



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan (C) leaves the Supreme Court in Islamabad yesterday after a petition hearing filed by him against President Pervez Musharraf position as army chief. Pakistan's Supreme Court began hearing a raft of petitions against General Pervez Musharraf's plan to be re-elected as both president and chief of the powerful army.

Nepal urges Maoists not to quit govt

Emergency talks held to avert chaos

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's political leaders held emergency talks yesterday with former rebel Maoists to try to persuade the ultra-leftists not to storm out of the government and launch nationwide protests.

The Maoists are demanding the immediate abolition of the monarchy, and a pullout from the cabinet and a return to street protests would deal a major blow to last year's landmark peace deal that ended a decade of civil war.

Maoist leader Prachanda was "scheduled to meet the prime minister Monday afternoon, and other leaders

have been meeting leaders from the other parties," Maoist deputy commander Ananta told AFP.

He said the ex-rebels were still standing by their demand for Nepal's deeply unpopular King Gyanendra to be shown the door immediately -- and not at a later date and by democratic vote as specified by the 10-month-old peace accord.

"We will have a mass public meeting Tuesday and Chairman Prachanda... will announce that we will leave government and begin our protest programmes if our demands are not met," Ananta said.

A member of the central committee of Nepal's largest party, the

Nepali Congress, said talks had been going on all day and that a meeting between the seven mainstream parties in government and the Maoists was "highly likely" Monday night.

"Democracy is not just a system, it's also a process. We agreed on a process and now they are backing out. This means they don't have any trust in the democratic process," the official, Arjun Narsingh KC, said.

Krishna Khanal, a politics professor from Tribhuvan University, said the Maoists' threats were symbolic of their difficulties in transforming themselves into a peaceful political party.

Qaeda calls for sowing of terror in West

AFP, Dubai

al-Qaeda called on Islamists to sow terror in the West to create a climate of fear, in a third video marking the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States which was posted on the Internet yesterday.

Called "reasons and motives for the attacks on New York and Washington," the video features a montage of images of the burning World Trade Centre towers and scenes from Islamist training camps.

"We must take Islamist terrorism to Western countries so that it becomes a normal part of life like natural disasters," a voiceover says.

"In that way, we will have acts of mass extermination in which people will feel that their affluence also brings death... and we will have created a balance of deterrence between us and them," the unidentified voice adds.

'War' talk heightens Iran's nuke row with West

AFP, Vienna

France followed up a warning that the Iran nuclear crisis could lead to war by calling yesterday for European sanctions against Tehran.

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said tensions with Iran are now "extreme", heightening a diplomatic storm caused by Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner's warning on Sunday that the world should prepare for a conflict over Iran's alleged work on a nuclear weapon.

The comments infuriated Iranian leaders who accused France of stoking "tensions". International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei called the war talk "hype".

But while French leaders said

they would prefer a negotiated settlement, they also launched a proposal to establish European sanctions against Iran, outside of those already implemented by the United Nations.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany are to discuss new UN sanctions on Iran, which has rejected demands to stop enriching uranium.

Kouchner met his Dutch counterpart Maxime Verhagen in Paris and said European countries should prepare their own non-UN sanctions.

"These would be European sanctions that each country, individually, must put in place with its own banking, commercial and industrial system. The English and the Germans are interested in

talking about this. We will try to find a common European position," Kouchner said.

Britain, France and Germany have led European pressure, with US backing, to try to persuade Iran to end its nuclear efforts in exchange for a package of economic and diplomatic measures.

Verhagen said that if the Security Council did not agree more sanctions, the Dutch government would be willing "to apply European Union sanctions in common with the United States sanctions."

On Sunday, Kouchner used the toughest language to date from a French minister, warning that "we have to prepare for the worst, and the worst is war." If Tehran possessed an atomic weapon, it would be a "real danger for the

whole world," he said in an interview.

Speaking Monday, the French prime minister said: "The Iranians must understand that tension has reached an extreme point... in the relationship between Iran and its neighbours."

He added however that "a confrontation with Iran is the last option that any political leader would want."

The French campaign cast a shadow over an IAEA general conference in Vienna, where Iran's nuclear programme tops the agenda.

