

## Pak forces destroy militant hideout

### Musharraf rebuffs US threat

AP, AFP, Miranshah

Pakistani troops backed by helicopter gunships and artillery destroyed a militant hide-out in North Waziristan yesterday, the army said, in what appeared to be its toughest military action in the lawless border region after a month of escalating violence.

Army spokesman Maj Gen Waheed Arshad said the security forces targeted the militant compound in Daygan, a village about 15km west of Miranshah the main town in North Waziristan after receiving "credible intelligence that militants were present there."

However, he said he had no information about how many militants were killed in the assault. The compound had been "knocked out," but security forces were still firing artillery, he said.

A local security official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to journalists, said the militants retaliated against the army action and both sides were using light and heavy weapons.

Residents in Miranshah could hear the boom of artillery, and said a stray mortar struck a home, wounding three civilians, including two children.

The security official confirmed that some weapons had hit a home in Daygan, and that three or four people had been wounded.

The assault appears to be the toughest military action since troops that were withdrawn from key checkpoints under a controversial peace deal with pro-Taliban militants in September 2006 were redeployed to North Waziristan about a month ago prompting

militants to pull out of the deal and resume attacks.

President Gen Pervez Musharraf, a key ally of the United States in its war on terror, is under pressure from Washington to crack down on militants after US intelligence agencies concluded that the peace deal had allowed al-Qaeda to regroup.

Musharraf yesterday called for a comprehensive strategy to deal with extremism as he rebuffed threats of air strikes on the country by US forces, the foreign ministry said.

Musharraf made the comments at a meeting with visiting US Senator Richard Durbin in the southern port city of Karachi, during which they discussed Pakistan-US relations and counter-terrorism, the ministry said in a statement.

## Millions go hungry in flooded South Asia

AFP, Patna

The toll from severe floods across South Asia soared to nearly 1,900 yesterday and although water levels in the region's swollen rivers started to recede, millions of people still faced hunger.

Aid workers struggled to deliver supplies to some of the 28 million people displaced across India, Bangladesh and Nepal by the worst monsoon-triggered flooding in decades, with some areas unreachable due to the high waters.

In India's Bihar state, 12 million people have seen their homes and farmland partially or totally submerged after the worst flooding in 30 years.

An overcrowded boat - one of scores ferrying the marooned to safety - capsized late Monday in the impoverished state, claiming the lives of at least 65 people, police told AFP.

Six women drowned in a separate boat accident, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

Some villagers and officials reported that boat owners were only

rescuing those who paid, with the going rate about 40 rupees (one dollar) a head.

"We had just enough money to pay for myself and our children and so we had to leave behind my husband," said an angry Khushboo Paswan, from Samastipur district, 150km north of the state capital Patna.

She was later reunited with her husband Mohan after volunteers rescued him and brought him to a highway junction that is now home to thousands of people forced from their homes by the floods.

Parts of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Assam states were also submerged during the rains, affecting another 6.5 million people, although officials said the situation had improved in Assam.

India's national disaster management agency said 1,294 people had died of monsoon-related causes from June 1 to Monday.

But figures given by state officials in Uttar Pradesh and numerous boat accidents in Bihar late Monday brought the toll close to 1,500.



A family hold a telephone cable as they make their way through floodwaters to reach the village of Mabby, in Darbhanga district some 170km north of Patna in Bihar yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Pakistani human right activists hold candles and placards during a peace rally in Lahore Monday to mourn victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945.

PHOTO: AFP

## Pak court quashes Interpol notices against Benazir

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani high court yesterday ordered the government to withdraw "red notices" issued by Interpol at its request against former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, court officials and her lawyer said.

The international notices were sought by the government in late 2005 after an anti-corruption court asked that they be issued to bring Benazir back to Pakistan to face trial.

The court had moved against Benazir in a case in which she was accused by the government of concealing her assets and providing wrong information to the election authorities.

The Interpol issued "red notices" in January 2006 but no follow up action was taken against Benazir who has lived in exile since 1998, shutting between London and Dubai.

Interpol said at the time the notices were not arrest warrants

and member countries would decide whether to take any action.

Benazir Bhutto, 54, is leader of the country's mainstream Pakistan People's Party and led the country twice in the 1980s and 1990s. She had branded the government action as politically motivated.

"During the hearing the allegations against her turned out to be false and the court has now quashed the Interpol warrants," Benazir Bhutto's lawyer Farooq Naik told AFP.

