

# Pakistan rules out early elections

### Govt takes U-turn in judge case

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's government yesterday ruled out holding early elections amid growing speculation that a crisis over President Pervez Musharraf's ouster of the chief justice could force snap polls.

Information Minister Mohammad Ali Durrani said the country's federal and provincial assemblies would see out their full five-year term, which is due to end in November, and that elections would then be held.

"The elections will be held on schedule and there is no possibility of any snap polls," Durrani told AFP. "The assemblies will complete their tenure."

The minister's statement indicates that military ruler Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, is set continue with his original plan to seek reelection as president-in-uniform by the current

assemblies.

Officials have said this is likely to happen in September.

Such an election would be a way for Musharraf to get around a constitutional provision that says he should quit as chief of the powerful army by the end of 2007.

But Musharraf has faced growing protests against his rule since suspending Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March. Political clashes in the southern city of Karachi in May left more than 40 people dead.

Speculation mounted among parliamentarians in recent days that the embattled president would announce snap elections, possibly in mid-July, so he could be reelected by the new assemblies and preempt future political turmoil.

Opposition parties including the Pakistan People's Party of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto say

this would be unfair, especially as they allege that tens of millions of voters are missing from electoral rolls.

In the latest protests against Musharraf, around 1,200 lawyers and opposition party activists burned effigies of the president in the eastern city of Lahore on Thursday, while 800 people rallied in northwestern Peshawar.

Meanwhile, a lawyer for Pakistan's government said yesterday it now had no objections if the Supreme Court deals with misconduct charges levelled by President Pervez Musharraf against the country's top judge.

The government previously wanted the allegations against Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry -- who was suspended by military ruler Musharraf in March -- to be dealt with by a special panel of five judges.



Indonesian people wade through flooded street yesterday at Pemancingan village in Klungkung on the island of Bali. Hundreds of houses were inundated by floodwaters, which reached a height of up to two metres in parts of the region.

# Asians must understand each other's concern

### Says Manmohan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked Asian countries to look at each other through "borrowed eyes" for greater understanding and cooperation among themselves.

"We Asians often look at each other through borrowed eyes, through tinted glasses and distorted mirrors. This must change," he said while releasing a book "The New Asia Power Dynamic" by former Indian Foreign Secretary M K Rasgotra here on Wednesday night.

Asian countries must learn to have an informed understanding of each other's concerns, Singh said adding the people in India must devote more time and resources in studying the strongest economies of Asia, China, Japan and South Korea, Singh said.

The prime minister said India's "Look East" policy, introduced in 1991, has contributed to a comprehensive re-engagement with South East and East Asia.

The rapid economic growth of China and India created new opportunities for expansion of trade and investment to their mutual advantages, he said and rejected suggestions that India was ganging up against China.

Singh said he had told the Chinese leadership that there was no question of ganging up against China as healthy ties between the two Asian giants was in the interest of both.

He said India and China were engaged in talks to solve the border problem and he did not have any instant solution to it.

Singh said India has revitalised Saarc as shown by the agenda and success of the Delhi summit in March this year. However, there is a need to realise the full potential of the regional grouping and civil societies must play its role in building mutual understanding, he added.

"We are generally more aware of what happens far away in distant shores than in the countries of our region," the Indian prime minister said.



Gordon Brown, the new prime minister of Britain, and his wife Sarah wave to the media as they arrive at 10 Downing Street in central London on Wednesday. Gordon Brown spent his first full day as British prime minister Thursday conducting a wholesale shake-up of senior government posts, with new faces for the ministries of finance and foreign affairs.

# Brown names cabinet vowing change

AFP, London

New British Prime Minister Gordon Brown unveiled his senior ministerial team yesterday, appointing a loyal and trusted ally as finance minister and the youngest foreign secretary for 30 years.

Alistair Darling, 53, succeeds Brown as chancellor of the exchequer, while David Miliband, 41, replaces Margaret Beckett as foreign secretary. He is the youngest person to hold the post since David Owen in 1977.

The former environment secretary, tipped as a future Labour Party leader, said he was "tremendously honoured and absolutely delighted" to be appointed and pledged to bring leadership and be "patient as well as purposeful".

The announcements came less than 24 hours after Brown replaced Tony Blair as prime minister and both Darling and Miliband's appointments had been widely expected.

