

PRESIDENTIAL VOTE TODAY

Pakistani court leaves election in limbo

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top court ruled President Pervez Musharraf's re-election bid can go ahead on Saturday, but kept his fate in limbo by saying it must resolve legal challenges before the winner is declared.

The decision effectively leaves a sword hanging over the head of Musharraf, a key US ally in the 'war on terror', who is expected to win the vote by an electoral college of the national and federal parliaments.

The Supreme Court decision came a day after he struck a deal with former premier Benazir Bhutto that would pave the way for a power-sharing arrangement aimed at ending the Islamic republic's chronic political instability.

Musharraf seized power of nuclear-armed Pakistan in a coup eight years ago and is controver-

sially standing for another five-year term in office while still holding his position as army chief.

His two rivals in the election challenged the validity of the election and of Musharraf's candidacy, but the court's ruling clears the way for the vote amid fears that postponing it could cause further unrest.

"The bench has unanimously resolved and directed that the election process should proceed as per the schedule announced by the chief election commissioner," chief judge Iqbal said.

"But final notification of the returning candidate will not be issued until the decision of this petition, for which the process is to begin from October 17," he added.

The ruling could however delay former commander Musharraf's plans to shed his military role -- a position he has said is vital for

fighting al-Qaeda -- and finally become a civilian ruler before he takes the oath of office.

He had promised to do so by November 15 when his term ends and was expected to do so much earlier, possibly by Monday, but may now feel he needs the army behind him in case of a hostile court ruling.

The court was ruling on challenges filed by his rival candidates: the vice-chairman of Bhutto's party, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, and by retired judge Wajihuddin Ahmad, who refused to swear allegiance after Musharraf's coup.

The government said it would "honour the decision and will implement it in letter and spirit."

"We look forward to tomorrow's election and are confident the president will get duly elected," deputy information minister Tariq Azeem told AFP.

But candidate Ahmad's lawyer declared it was the "first step to overall victory." "The court's order has stopped the declaration of the election results of a usurper," lawyer Hamid Khan said.

A senior government official said the decision risked heightening tensions.

"This has accentuated the uncertainty and may trigger instability," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The ruling came with Musharraf expected to formalise a last-minute national reconciliation deal with Bhutto that paves the way for power-sharing and for her planned return from exile on October 18.

The deal gives an amnesty for politicians active in Pakistan between 1988 and 1999 -- effectively clearing Bhutto of the corruption charges that forced her into exile eight years ago.



PHOTO: AFP

Lawyer for Pakistani presidential candidate and former Supreme Court judge Wajihuddin Ahmad, Hamid Khan (C) talks to media representatives, outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that today's presidential election can go ahead, but said results should not be announced until the legal challenges against the vote are resolved.

Ahmadinejad in new tirade against Israel

Tehran to work until 'all of Palestine is liberated'

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday launched a new tirade against Israel amid growing tensions with the West, vowing to work to abolish the Jewish state and questioning the scale of the Holocaust.

Ahmadinejad said Iran would work until "all of Palestine is liberated" from Israeli hands, in a speech to mark the Quds day, Iran's annual day of mass protest marches in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Tens of thousands of Iranians turned out for the march in central Tehran, carrying anti-Zionist banners, chanting "Death to Israel" and burning Israeli and American flags.

"The Palestinian people are standing firm. The Iranian people and other peoples will not stop until all of Palestinian territory is liberated," Ahmadinejad told the

faithful at Tehran University.

"They (world powers) should not think that the Iranian nation and other nations in the region will take off their hands off the throat of the Zionists and their supporters."

Ahmadinejad provoked an international outcry shortly after his election in 2005 when he called for Israel to be "wiped from the map" and also described the Holocaust as a "myth".

He has since toned down his rhetoric but in this speech he reaffirmed his deeply controversial questioning of the mass slaughter of Jews in World War II and his suggestion that Israel could be moved to arctic North America.

"The Iranian nation hates killing and considers Hitler and the executioners of the World War II as black and dark figures," he said.

"But the Iranian nation has a question and as long as there is no clear and reasonable response to this question, it will remain.



PHOTO: AFP

United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari (L) meets with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (R) Thursday at the United Nations in New York. Gambari was to make his report on his visit to Myanmar.

20 former world leaders urge China to press Myanmar

AFP, Oslo

Twenty former world leaders, including Lionel Jospin of France and Mary Robinson of Ireland, on Friday urged China to use its influence to press Myanmar's junta to hold talks with the opposition.

The former heads of state and government made the call in a letter addressed to Chinese President Hu Jintao, handed over by Norway's former prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik to China's ambassador in Oslo.

