



Former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto arrives for a meeting in West London yesterday. Pakistani power-sharing talks with President Pervez Musharraf are "totally stalled," former premier Benazir Bhutto said here Wednesday, dismissing a reported amnesty offer as "disinformation."

Polish envoy wounded in Baghdad bombing

AFP, Baghdad

Poland's ambassador to Iraq was wounded and one Pole and two Iraqis killed when three roadside bombs ripped through the ambassador's convoy in central Baghdad yesterday, officials said.

The three blasts occurred at intervals shortly after ambassador Edward Pietrzak's convoy left his residence in Al-Asrashat neighbourhood, an Iraqi defence ministry officials said.

Two Iraqis were killed and 14 people were wounded, among them the ambassador and two other Poles, the official said. It was not clear if the dead Iraqis were working for the embassy.

In Warsaw, the foreign ministry confirmed that Pietrzak was wounded, while the interior ministry said the ambassador's Polish driver died in hospital of his wounds and three other bodyguards were also injured.

11 die in fierce Kashmir battle

AFP, Srinagar

Two Indian army officers and nine suspected Islamic militants have been killed in a marathon gunfight in divided Kashmir, police said yesterday.

The fighting broke out in Tangmarg, a forested area west of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar and close to the heavily-militarised border with Pakistan.

"The 30-hour long gunbattle has ended. Two army majors and nine militants have died," police officer Iftikhar Ahmed told AFP by telephone from the area.

Four soldiers and a major were also hurt in the battle, one of the fiercest in Kashmir in recent months. Reinforcements have been sent.

Roadside bomb kills 14 in Pakistan tribal area 12 others killed in fighting

AFP, Miranshah

A roadside bomb ripped through a passenger van in Pakistan's troubled tribal belt bordering Afghanistan on Wednesday, killing at least 14 people, security officials said.

The blast happened near Mir Ali, the second biggest town in insurgency-hit North Waziristan district, on a road that is frequently used by Pakistani military convoys.

"The bus hit an explosive device planted on the road by militants, destroying it completely. Fourteen people died on the spot and five injured were taken to hospital," a security official said.

Earlier Pakistani security forces killed 10 pro-Taliban militants yesterday after an early morning



This handout picture provided by the UNIC shows top UN official Ibrahim Gambari (L) posing for a picture with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (R) during discussions in Yangon on Tuesday.

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US pressing 'very hard' for free elections in Pakistan: Rice

AFP, Washington

The United States is pressing Pakistani military ruler Pervez Musharraf "very hard" to allow for free and fair elections, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said.

She singled out parliamentary elections due early 2008 as a critical test of the Musharraf administration's commitment to democratic principles.

Musharraf, who seized power in a military coup in October 1999, has said he will resign as head of the powerful army and become a civilian leader by November 15 provided he wins another five-year term in a presidential vote Monday.

She emphasized that moderate forces had to unite in Pakistan to be able to continue to resist extremism and maintain economic progress that Musharraf's reforms had brought about.

Asked whether there was a place for former Pakistani premier and opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in any new political mix, Rice said, "Well, I don't see why not."

parliaments, where his allies hold a large majority.

Rice said this weekend's presidential election and the parliamentary elections due by January were "very important political events."

"And the parliamentary elections, in particular, are going to be a real test of the willingness of the government to really allow for free and fair elections and we're pressing that case very hard," she told the New York Post in an interview Monday.

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Abbas, Olmert try to bridge gaps in talks

AFP, Jerusalem/Gaza City

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas held a new round of talks yesterday to try to bridge gaping differences ahead of a US-sponsored Middle East peace summit.

The two leaders met one-on-one at Olmert's Jerusalem residence for their fourth encounter in less than two months, and were set to be joined later for the first time by their newly-formed negotiating teams.

But the two sides remain far apart over what kind of document to draw up ahead of the Middle East conference, expected to take place in Annapolis, Maryland in November.

The Palestinians want a detailed agreement and an implementation

timeframe on the thorniest problems of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem.

Embroiled in a months-long power tug with the rival Islamist movement Hamas, Abbas wants a detailed accord on the core issues as these sticking points have sunk previous peace talks.

The Israelis favour some kind of a vague document -- a joint declaration or a declaration of interests are the terms that have appeared in the Israeli media -- ahead of the international meet.

Olmert wants to stay vague so as not to rock his government coalition, which includes an ultra-nationalist and an ultra-Orthodox party that could oppose some of the concessions that Olmert's centrist Kadima or its main part-

ner, centre-left Labour, may be willing to make.

The yawning gap in the positions of the two sides was reflected in comments made ahead of Wednesday's meeting.

"The working teams will follow up on the progress made during the previous meetings between Olmert and Abbas and will discuss the fundamental issues necessary for reaching the goal of a two-state solution," an senior Israeli official told AFP.

"The document will spell out the perceptions and understandings as seen together by both sides," he said.

Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said that the teams' joint work "will focus on reaching an agreement on the core issues" that will constitute "the substance for the conference."



North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il (2nd-L) and South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun (R) shake hands while South Korean Finance Minister Kwon O-kyu (L) and Unification Minister Lee Jae-jung (2nd-R) look on following the second round of talks during the summit of two Koreas in Pyongyang, North Korea yesterday.

Seoul rejects Kim's offer to extend summit, satisfied with outcome

AFP, Pyongyang

South Korea's president yesterday turned down a surprise offer from North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to stay an extra day in Pyongyang for a historic summit, but said he was satisfied with the outcome.

"We estimate that the talks were sufficient and candid and have achieved good results," Roh's spokesman Cheon Ho-Soon said in comments broadcast live from Pyongyang.

"President Roh himself said he was satisfied with the outcome. We will be able to announce the outcome in the form of a declaration before tomorrow's lunch."

The summit is only the second in the 59-year history of the communist North and capitalist South.

No quick-fix to Tamil conflict, says Lanka

AFP, Washington

Sri Lanka cannot be pressured by the international community to bring about a political solution to its long-running separatist conflict, its foreign secretary T.B. Kohona said.

He said the government was searching for a political solution broadly acceptable to all the stakeholders while continuing to encourage Tamil separatists to renounce violence and enter the democratic process.

"This is far from the truth," he said, adding however that Colombo's commitment to a political solution "does not imply appeasement of terror."

Sri Lanka is under pressure from key foreign backers not to pursue the military option, as Colombo steps up its fight against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) while at the same time insisting that its operations have been defensive and humanitarian in nature.

"The government invites the international community to support this approach and to understand that you cannot have a quick-fix solution," Kohona said in a talk at Georgetown University in Washington on Tuesday.

"A political settlement in a

democracy has to be carefully and patiently negotiated with all the stakeholders," he said.

Kohona called "blind critics" those who argue that the government is pursuing a military solution to the Sri Lanka conflict, which has already claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.

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