

Fair poll impossible in Zimbabwe:
HRW

AFP, Johannesburg

Increasing levels of political violence have extinguished hopes for a free and fair presidential run-off election in Zimbabwe at the end of the month, Human Rights Watch warned yesterday.

"Since the runoff was announced, the violence in Zimbabwe has gotten even worse," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch, following the release of a report detailing incidents of abductions, beatings, torture, and killings of opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters.

"Zimbabweans can't vote freely if they fear their vote may get them killed."

The New York-based organisation said it has recorded at least 36 politically motivated deaths and 2,000 victims of violence since the first round of polling at the end of March.

According to the report, President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party had embarked on a politically-motivated campaign of looting and destruction, slaughtering animals, stealing food and property, and burning down homesteads.

Britain loses 100th soldier in Afghanistan

AFP, London

Prime Minister Gordon Brown insisted yesterday that deaths of British soldiers in Afghanistan were not in vain, after Britain lost its 100th soldier there since 2001.

Defence Secretary Des Browne hailed the struggle in Afghanistan as a "noble cause," after a suicide attack in southern Helmand province killed three soldiers Sunday just outside their base.

Britain has about 7,800 soldiers in Afghanistan, most of whom are in Helmand, where the Taliban has been waging a bloody insurgency since being ousted from power after the US-led invasion in late 2001.

"I want to pay tribute to the courage of all the 100 British troops who have given their lives in Afghanistan in the service of their country," he said in a statement, Brown said in a statement.

"They have paid the ultimate price, but they have achieved something of lasting value -- helping turn a lawless region sheltering terrorists into an emerging democracy."

Musharraf should be tried for treason, says PPP

Pak lawyers launch 'long march' against president

AFP, Islamabad/Karachi

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf should be impeached and tried for treason, a spokesman for the leading party in the country's new coalition government said yesterday.

The statement was the harshest that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto has issued against the embattled president since it defeated his allies in February elections.

"Musharraf violated the country's constitution, he should be impeached. As far as I am concerned, I would even urge that he should not only be impeached but tried for treason," PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar told AFP.

"Political problems will persist as long as he is in power," Babar added.

Treason is punishable by death in Pakistan.

His comments come two days after Musharraf, a key ally in the US-led "war on terror," defiantly dismissed mounting speculation that he was about to quit and go into exile.

Musharraf seized power in a coup in 1999. He imposed a state of emergency and suspended the constitution in November when the Supreme Court looked set to overturn his re-election as president the previous month.

Junior coalition partner and ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, the man Musharraf ousted nine years ago, has also called for Musharraf

to face treason charges, but the PPP had taken a more measured stance. Benazir Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, said recently that Musharraf was a "relic" but stopped short of openly calling for his impeachment or any stronger steps.

Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a suicide bomb and gun attack at an election rally in December. Her party went on to win the most seats in parliamentary polls three months later.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N was in second place, with parties backing Musharraf trailing behind.

Meanwhile, thousands of Pakistani lawyers and other opponents of President Pervez Musharraf embarked on a "long

march" yesterday aimed at reinstating judges sacked by the embattled US-backed leader.

Chanting "Go Musharraf, Go!", the protesters gathered in the southern port city of Karachi and then set off to travel through several major towns on the way to a major demonstration in Islamabad on Thursday.

The rally will put pressure on both Musharraf, who at the weekend denied speculation that he was to quit, and also on the new coalition government as it struggles to agree on how to restore the judges.



Pakistani political activists shout slogans during a rally against President Pervez Musharraf in Karachi yesterday. Thousands of lawyers and other opponents of President Pervez Musharraf rallied in Karachi before starting a "long march" against the embattled Pakistani leader.



Survivors of Cyclone Nargis are seen after receiving supplies in the town of Dedaye in the Irrawaddy Delta, some 400km from Yangon yesterday. Cyclone Nargis left more than 133,000 people dead or missing when it pounded into Myanmar five weeks ago.

Growing risk of nukes falling into hands of terrorists: Manmohan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday voiced concern over the possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists or those driven by extreme ideologies.

