



Kim Yoon-Young, one of 19 released South Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, reunites with her children at a hospital in Anyang, south of Seoul yesterday after returning home.

Sharif warns West against 'blind support' for Musharraf

AFP, London

The West should not give "blind support" to Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and must distinguish between democracy and his "misrule", ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif told AFP Saturday.

Speaking at the plush west London offices of his political party, the Pakistan Muslim League-N, Sharif added that he would never negotiate with the military leader who ousted him nearly eight years ago.

He said that the West "should clearly differentiate between a democratic rule and misrule because he (Musharraf) is the one who has brought Pakistan to the brink ... I only want that the West should take note of what he's doing, and not provide blind support to a dictator."

"This dictator has his own personal agenda, which differs from the agenda of the country, and he's using the army to perpetuate his illegal rule," he said.

He added that the Pakistani people were "dismayed and disappointed" by American support for Musharraf.

Sharif, who was Pakistan's prime minister from 1990 to 1993, and again between 1996 and 1999, pledged at a London press conference on Thursday to return to Islamabad on September 10 to lead a campaign to oust Musharraf from

office.

He himself was ousted in a bloodless military coup led by Musharraf, and was then exiled to Saudi Arabia for a decade in a deal struck with Musharraf.

The president's popularity has plummeted in recent months, with dissenters taking to the streets over his decision to suspend Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March.

Chaudhry, who has since been reinstated by Pakistan's Supreme Court, opened the door for Sharif's return last week in a Supreme Court ruling.

Sharif's opposition to Musharraf's rule contrasts with that of fellow exiled former premier Benazir Bhutto, who said in London on Saturday that a power-sharing deal she has been negotiating with Musharraf was "80 percent successful" – an agreement Sharif criticised.

Benazir is demanding that Musharraf shed his military uniform before seeking reelection, give up his powers to dissolve parliament and allow prime ministers to serve a third term.

"We both committed to not having any negotiations or parleys with dictators," Sharif said, referring to a deal the pair reached last October to return to their country to demand free and fair elections, which are due next year.

"Talking to Musharraf today

means that we are strengthening the dictatorship in Pakistan, talking to Musharraf means that we don't want undiluted democracy in Pakistan," he said.

"This is no service to democracy."

Asked whether he would consider negotiating with Musharraf were he to be sent to prison upon his return later this month, Sharif replied: "Musharraf put me in jail for 14 months ... I didn't think of negotiating then, so why would I negotiate now, after seven long years, eight years, when the movement is heading for success?"

For her part, Benazir said on Saturday that she thought Sharif had embarked upon a "personal vendetta" against the president.

Despite noting that of the 60 years since Pakistan's independence from British colonial rule, 32 of them had seen military rule in the country, Sharif also said that reforming the army's role was not necessary.

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