



Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf (2L) and Afghan President Hamid Karzai (R) attend the final day of a Pakistan-Afghan Peace Jirga in Kabul yesterday. Afghanistan and Pakistan must work together to rescue their societies from the backwardness and violence of Islamic extremism, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said.

PHOTO: AFP

# Musharraf decries rise of militancy

## Pak president addresses Kabul jirga

AP, AFP, Dabul

Pakistani President Gen Pervez Musharraf told more than 700 Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders yesterday that the two countries have been mired in the rise of militancy, extremism and radicalism while the rest of the world races forward with economic development.

Musharraf said the world is "forging ahead" while Pakistan and Afghanistan are confronted with a "particularly dark form" of terrorism he said is fostered by foreign influences.

He said the Talibanisation of the countries' border regions has prevented Afghanistan and Pakistan from benefiting from globalisation.

"Along with Afghanistan, Pakistan has also witnessed the rise of militancy and violence attacking our society," Musharraf said. "We cannot remain mired in the past."

Musharraf, who spoke both in his native Urdu and in English, was speaking at the closing session of a

four-day US-backed cross-border jirga, or tribal council, aimed at finding ways to stem Afghanistan's rising bloodshed.

Musharraf and Afghan President Hamid Karzai walked into the tent hosting the jirga to an extended standing ovation. The Pakistani president pulled out of speaking at the opening session because of domestic issues, instead sending Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz.

At the opening session on Thursday, Karzai spoke passionately of the daily suffering the Afghan people endure as the Taliban attack the government, schools, foreign troops and innocent villagers.

He lamented in particular the kidnapping of 23 South Koreans, including 16 women, saying such actions tarnish Afghanistan's image. Twenty-one of the hostages are still alive; two males have been killed.

"It doesn't matter if they kidnap thousands of men, they abducted women!" he said. Referring to other attacks, he said: "They behead

women in the name of the Taliban and Muslims in this country. In Helmand, one woman was nailed to a tree. In Zhari, they cut a woman in half. The same thing is happening in provinces near the Pakistan border."

Pak President met his Afghan counterpart Hamid Karzai in Kabul yesterday before both leaders were due to close a four-day tribal assembly on the growing Taliban and al-Qaeda threat.

Musharraf travelled to the presidential palace immediately after flying into Kabul for a one-day visit, the Afghan president's office said.

The leaders later addressed the "peace jirga" in the west of the city, where tribal leaders were working on a "joint strategy" to root out extremists, a jirga spokesman said earlier Sunday.

The tribal leaders began deliberations on Thursday with the notable absence of Musharraf, who pulled out at the last-minute citing security concerns.

But the Pakistani president

reversed his decision after phone calls from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Karzai.

Delegates to the assembly had earlier split into committees focused on topics such as the reasons for terrorism, the fight against drugs – said to finance militants – and good neighbourliness, spokesman Asif Nang said.

The results of these findings were to go towards the formation of the strategy, expected to be announced Sunday before Musharraf and Karzai were to formally close the meeting, he said.

Recommendations are likely to include the establishment of a joint commission to analyse factors fuelling terrorism and another on fighting the drugs trade and organised crime, Afghan media reported Sunday.

# Exiled Pak leaders reject Musharraf's 'no to return plea'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's main opposition leaders have roundly rejected President Pervez Musharraf's call to return home until after the forthcoming general elections, party officials said yesterday.

Musharraf said on Saturday that former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, who pose the biggest threat to his continued rule, should stay away to avert possible political turmoil in the country.

Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) said any elections held in her absence could not be free and fair.

"Benazir Bhutto will come before

elections. We have rejected Musharraf's call because elections cannot be free and fair in her absence," her spokesman Farhatullah Babar told AFP.

He said he expected Benazir Bhutto to return sometime between September and December. General elections are due late this year or early 2008.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League also rejected the call, insisting that "politicians do not create problems, they resolve the problems."

