

Myanmar junta says Suu Kyi's detention legal

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military regime insisted yesterday it had the right to keep opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest, likening its security laws to British and US anti-terror legislation.

In an editorial in the mouth-piece New Light of Myanmar newspaper, the junta said it was necessary to continue her detention to safeguard sovereignty.

The commentary piece highlighted Britain, the United States, Singapore and Malaysia as other countries which had similar legislation.

"Myanmar is not the only country that promulgates the laws to prevent those who pose a danger to the state," it said. "If necessary to guard the motherland and safeguard the lives and prosperity of the people, every government has to promulgate laws and impose restrictions."

Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) says the detention of their leader more than five years is illegal, and have announced their intention to appeal her confinement.

Finland okays EU treaty on eve of Ireland referendum

AFP, Helsinki

Finland's parliament voted by a large majority yesterday in favour of the European Union's Lisbon Treaty, a day before a referendum in Ireland where the charter risks being rejected.

One hundred and fifty-one of Finland's 200 parliamentarians voted for the treaty while 27 opposed it and 21 were absent. The speaker of parliament cannot vote.

Finnish President Tarja Halonen now has three months to give the text her final stamp of approval before it is ratified.

The Lisbon Treaty replaces the EU constitution that was rejected by French and Dutch voters in referendums in 2005, plunging the bloc into the worst crisis in its half-century history.

A yes vote had been anticipated in Finland after a parliamentary committee comprising members of almost all of the Nordic country's political parties recommended the adoption of the treaty.

Only the opposition Left Alliance, with 17 members of parliament, voiced opposition in the committee report, calling for a referendum to be held.

Finland's centre-right coalition government came out strongly in favour of adopting the text.

"The Lisbon Treaty meets the same basic criteria as a constitution: it is a clear improvement on the current situation and therefore the government proposes its ratification," Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen told parliament in April.



Nepalese Hindu demonstrators shout slogans against the government's decision to declare the country a secular state in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO AFP

Tamil Tigers attack navy outpost, kill 11 sailors

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tigers overran a navy outpost in Sri Lanka yesterday, killing at least 10 sailors and losing four of their own fighters.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they seized heavy weapons and radar equipment after hitting the Irukulampiddi naval detachment in northwestern Mannar district in a pre-dawn commando-style raid.

Sri Lanka's navy, however, said security forces had beaten back the offensive by killing at least four rebels, including a senior leader, and destroying a guerrilla boat.

"They are making big claims, but the attack was beaten back," navy spokesman Commander D K P Dassanayake said. "We lost three sailors killed and four more wounded. Four Tigers were killed. One of their boats was destroyed by us."

The clandestine Voice of Tigers radio said the rebels occupied the navy facility for more than two hours and killed at least 10 sailors before escaping with heavy weapons including mortars, an anti-tank weapon and explosives.

"Four Tiger commandos were killed in action," said the Tiger radio broadcast.

The defence ministry said following the fighting, the military deployed Mi-24 helicopter gunships to attack fleeing rebel boats.

"The air assault had been launched around 4:45 am (2315 GMT) targeting the terror boats fleeing (north) towards Veddithalthivu area," the ministry said.

It said the guerrillas had carried out the attack with the intention of discouraging civilians in rebel-held areas from escaping to government-held territory.

Four die as gas tanker explodes in Afghan jail

AFP, Kabul

A US national and three Afghans were killed when a gas tanker exploded in a prison in the capital Kabul on Wednesday, the defence ministry said.

The ministry did not provide further details about the casualties in the accident at Pul-i-Charki prison, where hundreds of Taliban suspects transferred from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba are being kept.

The gas tanker exploded while transferring gas to the prison's kitchen. Four people were killed -- the deaths included an American, his (Afghan) interpreter and two contractors," the ministry said in a statement.

The explosion triggered a fire, it said. Two soldiers and a civilian were wounded, the statement said, without providing details.

The US-led coalition, which has more than 16,000 troops fighting along with a separate 50,000-strong NATO-led force in Afghanistan, said the American was not a member of the force.

Bush warns Iran of 'all options'

AFP, MESEBERG, Germany

US President George W. Bush, pushing Germany to cut business ties with Iran, warned yesterday he has not ruled out using force in the dispute over Tehran's suspect nuclear drive.

"My first choice of course is to solve this diplomatically. All options are all the table, but the first choice is to solve this problem by working closely together," he said after talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Bush expressed support for a European package of diplomatic and economic rewards -- put together by Berlin, London, and Paris -- if Iran's leaders halt uranium enrichment, which can be a key step towards atomic weapons.