He also said that the concept of nuclear disarmament has to be implemented globally and not regionally.

Addressing an international conference on nuclear disarmament here, he said "the painful reality is that the goal of global disarmament, based on the principles of universality, non-discrimination and effective compliance, still remains a distant one."

What was "even more disturbing, however is the emergence of new threats and challenges to global security... growing risk that nuclear weapons may be acquired by terrorists or those driven by extreme ideologies; the increasing danger of non-state actors, accessing nuclear materials and devices; the development of new weapon systems based on emerging technologies which pose challenges to space security and provide new roles for nuclear weapons", Singh said.

Pointing out that nuclear arsenals in possession of major powers were enough to destroy the world many times, he said adding "in this scenario, it is not possible to regionalise nuclear disarmament scenario".

US military is Iraq's top problem: Iranian leader

AP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader told the visiting Iraqi prime minister yesterday that the US military presence is the main cause of Iraq's problems, according to Iranian state television, making clear his opposition to a US-Iraqi security pact.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's talks with Iranian leaders during his three-day visit here have focused on the proposed security agreement that Iran fears will keep the American military in neighbouring Iraq for years.

Al-Maliki has tried to push Iranian leaders to back off their fierce opposition to the proposed pact, promising that Iraq will not be a launching pad for any attack on Iran.

But the agreement has become a point of contention as

Baghdad tries to balance its close ties to rivals Washington and Tehran.

Iran, which has repeatedly said the way to end instability in Iraq is for US forces to withdraw, believes the proposed pact could lead to permanent US bases on its doorstep amid fears of an eventual American attack.

"Occupiers who interfere in Iraq's affairs through their military and security might... are the main problems," Iran's state television quoted Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as saying Monday.

Khamenei said Iraqis have to "think of a solution to free" themselves from the US military. Though he did not explicitly mention the security agreement, he said Iraqis not Americans must decide the fate of their country.

Pak govt scraps peace deal with Taliban

Militants kill 4 policemen in ambush

PTI, AFP, Islamabad/Peshawar

Rattled by a fresh wave of suicide attacks, Pakistan government yesterday scrapped a deal signed last month with the Taliban that had been bitterly opposed by the United States and Afghanistan.

"The Swat agreement is scrapped as the militants have (continued) their attacks on security forces," Rahman Malik, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Interior

Affairs, told reporters here.

The government in the restive North West Frontier Province had signed the agreement with Taliban militants in the restive Swat valley under which the militants had given a commitment that they would stop attacks on security forces.

It was also decided that army would be gradually withdrawn from the region.

Malik's announcement came a day after Taliban militants killed

four policemen in an ambush in Matani, near Peshawar, the capital of NWFP bordering Afghanistan.

The Pakistani Taliban had yesterday accused the government of not honouring its commitments under the deal.

Meanwhile, suspected Taliban militants killed four policemen in an ambush on their van in north-western Pakistan despite peace talks in the troubled region, police said yesterday.

Ousted Nepal king trying to hang onto crown

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's deposed king is refusing to cooperate with a government committee set up to audit royal property and has still not handed over his crown, an official source told AFP yesterday.

"We realise it's hard for some people to accept change," a member of the committee told AFP as he recounted various ways in which ousted king Gyanendra has been trying to stall the dismantling of his 240-year-old monarchy.

"We have not been allowed to look in the residence of the former king. He is not helping us very much in the audit of the crown jewels, valuables and property," the source told AFP on condition he not be named.

Nepal's monarchy was abolished on May 28 by a constitutional assembly, which was set up following a peace deal with Maoist insurgents and mainstream political parties.

Gyanendra has until Thursday to vacate the sprawling pink palace in central Kathmandu. The residence will then be turned into a museum.

But the committee member said key items, including the diamond and ruby-adorned crown -- last seen in public during Gyanendra's coronation in 2001 -- had yet to be recovered.

"We have been told informally that the crown and sceptre are still in the palace, but no one has formally given us the location," he said, adding that palace staff were throwing up "a lot of restrictions in the name of protocol" -- even though the last of the king's privileges were revoked in May.

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