



Supporters of former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif carry posters featuring Sharif, outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad yesterday. Supporters of Sharif launched a legal challenge in the country's Supreme Court against his deportation to Saudi Arabia by the government.

US HR group blames Musharraf for flouting int'l law

Human Rights Watch accused Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Monday of flouting international law by sending former prime minister Nawaz Sharif back into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Sharif was earlier deported from Pakistan just hours after returning from exile hoping to ignite a popular campaign to oust Musharraf.

"The Pakistani government's actions are a direct affront to the Pakistani constitution and a recent Supreme Court ruling on Sharif," the New York-based rights watchdog said in a statement.

'Musharraf on the brink after Sharif deportation'

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has bought time by deporting a key rival, but his options are running out as he battles plummeting popularity, a hostile judiciary and al-Qaeda, analysts say.

Musharraf, a vital US ally in the "war on terror" since the September 11, 2001 attacks, sent Nawaz Sharif back to Saudi Arabia on Monday just hours after the former prime minister returned home from seven years in exile.

The return of the man he ousted in a 1999 coup was the

latest in a litany of crises facing embattled military ruler Musharraf since he tried and failed to sack the country's chief justice six months ago.

Analysts said banning Sharif's homecoming was a short-term fix that ultimately revealed the weakness of Musharraf, who is facing an increasingly disillusioned electorate ahead of national polls.

They added that it would likely cause further chaos in this atomic-armed Islamic republic of 160 million people -- with the ripples, as so often before, likely to be felt across the globe.

"The political turmoil weakens

the fight against terrorism," retired general and political analyst Talat Masood told AFP. "Dictatorships cannot fight extremism and military governments cannot fight terrorism."

The expulsion of Sharif brought international criticism, with both the European Union and Britain calling on Pakistan's government to uphold the rule of law.

Sticking Sharif on the next flight out of Islamabad was apparently in direct defiance of Pakistan's Supreme Court, which in August ordered the government not to hinder the ex-PM's homecoming in any way.

Lanka navy sinks LTTE's gun-running ships

Norway confident stalled talks will start again

Sri Lanka's navy yesterday claimed its biggest success against the Tamil Tiger rebels, saying it had virtually wiped out the separatist group's ability to smuggle arms into the country.

The navy said it had destroyed three rebel gun-running vessels offshore in separate battles, killing up to 45 guerrillas and eliminating all but one of the Tigers' sea fleet, which had included 10 ships.

Navy chief Wasantha Karannagoda said the rebel ships

were detected 600 kilometres (375 miles) off the island's southeastern coast early Tuesday and engaged by naval craft.

"Each vessel had between 12 to 15 cadres... and we think up to about 45 may have been killed," Karannagoda told reporters here, adding that the navy had not suffered any casualties.

"This is our biggest single attack against the Tigers," Karannagoda said.

The navy chief said the Tigers had fired 120-millimetre mortar bombs from the three vessels,

which were located about 40 to 50 kilometres apart.

Asked where the rebels may have purchased their arms, Karannagoda said: "We have a rough idea as to from where the supplies are coming, but we don't want to go public as it might have other implications."

"But we know it has come from the southeastern direction," he said, suggesting the shipments may have come from southeast Asia.

The military said it believed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

(LTTE) -- who are fighting for a separate state for minority Tamils -- were transporting three light aircraft, artillery and a bullet-proof vehicle by sea.

Meanwhile, the main mediator in Sri Lanka's peace process, Norwegian Erik Solheim, expressed confidence Tuesday that stalled talks between the army and Tamil Tiger rebels would one day start again.

"It's very clear that again they will come back to the table" of negotiations, Solheim told reporters in Oslo.

Bomb damages Buddhist relic in Pakistan

A bomb detonated by pro-Taliban militants yesterday damaged a rock engraved with images of Buddha in northwest Pakistan that attracts thousands of tourists a year, police said.

The incident recalled the internationally condemned destruction of the huge Bamiyan Buddhas in neighbouring Afghanistan by the hardline Taliban regime in 2001.



Members of the US House of Representatives listen as Rep. Steny Hoyer (C), D-MD, speaks while Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (L), D-CA, and House Minority Leader Rep. John Boehner (R), R-OH, listen on the steps of the US Capitol Monday in Washington, DC. Members of Congress gathered to remember victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks on Washington, DC and New York City.

Europe on high alert as it marks 9/11

A powerful bomb was found in the Turkish capital yesterday and German police mounted a major security operation at a US military base on the sixth anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

As Americans remembered the 2,749 people killed in the 2001 attacks in New York, Turkish police defused a large bomb hidden under a mini-bus parked in a multi-storey car park in central Ankara.

"The meticulous work of the police averted a possible catastrophe... I do not even want to think about what would have happened if the attack had succeeded," the capital's governor, Kemal Onal, told journalists.

He said the bomb involved "a large quantity of explosives",

adding that there had been no immediate claim of responsibility.

Meanwhile, German police launched a major security operation at the US military airport at Spangdahlem, in the west of the country, after the base there received an anonymous bomb threat Monday afternoon.

"The man, who spoke in German with an accent that could have been Turkish or Russian, threatened to attack the Spangdahlem base with at least four accomplices. During the call, there was mention of 'bombs'," police said.

"The US armed forces immediately informed the police, who immediately put protective measures in place at the base, with the cooperation of the US security forces."



This still photo taken from footage released by al-Qaeda's media wing as-Sahab and provided by IntelCenter yesterday shows al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden delivering a speech at an unidentified time and place. Bin Laden praises one of the September 11 hijackers in a new video released Tuesday on the sixth anniversary of the traumatic 9/11 attacks.

9 GIs killed in Iraq as general testifies

9 militants die in US raid on Sadr City

Nine US soldiers were killed in Iraq, the military said on Monday, as their commander General David Petraeus told the US Congress that a premature drawdown of troops from Iraq would be devastating.

Seven soldiers were killed in a vehicle accident in western Baghdad on Monday, the military said, adding that 11 other soldiers were wounded in the accident.

Two detainees who were being transported by the soldiers were also killed, the military said, while a third detainee was wounded.

Another soldier died when his vehicle overturned east of Baghdad on Monday, the military said in a separate statement.

The military also announced the death on Sunday of another soldier from wounds sustained when insurgents fired a rocket at his patrol in the northern Iraqi province of Kirkuk.

The latest fatalities took the military's losses in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to 3,760, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

US forces yesterday killed nine militants and captured eight others in an air and ground raid in Baghdad's Shia bastion of Sadr City, the military said.

"The operation targeted a network in east Baghdad and resulted in nine armed terrorists killed and eight captured," it said.

US military spokesman Major Winfield Danielson said in an email to AFP that the raid was in Sadr City, the impoverished slum where most residents are loyal to anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

"Coalition forces conducted an operation to detain criminals involved in murder, kidnapping, IED (improvised explosive devices), mortar attacks and weapons smuggling," the statement said.

Air support was also used during the raid and "precise fire" destroyed a dump truck being used by the militants.

US war commander Petraeus told a crucial hearing of the House of Representatives Armed Services and Foreign Affairs committees that a "premature" drawdown of US troops from Iraq would be "devastating."