

Pakistan readies new plan to fight Taliban

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf held a special meeting with top Pakistani officials yesterday to discuss a new strategy to curb "Talibanisation" along the Afghan border, officials said.

The four-hour session came amid increasing concern that extremism is spreading not just in Pakistan's frontier regions but also to the cities, with a pro-Taliban mosque last week kidnapping several Chinese nationals.

Musharraf, a key ally in the US-led "war on terror", also faces international pressure to crack down on alleged insurgent enclaves being used to target Nato and US-led troops in Afghanistan.

"The meeting was to review the security situation, especially in the border areas, and to prepare a recommendation for a new security

initiative to curb extremism and terrorism," a senior government official told AFP.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, the governor of North West Frontier Province, the vice chief of army staff and some ministers were among those attending the meeting at the presidency in Islamabad, the official said.

"President Musharraf presided over the meeting lasting four hours. He will give details of the plan when he addresses the nation later this week," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"The plan envisages reinforcement of security... and also establishment of peace committees in the region, that will entail involvement of local people," he added.

"The aim is to isolate foreign elements and their local allies."

In 2004 Pakistan launched a

major operation to expel foreign Al-Qaeda-linked insurgents who fled Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and sheltered with Pakistani tribesmen.

Pakistan later began to negotiate peace deals involving the authorities, local tribes and local pro-Taliban militants which were designed to freeze out foreign rebels.

But attacks have continued. Pakistan has suffered around ten Taliban-linked suicide bombings this year, while Nato and US officials say cross-border offensives are up.

Beijing, Pakistan's closest ally, urged Pakistan last week to step up security after students from the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad briefly abducted seven Chinese from an acupuncture clinic.

The hardliners said the clinic was a brothel.

Global confce on Afghanistan opens in Rome

AFP, Rome

A two-day global meet on the state of law in war-battered Afghanistan opened in Rome yesterday, due to be attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, UN chief Ban Ki-moon and Nato head Jaap De Hoop Scheffer.

More than 20 delegations attended the UN-sponsored talks, including representatives from the World Bank, the European Union, the United States, Italy and Afghanistan.

The parleys began at 1300 GMT at the building housing the Italian foreign ministry. Karzai was due later Monday to hold talks with Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi.

Karzai and Ban are due to address the conference on Tuesday.

Afghanistan's judicial system is in tatters after almost three decades of war and conflict.

Nearly six years after the fall of the extremist Taliban government, it is corrupt, overburdened and under-resourced, and internationally backed efforts to reform the sector have dragged.

"The conference aims at reaffirming commitments of the Afghan government and the international community in accelerating the judicial reform process and the rule of law, which are basic pillars for the reconstruction of Afghanistan," an Afghan statement said.

Karzai was handpicked by the West to lead the country after the ouster of the Taliban in a US-led crackdown in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington.

The Indian-educated ethnic Pashtun had pledged to usher in a radically reformist path but his detractors accuse him of failing to rein in drug production, war, lawlessness and corruption.

Bomb blast kills 7 Afghan cops

AFP, Kandahar

Seven Afghan policemen were killed yesterday when a remotely detonated bomb exploded underneath their vehicle in southern Afghanistan, police said.

The policemen were travelling in the volatile Zhari district, about 30 kilometres (20 miles) west of Kandahar, when they were attacked, the provincial police chief Sayed Aga Sageb told AFP.

"Seven police were killed and the police vehicle completely destroyed," he said. "This mine was detonated by remote control."

Kandahar province is the birthplace of the Taliban movement that is waging an insurgency against the government and its foreign allies. The rebels regularly use suicide and roadside bombings in their campaign.

Police are the most often attacked of the security forces in Afghanistan, with several hundred killed in attacks this year.



PHOTO: ISPR

Chief of the Naval Staff Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam waters a Neem sapling that he planted earlier to inaugurate the Tree Plantation Campaign 2007 on the Naval Headquarters premises at Banani in the city yesterday.

‘Capitalism is bad for men's health’

AFP, Chicago

Communism may be oppressive, but it seems as though capitalism is bad for men's health, according to a recent study which found

Sex offence case against Israel president delayed

AFP, Jerusalem

Court proceedings against Israel's outgoing president Moshe Katsav for sex offences risked further delay yesterday as the prosecution sought extra time to justify a plea bargain slammed as too lenient.

