



Ex-Indian PM Chandra Shekhar dies

Former Indian prime minister Chandra Shekhar, who served briefly during a period of political turmoil, died Sunday from a blood-related illness at the age of 80, a report said.

Shekhar died of a blood disease after being ill for three months, the Press Trust of India reported.

The socialist politician became the eleventh prime minister of India in 1990 after splitting from his Janata Dal party and formed an unsteady coalition government under a new party that collapsed within eight months.

Pak opposition plans 'roadmap' for change

AFP, London

Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Saturday proposed forming a coalition of opposition parties to oust President Pervez Musharraf from power, his spokesman told AFP Saturday.

Sharif came up with the plan as opposition politicians met in London to draw up a "roadmap" to return the country to democracy and ensure military leader Musharraf steps down before elections later this year.

"Sharif said that we are all intent on getting rid of dictatorship and restoring democracy," Nadir Chaudri said.

"He said, let's boycott the next elections and Musharraf or if you have reservations about that then contest the elections as an alliance on a one-party ticket."

The All Parties Conference (APC) is hosted by Sharif and also features opposition leaders Imran

Khan, Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Amin Fahim, vice-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, another former prime minister, is not attending, despite being invited.

The meeting comes against a backdrop of increasing domestic turmoil for Musharraf -- the general who overthrew Sharif eight years ago -- triggered by his suspension of the country's chief justice in March.

The conference agenda circulated by Sharif's camp beforehand calls for strategies to restore "genuine democracy" "free and fair elections under an interim caretaker government without Musharraf" and an independent judiciary.

Chaudri told AFP Sharif said he would not be a candidate for prime minister if the proposed alliance

defeats Musharraf at the polls and that it would serve as an interim administration for one to two years.

A decision on whether to accept Sharif's plan is expected Sunday, the conference's final day.

"He said, sleep on it. Come back tomorrow then talk about it again," Chaudri said.

Chaudri told AFP earlier Saturday that all delegates were "almost unanimous" in opposing Musharraf's government and calling for the return of democracy.

But he conceded there were differences between participants about how to achieve their goals.

Sharif's camp says that the event is a unique event bringing together a broad spectrum of political opinion from Pakistan for the first time.

"This initiative is really to rescue the state, to make it functional again and to re-empower it," said Chaudhri Friday.

Landslides kill 24 in Pakistan

AFP, Gilgit

Landslides triggered by heavy rain struck two villages in northwestern Pakistan yesterday, killing 24 people including 13 members of the same family, officials said.

Another 15 people were injured when the slides swept away mud-brick houses in the mountainous Pattan district of North West Frontier Province, local official Saifur Rehman said.

"We have recovered 23 bodies including those of women and children, while efforts are under-way to retrieve a body which is stuck in the mud," Saifur said.

Pakistan has suffered a wave of extreme weather in the past month.

Floods unleashed by a tropical cyclone and torrential monsoon rain in the south and southwest of the country claimed more than 200 lives and affected 1.65 million people.

Around another 40 were killed in accidents caused by monsoon rains



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar families move towards safer places through the flooded streets in Bago district, some 50km north-east of Yangon on Saturday. Thousands of families living in the low-lying areas in Myanmar were forced to take shelter to higher ground due to floods every year.

'Martyrdom' will ignite Islamic revolution Says Pak mullah

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani cleric who has vowed to die with his followers in a besieged Islamabad mosque said in his will that their "martyrdom" will spark an Islamic revolution in the nation.

Abdul Rashid Ghazi, the deputy leader of the hardline Red Mosque, is heading the resistance by hundreds of students and Islamic militants holed up inside and surrounded by government forces since Tuesday.

"Our blood will not go to waste. It will bring an Islamic revolution in this country," Ghazi said in his will, according to excerpts read over the telephone to AFP by a mosque source.

"If the students of all madrasas in the country stand up against this evil system they can replace it with Islamic system."

Students from religious schools or madrasas affiliated to the Red Mosque called for the imposition of Islamic Sharia law and led a Taliban-style vigilante morality campaign in the run-up to the crisis.

The final straw came after they kidnapped seven Chinese nationals, including six women, whom they accused of prostitution. China is Pakistan's closest ally.

Pakistan has around 13,000 madrasas, which have been accused of fostering extremism.

Many were set up during the "jihad" against the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan.

President Pervez Musharraf has warned those holed up in the mosque -- said by security officials to include militants with links to al-Qaeda -- to surrender or be killed.

The government says 24 people

have died in the standoff. Ghazi said 330 students, mostly female, were killed in clashes overnight, but officials dismissed the claim.

Ghazi, 43, said this week that he and his followers have written their last testaments, adding that they should be buried at the mosque.

"Our martyrdom will uproot this devilish and evil system. All my well-wishers and colleagues should devote their lives to end this system," Ghazi's will said.

"The students who launched a jihad against obscenity and evil did not kill anyone, they did not commit any crime against the state.

"Despite that, their bodies were riddled with bullets. These people who fired bullets into their bodies are forces of evil," it added.

Indian police hunt for 12 people over Britain bomb plot

AFP, Bangalore

Police in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, home to three suspects held in the British bomb plot, are hunting 12 more people who may be linked to the conspiracy, a newspaper reported Sunday.

Police studied the database at the transport office in the middle-class district of Jayanagar from where they had earlier discovered the driving licence details of a man who rammed a flaming car into Glasgow airport on June 30, the Sunday Times said.

The newspaper said the police

were interested in a man it named as Saleem Ahmed, adding investigators were also probing the possibility that fake Bangalore driving licences were used in the bomb plot.

Three Indians have been arrested in connection with the foiled car bombings in London and Glasgow and they all hailed from Bangalore, India's software capital.

They have been identified as Sabeel Ahmed, a doctor, and his brother Kafeel Ahmed, an aeronautical engineer and suspected to be one of the two men who drove the blazing car into Glasgow airport.

The third has been identified as



PHOTO: AFP

Veteran Indian Communist leader Jyoti Basu gestures as people greet him on his 94th birthday in Kolkata yesterday. Thousands of party activists and supporters visited his residence to greet him on the occasion.