"Dear President Hu," they wrote. "We are writing to you to ask you to support a peaceful and inclusive dialogue for national reconciliation in Burma, in light of nationwide demonstrations and

shooting on the streets of Burma's major cities."

Burma is the former name for Myanmar.

"We believe China could play an increasingly constructive role in convincing Burma's military regime to participate in peaceful dialogue with (opposition leader) Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy, as well as the country's ethnic groups," they said.

On Friday, one week after the junta's violent crackdown on massive anti-government demonstrations in Yangon, Aung San Suu Kyi's party said she would consider "in a positive light" a heavily conditioned offer to meet junta leader Than Shwe.

China is seen as the junta's main ally.

N Korea committed to peace, says South

AFP, Seoul

South Korea said Friday the communist North was committed to peace and promised that the private sector will largely pay for an estimated 11 billion dollars in new projects agreed at a landmark summit.

President Roh Moo-Hyun, only the second South Korean leader to visit Pyongyang, pledged with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il to work for a peace treaty to close the last Cold War frontier after six decades of division.

The summit declaration also called for a series of joint economic projects including a special economic zone around the North's western port of Haegu, construction of joint shipyards and tours to

the North's scenic Mount Paekdu.

The deals surprised South Korean analysts and media, who had low expectations of the summit, although Roh's conservative critics charged that he failed to press the North on its nuclear weapons and human rights record.

Unification Minister Lee Jae-Joong said the two countries had started "a new framework to bring about permanent peace on the Korean peninsula and advance their relations, including economic cooperation and exchanges."

"This summit has opened a new chapter for peace," Lee told a news conference.

The leaders' declaration called for a summit with the United States and China to permanently end the 1950-53 Korean War, which halted

with only an armistice.

Foreign Minister Song Min-Soon pledged that work to draft a peace treaty would take place "in line with denuclearisation" -- not separately from it.

An upbeat Roh, a staunch advocate of reconciliation with the North, who leaves office in just four months, called a cabinet meeting and ordered his ministers to set up a "roadmap" to implement the summit's achievements.

Roh has said that Kim confirmed to him his "commitment to denuclearisation," almost exactly one year after his regime tested an atom bomb.

The leading Hyundai Research Institute estimated that the economic projects in the impoverished North would cost some 11 billion dollars.

Blackwater to blame for Iraq shooting

Says US military report

AFP, Washington

Blackwater security guards involved in a Baghdad shootout last month that left up to 17 Iraqi civilians dead were "obviously wrong," a senior US military official told Friday's edition of the Washington Post newspaper.

The unnamed official said the US military reports from the scene of the September 16 incident suggested the US private security firm was to blame

for the deaths, and that its employees in Iraq were trigger-happy.

"It was obviously excessive, it was obviously wrong," the official told the newspaper.

"The civilians that were fired upon, they didn't have any weapons to fire back at them. And none of the IP (Iraqi police) or any of the local security forces fired back at them," he said.

In reports after the incident, Blackwater executives insisted their teams had come under fire in

Baghdad's Nisour Square.

But according to US military officials cited in the Congress report, Blackwater's teams, contracted to protect US State Department diplomats and other officials in Iraq, behaved like imperious "cowboys" in Iraq.

"They tend to overreact to a lot of things," the US military official told the Washington Post. "When it comes to shooting and firing, they tend to shoot quicker than others," he said.

India successfully tests N-capable missile

AFP, Bhubaneswar

India Friday successfully test fired the short-range variant of its nuclear-capable Agni-1 ballistic missile, which can strike most targets in rival Pakistan, a defence official said.

The Agni-1, which has a range of 700km, was launched from Wheeler Island at mid-morning off the eastern state of Orissa, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"The test matched all mission objectives," said the official.

Wheeler Island lies 180km north-east of Orissa state capital Bhubaneswar.

The Agni -- Sanskrit for fire -- is

an intermediate range ballistic missile that can be fired from mobile launchers.

The official described Friday's test of the 12-metre (39-foot) missile, which can carry a one-ton payload as a "user trial" for the army.

In April, India staged a successful test of Agni-III, its longest range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead more than 3,000 kilometres (1,860 miles).

India, which held nuclear weapons tests in 1998, has developed a series of nuclear and conventional missile systems as part of a missile development programme launched in 1983.



PHOTO: AFP

Communist Party of Nepal (UML) supporters chant slogans during a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday to protest against the postponement of Constituent Assembly elections.

Food stocks in Myanmar running out: UN agency

AFP, Geneva

Food stocks for 200,000 people in an aid dependent region of western Myanmar are running out after deliveries were blocked, the UN food agency said yesterday.

World Food Programme spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume said truck deliveries of foreign food aid from the western port of Sittou to a nearby region had been held up for ten days.

"The WFP is very concerned about the delays imposed on sending food from Sittou to the state of north Rakhine (Arakan)," Berthiaume said without giving

further details about the hold up.

"Two hundred thousand people there receive food aid, she added. "It's becoming worrying because our food stocks are running out," she added.

Myanmar suffers from severe levels of malnutrition. Berthiaume said about 32 percent of under five year-olds suffered from stunted growth according to the government's own figures.

UN aid workers and human rights groups said this week that high food prices and shortages had helped drive people onto the country's streets, culminating in the military junta's bloody crackdown.

\$1.4 billion in possible US arms sales to ME announced

AFP, Washington

The Pentagon notified Congress Thursday of possible sales of missiles, armoured vehicles and cargo aircraft upgrades worth nearly 1.4 billion dollars to four Mideast states.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice earlier this year promoted a much larger package of arms sales to the region earlier this year as a means to counter Iran.

The biggest of the possible arms sales announced Thursday was to Saudi Arabia, which the Pentagon said wants to buy 61 light armoured vehicles, and 50 Humvees along

with assorted guns, machine guns and night vision goggles.

The Defence Security and Assistance Agency said the sale would be worth 631 million dollars.

"The proposed sale of light armoured vehicles will provide a highly mobile, light combat vehicle capability enabling Saudi Arabia to rapidly identify, engage and defeat perimeter security threats and rapidly employ counter and anti-terrorism measures," the DSCA said in a statement.

The light armoured vehicles, which are built by General Dynamic Land Systems, are the primary combat vehicle of the Saudi Arabia National Guard.

20 more Taliban killed

AP, Kandahar

Afghan troops backed by Nato-led forces clashed with suspected Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan, leaving 20 militants dead, a provincial police chief said Thursday.

The authorities recovered three dead bodies of the militants along-side numerous weapons after the clash in Shah Wali Kot district in Kandahar province late Wednesday, said Kandahar police chief Sayed Agha Saqib. There were no injuries among Afghan and Nato troops.

Retreating militants took 17

bodies off the battlefield, Saqib said.

Nato officials could not immediately confirm Saqib's account, and said they were checking the report. The clash could not be independently verified due to the remoteness of the area where it took place.

In a separate incident, militants attacked a police checkpoint in Arghistan district, also in Kandahar province, wounding three officers on Wednesday, Saqib said. There were no report of militant casualties from that clash.

Violence in Afghanistan has peaked this year, with nearly 5,100

people killed in suicide bombings, gun battles, airstrikes, and roadside bombs around the country through the first nine months of the year, according to an AP count based on figures from Afghan, US and Nato officials.

The number represents a 55 percent increase over the first nine months of 2006, when the AP count recorded 3,288 insurgency-related deaths. The AP count recorded 4,019 deaths in all of 2006.

Most of the violence occurred in the country's south, the centre of the resurgent Taliban movement that was ousted from power in the US-led invasion in late 2001.

Job Vacancy

The Canadian High Commission in Dhaka seeks to engage a Senior Consular Officer

Duties:

This position is for a Senior Consular Officer which serves resident and travelling Canadians in Bangladesh who require consular, notary, and emergency information and assistance. General information about the consular services provided can be found on www.voyage.gc.ca.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Excellent oral and written Bangla, English and French
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent (or an acceptable combination of work, education and training relating to the duties)
- Ability to obtain and retain an Enhanced Reliability security screening
- Ability to meet medical requirements as defined by the employer
- Excellent customer service and people skills
- At least two years' experience serving the public in difficult situations and in a crisis situation
- Ability to liaise with senior government officials, private organizational representatives, diplomats, and people of varying cultures
- Ability to work independently and in a team
- Creativity, flexibility, resourcefulness, problem solving, sound judgement, and initiative a must
- Ability to work under pressure and tight time lines, be organized, and constantly prioritize
- Ability to work occasional early mornings, evenings, and weekends on short notice
- Knowledge of common office software applications such as Word, Excel and internet search skills
- Knowledge of Canada

It is essential that applicants demonstrate that they possess the required experience and abilities to be considered in the selection process. Please send resume and covering letter addressing the above qualifications by 11th October, 2007 to the address below. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Canadian High Commission
c/o Personnel Section

House 16/A, Road 48, Gulshan - 2, Dhaka, Bangladesh