Brown also appointed Jacqui Smith, 44, to the post of home secretary following John Reid's departure.

Known for her unswerving loyalty to the party, she is the first woman to hold the position and was one of the 101 original "Blair babes" elected to parliament in 1997 when Blair became prime minister.

There was also a return to high office for Blair's former home and foreign secretary Jack Straw. He was appointed justice secretary, while Des Browne was re-appointed as Defence Secretary.

But as Brown spent his first full day in the job, Blair dominated the headlines following the announcement of his appointment as an international envoy to the Middle East soon after his formal resignation Wednesday.

In his first detailed comments on his new role, which he said he will start immediately, Blair said it was "a huge challenge".

"I have to prepare the ground for a negotiated settlement, and the key to that is to prepare the Palestinians for statehood," he told the Northern Echo in an interview published Thursday. "It is a fundamental issue."

# Immigration bill faces US Senate showdown

AP, Washington

The Senate's revived legislation to legalise millions of unlawful immigrants faces a critical test Thursday after surviving potentially fatal challenges.

Attempts from the right and left to alter key elements of the delicate bipartisan compromise failed Wednesday, including a Republican proposal to deny illegal immigrants a path to citizenship and Democratic bids to reunite legal immigrants with family members.

The Senate killed, by a 56-41 vote, an amendment by Sen Christopher Dodd, D-Connecticut, to provide more green cards for parents of US citizens. By a 55-40 margin, it tabled a proposal by Sen Robert Menendez, D-New Jersey, to give family members of citizens and legal permanent residents more credit toward green cards in a new merit-based points system.

A make-or-break procedural vote

was set for Thursday, however, as the Senate ploughed through amendments that supporters hoped would address waverers' concerns.

Facing determined opposition from conservatives who call the bill amnesty, leaders need 60 votes to keep the measure alive and complete it as early as Friday.

The Senate on Wednesday killed several proposals designed to answer conservatives' concerns that the bill, championed by President Bush, is overly lenient toward illegal immigrants. Among the amendments was one by Sen Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, to require all adult illegal immigrants to return home temporarily to qualify for permanent lawful status. The current bill requires only heads of household seeking permanent legal residency to return home to apply for green cards.

# Lockerbie bomber wins right to new appeal

AFP, London

Scottish legal authorities yesterday granted a Libyan man jailed for the 1988 bombing of a US airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland the right to appeal for a second time.

The Scottish Criminal Review Commission (SCRC) said Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al-Megrahi "may have suffered a miscarriage of justice" based on new evidence and on other evidence not submitted at his trial in 2001.

Megrahi, now 55, was convicted by a trio of Scottish judges sitting in a special court in the Netherlands of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 on December 21, 1988. He was jailed for a total of 27 years.

Megrahi, who applied for the SCRC review three years ago, has always proclaimed his innocence.

The explosion on the New York-bound flight killed all 259 people on board and 11 people on the ground in the southern Scottish town of Lockerbie in what was Britain's worst terrorist atrocity.

A previous appeal by the former Libyan intelligence officer, who is being held in a jail near Glasgow, western Scotland, was thrown out in 2002.

# Myanmar releases dozens of dissidents

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's military regime has released dozens of activists detained last month after marching in processions to pray for the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition confirmed Thursday.

At least 47 of the 52 who were arrested in separate incidents in May were freed Wednesday night, Myint Thein, a spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, said in a telephone interview.

"Authorities released the prayer vigil campaigners last night, but we are concerned about Phyu Phyu Thin who has not yet been released," Myint Thein said.

Phyu Phyu Thin, an AIDS activist from Suu Kyi's NLD party, was taken from her home on May 21 for questioning by police. She recently went on a hunger strike and was reportedly not well.

# Tibet envoys head to China for talks on autonomy

AFP, New Delhi

Two envoys of the Tibet government-in-exile in India will head for China on Friday for a sixth round of talks on greater autonomy for the Himalayan region, the exiles' foreign minister said yesterday.

"They'll be in China for about a week," Kalong Tempa Tsering, minister in the Tibet Central Administration, based in the Indian hill town of Dharamsala, told AFP Thursday.

"They are going with an open heart and mind."

