

China presses Myanmar junta as global outrage grows

AFP, Beijing

The Myanmar junta's closest ally China made Saturday its most strident call yet for an end to the violent crackdown on protesters in Yangon as pressure on the regime continued to grow worldwide.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao urged Myanmar to seek stability in a peaceful manner and work towards democracy and development, the government said.

"China hopes that all parties concerned in Myanmar show restraint, resume stability through peaceful means as soon as possible, promote domestic reconciliation and achieve democracy and development," Wen said.

Wen was the highest ranking Chinese official to comment on the situation so far amid pressure on Beijing from Western countries including the United States to use its leverage to stop the violence in Yangon.

The comments, made while discussing the Myanmar situation with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, came as EU foreign policy head Javier Solana called on Beijing to exert more pressure.

"All countries which have influence on the decisions of those in power in Myanmar should act now. This applies particularly to its direct neighbours such as China," Solana said in an interview with Germany's Bild am Sonntag.

The generals who run the coun-

try formerly known as Burma sent in troops this week to clamp down on pro-democracy protesters led by Buddhist monks, killing at least 13 people and arresting hundreds.

The United States and Britain, as well as Burmese opposition groups, have raised fears the death toll could be far higher.

In Brussels, a high-level European diplomat summoned Myanmar's charge d'affaires to "explain" the possible tightening of sanctions against his country, a spokeswoman said Saturday.

A deputy of Solana, Helga Schmidt, received Han Thu on Friday to warn that the 27-nation bloc was preparing to reinforce sanctions, Solana's spokeswoman Cristina Gallach said.

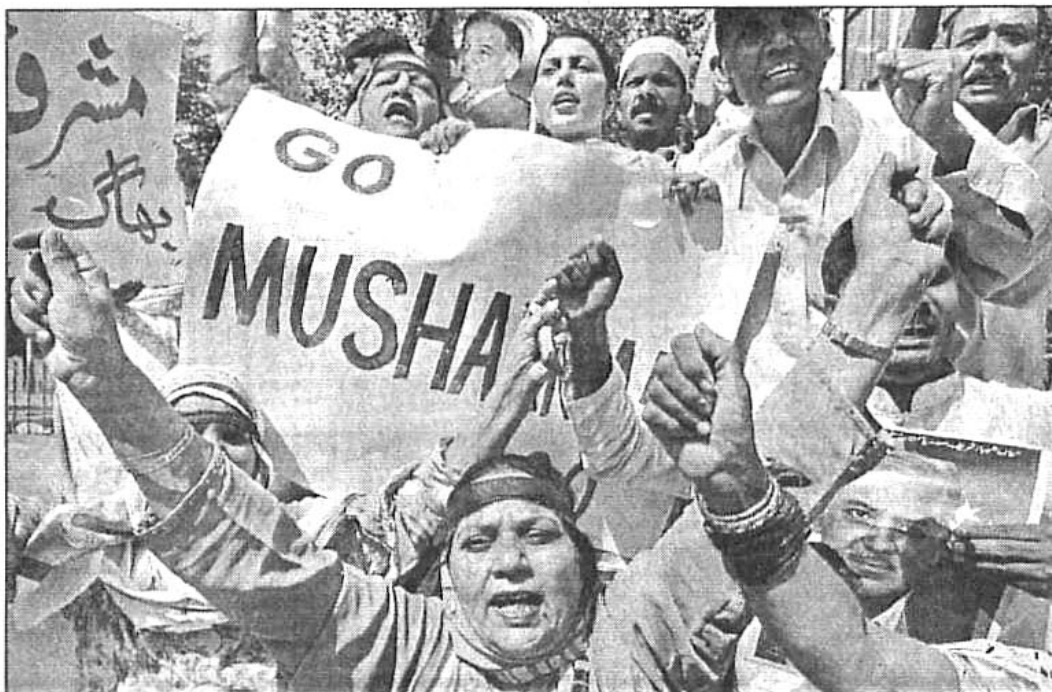


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani opposition party activists shout anti-Musharraf slogans during a demonstration in Lahore yesterday. Pakistan's key opposition parties vowed to lodge a last-ditch Supreme Court challenge aimed at stopping President Pervez Musharraf from standing for re-election on October 6.

Taliban trash Karzai's talks offer

3 civilians, two policemen killed

AFP, Kandahar

Afghanistan's Taliban militia yesterday rejected peace overtures by President Hamid Karzai, insisting they would never negotiate as long as international soldiers were in the country.