"We'll see what choice they make," he said, one day after the European Union agreed to crack down on Iranian banks. "We'll give diplomacy a chance to work."

Merkel said diplomatic pressure had already shown signs of paying off, highlighted international

cooperation in squeezing the Islamic republic, and said that Tehran would face more sanctions if it rejects the incentives plan.

"If Iran does not meet its commitments, further sanctions will have to follow," she said, citing possible EU steps against Iranian banks.

"If you look at the situation in Iran then you see that these efforts could be successful but that also requires the international community to act in a unified manner, that means in the European Union as well as at the UN Security Council," she said.

Iran denies Western suspicions that its nuclear programme hides an atomic weapons push and has put up its own diplomatic overture -- which does not include freezing uranium enrichment.

Bush met Merkel as part of what he has proclaimed his last trip to Europe before he steps down in January, a voyage that began in Slovenia Monday and takes him to Italy, the Vatican, France, and Britain.

The US president is still widely unpopular over the Iraq war that Germany, France, and Russia fiercely opposed, as well as his resistance to European-favored strategies for battling climate change.

"I hope that with regard to climate change we will take constructive steps forward in Japan" where the Group of Eight industrialized nations will meet in July, Merkel said after hosting Bush in Meseberg outside Berlin.

Last year Merkel was credited with winning concessions from Bush on climate change at a G8 summit in Germany -- albeit non-binding pledges on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions on which he has been accused of renegeing.

Bush urged Germany to step up its commitments in Afghanistan, acknowledging "this is a controversial subject" and has been "a contentious issue between our countries in the past" but stressing: "I believe it's necessary work."

As for the Iraq war, "I don't

regret it at all, removing Saddam Hussein made the world a safer place," Bush said, noting "you don't get to do things over in my line of work."

The unpopular US president predicted that Washington and Baghdad would work past differences on an agreement to govern the continued presence of US forces in Iraq after the UN mandate lapses at year's end.

"I think we'll end up with a strategic agreement with Iraq. There's all kinds of noise in their system and our system," said Bush, who angrily denounced "erroneous" news reports that he seeks permanent US military bases.

However, the White House confirmed earlier this year that it does not consider any US military bases anywhere in the world, except perhaps Guantanamo Bay, as permanent, because host countries could ask US forces to leave.

The talks came with much of Europe hoping that Democrat Barack Obama succeeds him in January.

Sharif to join long march for judges' reinstatement

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif, a leading member of the ruling coalition, said yesterday he would join a "long march" for the reinstatement of judges sacked by President Pervez Musharraf.

Thousands of lawyers and political activists are set to join a caravan of vehicles from the eastern city of Lahore to the capital Islamabad today, culminating in a mass rally led by the country's deposed chief justice.

Sharif, who himself was ousted by Musharraf in 1999, has been a major backer of a struggle by the country's lawyers to restore former Supreme Court chief Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the other judges.

"I will join the long march from Lahore on Thursday," said Sharif, whose Pakistan Muslim League-N party quit the cabinet last month to protest the coalition's failure to honour a May 12 deadline for the restoration of the judges.

Musharraf imposed a state of emergency and sacked the judges on November 3 when it appeared that the Supreme Court was about to overturn his victory in a presidential election the previous month.