The state prosecution requested another two days to respond to a high court order to explain the controversial deal, which dropped two rape charges and allowed Katsav to escape possible jail time, before an indictment can be filed.

The high court initially demanded that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz make his explanations by Monday, after women's groups and the Movement for Quality Government filed an appeal, outraged by what it called an "amoral" deal.

For 11 months, the father of five has been the focus of the worst scandal ever to befall an Israeli leader, as women made a string of accusations, including rape, that could have seen him jailed for 16 years if convicted.

significant increases in mortality rates after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The life expectancy for men freed from the Iron Curtain dropped by six years between 1991 and 1994 amid social disruption, physical hardships and economic instability.

The degree to which men were affected depended upon how rough the transition to capitalism was and how much income inequality increased, the new study from the University of Michigan found.

And they were significantly more likely to be impacted by the transition than women, the study found.

"The inequalities in status and resources that can come with capitalism does lead males to behave in ways that are detrimental to men's health," lead author Daniel Kruger said in a telephone interview.

Increased competition can create an environment that encourages risk-taking behavior that

results in fatal accidents, he said.

An increase in social and economic stress can manifest itself in suicide or homicide and can also cause physical strains which can lead to heart attacks.

"It seems as though there is a physiological embodiment of stress from being in a competitive environment," Kruger told AFP.

Kruger compared the mortality rates of men and women in 14 post-Soviet countries.

Male mortality from intentional causes - homicides and suicides - doubled in the region, although it varied significantly by country.

Poland, which had a relatively smooth transition, saw the rate increase just 15 percent while Estonia, which was much more unstable, saw violent deaths increase 238 percent.

More significantly, Kruger said, was that the gap between the male and female mortality rates grew an average of 9.3 percent which showed that "this

economic changed was more damaging to men than to women."

"The impact was really for men who are in their economically prime years," Kruger said.

"If you were an adolescent or young adult they may have seen this as an opportunity but those who are say 45 and settled into a routine they might see this as a threat."

The countries most affected were Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Albania, which saw the gap widen by 14 to 30 percent in the first five years after the fall of communism.

The gap grew by eight to 12 percent in Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and East Germany. It grew a modest one to six percent in Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

The study was published in the current issue of Evolutionary Psychology.



Vice-Chancellor of North South University Dr Hafiz GA Siddiqui inaugurated the 'Techno-Fun Fair 2007' on the campus in the city yesterday. The Computer Club of the university organised the three-day fair.

Controversy as N-powered US ship docks off southern India

AFP, Chennai

A nuclear-powered US aircraft carrier docked off the coast of southern India yesterday, an official said, as leftist parties denounced its presence in Indian waters.

The USS Nimitz, one of the world's largest battleships, was docked two nautical miles (3.7 kilometres) from the city of Chennai in southern Tamil Nadu state, where it will remain until Thursday, a port official said.

A number of Chennai residents will arrive on board later on Monday for celebrations with US sailors ahead of US independence day on July 4, officials from the United States consulate in the city said.

But festivities could be marred by a protest planned by left-wing political parties which say the Congress-led government should not allow a US warship to dock in Indian waters.

"This is a blatant violation of the assurance given at the time of government formation that we will be strictly non-aligned," D Pandian, an official of the state

branch of the Communist Party of India.

There was also concern about whether the vessel was carrying nuclear warheads.

But the ship's captain Michael Manazir told reporters on Sunday it was "the general policy of the US government not to deploy nuclear weapons on board its ships."

Some political parties and environmentalists also expressed concern about nuclear radiation from the warship, but US officials called the Nimitz's safety record "outstanding."

A large Muslim party will on Tuesday protest the ship's activities in the Persian Gulf, after the vessel made its first visit to the Middle East in June, where it was "conducting maritime operations and supporting the global war on terrorism," according to the ship's web site.

The Indian government has defended the visit by the 333-metre long warship which has a crew of 5,000, including nuclear reactor engineers, radiation experts and aviators and more than 60 fighter jets on board.

"Port calls by naval ships of friendly countries are a routine activity to promote goodwill amongst the navies," a defence ministry spokesman said in New Delhi ahead of the Nimitz's arrival.

