



A Pakistani pedestrian passes a burning car parked near a court during a lawyers demonstration in Lahore yesterday. Pakistani police fired teargas shells to disperse hundreds of protesting lawyers here in continuing unrest over the suspension of the country's top judge.

Pakistani lawyers, police clash over judge sacking

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistani police clashed for a second day on Saturday with lawyers protesting against government moves to sack the country's top judge as restrictions on the judge were lifted.

The suspension of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary on March 9 has outraged lawyers and united disparate opposition parties against President Pervez Musharraf, who is expected to seek another term late this year.

Police fired teargas and rubber bullets, detained numerous opposition activists and raided a television station on Friday during protests in Islamabad and other cities.

On Saturday, lawyers were meeting in the High Court in the city of Lahore to discuss the case when police fired teargas outside the court after they stopped a group of lawyers trying to get in, witnesses said.

Iranian army warns US against 'stupid move'

Sanctions won't work, says Ahmadinejad

REUTERS, AP, Tehran

A senior Iranian army commander warned the United States and other Western powers not to make any "stupid move" over Tehran's nuclear programme and said they would be surprised by the military response to any such action.

The comments by the commander-in-chief of the regular army, reported by newspapers on Saturday, were the latest in a series of defiant statements by Iran's leadership as the United Nations prepares to vote on new sanctions against the country.

Iran is embroiled in an escalating international dispute over its uranium enrichment, which Iran says is solely for fuel for power generation but the West suspects is a cover for making nuclear weapons.

The United States says it would prefer a negotiated solution to the crisis, but has not ruled out military options if diplomacy fails.

Armed forces chief Ataollah Salehi said Iran's military was much stronger today than when Iran fought an eight-year war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1980-88.

"Today the defensive capabilities of Iran are not to be compared with those of the time of the holy war and if our bullying enemies make a stupid move, they will certainly be surprised," the daily Siyasat-e Rouz quoted Salehi as saying on Friday.

A draft resolution agreed by the UN Security Council's five members with veto power -- the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia -- and Germany was sent to the 15-nation council on Thursday for a vote expected next week.

The draft seeks new sanctions against Iran for refusing to suspend uranium enrichment, whose product can be used to generate power or, more highly enriched, to make nuclear bombs.

Iranian leaders have reiterated in recent days they will not bow to pressure and abandon their nuclear programme, while saying they too would prefer a negotiated solution.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larjani said on Wednesday his country would respond militarily if attacked.

Earlier President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad insisted Friday that new sanctions won't force Iran to give up its right to enrich uranium, and he blasted the UN Security Council as an instrument used by "bullying" Western nations against Tehran.

"We have achieved the nuclear fuel cycle. We won't give it up under pressure. You can't stop the Iranian nation from this path through meetings," Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying by state media.

But even as he reiterated Tehran would pursue the controversial enrichment program, he has asked to speak before the UN's most powerful body on the day the Security Council votes on a new resolution on stepped up sanctions against his country.

Security Council members have raised no objections to Ahmadinejad's request, said South Africa's UN Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo, who holds the rotating council presidency.

Lanka seeks foreign help to bring Tigers back to peace talks

AFP, Washington/ Colombo

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on Friday sought international help to prod Tamil Tiger rebels waging a battle for a separate homeland to return to the negotiating table.

"The international community should once again seek to prevail upon the LTTE to return to the negotiations and to negotiate in good faith," he said during a visit to Washington, where he held talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other senior government officials.

Direct peace negotiations between Colombo and the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) stalled in October last year and fighting has intensified despite the two sides agreeing to a Norwegian-brokered truce in 2002.

More than 4,000 people have also been killed since December 2005.

Bogollagama urged the international community to make clear to LTTE rebels that they should respond "in a time bound fashion with specific targets" if they wanted to return to talks.

They should "not seek to use such an opportunity to merely buy time or to score tactical advantages," he said.

"Above all they must join the

democratic political mainstream. After all there are several militant groups that have successfully made this transition," he said.

Bogollagama said it was "hard to tell" whether foreigners would succeed in convincing the LTTE but added that they "must push the LTTE to make this choice, and make it now" as Colombo prepared constitutional reforms that would set the stage for devolution of power in Sri Lanka.

An all-party consultative committee has emerged with several proposed constitutional reforms to be refined into a "final" plan by April, he said.

