

Governor of militancy-hit Pakistan border province quits

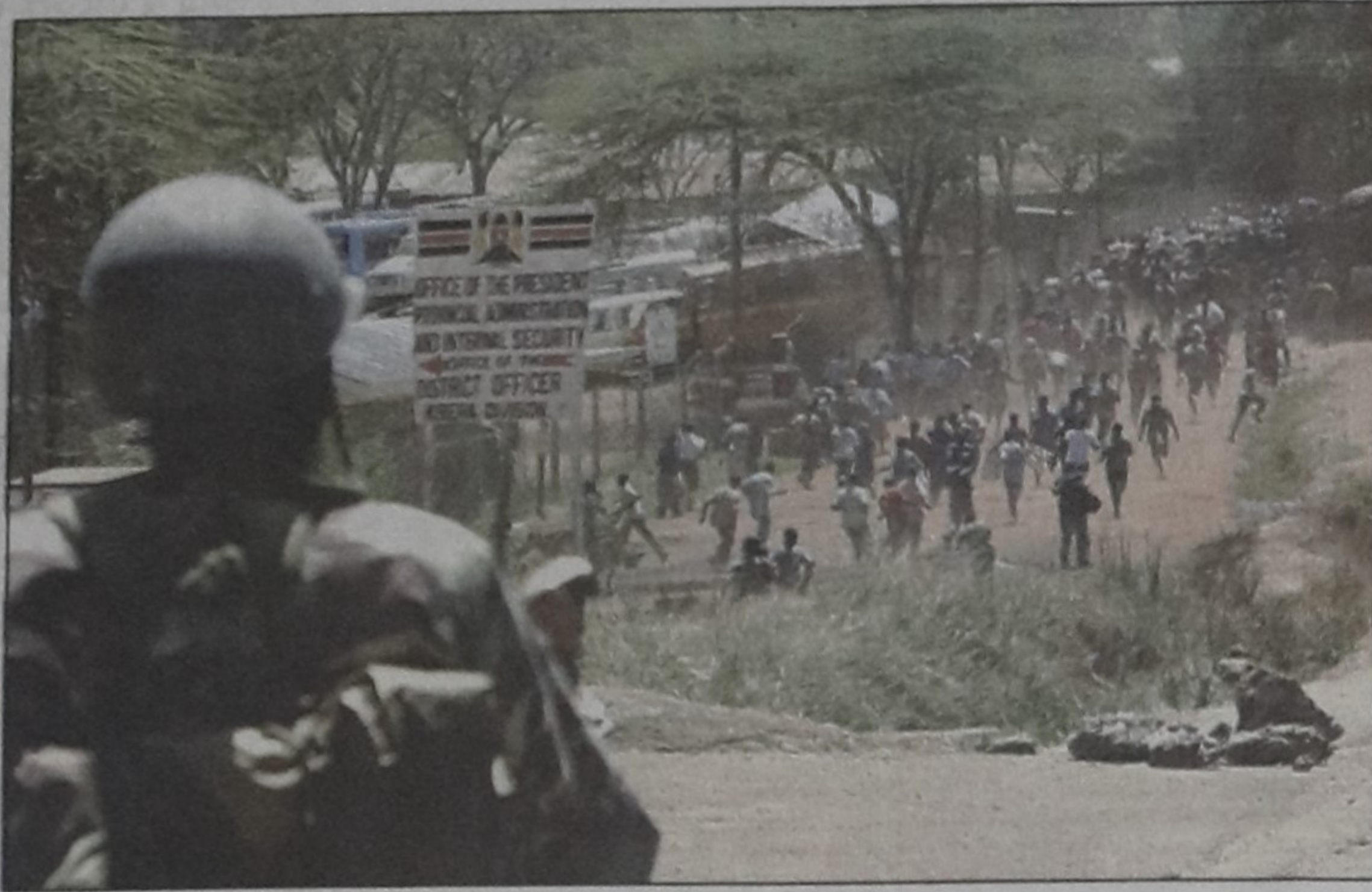
AFP, Islamabad

A top official in charge of Pakistani tribal areas resigned yesterday following a surge in violence linked to al-Qaeda rebels hiding out in the country's northwest, an official said.

