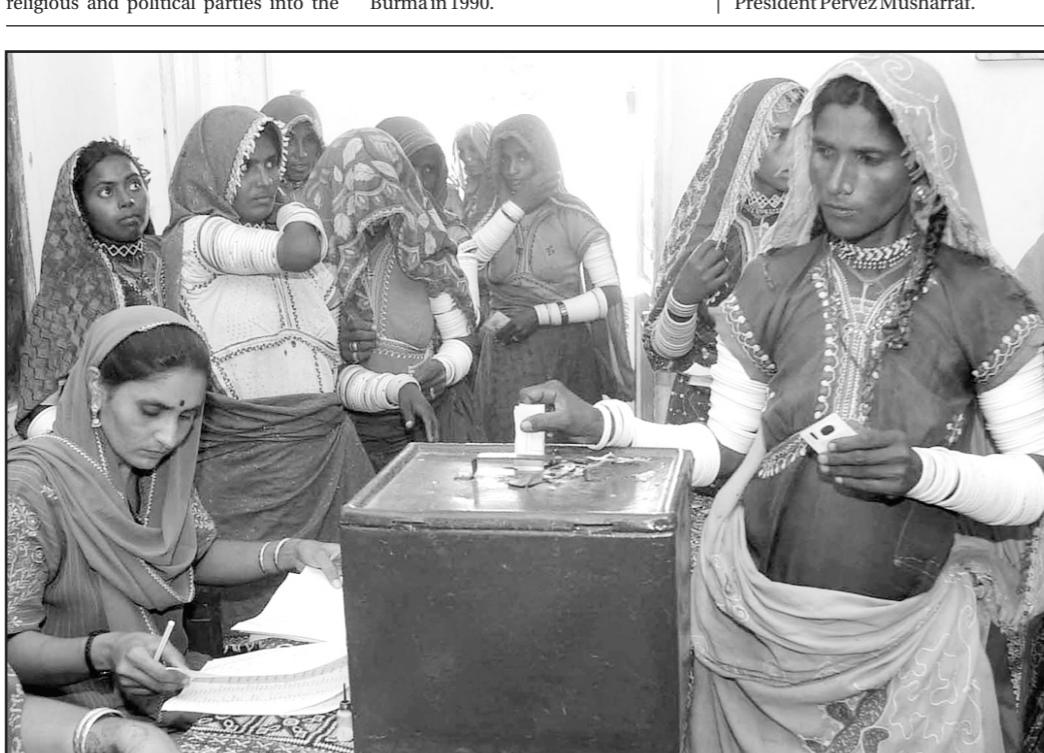
AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday announced rewards totalling 1.1 million dollars for information on six wanted terror suspects including Al-Qaeda's Libyan planner Abu Faraj Faraj, described by Pakistani intelligence as the new number three in Osama bin Laden's network.

The government placed photos of the six on the front pages of major newspapers, offering rewards of around 345,000 dollars each for Faraj and Pakistani militant Amjad Hussain Farooqi.

Bounties of 172,000 to 86,000 dollars each were offered for four other Pakistani suspects.

All six are Al-Qaeda suspects believed to have played a role in two December attempts to assassinate President Pervez Musharraf.



A Pakistani woman (R) casts her ballot as others wait for their turn to vote in a by-election for a seat in the national parliament, in Tharparkar, Sindh province, yesterday. Shaukat Aziz, the finance wizard chosen by President Pervez Musharraf to be Pakistan's next prime minister, sought to cut a path to the parliament's lower house through a virtually guaranteed by-election in this rural seat.