A court official confirmed the Interpol notices were declared "null and void".

The development follows a recent meeting between the country's military ruler Pervez Musharraf and Benazir in Abu Dhabi to strike a power-sharing deal but the negotiation have apparently stalled.

## Iraqis suffer as Maliki govt stay paralysed

### Four more ministers boycott cabinet meet

AFP, Baghdad

As Iraqis queue for food and water, or swelter in homes and hospitals without electricity, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's coalition government is collapsing around him.

The latest boycott - by four ministers from a non-sectarian party - brought to 17 the number of members of the Shia-led coalition to have walked out, tendered their resignations or withdrawn from cabinet meetings.

Hopes that the so-called national unity coalition can be saved now depend on the senior leadership of the rival parties cutting a new power-sharing deal that can convince the bitter Sunni minority to return to the fold.

"The government cannot survive all these defections," said Joost

Hiltermann, the chief Iraq expert at the International Crisis Group think tank, after the secular Iraqi National List said its four ministers are boycotting cabinet.

"The Shias and the Kurds don't want to cede power to people they don't trust. But if they don't, there won't be reconciliation. Then all we can look forward to is civil war," he told AFP by telephone from Amman.

"Frankly, even with everyone in, there was total paralysis of government. Everyone is waiting for the top leadership to meet and cut a different kind of deal," he noted, with pessimism.

Since the US-led invasion of March 2003, Iraq has plunged into an abyss of overlapping civil conflicts that have divided its rival religious and ethnic communities, and left tens of thousands of civilians dead.

Last year's formation of an

elected government of national unity held out the promise of reconciliation, but Maliki's rule has been undermined by bitter sectarian rivalries both within and outside his fragile coalition.

Sheikh Khalaf al-Ilayan, a senior lawmaker in the National Concord Front that resigned on August 1, said the government has failed on every level.

"The government has failed because it has failed to stick to its political obligations to its members. As so many have withdrawn, the government has no right to make decisions now," he said.

"If I were prime minister I would have resigned. But America thinks otherwise. This is against everything that is right," he said.

## Bush meeting had 'no result', say Taliban

AP, Ghazni

A purported Taliban spokesman yesterday said a meeting between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and President Bush had "no result" and that militants' demands must be met if 21 South Korean hostages are to be safely released.

The spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, said Bush and Karzai must

accept Taliban demands that militant prisoners be released in exchange for the lives of South Koreans or there will be a "bad result."

The militants kidnapped 23 Korean aid workers traveling by bus from Kabul to Kandahar on July 19. Two male hostages have been executed.

## 6 killed as UN envoy visits Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops killed six suspected Tamil Tiger rebels in overnight clashes in the north of the country ahead of a visit by a top UN rights envoy to the embattled region yesterday, officials said.

Sri Lankan troops on foot patrol opened fire at the suspected rebels,

killing six and wounding several others in Vavuniya, 260km north of the capital, the defence ministry said.

The ministry made no mention of casualties among government soldiers. There was also no immediate comment from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are fighting for a separate state.



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar pro-democracy activists shout slogans during a demonstration near the Indian Parliament in New Delhi yesterday to mark the 19th anniversary of "8888" a pro-democracy uprising. Hundreds of demonstrators staged the protest in memory of victims who were allegedly killed by the military junta during the August 8, 1988, national uprising, and demanded the immediate release of leader Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners in Myanmar.

## Thailand steps up crackdown in Muslim south: 4 killed

AFP, Yala

Thai authorities arrested 45 suspected insurgents Tuesday as they stepped up a six-week crackdown on separatists in Muslim-majority provinces, while four people were killed in fresh attacks.

Thai authorities launched the major crackdown in late June. It has seen hundreds of people detained, often without charge, at army bases in the southern region along the Malaysian border.

Security forces carried out two raids on villages in Yala and Narathiwat provinces Tuesday, arresting 45 suspected insurgents, army spokesman Colonel Acra Tipoch told AFP.

The latest arrests bring to more

than 200 the number of people detained in the region, Acra said.

Another 400 people have been detained and released, sometimes after being held for weeks without charge under sweeping powers granted to security forces under a state of emergency in the region, he added.

Analysts said the arrests appeared to bring down the level of violence in July, but the past week has seen a deadly surge in attacks.

Two soldiers were killed and two others wounded in a roadside bombing in Pattani province on Tuesday, police said.

They were part of a security team escorting teachers home from school.