The Taliban is also not interested in government positions, the movement's purported main spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP.

Karzai said Saturday he would "immediately" offer the militia posts in his government if they gave up a bloody insurgency.

He also said he was ready for peace talks with the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, who is wanted by the United States, if this could lead to a way out of the grinding conflict.

But Ahmadi dismissed Karzai's statements, which came hours

after one of the deadliest Taliban bomb attacks in Kabul killed 30 people, as "nothing new."

"Taliban are not interested in government posts -- ministries or anything. We want the withdrawal of foreign forces and we stand by our position," he said.

"As long as they have not withdrawn, we'll never talk with the Kabul administration."

Meanwhile, three Afghan civilians were killed in crossfire between Taliban and soldiers in Afghanistan that also left several rebels dead, while two police died trying to defuse a large bomb Sunday, officials said.

The civilians died in an ambush on Afghan soldiers on Saturday in Paktya province. Nato's International Security Assistance Force said in a statement, adding it was investigating what had happened.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepal's Communist party supporters participate in a demonstration through the streets of Kathmandu yesterday. The nation was thrown into turmoil two weeks ago when the Maoists stormed out of the coalition government and demanded that King Gyanendra and his two-century-old dynasty be axed, jeopardising the nation's fragile peace.

Parties slam US plan to split Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Representatives of Iraq's major political parties on Sunday strongly denounced a US Senate proposal calling for a limited centralized Iraqi government with the bulk of the power given to the country's ethnically divided regions.

The groups, which represented both Shias and Sunnis, said the plan would hamper Iraq's future stability, and they suggested parliament draft a law permanently banning the splitting of Iraq along sectarian or ethnic lines.

"This proposal was based on the incorrect reading and unrealistic estimations of Iraq's past, present and future," according to the statement read by Izzat al-Shahbandar, a representative of the Iraqi National List, a secular political party.

The nonbinding Senate resolu-

tion calls for Iraq to be divided into federal regions under control of Kurds, Shias and Sunnis in a power-sharing agreement similar to the one that ended the 1990s war in Bosnia. Sen Joseph Biden, D-Delaware, was a prime sponsor of the measure.

The Kurds in three northern Iraqi provinces are running a virtually independent country within Iraq, while nominally maintaining relations with Baghdad. They support a formal division, but both Sunni and Shia Muslims have denounced the proposal.

The majority Shias, who would retain control of major oil revenues under a division of the country, oppose the measure because it would diminish the territorial integrity of Iraq, which they now control. Sunnis would control an area with few if any oil resources. Kurds have major oil reserves in their territory.

13 killed in Turkey's bloodiest rebel attack in years

AFP, Ankara

Thirteen people died in Turkey's volatile southeast when gunmen, apparently Kurdish rebels, sprayed a bus with machine gun fire, prompting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Sunday to vow to punish the attackers.

Saturday's audacious attack came a day after Turkey and Iraq signed an agreement to crack down on Turkish Kurd rebels based in northern Iraq and the killing of a Kurdish separatist in the Kurdish-dominated east.

"Terrorists from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) used machine gun fire on a minibus carrying 14 people, killing 13," local governor Selahattin Apari said Sunday on the NTV television channel.

The incident occurred near the town of Beytusehab in Sirnak province not far from the Iraqi border, he said, adding that the dead included a seven-year-old boy.

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PHOTO: AFP

Protesters demonstrate during an anti-war march on Saturday in Washington, DC. Activists marched around DC passing federal buildings to protest the war in Iraq.

'Comprehensive' Korean N-accord reached

AFP, Beijing

Envoys from six nations struck an agreement yesterday on the next phase of disabling North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, which the United States hailed as comprehensive and detailed.

The provisional agreement will now go back to the governments for approval, and negotiators will resume their talks here in a few days so the deal can be sealed, the US and other envoys said.

No specifics of the agreement were released.

"The joint statement was very comprehensive," US negotiator

Christopher Hill told reporters, referring to the agreement outlined by China, which is hosting the talks.

"China put together a very nice joint statement. There are lots of details. It is very useful."

The latest round of the long-running talks -- involving both Koreans, China, the United States, Japan and Russia -- was originally due to end Sunday after four days of meetings.

The round was focused on devising a plan for North Korea to disable its key nuclear facilities and declare all the atomic programmes it has spent decades secretly developing.

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