



A Pakistani political activist shouts anti-Musharraf slogans during a protest rally near the residence of sacked Supreme Court chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry during a protest rally in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistani riot police used tear gas and batons to disperse hundreds of protesters chanting slogans against President Pervez Musharraf.

## Davos switches focus to Pakistan

### Musharraf promises 'peaceful' polls

AFP, Davos, Switzerland

The volatile situation in Pakistan took centre stage in Davos yesterday, after a first day dominated by talk of a US recession.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf took part in the annual gathering of the world's political and business elite in a discussion on peace and stability together with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih.

The Pakistani president vowed to crack down on any attempt to disrupt elections in Pakistan next month and insisted the polls would be "free and fair".

Davos was Musharraf's latest stop on a European tour aimed at shoring up his battered image overseas after months of turmoil and the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

Her murder resulted in elections being rescheduled for February 18.

"Obviously, the elections must be fair free and transparent, and I've added a new word 'peaceful', Musharraf said, adding: "We will make sure they are peaceful".

Musharraf held talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice here on Wednesday -- marking the highest-level US contact with the president since the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto in December.

During their meeting, Rice stressed that next month's elections in Pakistan had to be seen to be "free and fair" and carry the "confidence" of the Pakistani people.

Earlier Thursday, climate campaigner and former US vice president Al Gore warned delegates at the World Economic Forum that the global climate crisis was "significantly worse" than previously thought and unfolding more rapidly than even pessimists had predicted.



A poultry farmer catches his chickens for culling at the site of a mass culling of birds at Ganganagar village, some 200-km north of Kolkata, yesterday. India's battle against its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu suffered a new blow as rain forced a halt to culling in West Bengal, an official said.

## US-led soldiers kill nine Afghan policemen

AFP, Kabul

US-led soldiers killed nine Afghan policemen, including a district police chief, and a woman in an overnight raid aimed at Taliban fighters, Afghan officials said yesterday.

The police officers had gone to the scene of a US-led coalition operation in the central province of Ghazni early yesterday, said Mohammad Nashir, the spokesman for the provincial governor.

The coalition forces opened fire at them. Nine policemen including a police district chief, Abdul Wakeel Kamiab, were killed... A civilian woman was also killed, he said.

The US-led coalition said its early morning raid killed "several insurgents" but it was looking into

the allegations. Afghan interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary said eight policemen were killed in the incident.

"We have sent down an emergency delegation to find out how exactly this has happened," he told AFP, adding the incident was probably the result of a "misunderstanding".

"The dark of the night has been one of the causes of the incident," he said.

In a statement, the coalition said its soldiers had been searching a compound for a Taliban commander believed to be involved in suicide attacks.

They came under fire and retaliated, including using aircraft.

"They killed some of the insur-

## Mass grave found in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

The bodies of at least 16 people have been found in a mass grave in a government-controlled area of north-central Sri Lanka, police said yesterday.

The decomposed bodies were found by local residents in the district of Anuradhapura, 206 kilometres (130 miles) north of Colombo, police said.

Investigations have now begun to establish the identity of the victims and the circumstances in which they were buried, police said.

Local residents alerted a magistrate to at least one body that was found in the area. But when police visited the site, they discovered another 15 bodies in two adjoining graves.

Similar mass graves have been found in the past in Sri Lanka's embattled northern regions, where the government is fighting Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

Several people killed execution-style were also found in and around the capital last year, prompting the United Nations to demand it be allowed to set up a mission on the island to monitor human rights.

The Sri Lankan government angrily rejected the demand.

## 20 killed in Polish military aircraft crash

AFP, Warsaw

All 20 people on board a Polish military transport plane died when it crashed as it came in to land at an airport in northwest Poland, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said yesterday.

"It appears that 20 people died in the Casa military plane disaster," Donald Tusk said as he arrived at the crash site with Defence Minister Bogdan Klich.

The crash at around 7:10 pm (18:10 GMT) on Wednesday of the EADS Casa plane at Miroslawiec airport, the third worst accident in Poland's aviation history, was being investigated by a special airforce panel.

"Obviously we will do everything we can to prevent such accidents in the future," said Tusk.

The toll includes four crew and 16 passengers including senior members of the Polish airforce. Early reports spoke of between 10 and 23 dead.

# Palestinians pour into Egypt for second day

AFP, Rafah, Gaza Strip

Palestinian thronged out of Gaza into Egypt for a second consecutive day yesterday to stock up on supplies after militants blew open the border of the Hamas-run territory.

The area where several border walls stood in the town of Rafah less than two days ago assumed the feel of a busy bazaar, as under sunny skies crowds took advantage of a rare chance to leave the fenced-off Gaza Strip unhindered.

Stalls selling falafel and other fast-food sprouted up to cater to the throngs of shouting, jostling people, intent on buying goods on the Egyptian side a week after Israel imposed a blockade on the impoverished, densely populated territory.

