

# Gilani calls for resumption of Indo-Pak dialogue

## Swat deal within ambit of Pak constitution

PTI, Islamabad

Asserting that his Government is committed to bringing the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has called for the resumption of the Composite Dialogue with India.

During a meeting with visiting British shadow security minister Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones yesterday, Gilani reaffirmed his government's commitment that "the perpetrators of those heinous crimes will not be spared".

However, he regretted that India, by refusing Pakistan's cooperation, has only served the objectives of terrorist elements in the region, said an official statement issued after the meeting.

Gilani expressed the hope that both countries "would soon revert to the composite dialogue and undertake sincere efforts to resolve all the issues, including the Kashmir issue, amicably", the statement said.

Johns agreed with Gilani that the Kashmir issue is "part of the problem in the region" and should be resolved by resuming the Composite Dialogue between Pakistan and India as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, under attack from the international community, including US, on the Swat peace deal with Taliban-linked group, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has said that the pact was within the ambit of the country's constitution and there was "nothing to worry about".

He said that the peace deal enforcing Islamic laws in the restive Swat region would only become operational after restoration of complete normalcy in the area.

Gilani said the Nizam-e-Adl Ordinance would be signed by President Asif Ali Zardari only after the restoration of complete peace in the area.

"What we are doing is within the ambit of the constitution and there is nothing to worry about," he said.

