

## Pakistan tells US to respect borders in terror war

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has assured the United States of unwavering support in the war on terrorism, but said he would not tolerate violation of the country's borders by US forces, newspapers said.

Musharraf met US Central Command chief General John Abizaid on Tuesday after strikes by Afghanistan-based US forces killed 24 suspected militants in a Pakistani tribal region bordering Afghanistan last week.

The strikes prompted anti-US protests by pro-militant tribesmen in North Waziristan, just inside the Pakistan border, during funerals for some of the dead on Saturday.

Wednesday editions of Pakistani newspapers quoted Musharraf as telling Abizaid during a meeting in the garrison city of Rawalpindi that Pakistani forces were doing everything they could to purge the country of terrorists.

"Now we want our borders to be respected in the war on terrorism and will not put up with future border breaches," the Daily Times quoted Musharraf as saying.

There was no comment from the Pakistan government on the newspaper reports.

## Kashmiri pandits agree to return home

PTI, Srinagar

Assured of a "deeper sense of security and dignity", Kashmiri Pandits on Tuesday agreed to return to the Valley after a meeting with the Hurriyat moderate faction that also endorsed the Indo-Pak dialogue process.

Reading out a statement after the meeting, Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq said the two sides had resolved that the "Pandits will return to the Valley with a deeper sense of security and dignity... And that, unmistakably, requires a favourable environment".

He said the participants supported the dialogue process between India and Pakistan to resolve issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to ensure lasting peace in the region. The meeting, which was the first between the two communities since militancy erupted 16 years ago, was boycotted by Kashmir Samiti and Panun Kashmir.

"The Hurriyat Conference along with all sensible elements will endeavour to discharge their duty effectively and the Pandit intellectuals will contribute towards the forward movement as handsomely as possible," the joint statement said.

The Mirwaiz said the involvement of the people would help "build bridges of goodwill, mutual trust and, above everything else, the understanding required under the circumstances".



PHOTO: AFP

A police officer salutes as a young survivor of a bombing attack holds up the national flag in Tahrir Square in central Baghdad yesterday, as Iraqis observed a three minutes silence for victims of last weeks bombings in Baghdad and in the southern town of Al-Musayyib. Children from New Baghdad who came to this square, lost friends a week ago in an attack that left 32 children dead when a suicide bomber blew himself up as US soldiers handed out chocolates in the street.

## Army recruits again hit by bombs

Sunnis suspend their roles in Iraq constitution team

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

A suicide bomber blew himself up outside an often-targeted army recruiting centre, killing at least eight people, as Iraqis nationwide held three minutes of silence to commemorate victims of two of the recent bombings.

At least 26 would-be recruits were also wounded in the 9:30 am (0530 GMT) attack outside the main gate at the Muthanna recruitment center, an interior ministry official said.

The blast came 10 days after another suicide bomber killed at least 21 would-be recruits waiting at the same gate.

The Muthanna base, a former airfield, has been attacked more than six times over the past months.

Earlier Wednesday, two car bombs were reported in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, with at least two

wounded, the official said.

Iraq is reeling under a blitz of bombings that have killed at least 200 and wounded hundreds more over the past week.

Meanwhile several Sunni Arab members of the team drafting Iraq's new constitution have suspended their membership following the assassination of two of their colleagues, a spokesman said on Wednesday.

The suspension could complicate the task of drafting the charter by a mid-August deadline.

Salih al-Mutlaq, spokesman for the Iraqi National Dialogue, a Sunni Arab umbrella group, said four of its members on the drafting committee had suspended their membership. Two National Dialogue members also on the team were killed on Tuesday.

"The environment in Iraq isn't right for anyone to get work done," Mutlaq told Reuters when asked

why the action had been taken.

Another official on the committee said all 15 Sunni Arab members of the 71-member body had suspended their membership, but that could not immediately be confirmed.

The constitution drafting committee was due to hold a news conference later on Wednesday to lay out the progress made so far in drawing up the document.

Hours before Tuesday's killings, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said he hoped the draft constitution could be ready early -- by the end of this month -- if Sunni concerns could be quickly addressed.

Fifteen Sunni members joined the committee last month, making it the first nationwide political body to include significant Sunni Arab representation since the new government, led by Shias and Kurds, took office in April.

## NRIs hail Singh's US visit as sign of India's rise

AFP, Washington

Indian-Americans are celebrating the US visit by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as affirmation that their homeland now is seen as a force on the world stage.

Singh was honored at a formal White House dinner Monday with pomp and pageantry befitting a head of state, and on Tuesday gave a rare address to a joint session of Congress -- something only a handful of foreign leaders have done since President George W. Bush took office in January 2001.

As US and Indian flags fluttered outside the Capitol underscored the warm relations between the two countries, many from America's sizeable Indian community glowed with pride.

Mohan Kumar, a tourist from India who paced outside the Capitol building hoping to capture the prime minister's arrival on his video camera, exulted that the Indian leader had received such a cordial welcome in Washington.