"There are no mattresses in Gaza. When people get married, they need mattresses," said a smiling Salman, 25, as he stood next to a pile of 15 brand-new mattresses that he scooped up for a good price in Egypt and was sure he could unload easily back in Gaza.

Since militants set off explosions bringing down stretches of the walls that mark the border between Gaza and Egypt in the divided town of Rafah on Tuesday night, tens of thousands of Gazans have flooded out.

Shelves in numerous stores on the Egyptian side of the town of Rafah and in the North Sinai provincial capital of El-Arish further west have emptied because of the unexpected influx, witnesses said.

Amid the hustle and bustle, with shouts of people intermingling with the noise of goats and car horns, 40-year-old Fawsa al-Jisha stood out as she stood gazing around surrounded by her nine daughters.

"I just came here to smell the liberty," she said. "I haven't left Gaza for a really long time."

The exodus came a week after Israel imposed a full-scale blockade on Gaza in response to persistent rocket and mortar fire from the territory ruled by Hamas, a group pledged to the destruction of the Jewish state.

Although Israel eased the lockdown on Tuesday amid mounting fears of a humanitarian crisis, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has vowed to keep up the pressure on Gaza as long as militants there continue to fire rockets and mortars into Israel.

"Does anyone seriously believe that while children here wet their beds at night from fear and are afraid to leave their homes, they will live of quiet routine," Olmert said in an address late on Wednesday.

"Under no circumstances will we allow a humanitarian crisis to develop," he said. "However there is no justification or basis to demand that we allow the residents of Gaza to live normal lives, while mortars are fired and missiles are launched from their streets and courtyards of their homes toward... communities in the south" of Israel.

Over the past 10 days, Israeli army raids in Gaza have killed more than 40 people, most of them militants, while gunmen have fired

more than 200 rockets and mortars into Israel, lightly wounding 10 people.

Israel has progressively tightened restrictions on movement in and out of Gaza since June 2006, after militants from the territory seized an Israeli soldier in a deadly cross-border raid.

Since then the Rafah border crossing -- Gaza's only one that bypasses Israel -- has been closed almost continuously.

After Hamas seized control of the territory a year later, routing forces loyal to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in a week of deadly clashes, Israel sealed Gaza to all but humanitarian aid and basic supplies.

Last week, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak ordered Gaza completely locked down in response to persistent rocket and mortar fire.

Amid mounting international fears of a humanitarian crisis in a territory whose 1.5 million inhabitants are largely dependent on foreign aid, Israel eased the block-

## Pak police find bomb on Sharif convoy route

AFP, Peshwar

Pakistani police defused a roadside time bomb just minutes before opposition leader Nawaz Sharif was due to pass the spot in the northwestern city of Peshawar yesterday, officials said.

Former prime minister Sharif was travelling in a convoy to address a lawyers' convention and a political rally in the troubled city near the Afghan border ahead of elections on February 18.

The discovery comes exactly four weeks after fellow opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a gun and suicide attack at an election meeting in the northern city of Rawalpindi.

"We recovered a 400 gram (0.8 pounds) bomb fitted with a timer beneath a main bridge near the high court on the route that Sharif was to take. We have defused it," bomb disposal squad official Hukam Khan told AFP.

Ijaz Khan, a senior police officer, said the bomb was found wrapped in a plastic shopping bag.

"It was planted on the road that Nawaz Sharif was to pass. When policemen were searching the area they found it and immediately called in bomb disposal staff who defused it," Khan said.

# Power-sharing deal most likely way out of Kenya crisis: analysts

AFP, Nairobi

The only way out of the deadly crisis that has rocked Kenya for a month is a political deal, which analysts said yesterday was likely to include creation of a prime minister position for the opposition.

Since a dispute erupted over the December 27 polls, with opposition leader Raila Odinga accusing President Mwai Kibaki of stealing the vote, Kenya has been mired in its worst crisis in 25 years.

Because no clear majority emerged from the parliamentary ballot for the first time since the 1963 independence, bills risk being systematically blocked and the country's institutions locked in a prolonged stalemate.

Odinga has ruled out resorting to courts he says are controlled by Kibaki, while the street confrontation between opposition supporters and police has led to violence for which both sides have been

blamed.

"Normally the way you deal with a coup is a counter-coup. Maybe that's too drastic because it will lead to more loss of lives. So you have to look for other ways," said Hwo Okoth-Ogendo, from the University of Nairobi.

"I call it a drastic constitutional change: to amend the constitution by creating a power sharing mechanism," explained the professor of public law.

Such an option would see the creation of a post of prime minister for Odinga or a member of his movement while Kibaki retains the presidency with fewer prerogatives.

Earlier this month, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer both suggested such a power sharing arrangement could break the deadlock.

"This (constitutional) amendment will convert Kenya

into a parliament system where the country is ruled by an executive prime minister," Okoth-Ogendo explained.

