



PHOTO: AFP  
Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf arrives on Saturday at the Ajmer Sharif, the shrine of a revered Indian Sufi Saint Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, to pray for peace. Musharraf is in India for a three-day visit and during his stay he will watch the sixth and final one-day cricket match between India and Pakistan in New Delhi today.

## India spells out steps to mend ties with Pakistan

### Security cabinet plan strategy

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday spelled out a series of measures including steps on disputed Kashmir it said New Delhi had offered to Pakistan to bolster trust between the two nuclear-armed rivals.

India documented 72 steps including seven on Kashmir and five military confidence-building measures (CBMs) it had handed to Pakistan since January last year when the two South Asian neighbours began taking cautious steps to improve ties.

"We hope agreements are reached on all the CBMs we have put forward," Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said as Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf began his first visit to India in four years with a pilgrimage to a Muslim shrine ahead of talks with Premier Manmohan Singh.

Among the measures, India

wants new bus services between Kargil and Poonch in Indian Kashmir to Skardu and other points in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

The launch of a bus service on April 7 between the administrative headquarters of the two Kashmiri zones has been hailed by the two sides as a historic step which has boosted their slow-moving peace process.

"We also seek an agreement in peace and tranquility along the LoC (Line of Control) with Pakistan just like the accords we signed with China in 1993 and 1996," another foreign ministry official told AFP.

The LoC is the de facto border dividing the two zones of Kashmir, where the Indian and Pakistani armies have been observing a ceasefire with only a few minor infringements since November 2003.

The Indian measures include "meeting points across the LoC" to enable people of Kashmir's two

zones to meet, joint promotion of tourism in the Himalayan region and a higher degree of cultural interchange between the two sides.

Cross-border trade, pilgrimages, tourism and promotion of cultural links are among other measures expected to figure in talks Sunday between Musharraf and Singh.

India also seeks an accord on communication links between the two coast guards, a hotline between the foreign secretaries of the two neighbours, naval exchanges and periodic meetings between military commanders, said the foreign ministry official, who did not want to be named.

"Most of them are hanging fire and in the trade sector we have already asked Islamabad to accord the most favoured nation status on India as we have already done to Pakistan," he said.

"But currently the CBMs on Kashmir are paramount."

Earlier India's premier held a security cabinet meeting yesterday to map its strategy ahead of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's three-day visit to discuss the decades-old conflict over divided Kashmir.

The meeting reviewed initiatives India would put to Musharraf during the weekend talks in which the nuclear-armed rivals will seek to push forward a slow-moving peace process, officials said.

"All subjects likely to figure during Musharraf's visit were taken up," Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said after the hour-long meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The visit marks Musharraf's first to India since a failed summit with then prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2001. He has made it clear that as in 2001 the focus will be on Kashmir, which both neighbours claim in full.

## Special gift for Musharraf

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

A special gift awaits Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf from New Delhi Municipal Corporation during his three-day visit to India that began yesterday.

The birth registration record of Musharraf, who was born in Delhi, has been found by the civic body and the birth certificate has been prepared, the Corporation's spokesman Madan Thapliyal said.

"We have found an entry for a male child born on August 11, 1942, identified as a 'son of Mr Musharraf' and delivered at Lala Giridharilal Maternity Hospital," he said adding "we are preparing a birth certificate for this entry and hand it over to the government."

Musharraf's mother Begum Zarin had visited the hospital in Old Delhi's Kamala Market locality last month and expressed the desire to get the birth certificate of her two sons Javed and Pervez born in that hospital born in July 1941 and August 1942 respectively.

"Begum Zarin became very emotional during her visit to the hospital and she could even remember the name of the medical superintendent of the hospital at that time and some of the staff members," said Indira Yadav, the current medical superintendent of the 75-year-old hospital.

## Hezbul militant leader offers talks to Delhi

AP, Srinagar

The head of Kashmir's largest militant group - one of India's most wanted men - said Saturday he is ready for peace talks if invited by New Delhi and that his organisation is not opposed to a new India-Pakistan bus service across the divided Himalayan region.

The statement came hours before the arrival of Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf in India on a goodwill tour.

"I believe that no freedom fighter will attack or fire a single bullet on the bus. These are not our concerns," Syed Salahuddin, the chief commander of the Pakistan-based Hezbul Mujahadeen group, told the private Zee News in an interview.

Rebels have threatened the bus service, and the building where passengers were staying was torched a day before the April 7 start of the service.

Hezbul Mujahadeen is the biggest of about a dozen armed

rebel groups in Indian-controlled Kashmir that have been fighting Indian security forces since 1989 to carve out a separate homeland or merge the Himalayan region into Pakistan.