"General Musharraf is responsible for all the problems Pakistan is facing today and he should quit," said party spokesman Siddiqui Farooq, adding that Sharif may return in

October.

The beleaguered president is facing a wave of Islamist violence across the country amid US accusations that Pakistan's border areas have become a safe haven for al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Musharraf told newspaper executives Saturday that the return of the opposition leaders "would not be proper" if it were to lead to disturbances, adding that "stability should reign" until the vote.

Musharraf also said that no extreme steps, including the imposition of a state of emergency which he reportedly considered last week, would be taken by the government, Dawn newspaper reported.

# 'Musharraf met Benazir to negotiate a safe exit'

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf met former prime minister in exile Benazir Bhutto at Abu Dhabi recently to negotiate a deal for a safe exit, a senior opposition leader has said.

"The Abu Dhabi meeting was held on Musharraf's asking. The President wants a safe exit and that is why he had sought mediation of various people to negotiate the same with Benazir Bhutto," the Dawn reported on Sunday, quoting Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Abida Hussain as saying.

According to her, Musharraf's graph had nose-dived within no time. "A few months ago no one believed that the President would get weaker so soon."

Stating that it was for Musharraf to prove in the Supreme Court that he was eligible to contest the presidential election in uniform, Hussain said, "In case, the apex court clears him, still he would become a titular head of state in the days ahead."

The Islamic nation's ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML) also stood no future, she claimed.

Hussain, a former Minister, however, defended her party chief by saying that the PPP Chairperson met Musharraf only for the sake of democracy.

Though many people had reservations about the meeting, she said, the PPP chief took a better decision in the interest of Pakistan. "Everyone has the right to have his own opinion on the issue. But those who want the nation to make a smooth transition to democracy will support Benazir Bhutto's move."

Benazir had also shared all the details of the Abu Dhabi meeting with the media in presence of a large number of party leaders who were in London recently to seek party tickets for the general elections slated for later this year, she said.



Newly elected Indian Vice-President Mohammed Hamid Ansari, (70) (2L), Indian President Pratibha Patil (2R) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) pause at the swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi on Saturday. Scholar-diplomat Ansari was elected Vice President on August 10 to succeed Bhairon Singh Shekawat, who quits office after his defeat in the Presidential election on July 21.

PHOTO: AFP

# Imran links 'war on terror' to legacy of partition

AFP, London

Former Pakistan cricket captain turned politician Imran Khan linked the "war on terror" to the legacy of partition 60 years ago, in an interview published yesterday.

With the anniversary of Pakistan's formation looming this week, Khan said his country had had a "traumatic birth because the British left in such haste" and so became obsessed with security issues.

It also became a "client state" reliant on the United States, Khan told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper, adding that the "war on terror" was one of the results.

Khan also said that he believed Pakistan was no longer a democracy and said he would not want to serve in a coalition government "because you have to compromise too much."

In recent months, he has met former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, now in exile in London, and other opposition politicians about ousting embattled President Pervez Musharraf.

In an interview conducted at the London home of his ex-wife Jemima Khan, he said that the turbulence of partition had meant that the Kashmiri question was not resolved and left relations with India in a poor state.

"Another result was that the state became obsessed with its own survival. Security became the first priority," he told the paper.

"And we became a client state, relying on US aid, rather than being non-aligned like India. It left us with the problem of militancy. The Mujahedin on the Pakistan border with Afghanistan was actually trained by the CIA during

the Cold War...

"The legacy of all this is the war on terror, which many in Pakistan see as a war on Islam, that is why there is no shortage of recruits there."

Khan added that he believed the "war on terror" had been "misguided" because it had "benefited the people who caused 9/11."

"The US has bombed the (border) area killing many tribesmen -- so anyone who opposes the US becomes a hero," he said.

Speaking of his personal life, he revealed that attacks on his marriage by political opponents had strained the relationship and said he reads his sons -- aged 10 and seven -- bedtime stories from the Koran, "much to my ex-wife's consternation."