## UK soldiers face war crimes trial

British military 'bitterly regrets' death of Iraqi prisoner

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Three British soldiers are facing war crimes charges as well as criminal charges in connection with the death of a detainee in Iraq in September 2003.

One soldier faces manslaughter charges and two others abuse charges after an operation in which the Iraqi died. Four more soldiers face other charges.

All seven will be tried by British courts martial, not at The Hague.

In a separate case, four soldiers face criminal charges over claims an Iraqi drowned in a canal after being beaten.

One of the 11 men charged is a colonel, the most senior officer to be charged with an offence during the military action in Iraq. The charges faced by three of the men - of "inhuman treatment of persons" - were brought under the International Criminal Court Act 2001 and will be tried as war crimes.

The soldiers involved are from the Queen's Lancashire Regiment.

Brigadier Geoffrey Sheldon, the colonel of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, said the death of Baha Mousa, the victim in the first case, was an "isolated, tragic incident which should never have happened and which I and every member of the regiment bitterly regrets".

But Phil Shiner, lawyer for the Mousa family, said a charge of murder would be more suitable and said it was inappropriate for the British military to try their own.

The charges were announced by the Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, in the House of Lords on Tuesday evening.

In the first case, the soldiers are alleged to have committed a number of offences against a group of detainees arrested following a planned operation.

One of the detainees, Mr Mousa, a Basra hotel receptionist, was allegedly killed by one of those charged, Corporal Donald Payne, 34, of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment.

Corp Payne is also alleged to have mistreated others and faces charges of manslaughter, inhuman treatment of persons and perverting the course of justice.

Two other members of the regiment, Lance Corporal Wayne Crowcroft, 21, and Private Darren Fallon, 22, also face charges of inhuman treatment of persons.

A fourth serviceman, Sergeant Kelvin Stacey, 28, also of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, is alleged to have assaulted a detainee causing actual bodily harm, or alternatively common assault.

## 5 killed, 25 hurt in Kashmir car bomb

AFP, Srinagar

A car bomb claimed by Islamic rebels exploded in the heart of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar early Wednesday, killing four soldiers and a civilian and injuring 21 other people, police and medical sources said.

The blast came as the army reported a rise in rebel infiltration into the Indian zone of disputed Kashmir since Himalayan snows began melting. India's Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said militants are still being trained in the Pakistani zone.

The explosion outside a school in a high security zone was caused by a car bomb that targeted two passing security force vehicles, Kashmir police chief Gopal Sharma told reporters.

"Four soldiers have died in the explosion," Sharma said.

Doctors at Srinagar's main hospital said the body of a government employee was also found at the scene. Earlier, the town's police chief Syed Ahmed had said all five dead were Indian soldiers.

Police and the army said 17 civilians and four soldiers were injured.

Police said they were investigating eyewitness claims that a car laden with explosives was driven into the back of an army vehicle, possibly by a suicide bomber.

"It is possible that the militant driving the car might have jumped out at the last moment," said Javed Maqdoom, inspector general of police.

He said searchers have not been able to find the remains of a suicide bomber but were still investigating.

The region's main rebel group Hizbul Mujahedin claimed responsibility in a telephone call to a local news agency. It made no mention of a suicide bomber.

"It was a devastating blast," said Abdul Majid, a government employee, who was passing by the area.

"We saw an army jeep thrown on the footpath. We could see at least one dead soldier whose head had been severed. Other civilians were lying in a pool of blood."

The area was strewn with debris from a vehicle, bullet-proof jackets and other army gear. Windows in a nearby shopping centre were shattered.

## One million flee as storm batters China

REUTERS, Beijing

Heavy rain and winds forced more than one million people from their homes in southeast China on Wednesday and killed at least one, state media said, but the mainland was spared the battering that hit Taiwan.

State media showed residents in the rice-growing provinces of Zhejiang and Fujian bracing against the heavy wind, which one reporter described as like sand pelting his face.

In the worst-hit area, Zhejiang's coastal Cangnan county, power supply was sporadic, water cut off and floodwaters reached shoulder height after torrential rains.

At least 300 people in Cangnan's Guangmei area holed up in a primary school on high ground only to be surrounded by floodwaters, residents said.

"A wall of our school has collapsed because of the rising floodwater," a school official surnamed Ye told Reuters by telephone. Securing food for those inside was the biggest problem, he

said.

A university student interning at the school said government relief supplies had yet to reach them.

"I have seen two boats coming to bring food and carry some people away. But they were not sent by the government," the student, Cheng Jijia, said by telephone.

"Everyone staying here was offered a bag of biscuits and bottled water last night, but the food was only sufficient for two meals," she said.

A landslide of mud and rock caused by the torrential rain blocked roads in the area.

The death toll from Typhoon Haitang in Taiwan meanwhile rose to 10, with another three missing after the storm shut schools, offices and financial markets on Monday.