Thousands protest Iraq war in US

AP, Washington

Thousands of Christians prayed for peace at an anti-war service Friday night at the Washington National Cathedral, kicking off a weekend of protests around the country to mark the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq.

Afterward, participants marched with battery-operated faux candles through snow and wind toward the White House, where police began arresting protesters shortly before midnight. Protest guidelines require demonstrators to continue moving while on the White House sidewalk.

"We gave them three warnings, and they broke the guidelines," said Lt Scott Fear. "There's an area on the White House sidewalk where you have to keep moving."

About 100 people crossed the street from Lafayette Park where thousands of protesters were gathered

to demonstrate on the White House sidewalk late Friday. Police began cuffing them and putting them on busses to be taken for processing.

Police said they would not know the total number of protesters arrested until later Saturday.

The windows of the executive mansion were dark, as the president was away for the weekend at Camp David in Maryland.

John Pattison, 29, said he and his wife flew in from Portland, Ore., to attend his first anti-war rally. He said his opposition to the war had developed over time.

"Quite literally on the night that shock and awe commenced, my friend and I toasted the military might of the United States," Pattison said. "We were quite proud and thought we were doing the right thing."



South Korean protesters shout slogans in Seoul yesterday during a demonstration against the war in Iraq marking the fourth anniversary of the Iraq war. About one thousand protesters demanded the withdrawal of South Korean troops from Iraq.

Israel refuses contacts with Palestinian govt

AFP, Jerusalem/ Gaza City

Israel refused yesterday to have any contacts with the new Palestinian government of national unity that groups secular Fatah with the Islamist Hamas movement.

"Israel will not recognise or work with this new government or with its members," government spokeswoman Min Eisin told AFP.

"The new government continues along the clear line of the preceding one. Unfortunately, there is no recognition of Israel, there is no recognition of past accords with the Palestinian Authority.

"And not only is there no renunciation of terrorism, there is a clear call by the new prime minister to what he calls the right of resistance.

"We expect the international

community to firmly stick to its demands concerning the three conditions" for lifting the aid freeze imposed on the Palestinian government a year ago when Hamas came to power.

The West has demanded that a Palestinian government renounce violence and recognise Israel and past peace deals for the aid flow to resume.

STORM HITS CITIES
US airlines cancel over 2,000 flights

REUTERS, Washington

Big US airlines and their affiliates cancelled more than 2,000 flights on Friday as a late-winter storm hit the Northeast's biggest cities, airline and government officials said.

Airlines, hoping to avert the type

of storm-related service meltdown that stung JetBlue Airways Corp. in New York a month ago, began cancelling flights on Thursday. Cancellations piled up during the day and by late afternoon there was little activity at busy New York-area airports.

16 killed after bus falls into ditch in West Bengal

AFP, Kolkata

At least 16 people were killed and 67 injured yesterday in West Bengal when their bus slid into a ditch after it tried to avoid an oncoming vehicle, police said.

"The bus packed with labourers and office-goers rolled into a roadside ditch after it tried to avoid a police vehicle," West Bengal state police chief Raj Kanooja told AFP.

Sixteen bodies had been recovered from the ditch, he said, and the 67 injured have been taken to hospital.

"The death toll may rise as the condition of some of the injured is critical," Kanooja added.

Benazir warns of Taliban threat to Pakistan

REUTERS, New York

The Taliban must be defeated in Pakistan this year or the country risks falling under the sway of extremists much as Afghanistan did before Sept. 11, 2001, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said on Friday.

Benazir, who hopes to return from exile and run for prime minister again in elections this year, also warned that the judicial crisis gripping Pakistan could spin out of control and underscores the importance of restoring civilian rule.

"They (the Taliban) have actually established a mini-state in the tribal areas of Pakistan. My fear is that if these forces are not stopped in

2007, they are going to try to take on the state of Pakistan itself," Benazir told Reuters in an interview.

"In my view it is a genuine threat," she said.

Other commentators have warned of the dangers to Pakistan of a resurgent Taliban, which was routed from power in neighbouring Afghanistan by the US invasion following the Sept. 11 attacks.

Bhutto said the Taliban comeback was particularly dire because Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was unable to suppress elements of the Pakistani security forces that remain sympathetic to the Taliban.