

No terrorist safe havens in Pakistan: Musharraf

Pak opposition welcomes Benazir return

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf told a visiting US Congressional delegation yesterday there were no safe havens for terrorists on Pakistani soil, an official statement said.

Musharraf also reiterated Pakistan's "strong resolve to fight extremism and terrorism" during a meeting with a US delegation led by House Republican Leader John Boehner in Rawalpindi.

Pakistan has come under mounting US pressure to crack down on al-Qaeda and the Taliban following US intelligence reports militants are using the country's rugged northwestern region as a base to plan attacks across the globe.

"The president said there was no safe haven for terrorists and that Pakistan was determined not to allow its territory to be used by anyone for terrorist activity," the statement said.

Musharraf also urged US media to develop a better understanding of Pakistan's efforts in fighting terrorism, the statement said, adding that the US lawmakers appreciated the country's efforts in that area.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's opposition parties yesterday cautiously welcomed former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's decision to return from exile, but hoped she would not strike a deal with President Pervez Musharraf.

Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party said Friday she would return on October 18, ending a self-imposed eight-year exile in Dubai and London.



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistan human rights activists hold placards during a demonstration in Lahore yesterday in support of an independent judiciary and against US interference in the country's political system.

Sadr group to pull out of Iraq's ruling Shia bloc

AFP, Baghdad

The movement of radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said yesterday it would withdraw from the Shia bloc that leads the Iraqi government, in a new blow to the faltering political process.

"The Sadr bloc will hold a press conference in Najaf this evening where it will announce its decision to withdraw from the Shia alliance," Sadr spokesman Saleh al-Obeidi told AFP.

The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) initially comprised four key Shia factions -- the Sadr group, the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council of Iraq (SIIC), the Dawa party and the Fadhila party -- and held 130 seats in the 275-member parliament.

However, the number dropped to 115 when the Fadhila party pulled out in March.

The Sadr bloc has 32 seats in parliament.

Obeidi last week told AFP the bloc was considering withdrawing from the bloc as the SIIC and Maliki's Dawa had formed another alliance with two Kurdish groups.

Floods hit thousands in Africa

AFP, Lome

Several of Africa's poorest countries are in dire need of assistance due to severe floods that have killed more than 200 people and affected a million in recent weeks, officials warned yesterday. The latest victims were reported in Rwanda, where officials from the northern region said floods killed 15 people and destroyed more than 500 homes since Wednesday.

In Sudan, the worst floods in living memory have left 64 people dead and displaced and affected several hundred thousand, mainly in the troubled south, according to the United Nations.

A cholera epidemic spread by floods has also killed at least 49 Sudanese in recent weeks, according to the World Health Organisation.

"The response is still ongoing... Most of the 200,000 plus people who were homeless at the end of August have by now been given shelter," Maurizio Giuliano, spokesman for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told AFP.

In neighbouring Uganda, the minister in charge of refugees and disaster preparedness said that 300,000 people were in need of humanitarian assistance.

"The situation borders a crisis," Musa Eweru told reporters. He said nine Ugandans had died as a result of the floods, which he described as "a new phenomenon that we have not experienced for many years."

Kenya has also suffered from the downpours, a year after unprecedented floods displaced 700,000 people.

Fukuda tipped as Japan's next prime minister

THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN/ ANN, Tokyo

Gaining increasing support from Liberal Democratic Party factions Friday, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda is certain to be the successor to outgoing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

As the schedule for the presidential election was officially announced Friday with candidacies to be accepted Saturday, leaders of LDP factions expressed their support for Fukuda in the race set for Sept. 23.

UN protest as Nepali Maoists leave camps

AFP, Kathmandu

Thousands of Nepal's former Maoist rebels briefly left their United Nations-monitored camps for a protest Friday, drawing strong condemnation from the world body.

Around 5,000 uniformed Maoists left their camps in Nawalparasi for around two hours Friday to protest about their conditions and push for integration into Nepal's national army, their division commander told AFP.