Sharif, who returned from

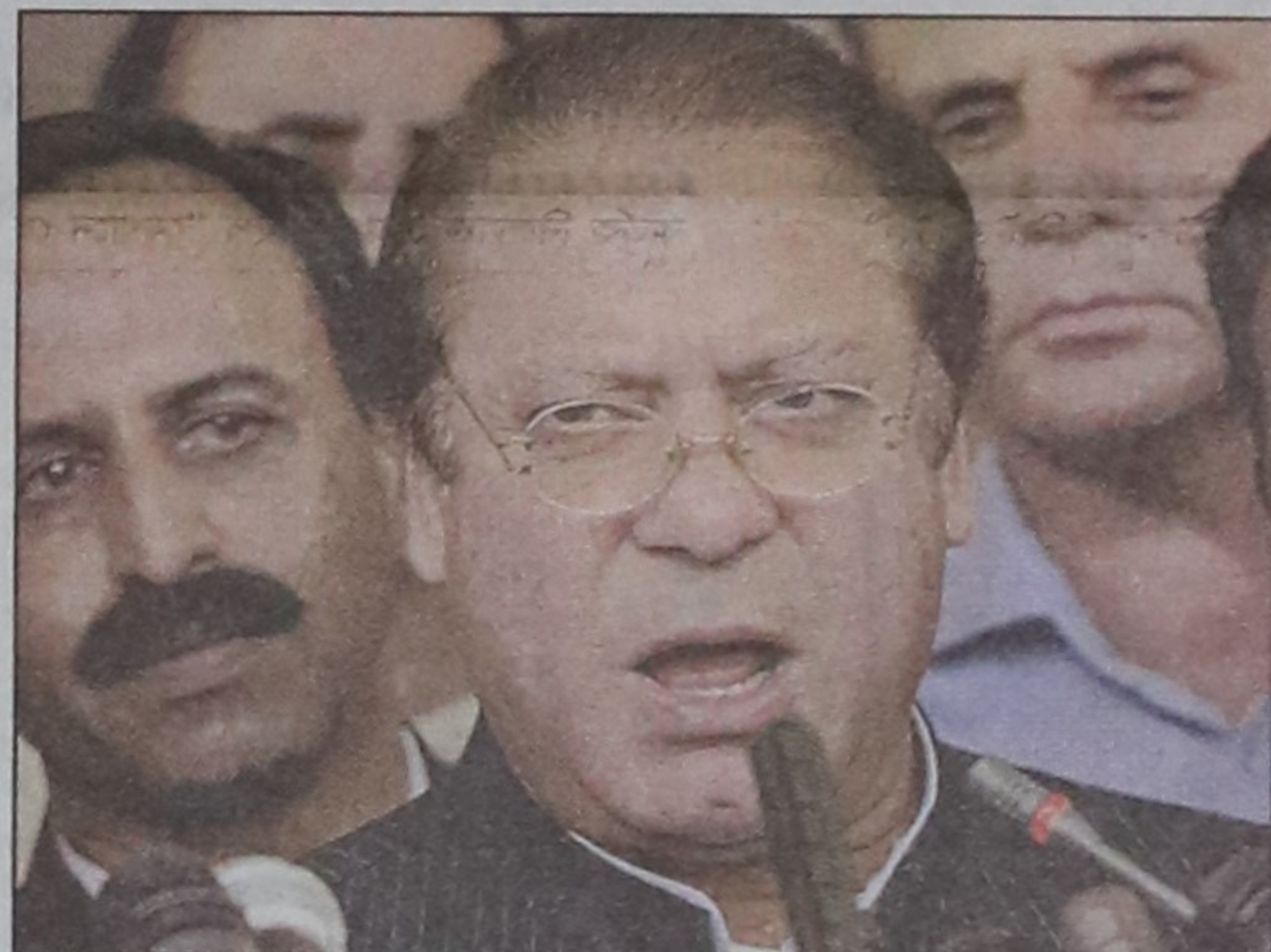
London yesterday morning to participate in the protest, appealed to Pakistani citizens to join the rally.

"This is a march for our survival. The long march will continue until the restoration of judges and the resignation of Musharraf," he told reporters in Islamabad.

The biggest party in the coal-

ition, slain former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, is drawing up a package of constitutional reforms that is set to include the reinstatement of the judiciary.

But it has been hobbled so far by disagreements over whether to limit the power of the judiciary and about whether the coalition will directly take on Musharraf.



Former Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif addresses a press conference in Islamabad yesterday. Sharif announced his intention to join the "long march" for reinstatement of judges from Lahore today.

Bomb kills 5 in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A roadside bomb killed at least five people and wounded 10 others in northern Baghdad's Shiite holy neighbourhood of Kadhimiyah yesterday, security officials said.

The bomb struck two passing minibuses at around 10:00 am (0700 GMT) in Kadhimiyah, which houses the revered shrine of Shiite Imam Musa Kadhim, they said.

A security official with the interior ministry said the two buses were ferrying passengers to their offices when the bomb struck them.

125 Tibetan exiles detained in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Police in Nepal yesterday detained at least 125 Tibetan exiles as they protested outside a Chinese embassy building, officials said.

The protesters were prevented by police from reaching the building in the capital Kathmandu and were bundled into waiting vans as they shouted "We want free Tibet," and "Stop the killing in Tibet," witnesses said.

Tibetan activists have been protesting in Kathmandu almost every day since unrest broke out in Tibet in March and was met by a tough Chinese government crackdown.

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