Retired Lieutenant General Ali Muhammad Jan Aurakzai, governor of North West Frontier Province "cited personal reasons behind his decision and President (Pervez) Musharraf has accepted his resignation," the government official said.

Musharraf's close aide Aurakzai was appointed in 2005 with a mandate to improve a deteriorating security situation in tribal areas, a known hub of radical Islamists and al-Qaeda-inspired militants.

He structured a peace deal with the Pakistani Taliban in September 2006 in the wake of bloody clashes between the army and militants that killed hundreds on both sides.



The crowd runs away from Kenyan riot police who intervened after some of them looted street side markets, outside Kibera slum, in Nairobi yesterday. Washington's top Africa envoy on Saturday began talks with Kenyan leaders whose election row triggered a wave of violence that has left at least 360 people dead and displaced 250,000.

Kenyan president offers unity govt to resolve row

AP, Nairobi

Kenya's president is ready to form "a government of national unity" to help resolve disputed elections that caused deadly riots, a government statement said Saturday without explaining what a power-sharing arrangement might involve.

President Mwai Kibaki made the statement to Jendayi Frazer, the leading US diplomat for Africa, according to the director of the presidential news service, Isaiya Kabira.

Kabira said he could not say whether that was a formal offer to Raila Odinga, the opposition leader who accuses Kibaki of stealing the Dec. 27 vote described by international observers as deeply flawed.

Britain, the former colonial power in Kenya, appealed Friday to

leaders in the East African country to consider sharing power.

Frazer, who met with Odinga earlier Saturday, would be meeting with the opposition leader again, Kabira said, implying she might be carrying a message from Kibaki.

Odinga told a news conference he had not received any formal offer from the government, but added, "Let them put that on the table when we are negotiating."

He declined to say what his response would be, but his spokesman, Salim Lone, told The Associated Press that Odinga would rather not share power.

"Raila has said a number of times that he is not happy with (the idea of) a government of national unity, he has said he would rather remain in the opposition," Lone said.

In talks with Frazer, Odinga

repeated his demand for a new election, he said.

On Friday, Odinga called for a transitional government to organize a new presidential election, but Kibaki said it could be ordered only by the High Court.

In parliamentary balloting, Odinga's party won 95 of 122 legislative seats and half of Kibaki's Cabinet lost their seats, meaning it would be almost impossible for Kibaki to govern without opposition cooperation.

There was no immediate statement from Frazer on her 90-minute meeting with Kibaki or her talks with Odinga.

Kabira read a government statement that quoted Frazer as saying that "by extending an olive branch to the opposition, President Kibaki had shown his commitment to ending the political impasse."

N Korea nuclear talks stalled amid disputes

AFP, Seoul

International efforts to put an end to North Korea's nuclear programme appeared to hit a snag Saturday after Pyongyang defiantly insisted it had lived up to its end of a six-party disarmament deal.

Days after the North missed a December 31 deadline to disable its nuclear plants and provide a full declaration of its nuclear facilities it insisted it had given the list to the United States in November, a claim Washington denied.

North Korea said it had been forced to slow compliance with the deal reached last February as the other parties to the agreement -- China, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the US -- had not held up their end of the bargain.

It accused the other parties of failing to deliver promised energy aid, and also said the United States had not "honoured its commitments" to remove Pyongyang from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

ME visit to promote peace, corral Iran

Says Bush

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush said yesterday that his trip to the Middle East next week aimed to promote peace between Israel and the Palestinians and curtail Iran's "aggressive ambitions."

"This is a region of great strategic importance to the United States, and I'm looking forward to my visit," Bush, who leaves January 8, said in his weekly radio address.