India and the US have stepped up joint military exercises as part of improved ties, which were boosted in 2005 when they set aside Cold War mistrust and signed a historic civilian nuclear energy transfer deal.

No atmosphere for council: Khaleda

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the tele-conference told The Daily Star last night that the BNP chairperson made the comments during the news conference over telephone arranged by the New York unit of BNP.

Khaleda Zia alleged that the party secretary general did not take her consent for holding a council and she did not even get a copy of their reform proposal.

"He [Bhuiyan] worked with me for a long time, he could have come to me if he had wanted," Khaleda said adding that an atmosphere ensuring the credibility of a council has to be created first.

In reply to a question, she said if any member of the party violates the party constitution then she will talk to party leaders for taking steps against that person.

"I also have some reform proposals which I am preparing to place before the council after discussing them with all, but the situation of the country is not in favour of holding a council right now," she said.

"How a council could take place when indoor politics is banned and the party office is closed....how discussions could be held among party members if the ban is not lifted?" she asked.

"The councillors won't even be able to come to the council under the circumstances," she quipped again.

"We are seeking permission for indoor politics as we all want to bring reforms to the party but under an atmosphere where everyone may speak freely" she said adding that an important event like a reform council might even go on for a week, a one-day council might not be enough for the purpose.

In another tele-conference coordinated by Abul Hashem and Kazi Azam, the BNP chairperson dispelled a rumour that she had talked to or contacted Awami league President Sheikh Hasina recently. She also hoped that the military backed caretaker government will hold a free, fair and neutral election.

Meanwhile, the reformist leaders claimed they are not doing anything in violation of the party constitution.

They are now collecting signatures from grassroots level leaders in favour of the reform proposal announced by the party secretary general on June 25 to ensure intra-party democracy, they claimed.

"The secretary general will go to the chairperson to discuss the

council and to seek her permission for it after finalising the reform proposal," ZA Khan, an adviser to the party chairperson told reporters yesterday after meeting Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the latter's Gulshan residence.

When asked, what will the reformists do if Khaleda does not allow Bhuiyan to hold a council, he said a proper decision will be taken at the proper time. "But we believe she will agree to hold the council," he added.

According to the party constitution, the secretary general is empowered to call a requisitioned meeting with the support of one-third of the party councillors.

Ashraf Hossain, a joint secretary general of the party, said, "We are doing everything according to the party constitution and we will get the reform proposal approved by the council."

"Preparations to hold the council according to the party constitution are underway and grassroots level leaders are coming to meet the reformist leaders to express their support for the reforms," Sardar Shakawat Hossain Bakul, a reformist BNP leader and a former lawmaker, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Half of fertilisers on sale is spurious

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phosphate, 28.02 of which is soluble in water, while it should contain a total of 46 percent phosphate, 40 percent of which should be soluble in water.

International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Liaison Scientist for Bangladesh Dr MA Hamid Miah told The Daily Star that farmers usually apply fertilisers according to the measures set by experts. But if the fertilisers do not contain the proper ratio of ingredients, farmers would not get the expected yields and incur economic losses instead. The national production would also go down, he added.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association Reaz Uddin told The Daily Star that there is a significant number of floating vendors who usually blends one or two types of fertiliser

components and sell those in open markets.

Genuine fertiliser businessmen are not involved in such types of adulteration as they are to careful about their reputations, Reaz observed. In most of the cases, it is very difficult to net the bootleggers as they constantly change their locations, he added.

SRDI recommended strict enforcement of the Fertiliser Management Act 2006, under which any offender is to be sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment or to be fined Tk 2 lakh or both.

It also suggested that field level officers of the Department of Agricultural Extension should maintain a list of local fertiliser manufacturers and regularly inspect those fertiliser factories to ensure production of only quality

fertilisers.

SRDI's Mainul Ahsan told The Daily Star that adulteration of fertilisers has been a little curbed since the declaration of the state of emergency. He however observed if there is a fertiliser crisis in the market, be it real or artificial, dishonest businessmen might take the opportunity to adulterate fertilisers with a renewed zeal.

Farmers are tempted to buy fertilisers without much consideration when there is a fertiliser crisis, Mainul added.

Despite being a mixed fertiliser, NPKS has been very popular among the farmers for a few years now, but due to widespread adulteration of it, they have already started to become disillusioned about its effectiveness, Mainul quipped.

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