

# 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 handicapped 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 Ago Saqeb 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.

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.

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