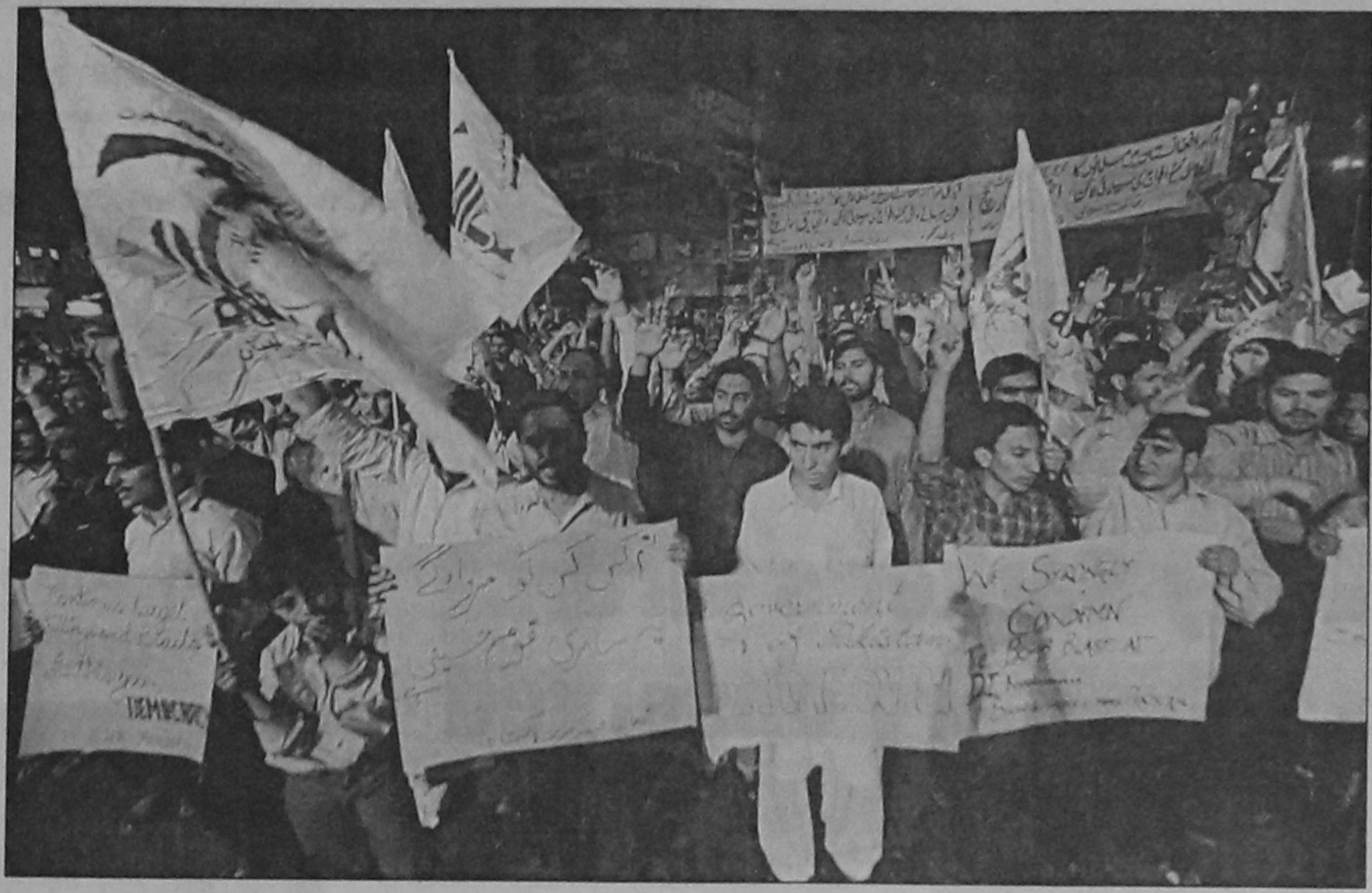
Gilani's comments came as the US,

Nato, India and Britain voiced concern over the pact with the Taliban-linked group, saying that it could be a ploy to enable the militant organisations to re-group.

Hardline cleric Sufi Mohammad of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariah Mohammadi has been clobbered with his son-in-law and Pakistani Taliban commander Maulana Fazlullah for the past two days to get the peace pact endorsed by the militant group, who have been waging a bloody campaign in the picturesque Swat valley for enforcing Sharia laws.

Islamic laws in eight districts of Malakand division, Gilani said similar rules were in place during British rule and similar steps had also been taken in 1995.

Responding to a question about the international concern on the Swat deal, he rejected the apprehensions and said the pact was within the ambit of the constitution and part of the government's three-pronged policy of countering militancy through dialogue, development and deterrence.



Pakistani Shia Muslims shout slogans during a protest in Karachi Friday against the killing of Shia Muslims in a suicide attack in Dera Ismail Khan. PHOTO: AFP

# Pakistan-style truce in Afghanistan acceptable

## Says US Defence Secretary

AP, Krakow

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said Friday that Washington could accept a political agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban if the insurgents will lay down their arms and accept the government's terms.

He was responding to a question from a Pakistani reporter about whether a deal struck by Pakistan with Taliban fighters in the restive Swat valley could serve as a model for Afghanistan.

On Monday, Pakistan announced it would agree to the imposition of Islamic law in the northwest valley as part of an agreement aimed at restoring peace after an 18-month military campaign. The pact was spearheaded by a hard-line cleric who is negotiating with the

Taliban in the valley to give up their arms.

A reporter from Pakistan's Geo Television brought up the Swat deal and criticism of it by Richard Holbrooke, the Obama administration's envoy to the region.

The reporter asked whether, if Pakistan succeeds in pacifying militant activity in Swat, the United States would allow Afghans to make a similar type of agreement.

Gates replied: "If there is a reconciliation, if insurgents are willing to put down their arms, if the reconciliation is essentially on the terms being offered by the government then I think we would be very open to that."

"We have said all along that ultimately some sort of political reconciliation has to be part of the long-term solution in Afghanistan," Gates said.

# Blast damages Nato oil tanker in Pakistan

## Two suicide bombers killed

AFP, Peshawar

One person was killed and two wounded in northwest Pakistan yesterday when a bomb exploded near a fuel tanker destined for Nato forces in Afghanistan, an official said.

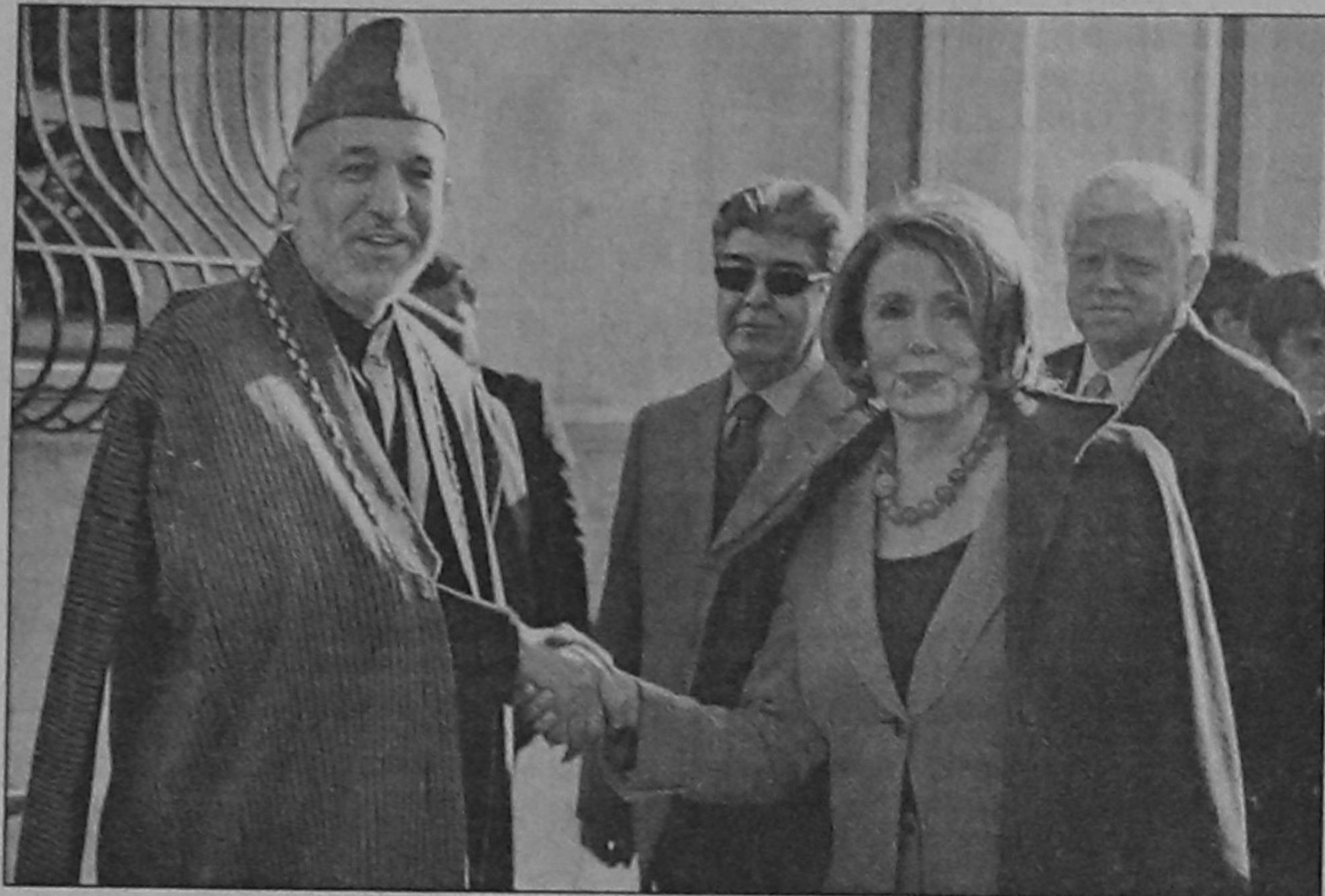
The remote-controlled bomb was planted on the main highway linking Peshawar city with the Torkham border crossing, local official Fazle Akbar told AFP by telephone.

The blast partially damaged the oil tanker, but its driver escaped injuries, Akbar said, adding a passer-by was killed and two local men were injured. A security official also confirmed the incident but gave no casualty figure.

The explosion occurred in the troubled tribal district of Khyber, where Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked insurgents have carried out a series of attacks on Nato vehicles and terminals outside the northwestern city of Peshawar.

Earlier two suicide bombers were killed when their explosives-laden car blew up before hitting its target in violence-hit northwest Pakistan early Saturday, police said.

The bombers intended to ram the vehicle into a police post in Lakki town situated in the Bannu district, but it exploded a few metres ahead of its target, local police officer Mohammad Habibullah said.



Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai (L) shakes hands with US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at the Presidential Palace in Kabul yesterday. Pelosi arrived in Kabul for talks with Karzai. PHOTO: AFP

# US, allies cannot delay addressing Iran worries

## Says White House

AFP, Washington

The United States and its partners "can't delay" addressing worries over Iran's suspected nuclear programme, the White House said Friday after a new UN report on Tehran's atomic work.

"This White House understands that -- working with our allies -- that this is an urgent problem that has to be addressed and we can't delay addressing," spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters.

The comments came a day after International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran was continuing to enrich uranium, a key stage in the atomic bomb-making process, but had slowed down the expansion of its enrichment activities.

Washington also expressed concern about Tehran-ally Syria's atomic ambitions, and summoned Damascus's ambassador in Washington to discuss IAEA findings of unexplained uranium particles at a remote desert site.

The US envoy to the United Nations, Susan Rice, meanwhile said in a radio interview that the IAEA report "confirms what we all have feared and anticipated, which is that Iran ... remains in pursuit of its nuclear programme."

"There's no ambiguity about that, and our aim is to combine enhanced pressures, and indeed the potential for direct engagement to try to prevent Iran from taking its programme to fruition," Rice said in remarks to be aired later Friday on National Public Radio's All Things Considered programme.

# Myanmar junta to set free 6,300 convicts

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's military government announced an amnesty Friday night for more than 6,000 prisoners but did not mention whether any political detainees will be among those released.

State radio and television announced that the convicts from various prisons would be released starting Saturday. The brief announcement said that 6,313 prisoners were being freed in recognition of their good conduct and so that they would be able to participate in a general election planned for next year.

Human rights groups estimate that the regime holds more than 2,100 political

detainees, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi has spent 13 of the past 19 years in detention without trial.

When the junta freed 9,002 prisoners last September, only about a dozen were political detainees.

In recent months, the junta's courts have sentenced more than 100 dissidents, including some of the country's most prominent activists, to prison terms that would keep them incarcerated well past the 2010 polls. The junta says the elections will restore democracy, but critics charge they will be a sham to keep the military in control.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (L) meets with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Beijing yesterday. Hillary Clinton called here for a deeper partnership between the US and China, saying the world powers needed to unite to tackle the economy and climate change. PHOTO: AFP

# Azad resigns as member of Kashmir assembly

PTI, Jammu

Senior Congress leader and former chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad has resigned as member of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly after getting elected as member of Rajya Sabha.

Azad submitted his resignation on February 19 to protem speaker of Kashmir assembly Choudhary Mohammad Aslam, who has accepted it, secretary of the house M Ramzan said on Saturday.

# US Senator Kerry meets Assad in Damascus

AFP, Damascus

US Senator John Kerry on Saturday met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as Washington reviews its policies towards countries regarded as hostile under the former administration, SANA news agency reported.

Kerry, a former presidential candidate who now chairs the Senate foreign relations committee, is the latest US legislator to visit Damascus this week.

His talks with Assad were set to focus on Syria's support for Iran and regional Islamist militant groups, including the Shiite Hezbollah movement in Lebanon.

"We want Syria to respect the political independence of Lebanon, we want Syria to help in the process of resolving issues with Hezbollah and with the Palestinians," Kerry said on Wednesday in Lebanon.

"We want Syria to help... with the disarmament of Hezbollah," added Kerry, the most senior US official to visit Damascus since House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2007.

Syria dominated neighbouring Lebanon for three decades until April 2005 when it pulled out its troops in the face of international pressure following the assassination of Lebanon's former premier Rafiq Hariri.

# Palestinian factions to hold reconciliation talks

## Two militants killed near Gaza border

AFP, Ramallah/ Gaza City

Palestinian factions including the secular Fatah movement and its Hamas rivals will meet in Cairo on Wednesday in a new reconciliation bid, a senior Fatah official said yesterday.

"Egypt has informed (Palestinian) president (Mahmud) Abbas and the factions that it will launch a dialogue on February 25 with all Palestinian groups," Azzam al-Ahmed, the head of the Fatah parliamentary bloc, told AFP.

He added that five commissions would be created to look into the main points of conflict between the two main Palestinian factions, including reforming the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the security forces.

The two groups have been bitterly divided since Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 after driving out Abbas's forces, effectively confining the Western-backed leader's authority to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The Egyptian-brokered talks were originally going to be held Sunday, but Cairo officials said more preparatory discussions were required.

The talks are part of an Egyptian-proposed plan for a lasting truce following Israel's massive three-week offensive against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip that killed more than 1,300 Palestinians.

Meanwhile, two Gaza militants were killed on Saturday in an explosion near the border with Israel, Palestinian sources said, although there were conflicting reports about the circumstances of their death.

Muawiya Hassanein, the head of Gaza emergency services, said the two men were militants killed by Israeli shelling and gunfire in the village of Juhral-Dik southeast of Gaza City.



Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara (R) meets with US Senator John Kerry in Damascus yesterday. Kerry, a former presidential candidate who now chairs the Senate foreign relations committee, met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as Washington reviews its policies towards countries regarded as hostile under the former administration. PHOTO: AFP

### NEWS ANALYSIS

# Even US military split over Iraq pullout

AP, Washington

President Barack Obama faces split opinions within the military on whether to make the speedy withdrawal from Iraq he championed on the campaign trail.

Obama's top generals in Baghdad are pressing for an elongated timetable, while some influential senior advisers inside the Pentagon are more amenable to a quicker pullout.

Although Obama has yet to decide the matter, his announcement last week that he's sending thousands more combat troops to Afghanistan implies a drawdown of at least

two brigades from Iraq by summer.

But that does not answer the question that has been dangling over Iraq since he took office in January: Will Obama stick to his stated goal of a 16-month pullout or opt for a slower, less risky approach?

Gen. Ray Odierno, the top American commander in Baghdad, favors a longer timetable for leaving Iraq. He sees 2009 as a pivotal year, with parliamentary elections set to be held in December; he doesn't want to lose more than two of the 14 combat brigades that are now in Iraq before the end of the year. And he

believes the US military will need to remain engaged in Iraq, to some degree, for years to come.

Odierno's boss at US Central Command, Gen. David Petraeus, leans toward Odierno's view.

Gen. David McKiernan, the top US commander in Afghanistan, has steered clear of the debate over withdrawing from Iraq, but he sees his battlefield as an increasingly urgent priority not just for additional combat troops but also for Iraq-focused surveillance aircraft and more civilians support.

There are now about 146,000 US troops in Iraq,

compared with 38,000 in Afghanistan. Obama has directed 17,000 more to head to Afghanistan, including Marines and soldiers who had been in line for Iraq duty.

At the Pentagon, a more mixed view prevails. The uniformed service chiefs see Iraq as a strain on their troops and, more broadly, a drain on their resources. The Marines, in particular, are in the tough position of having a foothold in both major US wars Iraq and Afghanistan. As a relatively small service, they would prefer to concentrate more fully on Afghanistan, if only they could get out of Iraq.



Italian peacekeeping soldiers with the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (Unifil) and a Lebanese farmer (R) examine the site where Israeli artillery landed in the village of Henniye, southern Lebanon, in retaliation of two rockets fired at northern Israel from Lebanon yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Woman OK after bullet ends up in her hair weave

AP, Kansas City

Other than having a bit of a headache, a Kansas City woman was uninjured after a bullet fired at her ended up tangled in her hair weave. Police said the 20-year-old woman was in a convenience store parking lot late Wednesday when a man flagged her down and told her that her ex-boyfriend still loved her.

She replied, "Well I don't love him," then heard gunshots. She said she looked behind the vehicle and saw her ex-boyfriend firing a handgun at her.