Such a constitutional amendment would have to be approved by two-thirds majority in parliament, but the opposition only won the first vote in the assembly by a very narrow simple majority.

"The president can say no to a constitutional amendment. It's a question of political compromise," Nairobi-based analyst and lawyer Evans Monari said.

"This means such a reform needs a political agreement" between Kibaki and Odinga, said Francois Grignon, head of the Africa programme at the International Crisis Group think-tank.

The two foes were due to meet Thursday for the first time since the dispute erupted a month ago in a three-way meeting mediated by former UN chief Kofi Annan.

# More Russian nuclear fuel delivered to Iran

AFP, Tehran

Russia delivered a sixth consignment of fuel for Iran's first nuclear power plant in the Gulf port of Bushehr yesterday which makes it around 80 percent of the consignment, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"The sixth load of nuclear fuel arrived at the Bushehr plant in the morning," said a statement from the Organisation for Production and Development of Nuclear Energy quoted by the news agency.

The delivery brings the nuclear fuel supplied by Russia so far to 66 tonnes or around 80 percent of the total order of 82 tonnes, IRNA said.

Previous deliveries were made on December 17 and 28, and January 18, 20 and 22. Two more consignments are due by February

according to a timetable agreed by the two sides.

Late last month, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said the Bushehr reactor would be working at 50 percent capacity by mid-2008.

But the Russian constructors insist the 1,000-megawatt plant will not go on line until the end of the year.

After delivery of the first shipment of fuel, Russia said Iran no longer needed to pursue its own uranium enrichment, a message repeated by US President George W. Bush.

Tehran has so far defied successive UN Security Council ultimatums to suspend enrichment prompting two sets of UN sanctions.

The six major powers, the five veto-wielding permanent mem-

bers of the Security Council -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- plus Germany drew up a new text on Tuesday to put before the council.

The contents of the text agreed by the foreign ministers of the so called 5+1 were not released.

But a senior US official said the new draft "increases the severity of the sanctions already in place and will also introduce new elements."

Iran on Wednesday described as illegal and ineffective the threat of new UN sanctions and said it would clear up any remaining questions about its nuclear programme in talks with the UN watchdog.

The Western powers fear that Iran's nuclear programme is a cover for a drive to develop a bomb, a charge Tehran strongly denies.

# Greek PM for closer ties with Turkey

AFP, Ankara

Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis used yesterday the occasion of the first visit by a Greek premier to Turkey in almost 50 years to push for closer ties and warn of the "immense" cost if tensions persist.

"We have a lot to gain by moving ahead together. We have even more to lose by following the path of tension and enmity," Karamanlis said in an address at the capital's Bilkent University.

"The way ahead will be long and difficult. But the cost of not moving ahead... would be immense."

Karamanlis reiterated Greece's support for Turkey's bid to join the European Union, but stressed that Ankara could become a full member only when it complies with all the norms of the bloc.

"A European Turkey will be to the benefit, first, of its people and then, of the region and the conti-

nent as a whole. Recourse to the use or threat of force is a non-option for modern European states," he said.

Traditional rivals, Turkey and Greece have significantly improved relations over the past decade but remain at loggerheads over territorial disputes in the Aegean and over Cyprus.

In 1995, Turkey declared it was prepared to go to war to prevent Greece from extending its territorial waters from six to 12 miles (10 to 20 kilometres).

A decade later, in 2005, a Greek pilot was killed when fighter jets from the two countries crashed during a mock dogfight over the Aegean.

Since January 2002, diplomats have been holding regular closed-door talks over territorial issues, but no progress has been publicised and mutual accusations of violations continue on an almost daily basis.



Taiwan's Premier Chang Chun-hsiung (front row C) poses for a group photo with all cabinet members before their resignation in Taipei yesterday. Taiwan's Premier Chang Chun-hsiung and his cabinet resigned en masse, less than two weeks after the governing Democratic Progressive Party's crushing defeat in parliamentary elections.

# Raid on suspected al-Qaeda cells in Turkey: 3 killed

AFP, Ankara

Three people, among them a police officer, were killed in house raids against suspected al-Qaeda militants in the southeast of Turkey, the Anatolia news agency reported yesterday.

The anti-terror operation was launched overnight against several suspected hideouts in the provinces of Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş, the report said.

A police officer was killed and four others were wounded in the raids in Gaziantep while two suspected militants were shot dead by police.

Eighteen others suspects were detained in both provinces, Anatolia said.

Police have set up a security

cordon around the operation area in Gaziantep, where armoured vehicles and ambulances were standing by, Anatolia said.

It added that explosions could be heard in the city where the operation was still continuing.

Gaziantep Governor Suleyman Kamci told reporters at the scene that the raids targeted a "terrorist organization" but did not name the group.

Turkish police have recently detained several people suspected of being al-Qaeda members in operations across the country.

A Turkish cell of al-Qaeda was held responsible for two twin truck bombings in Istanbul on November 15, 2003 and the British consulate and a British bank five days later.