

# US attack on Iran to be ‘terrible mistake’

Warns Musharraf

AFP, Sarajevo

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said a possible US attack on Iran would be a "terrible mistake", in an interview published here yesterday.

"It will be a terrible mistake if President George Bush orders an attack against Iran," Musharraf told Sarajevo daily Dnevni Avaz ahead of his visit to Bosnia.

"I'm concerned about the possibility that a US attack on Iran (would cause) turbulence in the region," he said, warning it would spark "radicalism."

The United States wants Iran to suspend a uranium enrichment programme over fears the material could be used for nuclear weapons, but Tehran insists it is only interested in producing energy.

Washington also accuses Iran of aggravating violence in neighbouring Iraq.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf arrived in Bosnia on Friday to discuss boosting ties between the two countries, the Bosnian presidency said.

Musharraf, on his first official trip to the Balkan nation, is to meet in the capital Sarajevo with members of Bosnia's tripartite presidency and Prime Minister Nikola Spiric, before addressing its parliament.

During the two-day visit, Pakistan and Bosnia are to sign several bilateral agreements, notably on cooperation in air traffic and the defence industry.

On Saturday, Musharraf is to meet members of a local inter-religious council that gathers Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians.

He is expected to support dialogue between the three main ethnic groups -- Muslims, Croats and Serbs -- who fought each other during Bosnia's 1992-1995 war.

The Pakistani leader is also

scheduled to pay respects to victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

Some 8,000 unarmed Muslim men and boys were killed in and around the eastern town by Serb forces at the end of Bosnia's 1992-1995 war. The atrocity is the worst in Europe since World War II.

In the interview, Musharraf reiterated accusations against Afghan President Hamid Karzai about Pakistan's lack of readiness to fight terrorism.

Afghan authorities "must stop spreading those bare-faced lies. President Karzai must stop deluding the world," said Musarraf.

He also denied accusations from Karzai that al-Qaeda head Osama bin Laden and Taliban leader Mulla Mohammad Omar were in Pakistan.

The comments set the stage for a stormy meeting in Turkey next week between Musharraf and Karzai, two key allies of the United States.

# Abe meets Bush in 1st White House trip

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush welcomed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for the first time at the White House Thursday, with baseball and golf coming up in their conversation at dinner.

The two, accompanied by their wives and a handful of close aides, held dinner "at a family-like atmosphere" on the eve of their official summit at the Camp David presidential retreat, a Japanese government official said.

"They discussed the performance of Japanese Major League baseball players, led by Matsuzaka," the official said, referring to pitcher Daisuke Matsuzaka of the Boston Red Sox.

The two also chatted about a picture of their grandfathers playing golf with then-president Dwight

Eisenhower, the official said, adding that the two men will get down to business at the Camp David presidential retreat Friday morning.

Shortly after his morning arrival in Washington, Abe renewed his expression of sympathy for Asian women driven into brothels by Japan's military during World War II while he pledged to step up its alliance with the United States.

"As a person and as prime minister, I feel sympathy from the bottom of my heart to former comfort women, who experienced hardships," Abe told members of the US Congress.

"I feel deeply sorry that they were forced to be placed in such extremely painful situations," Abe told a small group of Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill, according to a Japanese government official.



PHOTO: AFP

US President George W Bush (R) with First Lady Laura Bush (L) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2nd R) with his wife Akie (2nd L) make their way from Blair House to the White House for a social dinner on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) shout anti-government slogans against the government as they stop the departure of the Hyderabad-Delhi bound Andhara Pradesh Express train for more than an hour in Hyderabad yesterday in protest against the construction of the Babil barrage across the Godavari river in Maharashtra.

# Congress clears Iraq bill, Bush vows veto

AP, Washington

In a bold wartime challenge to President Bush, the Democratic-controlled Congress cleared legislation Thursday to begin withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by Oct 1 with a goal of a complete pullout six months later. The White House dismissed the legislation as "dead before arrival."

The 51-46 Senate vote was largely along party lines, and like House passage a day earlier it underscored that the war's congressional opponents are far short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a Bush veto.

Democrats marked Thursday's final passage with a news conference during which they repeatedly urged Bush to reconsider his veto threat. "This bill for the first time gives the president of the United States an exit strategy" from Iraq,

said Rep David Obey of Wisconsin.

The legislation is "in keeping with what the American people want," added Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

The White House was unmoved. "The president's determined to win in Iraq. I think the bill that they sent us today is mission defeated," said deputy press secretary Dana Perino. "This bill is dead before arrival."

Given that standoff, Republicans and Democrats alike already were manoeuvring for position on a follow-up bill.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell dismissed the just-passed legislation as "political posturing" by Democrats that deserves the veto it will receive. "The solution is simple: Take out the surrender date, take out the pork and get the funds to our troops," he said.

# 'Kosovo is ready for independence'

AFP, Pristina

Kosovo is ready for independence, its ethnic Albanian leaders told UN envoys visiting the disputed Serbian province on Friday to test its readiness to become the world's newest state.

Prime Minister Agim Ceku said he told the UN Security Council ambassadors Kosovo had fulfilled conditions necessary to win supervised independence as proposed in a UN plan staunchly opposed by Serbia and Russia.

"We presented our achievements in the fulfilment of standards, challenges, our vision for the future, and I think they understood that we are serious and ready," Ceku told reporters after meeting with the delegation.

"We offered our arguments that Kosovo is ready to function as a state. It's time to recognise this reality through a UN Security Council resolution," said the Kosovo Albanian leader.

# Afghan district governor killed in Taliban attacks

AFP, Kandahar

Taliban violence erupted across Afghanistan yesterday with rebels killing a district governor and police chief and dozens of militants attacking Nato troops

The administration and police chiefs of Giro district in the volatile eastern province of Ghazni were killed with three police guards when they were ambushed by scores of Taliban late Thursday, the provincial governor said.

Ghazni governor Mirajudin Pattan rejected a Taliban statement that the rebels had captured the district, saying the ambush was not even in the centre of Giro and occurred while the men were travelling elsewhere.

"On the way they were ambushed by a reported number of 100 to 150 Taliban, sparking a battle. The governor, police chief

and three police guards were killed.

"There were definitely Taliban casualties but we cannot give you an exact number," he said.

"This is just Taliban propaganda that they have taken control of the district. This not true."

A police official said earlier an emergency meeting was called to appoint a new district chief and police chief and send in fresh forces.

The Taliban have briefly captured several districts in a campaign that has steadily gained intensity since it was launched after the ultra-conservative movement was booted from government in late 2001.

But Afghan authorities and their allies in the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) say they rebels are easily driven out of the areas they occupy -- all of which have been remote and under-policed.



PHOTO: AFP

US Senator Barack Obama (L) speaks as US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton listens during the Democratic Party Presidential Primary Debate on Thursday at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina.