

Fight religious extremism

Pak press urges political parties

AFP, Islamabad

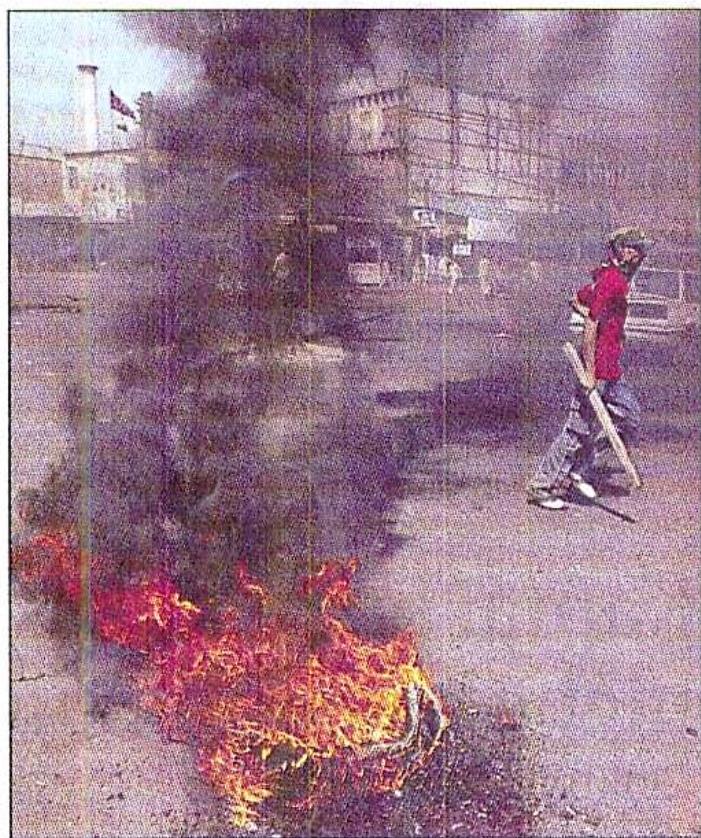
Pakistani newspapers urged yesterday political parties to unite to fight religious extremism in the wake of the nation's worst suicide bombing that killed 139 people.

Papers warned that the rise of extremism was the biggest challenge facing the Islamic nation of 160 million people as it attempts to return to democracy with general elections due in January.

"It is even more evident now that moderate forces should join hands and work harder to fight the forces of extremism," the widely published Urdu-language Jang newspaper said.

"The entire nation should rise above political, religious and regional conflicts and work as one to fight the threat because extremism and terrorism is the biggest challenge facing Pakistan," it said in an editorial.

The suicide blasts overnight Thursday in Karachi targeted former premier Benazir Bhutto who returned to Pakistan after eight years in self-imposed exile to lead her party in the



A supporter of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto carries a stick in front of burning tyres during a protest in Karachi yesterday.

elections.

The blasts ripped through a crowd of tens of thousands of her supporters gathered on the streets for her homecoming parade.

Bhutto, who was unharmed, said she received warnings ahead of her return about members of al-Qaeda, Pakistani and Afghan Taliban and a Karachi-based militant group who may plan to attack her.

The English-language Daily Times warned extremism was destroying the move to democracy and jeopardising the January election.

"Democracy can function only after conditions for it have been created, the upmost of which is law and order and writ of the government.

"Inside Pakistan, the biggest obstacle in the way of democracy is terrorism, and those who don't want to fight it cannot be friends of democracy," it said in an editorial.

The entire front page of the paper's Metro section named those killed on Thursday under the headline "The names of those who will be missed."

Dawn urged the government of President Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup, against using the tragedy to curtail campaigning for the election, saying free campaigning was an essential part of any democracy.

Emboldened Musharraf signed an amnesty clearing Bhutto of corruption charges to allow her to return, in a move towards a power-sharing pact between the pair to shore up his support ahead of the expected hard-fought poll.

In an editorial titled "Standing up to terror" the newspaper said: "All political parties must unite to fight religious extremism, led as it is in most cases by semi-literate fanatics."

The English-language paper pointed out that the sheer number of people who turned out for Bhutto's homecoming showed support for democracy not fanaticism.

"The terrorists may kill and destroy, but the Pakistani people have made their choice clear: They stand their ground and reject fanaticism that thrives on human blood."

Dalai Lama to visit Japan

AFP, Tokyo

The exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama will visit Japan next month at the invitation of religious groups, a report said yesterday.

His planned visit could come at a politically sensitive time as China has been angered by the honouring of the Dalai Lama in the United States.

The Dalai Lama plans to visit Japan from November 14 to 23 but it may be affected by the political row between Washington and Beijing, Kyodo News agency quoted anonymous sources saying.

During his Japan tour, the first since a similar visit last November, the Dalai Lama will give lectures in Yokohama near Tokyo and other cities, the agency said.

China has opposed visits to Japan by the Dalai Lama, but Japan allowed him to come last year on the condition he avoid political activities.

US President George W. Bush on Wednesday defied repeated warnings from China and awarded the Dalai Lama the Congressional Gold Medal -- US lawmakers' highest civilian honour -- at the US Capitol building.

It was the first time a sitting US president had appeared in public with the Dalai Lama, whom China accuses of being a dangerous figure agitating for Tibetan independence.

Iran to fire '11,000 rockets in a minute' if attacked

AFP, Tehran

Iran warned yesterday it would fire off 11,000 rockets at enemy bases within the space of a minute if the United States launched military action against the Islamic republic.

"In the first minute of an invasion by the enemy, 11,000 rockets and cannons would be fired at enemy bases," said a brigadier general in the elite Revolutionary Guards, Mahmoud Chaharbaghi.

"This volume and speed of firing would continue," added Chaharbaghi, who is commander of artillery and missiles of the Guards' ground forces, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

The United States has never ruled out attacking Iran to end its defiance over the controversial Iranian nuclear programme, which the US alleges is aimed at making nuclear weapons but Iran insists is entirely peaceful.

Iran has for its part vowed never to initiate an attack but has also warned of a crushing response to any act of aggression against its soil.

"If a war breaks out in the future, it will not last long because we will rub their noses in the dirt," said Chaharbaghi.

"Now the enemy should ask themselves how many of their people they are ready to have sacrificed for their stupidity in attacking Iran," he said.

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned the military would target the bases of US forces operating in neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan in the event of any attack and already has these sites under close surveillance.

Chaharbaghi said that the Guards would soon receive "rockets with a range of 250 kilometres (155 miles)" whereas the current range of its rockets is 150 kilometres (91 miles).

"We have identified our targets and with a close surveillance of targets, we can respond to the enemy's stupidity immediately," Chaharbaghi added.

He said that the Guards' weapons were spread out throughout the country and so would not be affected by any isolated US strikes against military facilities.

The Guards are Iran's elite ideological army and responsible for its most significant weapons such as the longer range Shahab-3 missile which has Israel and US bases in the Middle East within its range.

12 killed in Indian bldg collapse

AFP, Chennai

Twelve people died and eleven sustained severe injuries in southern India when an apartment building collapsed after heavy rain, police said Saturday.

Three women and a boy were among those who died in the accident late Friday in southern Coimbatore city.

Around 500 policemen were deployed to clear the debris and help with rescue work, city police commissioner C.K. Gandhirajam said.

The apartments -- built by the government 30 years ago -- had developed deep cracks and residents had been advised to move out for repair work.

"The building collapsed even as the victims were still busy packing all that they considered valuable," said a senior police official, who did not wish to be named.

Such accidents are common in India, where houses and flyovers often collapse because of heavy rain, poor construction materials or flouting of building regulations.

Chronology of major attacks

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan has been beset by violence, almost all suicide bombings mostly claimed by Islamic militants, since the military stormed the al-Qaeda linked Red Mosque in Islamabad in July.

The attacks, culminating this week with blasts during former premier Benazir Bhutto's homecoming parade, Pakistan's worst suicide bombing, have left almost 400 people dead.

Here is a chronology of major attacks in the last four months:

July 12: Suicide car bomber kills five people, including three police, in Swat in the northwest. Three people die when another attacker blows himself up at a government office in Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan tribal area.

July 14: Twenty-four people are killed in a suicide attack on military convoy in North Waziristan.

July 15: Suicide attacks kill more than 40 people in northwest Pakistan, including 26 at a police recruitment centre.

July 17: Seventeen people are killed in a suicide attack on a rally by Pakistan's chief justice, Iftikhar Chughtai.

August 30: More than 150

Pakistani soldiers "stranded" in South Waziristan amid tensions with militants. Army says they are safe, rebels say they have been kidnapped.

September 1: Three soldiers, two civilians are killed in suicide attack in Bajaur tribal zone.

September 4: Two suicide attackers, one on a military bus and another in a market, kill at least 25 people near military headquarters in Rawalpindi.

September 11: A suicide bomber blows himself up inside a minibus as police try to arrest him killing 17 people in northwest Pakistan.

September 13: A suicide bomber kills 20 commanders from an elite unit tasked with tackling Osama bin Laden's extremist network.

October 1: A suicide bomber disguised in a woman's burqa strikes at a police checkpoint in northwest Pakistan, killing 16 people.

October 18: One suicide attack and another smaller blast targeting former premier Benazir Bhutto kill at least 139 people in Karachi, just hours after she had returned to Pakistan for the first time in eight years.



People searching for their missing relatives look at the pictures of those who were killed in the suicide bombing, aimed at former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's vehicle in a procession on October 18, displayed outside a mortuary in Karachi yesterday.

Turkish PM urges US, Iraq to rout Kurdish rebels

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Washington and Baghdad to crack down on Kurdish rebels based in northern Iraq, warning that Ankara will follow through with its threat of a cross-border operation if it sees no action.

"We are tired of being put off with empty words," Erdogan said in an interview late Friday on the Kanal 24 news channel. "We need to see some concrete results with regards to the presence of (Kurdish rebels) in northern Iraq."

He added that he was ready to discuss a proposal by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki during a telephone conversation earlier this week to carry out a joint military operation against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) bases in

northern Iraq should negotiations with Baghdad fail to provide a solution.

"Maliki confirmed the following thing: that if there was no result from the talks, we would carry out this operation together," he said, adding that Turkey was prepared to "provide the necessary support."

But Erdogan said that the United States had the primary responsibility in routing PKK bases but warned that Ankara would not flinch from taking military action if it did not see results.

"We will then start implementing our road map," he added.

The Turkish leader said his talks with US President George W. Bush early next month in Washington would be crucial in determining the next course of action.

"As far as a cross-border operation goes, we are in the position of

Clashes leave 2 dead in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Two people were killed when new clashes broke out yesterday between the Hamas-run police in the Gaza Strip and a clan tied to the rival Fatah movement, eyewitnesses and medics said.

Mohammed al-Susei, a 13-year-old boy caught in the crossfire, and Mohammed Hellis, an armed member of the clan, were both killed, and at least 20 people were wounded in the fighting, medical officials said, updating a previous toll.

Mediators from other Palestinian factions said they had brokered a ceasefire agreement, but witnesses said the area is still closed off and gunmen are still roaming the streets.

On Wednesday night street battles erupted between the Hellis clan and the Executive Force, a Hamas-run paramilitary unit that has policed Gaza since the Islamist movement seized control in June.

Four people were killed in that round of fighting and another 30 were wounded, making it the deadliest bout of Palestinian factional infighting since Hamas seized power four months ago.

The following morning the Hamas-run interior ministry and the clan agreed to a ceasefire under which the gunmen would withdraw and the police would leave the area, an agreement the ministry accuses the clan of breaking.

"Since last night the members of the Hellis family have shown they have no intention of implementing our agreement and have erected sand blockades, laid mines and taken up arms," said Ihab al-Ghussein, a spokesman for the ministry.

He added that on Saturday Hellis family gunmen opened fire on members of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, wounding one fighter.

"Another tried to fire an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) at Qassam members but it exploded in his hands and killed him instantly. At that moment the clashes broke out," Ghussein said.

Karzai urges 10 Muslim states to fight terror, poverty

AFP, Herat, Afghanistan

Afghan President Hamid Karzai called on 10 Muslim-majority nations gathered here yesterday to work together to end terrorism, which he said is tarnishing Islam, and boost their economies.

Karzai was addressing a meeting of foreign ministers and senior officials from nations in the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), a grouping of Central Asian states and regional heavyweights Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

"Terrorism, poverty, organised crime, economic problems and corruption are among significant obstacles to development and our regional cooperation," the president told about 100 delegates meeting in the western city of

Herat.

"We, the Muslims, must show the true image of Islam to the world and this will be impossible unless we eliminate terrorists wherever they are and fight them collectively," he said.

Pakistan, represented in Herat by Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri, was struck late Thursday by a terror attack which killed 139 people in a failed bid to kill former premier Benazir Bhutto on her return from exile.

Afghanistan is also battling a wave of violence by Taliban and other radicals trying to impose an extremist version of Islam.

The United States has alleged that advanced weapons are being supplied to the Taliban through Iran, likely with the knowledge of that country's military, a charge

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki dismissed in Herat Friday.

"Terrorists are misusing our noble religion," Karzai told the delegates from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

He said ECO needed to follow the example of other regional groupings, such as the European Union, to work together to boost development, wealth and education.

"While other countries are getting closer in globalised active economic cultural and political partnerships, we still do not enjoy enough proximity despite those historical and cultural commonalities," he said.

'We never lied' about our marriage: Cecilia Sarkozy

AFP, Paris

Cecilia Sarkozy said she and her former husband French President Nicolas Sarkozy had never lied about their marriage, in an interview that appears Saturday in the weekly magazine *Elle*.

"I always acted and thought for my family and wasn't calculating. Nicolas and I never lied. We tried to rebuild, save our relationship, right up until the end," in response to suggestions they could be "accused of having lied during the election campaign in a united couple."

The notoriously difficult relationship of the Sarkozys was of intense interest in the run-up to the May presidential election, fueled by the fact they were rarely seen together.

Since Sarkozy's election Cecilia has rarely appeared at her

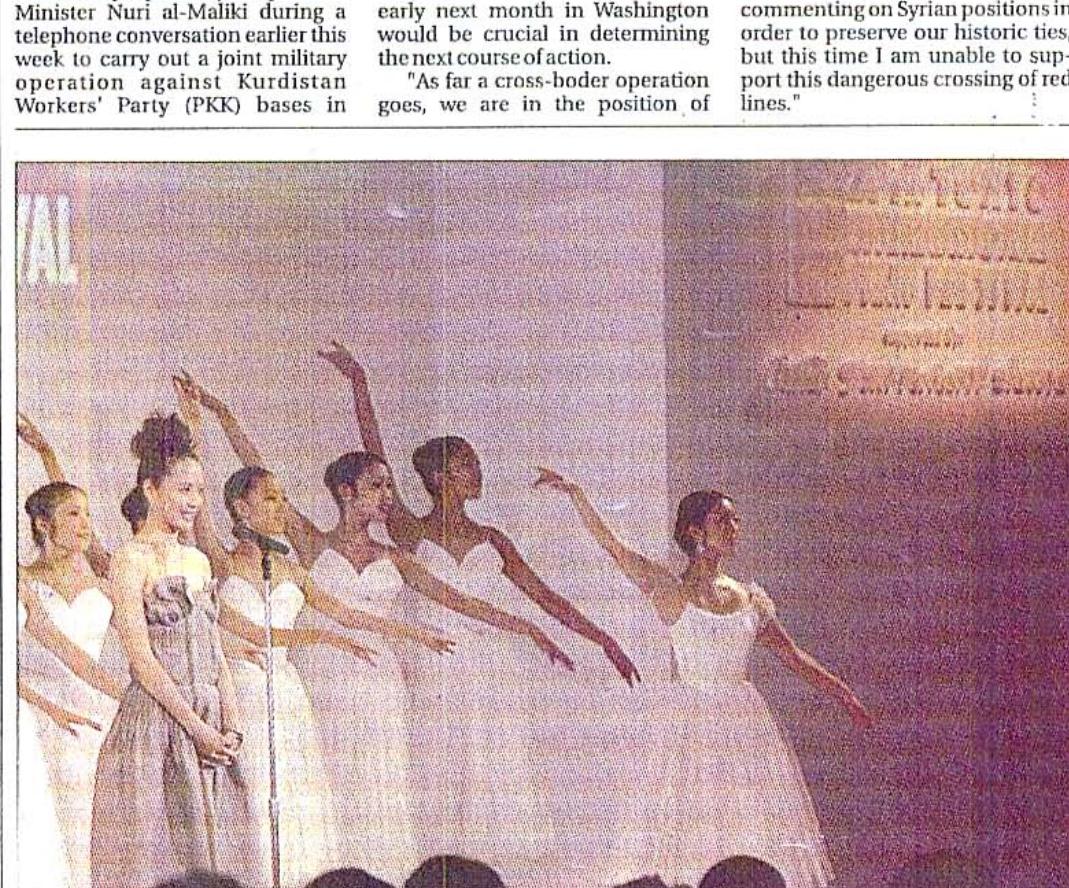
husband's side, occasionally causing awkward situations such as when she bowed out of what had been planned as a family gathering with US President George W. Bush and his wife Laura in August.

The interview in *Elle* is the second Cecilia Sarkozy has given since Thursday's announcement of their divorce, despite a statement from the president's office saying the couple would not be making any public comments.

On Friday, in an interview with the *L'Est Républicain*, she admitted she had "fallen in love" with another man in 2005 and went to live with him in New York, and said the couple had done everything to try to rebuild their marriage but failed.

She described herself as "someone who prefers the shadows, serenity, tranquility" and not cut out for the very public role of a first lady.

In the interview with *Elle*, Cecilia said she hopes her ex-husband "finds serenity, to be the politician who brings the country what it needs" and to "be happy."



20-year-old Japanese actress Masami Nagasawa (2nd L) declares the opening of the 20th Tokyo International Film Festival during its opening ceremony in Tokyo yesterday.