Salahuddin said he was ready for peace talks with India.

"If India invites us, we will definitely come to the table," said Salahuddin, a former teacher and politician.

Security officials estimate that Hezbul Mujahadeen has half of the estimated 3,000 militants in the Kashmir Valley.

The territorial dispute over Kashmir are at the heart of festering India-Pakistan tensions. Pakistan says it is cracking down on the militants, but India alleges that the rebel training camps have not been dismantled by Pakistan.

Rivals of three wars, both countries are now trying to solve their differences at meetings like Musharraf's weekend visit.

## Thousands protest against Japan

### China says relations at 'crossroads'

AFP, Beijing

Thousands of people staged violent anti-Japanese rallies across China yesterday in a second weekend of protests as Beijing said relations with its neighbour were at a "crossroads".

Onlookers estimated up to 10,000 people alone marched along Yanan Road in Shanghai towards the Japanese consulate while several thousand rallied in the eastern city of Hangzhou and similar numbers in Tianjin, southeast of Beijing.

At the consulate in Shanghai, riot police three-deep linked arms to prevent the rowdy crowd from entering the compound as they pelted it with rocks, bottles and paint, smashing windows.

Elsewhere in the city, Japanese restaurants, businesses and cars

were attacked with rocks and eggs. One restaurant was completely destroyed.

More protests, sparked by the Japanese government's approval of revamped history textbooks which Beijing felt made light of the nation's atrocities in World War II, are expected around China Sunday.

However, a rally scheduled for the capital Beijing, where police were out in force, failed to materialise following a warning Friday against any protests by the Public Security Bureau.

Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura said Saturday he will "strongly protest" to Beijing when he visits Sunday for its failure to stop the violent demonstrations and demand an apology.

Machimura said Japan will also renew demands of compensation

for damage incurred during the protests.

"I will meet Foreign Minister Li (Zhaoxing) tomorrow and we will bring up this issue during the meeting," he said.

"The embassy has called the Chinese authorities to take necessary measures to stop the illegal and violent actions staged by the Chinese mobs," Keiji Ide, spokesman for the Japanese embassy in Beijing, told AFP.

The rallies in Shanghai began at three separate venues - the Bund, People's Square and Shanghai Museum - before the demonstrators shouting "Down with Japan" and "Boycott Japanese Goods" converged to march to the consulate.



PHOTO: AFP  
Chinese demonstrators throw stones during an anti-Japanese rally in Shanghai yesterday. Thousands of people staged violent anti-Japanese rallies across China in a second weekend of protests as Beijing said relations with its neighbour were at a crossroad.

## Nepali king meets Indian envoy

### Maoists kill 10 Nepali villagers: Army

AFP, Kathmandu

India's envoy to Nepal held talks with King Gyanendra Friday, officials said, a day after the monarch announced municipal elections in a move to "reactivate" democracy.

India has sharply criticised Gyanendra's seizure of power on February 1 and suspended military aid to Nepal which is seeking to crush an increasingly deadly Maoist revolt.

Britain has also suspended arms sales while the United States has threatened to follow suit.

The envoy's audience at the royal palace with Gyanendra followed Indian media reports of feelers being sent by Nepal for a meeting between the king and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the Asian-African Summit to be held in Jakarta from April 20-24.

"Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee and the king discussed the current political situation in Nepal" during the meeting that

lasted nearly 90 minutes, an Indian embassy spokesman said, without elaborating.

India has been pushing for restoration of democracy and the release of political prisoners taken into custody after Gyanendra's assumption of absolute power.

A source close to the pro-royal party backing the king said Gyanendra's meeting with the envoy could result in the release of 240 leaders, human rights activists, scholars and others still in detention since the royal takeover.

Meanwhile, Maoists attacked a village in southwestern Nepal killing 10 civilians and wounding seven others, an army spokesman said yesterday.

"The rebels are reported to have taken the action against the villagers accusing them of being members of an anti-Maoist vigilante team," Colonel Jit Bahadur Gurung said.



PHOTO: AFP  
A Palestinian girl holds a portrait during a protest calling for the release of Palestinian prisoners being held by Israel in Gaza City yesterday.

## Ecuador declares emergency

AP, Quito

Facing growing street protests demanding his ouster, President Lucio Gutierrez declared a state of emergency Friday night in the capital and dissolved the Supreme Court in an effort to resolve an escalating political crisis.

The state of emergency placed the military in charge of maintaining public order.

Gutierrez, with the military high command standing behind him, announced in a televised address to the nation that under the authority provided by the Constitution, he was dismissing "the judges of the current Supreme Court designated by Congress" in December.