# 'Military buildup seen hitting China's inroads in Asia'

AFP, Washington

China may be making huge strides in projecting "soft power" in Southeast Asia amid US preoccupation in Iraq, but the region remains wary of the Asian giant's military ambitions, experts say.

Once a US stomping ground, Southeast Asia is seeing greater Chinese involvement in diplomacy, trade, investment, cultural and educational exchanges as well as foreign aid to less developed states.

"A critical component of China's "soft power" diplomacy is the emphasis on engaging the region as a whole -- unlike the United States, which has focused primarily on bilateral relations.

The United States helped set up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) as a bulwark against communism 40 years ago, but today China is "increasingly the most influential external actor in

dealing with Asean," said Joshua Kurlantzick, a visiting scholar at the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Also, unlike the United States, China has acceded to Asean's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation -- a non-aggression treaty -- and forged a free trade agreement with the group comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

"This makes it appear like China is more committed to regional free trade, and there has been much less protest in Southeast Asia against the China deal than against some of the deals with the US," said Kurlantzick, author of "Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World."

# 4 Nato troops among 29 killed in Afghan fighting

AFP, Kabul

A wave of Taliban attacks across Afghanistan killed 29 people, including four international soldiers and nearly two dozen militants, military officials said yesterday.

The violence came after a week of intense fighting as the Taliban's al-Qaeda-backed insurgency, launched nearly six years ago, intensified into the summer.

Three soldiers with the US-led coalition and their Afghan interpreter were killed near the border with Pakistan when they were hit by a bomb during combat, the force said in a statement.

Taliban fighters were responsible for the attack in Nangarhar province, a spokesman told AFP by telephone, claiming the soldiers were US nationals.

The coalition withheld their nationalities but most of the international soldiers in eastern Afghanistan are from the US military.

Earlier, the British defence ministry announced that a British soldier was killed and five wounded after their patrol came under fire from Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan on Saturday.

The attack was in the volatile Sangin district of Helmand province, considered a hotbed of Islamic extremists and opium farmers said to help finance the insurgency.

Militants also ambushed an Afghan army patrol in Sangin overnight, the Afghan ministry of defence said. The attack sparked a fierce gun battle in which seven rebels were killed and seven wounded, it said.

Warplanes were called in to attack ground targets after rebels stormed an Afghan army post in southern Uruzgan province on Saturday.

"Four enemies were killed and their bodies are still at the battlefield," the statement said. Three Taliban fighters were killed in a separate clash in the same area, it said.

The ministry also reported two

Afghan soldiers were killed in the previous 24 hours but gave no details.

Militants meanwhile tried to overrun a district police headquarters in Wardak province overnight, sparking five hours of fighting which left four of the attackers dead, police said.

In neighbouring Ghazni, where the Taliban are holding 21 South Korean hostages, Afghan and coalition troops clashed Saturday with insurgents, four of whom were killed, they said.

An international military operation drove the Taliban out of government in late 2001 when the hardliners did not hand over their al-Qaeda allies in the weeks after the 9/11 attacks.

But the hardliners have been able to regroup in recent months and carry out daily attacks aimed at undermining the new administration.

# Pakistan frees 100 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan released 100 Indian fishermen, including 28 children, as a goodwill gesture yesterday, ahead of the South Asian neighbours' 60th independence anniversaries next week, officials said.

The fishermen had been languishing in local jails since last year for poaching in Pakistani territorial waters, the officials said.

Seventy-two Indian men were released from Karachi's Landhi Jail while 28 children, aged between 12 and 17 years, were freed from the port city's juvenile prison, provincial home minister Wasim Akhtar said.

"They have been sent in two buses to Lahore where they will be handed to the Indian government officials at the Wagah border on Monday," he said.



Palestinian supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Islamic Liberation Party) chant slogans and wave black and white flags with the religious writing during a rally in the West Bank city of Ramallah Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP