

India's nat'l security advisor in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

India's national security advisor arrived in revolt-hit Kashmir yesterday to review the situation after weeks of violent protests have shaken the region, officials said.

M.K. Narayanan was in Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar "to assess the situation," a state government official said, asking not to be named.

The mainly Muslim region has been rocked by some of the biggest protests since a deadly separatist Islamic insurgency against New Delhi's rule erupted in 1989.

The latest tensions centre around a small piece of land awarded to a Hindu pilgrimage trust, sparking Muslim protests that began in June when the order was made public.

The order was then rescinded, prompting Hindu hardliners to block the region's main highway --

a protest that kept the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley shut for nine days.

Since June, at least 31 Muslims and three Hindus have died in police firing on protesters in the Kashmir valley and Jammu area.

On Monday, tens of thousands of Muslims took to the streets of Srinagar to demand that the United Nations recognise the Himalayan region's right to self-determination.

Narayanan was accompanied by India's top intelligence and home ministry officials, who were slated to hold meetings with key state officials.

The visit came amid a lull in protests after separatists, who are spearheading the demonstrations in the valley, called for three days of calm.

They have called for a strike and further protests on Friday in the region, where the anti-Indian insurgency has claimed more than 43,000 lives by official count.

Pak coalition working on resolving rift

AFP, Islamabad

Members of Pakistan's ruling coalition said yesterday they were trying to resolve a split over the reinstatement of judges sacked by former president Pervez Musharraf, who resigned this week.

The coalition, led by the parties of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto and ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, managed a rare show of unity when it agreed on impeachment charges that forced Musharraf out of office on Monday.

But since then, Sharif has been pressing for the immediate restoration of the judiciary, with talks between coalition members on Tuesday ending without agreement and due to restart on Friday.

Asif Ali Zardari, Bhutto's widow, and Sharif agreed in May to restore around 60 judges who were sacked by Musharraf during a state of emergency last November in elections in February.

She was assassinated in a suicide attack in December.

Musharraf warned in his televised resignation speech on Monday that the coalition had to tackle the country's problems urgently in order to "save Pakistan."

order to push through his election as president.

But moves to bring back the judges, including the independent-minded former chief justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, stalled amid speculation over Zardari's commitment.

The judges could theoretically overturn an amnesty on graft charges that Musharraf gave to Zardari and Bhutto as part of a doomed power-sharing deal in October last year, before Bhutto's return from exile.

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Pakistani lawyers set fire to an effigy of former president Pervez Musharraf during a protest in Multan yesterday. Members of Pakistan's ruling coalition said that they were trying to resolve a split over the reinstatement of judges sacked by former president Pervez Musharraf, who resigned this week.

Musharraf's foes want his trial

STAR REPORT

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Ousted Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's foes in the National Assembly on Tuesday called for denying him a "safe exit" and putting him on trial as the ruling coalition pondered over reinstating judges he had deposed and finding a democratic successor of a disgraced former dictator.

In the face of severe criticism for his alleged violations of the Constitution and victimisation of political opponents, some of his loyalists from the formerly ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) had words of praise for the last of the country's four military rulers and urged his critics to forget and forgive the former president.

Several members lambasted a farewell military guard of honour presented to the ex-president after he announced resigning from his office to escape the humiliation of impeachment planned by the ruling coalition led by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and saw it as a sign of possible moves to save him from paying for usurpation of power in violation of the Constitution since his Oct 12, 1999 coup and other alleged misdeeds, including his role in the alleged murder and disappearance of thousands of people.

Meanwhile Saudi Arabia has denied it has a plane waiting at Islamabad airport to take former

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President Pervez Musharraf to the kingdom, a press report said on Tuesday amid speculations that Riyadh could offer him asylum.

Saudi Ambassador to Pakistan Ali Awad Essesi was quoted by the Okaz newspaper as saying that reports about the plane were "baseless" and "mediatised".

Meanwhile The Daily Times has reported that Musharraf has no plans to leave Pakistan.

"My resignation as president does not reflect my defeat as I resigned in the interest of Pakistan and its people," Geo News quoted Gen (r) Pervez Musharraf as saying on Tuesday.

According to the channel, Musharraf met with various delegations on Tuesday and said that he did not intend to leave the country, as it was his first love.

In another development, one of Pakistan's most prominent pro-democracy leaders, Aitzaz Ahsan, has accused a senior British diplomat of undermining his country's rule of law.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant was in Pakistan recently and reportedly urged the government to give President Musharraf immunity if he resigned.

Ahsan said that any deal to give the president "safe passage" was wrong.

The British Foreign Office meanwhile told the BBC it was working to avoid confrontation in Pakistan.

Sources: The Dawn, The Daily Times, BBC Online

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