Envoys Lodi Gyaltsen Gari and Kelsang Gyaltsen were briefed by Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama Tuesday, a statement released by the Dalai Lama's office Thursday said.

"We are not demanding independence but we want genuine autonomy for the entire Tibetan region," said Tsering.

# Indo-US nuke deal to be implemented this year

### Says Rice

AFP, Washington

The outlines of the deal, described by Rice as "historic and pathbreaking," were agreed even though New Delhi refuses to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and had tested nuclear weapons in 1998.

Under the deal, India is to separate nuclear facilities for civilian and military use and set up a regime of international inspections in return for technology and nuclear fuel supplies.

Despite several rounds of talks, India has stood fast against accepting any curbs on its reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel.

India also wants assurances that Washington will continue to supply fuel for its atomic plants in the event New Delhi conducts further nuclear weapons tests.

"I feel that we have strong commitments on the part of both govern-

ments because we have strong commitment on the part of our leaders," Rice said.

India is "a country for whom economic development cannot afford to slow" and needs new energy sources to maintain growth without contributing to global warming, she said.

Aside from inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), India must also agree to demands for export and non-proliferation safeguards by the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group.

India has proposed to set up a special unit to reprocess spent atomic fuel under international safeguards in a bid to close the US deal, the Press Trust of India reported this month.



Afghan policemen and US soldiers stand at the site of an attack in Kabul yesterday. A suicide car bomb exploded near a foreign security convoy in Kabul, killing two US nationals and an Afghan woman.



# Jail changed life, says Paris Hilton

AP, Los Angeles

Paris Hilton told CNN's Larry King she would never again drink and drive and that her time in jail was "a time-out in life."

In her first televised interview since leaving jail, a demure Hilton said Wednesday that even though she's an Aquarius and "we're social people," her time behind bars taught her "there's a lot more important things in life" than partying.

"I'm frankly sick of it," Hilton said, with loose, re-blonded locks and camera-ready makeup. "I've been going out for a long time now. Yeah, it's fun, but it's not going to be the mainstay of my life anymore."

She said her incarceration was "a very traumatic experience" that inspired a "journey" of self-discovery that she intends to continue. The world will see a new Paris Hilton, she said.

# 'Norway meeting will help revive Lankan peace process'

### Air raids after bomb kills two soldiers

AFP, Tokyo

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said yesterday he was optimistic that a meeting of top donors this week would help to revive the island nation's moribund peace process.

Peace broker Norway is holding the crucial meeting of Sri Lanka's top aid donors in a bid to halt a new wave of bloodshed.

"We are expecting a very favourable development. The outcome is expected to encourage the current peace process toward contributing to the sustainability of our country," said Bogollagama.

Oslo-brokered peace talks collapsed in October last year and since then diplomatic efforts have failed to end violence in the bitter ethnic conflict which has claimed more than 60,000 lives in the past 35 years.

More than 5,000 people have died in the latest wave of fighting since December 2005 despite a truce in place since February 2002.

Bogollagama, in Japan for the first time since he took office in January, met Wednesday with his Japanese counterpart Taro Aso, who pledged about one million dollars' worth of aid for landmine removal and support for refugees.

Japan accounts for about two-thirds of total bilateral aid to the island and international human rights groups have been lobbying Tokyo to exert pressure on Colombo to stem the spiralling violence.

Bogollagama praised Japan's continued assistance even as some donor countries move to cut aid owing to alleged human rights abuses.

Aso on Wednesday raised Japanese concerns over the human rights situation in Sri Lanka during a meeting with Bogollagama, according to Japan.

Britain, Germany and the Netherlands have already slashed various forms of aid to Colombo due to human rights abuses and other reasons linked to the conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels. Several other

nations could follow suit.

The United States also has refused to include Sri Lanka in its so-called Millennium Challenge Account, under which it could receive millions of dollars in aid for building critical infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan warplanes attacked suspected Tamil Tiger rebel camps in the island's north on Thursday as an officer and a soldier were killed in a roadside bomb attack, the defence ministry said.

Supersonic jets "completely destroyed" two camps of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the district of Mullaitivu, the defence ministry said in a statement.

Shortly after the air raids, suspected LTTE activists triggered a powerful Claymore mine in Jaffna as soldiers were on a routine motorcycle patrol, the statement said.

It said an officer and a soldier were killed instantly.