"The measure... was taken because Congress until now has not resolved the matter of the current Supreme Court, which is generating national commotion and especially in the city of Quito... which rejects the operation of the Supreme Court," he said.

A state of emergency suspends individual rights, including the right to free expression and public assembly, and allows police to enter private homes without search warrants.

## RICE SAYS

# UN needs overhaul to survive as vital force

REUTERS, Washington

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Friday the United Nations needed to be overhauled "to survive as a vital force," in the strongest criticism yet from a senior US official amid a debate on UN reform.

Rice, who has chosen John Bolton, a longtime critic of the organisation, to be her UN ambassador, said Washington needed to lead changes to fix an institution dogged by scandals over corruption and sexual abuse by peacekeepers.

"It is no secret to anyone that the United Nations cannot survive as a vital force in international politics if it does not reform - if it doesn't reform its organisations, if it doesn't reform its management practices," she told a newspaper editors' conference.

Last month, Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed the most wide-

ranging overhaul of the United Nations since its creation in 1945. He recommended the expansion of the UN Security Council, a radical program to combat poverty, a new human rights body and a condemnation of all forms of terrorism and a series of management and watchdog reforms.

"As important an institution as it is, one has to say that there are some things that are not so great about the United Nations right now. And everybody recognises that. And we've got to fix it," Rice said.

President Bush has had strained relations with the United Nations. In his first term, he challenged it to avoid becoming irrelevant and ordered the invasion of Iraq without explicit UN approval before increasingly turning to the organisation for support after the war.

Bolton, a hardline conservative who once said the United States should only make the United Nations work to benefit US inter-

ests, has pledged to work to improve UN accountability and complained of overlapping programs and mandates.

"He is going to be a force for what is always needed in the United Nations: American leadership to update and reform and strengthen this great institution," Rice said.

In a related development, a Congressional-mandated task force on UN reform visited the UN headquarters in New York on Friday, led by Newt Gingrich, the Republican former speaker of the House of Representatives, and George Mitchell, former Democrat Senate leader.

Both praised the meetings with Annan and his senior staff as "candid" and "informative." Their report, to be completed in June, is expected to have an impact on Congressional calls to cut US payments to the United Nations.

## 7 killed in restaurant blast

### Iraqi insurgents seize 80 hostages, Shias start fleeing the town

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad/ Baquba

At least seven people were killed, three of them policemen, in an explosion yesterday in a restaurant in Baquba north of Baghdad, an Iraqi army officer said.

"Seven people, including three policemen were killed and at least five other people were injured around 2:00 pm (1000 GMT) in an explosion at a restaurant near the courthouse in the centre of Baquba," Colonel Ismail Ibrahim told AFP.

He did not immediately know if the blast, which took out the back of the restaurant, was due to a bomb inside the establishment or to a booby-trapped car outside.

Earlier Sunni guerrillas took at least 80 people hostage in an Iraqi town near Baghdad on Friday and threatened to kill them unless Shias left the area, a Shia official quoted residents as saying.

The hostage-taking and three successive days of bombings which killed at least 34 people suggested

insurgents had regrouped after a lull in violence since Jan. 30 elections.

"People from the town called me begging the Iraqi government to save their relatives who are hostages. They told me there are at least 60 hostages," the official, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters in Baghdad.

Iraqi Shias were fleeing the town of Al-Madain south of Baghdad yesterday following the hostage taking incident.

"Gunmen are going around with loudspeakers demanding that all Shias leave the town," said Captain Haitham Mohammed of the Iraqi army who fled Madain with several people on Friday evening to the city of Kut further south.

"They have detained more than 80 people, including women and children, and they are threatening to kill them unless Shias leave."

Mohammed said many Iraqi soldiers and police officers have changed into civilian clothing and have fled the mixed Sunni-Shia town on the Tigris river 30km south

of the capital.

"Gunmen have ringed the town," said Khodeir Abbas, 72, who fled with 10 members of his family.

A distraught Abbas Mahmoud, 47, a labourer in Madain's market said: "I fled the town fearing they would kill me if I stayed."

Insurgents with heavy weapons appeared to have taken control of the mixed Sunni and Shia town of Madain, just south of Baghdad, and no police or government forces were in sight, said the official.

"The residents told me the insurgents were wandering the streets in cars and warning people on loudspeakers that if Shias want the hostages to be safe they must leave town," he said.

Guerrillas have taken control of cities such as Falluja before but seizing many hostages in a town so close to the capital will pile pressure on Iraq's new leaders to deliver the improved security Iraqis have expected since the elections.