Hamas chief ready for talks with Abbas

AFP, Damascus

The exiled political chief of the Palestinian Islamist Hamas movement reiterated in a Friday speech he was ready to talk unconditionally with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

"We are ready for an unconditional dialogue in which all issues will be discussed, including that of bringing forward elections. I say to the leaders of Fatah that our differences are political," Khaled Meshaal said.

in a speech in Damascus on the 20th anniversary of the founding of Hamas.

On Monday, Abbas said he wanted to "open a new page" with Hamas if it gave up control of the Gaza Strip, which it took forcibly in mid-June last year from forces loyal to the secular Palestinian president.

The following day, senior Hamas official Mahmud Zahar said the movement welcomed dialogue, but he adamantly rejected the conditions Abbas set for talks

aimed at halting the factional struggle.

"No Arab country has asked Hamas to give up on the current situation in Gaza," Meshaal said, adding the government of Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad should "go."

"Our people must stop this government from selling off Palestinian interests," he added of the administration that in effect governs in the West Bank only, and accused it of hounding Hamas members.

Obama, Hillary to clash in New Hampshire debates

AFP, Manchester

Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton will clash face-to-face on Saturday for the first time since he won the first 2008 White House nominating contest and threw her campaign into turmoil.

Three days before the second leg of the presidential selection marathon in New Hampshire, the rivals will trade shots as surviving Democratic and Republican hopefuls take part in unusual back-to-back televised debates.

Obama, triumphant in the Iowa caucuses on Thursday, will try to avoid mistakes while the former first lady is desperate to stall his momentum and hopes to use New Hampshire's primary on Tuesday as a firewall.

In the Republican debate, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney will look to hit back at ordained Baptist preacher Mike Huckabee, who pulled off a stunning triumph in Iowa, while surging John McCain also hopes to

shine. Hillary Clinton and Obama both flew into New Hampshire in the early hours of Friday, and laid out retooled battle strategies for the northeastern state, where campaigning is typically less genteel than in rural midwestern Iowa.

Obama electrified a crowd of more than 3,000 Democratic activists, injecting even more vitality than usual into his always stirring stump speech, portraying the primary as a moment of history which could send him to the White House.

"In four days, you can do what Iowa did last night," Obama told activists, and in a new riff to the speech suggested he could unite Democrats, independents and some Republican voters nationwide.

"You the people of New Hampshire can build the coalition that we have not seen in a generation," he said, implicitly contrasting his appeal with what critics say is Hillary Clinton's divisive image.



Scotland Yard detectives inspect the site of the assassination of former premier Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi yesterday. British anti-terrorism police started examining evidence in the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, officials said.

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(Front L-R) Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Abdullah Shalah, exiled Palestinian Hamas supremo Khaled Meshaal, and Secretary General of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), Ahmed Jibril, attend a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the Islamist movement's establishment in Damascus on Friday.

Advertisement for Uttara University featuring 'Admission Spring 2008' and listing various degree programs like BBA, MBA, and EMBA.

One million lose power in California storm

AP, Sacramento

Howling winds, pelting rain and heavy snow pummeled California on Friday, toppling trees, flipping big rigs, cutting power to more than a million people and forcing evacuations in mudslide-prone areas.

Flights were grounded and highways closed in Northern California as gusts reached 80 mph during the second wave of an arctic storm that sent trees crashing onto houses, cars and roads. Forecasters expected the storm to dump as much as 10 feet of snow in the Sierra Nevada by Sunday.

102-yr-old quitting Britain for New Zealand

AFP, London

A 102-year-old man was setting sail yesterday to start a new life in New Zealand, becoming Britain's oldest emigrant in the process, BBC television reported.

Eric King-Turner and his New Zealander wife Doris, 87, have decided to leave their village in Hampshire, southern England, for the city of Nelson on the South Island, seeking adventure and a cure for her homesickness.

"I think I possibly like wandering about a bit. I somehow thought that it might be rather fun to move to New Zealand," said sprightly retired dentist Eric, who served on HMS Invincible during World War II.

Large advertisement for SINGER heaters and water heaters, featuring images of the products and descriptive text for different models like SINGER Room Heater and TROPICA Water Heater.