Iran insists its nuclear work is peaceful and Vice President Reza Aghazadeh, who is also head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation (AEOI), warned the West against seeking a confrontation.

Lanka vows to defeat Tamil Tigers

AFP, Colombo

A top Sri Lankan official said Monday that Tamil Tiger rebels need to be defeated ahead of any political settlement in the island's long-running ethnic conflict.

Marking a shift in the government's stated policy to negotiate while keeping up "defensive" operations against the Tigers, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse also called for more military action against the guerrillas.

Rajapakse, who is the brother of the island's president, argued that unless the Tigers were defeated, any political solution would be unworkable.

"Without defeating terrorism, we can't have a political settlement," he said in a speech in the northeastern coastal city of Trincomalee as part of

celebrations marking the claimed sinking last week of rebel gun-running ships.

"The president is working hard on a political settlement," he said, adding: "Whatever the political settlement, it cannot be implemented unless terrorism is eradicated."

Sri Lanka's government has been stepping up its fight against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in recent months, while at the same time insisting that its operations have been defensive and humanitarian in nature.

Authorities have also been keen for it not to appear as if it is government forces who are responsible for the breakdown of a Norwegian-brokered truce that has been in place since February 2002.



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lankan sailors take off their caps to salute the Navy attack craft "Sayura" in the eastern port of Trincomalee yesterday. Rajapakse and the top defence officials attended the state function to honour the Sri Lanka Navy for its destroying three arms ships belonging to Tamil Tiger rebels 600 nautical miles south east of the island last week.

Greenspan memoir links Iraq war to US thirst for oil

AFP, Washington

Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan, for years an inscrutable seer on the economy, is causing a stir by alleging in his new memoir that "the Iraq war is largely about oil."

Greenspan, who as head of the US central bank was famous for his tight-lipped reserve, is uncharacteristically direct, also accusing President George W Bush of abandoning Republican principles on the economy.

"I'm saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows -- the Iraq war is largely

about oil," he wrote in reported excerpts of "The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World," which is set for release on Monday.

Greenspan's memoir appears 18 months after he left the Fed following a career that spanned 1987 to 2006, with the US economy at a crossroads, and ahead of a critical central bank meeting under the chairmanship of his successor, Ben Bernanke.

The man dubbed "The Oracle" tells his own tale of nearly two decades at the helm of one of the world's most powerful financial institutions, and includes surprising swipes at the Bush administration.



PHOTO: AFP
Photo taken on Sunday shows a South Korean driver escaping the swelling waters after abandoning her car in the southern resort island of Jeju hit by typhoon Nari. A powerful typhoon has killed at least seven people and flooded hundreds of homes in South Korea after the storm lashed the country's southern region.

Bush to pick Mukasey as attorney general

AP, Washington

Michael Mukasey, President Bush's pick to replace Alberto Gonzales as attorney general, is not expected to prompt the confirmation battle that Senate Democrats threatened to wage if a more partisan nominee was chosen.

The retired federal judge from New York has received endorsements in the past from liberals, including one of the Senate's most liberal Democrats. And while some legal conservatives have expressed reservations about his record on the federal bench, other conservatives are happy about the decision Bush was expected to announce Monday.

Taliban steps back from negotiations call

Suicide attack kills 8

AFP, AP, Kandahar

A Taliban spokesman said yesterday that the Islamic militant group would only talk to the US-backed Kabul administration if tens of thousands of Western troops leave Afghanistan.

The hardline movement's spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi had said a week ago that the Taliban were ready to respond positively to President Hamid Karzai's renewed offer of negotiations.

But Ahmadi appeared to be stepping back from that stance on Monday by making the apparently new condition involving the withdrawal of foreign soldiers from the insurgency-hit country.

"If these talks... rescue our

country's independence and result in finding a way for the withdrawal of foreign forces, (Taliban) are ready to participate," Ahmadi said in a statement.

But he said that the Taliban did not believe the Afghan government had the authority to meet such conditions.

He also accused the media of misinterpreting comments by the Taliban, saying they were "at the service of the invading forces."

Karzai made the offer of talks with the insurgents on September 9.

In fresh violence a suicide bomber on foot entered a government office and blew himself up Monday in the volatile south, killing eight people, including four policemen, officials said.