In the far south of the island, 3,000 tourists were stranded as heavy rain and floodwaters damaged a bridge and cut off road links, local media said. The government planned to send chartered jets to bring the tourists out, reports said.

## Two Koreas to dismantle border propaganda

AFP, Seoul

South and North Korean military officials agreed Wednesday to resume stalled work on dismantling propaganda materials on the Cold War's last frontier, officials said.

The agreement came at inter-Korean military talks, which were held at the border truce village of Panmunjom to prepare for a general-level meeting on easing tension, the South's defense ministry said.

"South and North Korea agreed to restart the elimination of propaganda materials on July 25 and complete it by August 13," the ministry said in a statement.

At military talks in June last year, the two sides signed a landmark accord to stop propaganda activity on the 248-kilometer border, which has been dotted with slogan boards and posters.

Under the accord, they began dismantling all propaganda materials and turned off electronic signboards and high-performance loudspeaker batteries on each side of the border.

## Anti-Gaza protest fizzles out

Israeli MPs reject pullout delay

AFP, Gaza Strip

A mass protest by thousands of diehard opponents of Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip was fizzling out Wednesday as police and soldiers again prevented them from marching on the territory.

Under massive security, all access to the small town of Kfar Maimon has been sealed off to prevent new demonstrators from arriving, albeit allowing tired protesters to return home.

The main settlers' lobby that organized the demonstration said the bulk of the rally would break up later in the day, leaving a kernel of "several thousand" hardcore protesters determined to reach the Gaza settlements.

"We never intended to stay longer than Wednesday, because most of the demonstrators came with their families and need to get back to their jobs and homes," Yeshu spokeswoman Emilie Amaroussi told AFP.

A Yeshu leader said demonstrators were still determined to reach doomed Jewish settlements in the occupied Gaza Strip that were last week declared a military zone closed to public access.

The Israeli parliament overwhelmingly rejected a last-ditch move by right-wingers Wednesday to delay the Gaza Strip pullout for up to a year.

A series of bills put forward by a number of MPs, including two former cabinet ministers, were rejected after a stormy debate by a vote of 69-41, with two abstentions.

A sponsor of one of the bills, former welfare minister Zevulun Orlev, had proposed that the pullout not begin before July 2006, arguing that the government had made insufficient preparations to look after the 8,000 Gaza settlers.

"The government is trying to fool us when it says that everything is ready to rehouse the settlers," he said at the start of the debate.

## World's largest lonely hearts club

AFP, Tours

China is set to become the world's largest lonely hearts club in coming decades, with some 23 million men of marriage age unable to find a female partner, an international population conference heard Wednesday.

The prospect of millions of men forced to go solo threatens major social and political problems for the tightly controlled and nation of 1.3 billion people, the most populous nation on the planet, experts told the conference.

China, like its neighbours Taiwan and South Korea, has paid the price for a rapid decline in fertility combined with a preference for male children, according to University of Texas researchers Dudley Poston and Karen Glover.

Since the 1980s, modern medical techniques which can determine the sex of a baby before birth, have led to high rates of abortion for female fetuses, according to the findings.

"From the year 2000 and

continuing until 2020 there will be many extra boys of marriage age seeking females to marry, who will be unsuccessful in their courtship pursuits," the researchers said.

During China's baby boom of the 1960s the fertility rate peaked at 7.5 children per woman -- compared to 3.7 at the height of the US baby boom in the 1950s -- but plummeted following the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, to 1.7 children per woman in 2001.

Despite the assertion by former Chinese leader Mao Zedong that "women hold up half the sky", the one-child policy led to massive sex selection in favour of boys from the 1980s.

As the ratio reached 120 male babies for every 100 female, the excess boys became known in Chinese as the *guang guan* or "bare branches".

According to the research, men who do not marry are more prone to crime than if they were married, raising fears of social and political instability.



PHOTO: AFP

Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako walk past wellwishers to visit the UK pavilion in the 2005 World Exposition in Nagakute, Aichi Prefecture yesterday. Japan's stressed Crown Princess Masako returned to limited official duties outside Tokyo with a day trip to the World Exposition, about 20 months after she retreated from public view.

## Bush picks conservative judge for Supreme Court

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush nominated conservative judge John Roberts to the US Supreme Court, a move that could shape the outcome of battles over volatile issues like abortion for decades.

Republicans welcomed the choice of a candidate with a reputation as a brilliant lawyer with right wing credentials. But senior Democrats expressed doubts, setting the scene for a Senate battle over Roberts' confirmation.

"The decisions of the Supreme Court affect the life of every American," the president said in a televised address from the White House, with the 50-year-old federal appeals court judge at his side.

"A nominee to that court must be a person of superb credentials and the highest integrity, a person who will faithfully apply the constitution and keep our founding promise of equal justice under law. I have found such a person in Judge John Roberts," said Bush.