

Pakistan's top judge returns to bench

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's supreme court chief justice called for an end to judicial corruption after returning to bench for the first time in 16 months brought back to resolve a political crisis that showed the country's volatility as the fight against terrorism intensifies.

Judge Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry also faced demands Tuesday to investigate the disappearance of hundreds of people believed detained by security forces since the Sept 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

Chaudhry, hailed by supporters as a fearless and independent justice, was dismissed in late 2007 when then-President Pervez Musharraf declared emergency rule, angering lawyers who protested and helped oust the U.S.-backed military ruler in 2008. It was the second time Musharraf had sought to oust Chaudhry in 2007.

Musharraf's successor, Asif Ali Zardari, had resisted demands to reinstate Chaudhry, apparently out of fears he may examine a deal that has provided Zardari protection from prosecution on corruption claims.

Zardari relented this month, but only after thousands of demonstrators led by Nawaz Sharif, the head of the largest opposition party, were preparing to surround the parliament.

All sides in the dispute have called for reconciliation in recent days, which is likely to please the United States and other Western allies who want Pakistan to focus on battling al-Qaida and the Taliban.

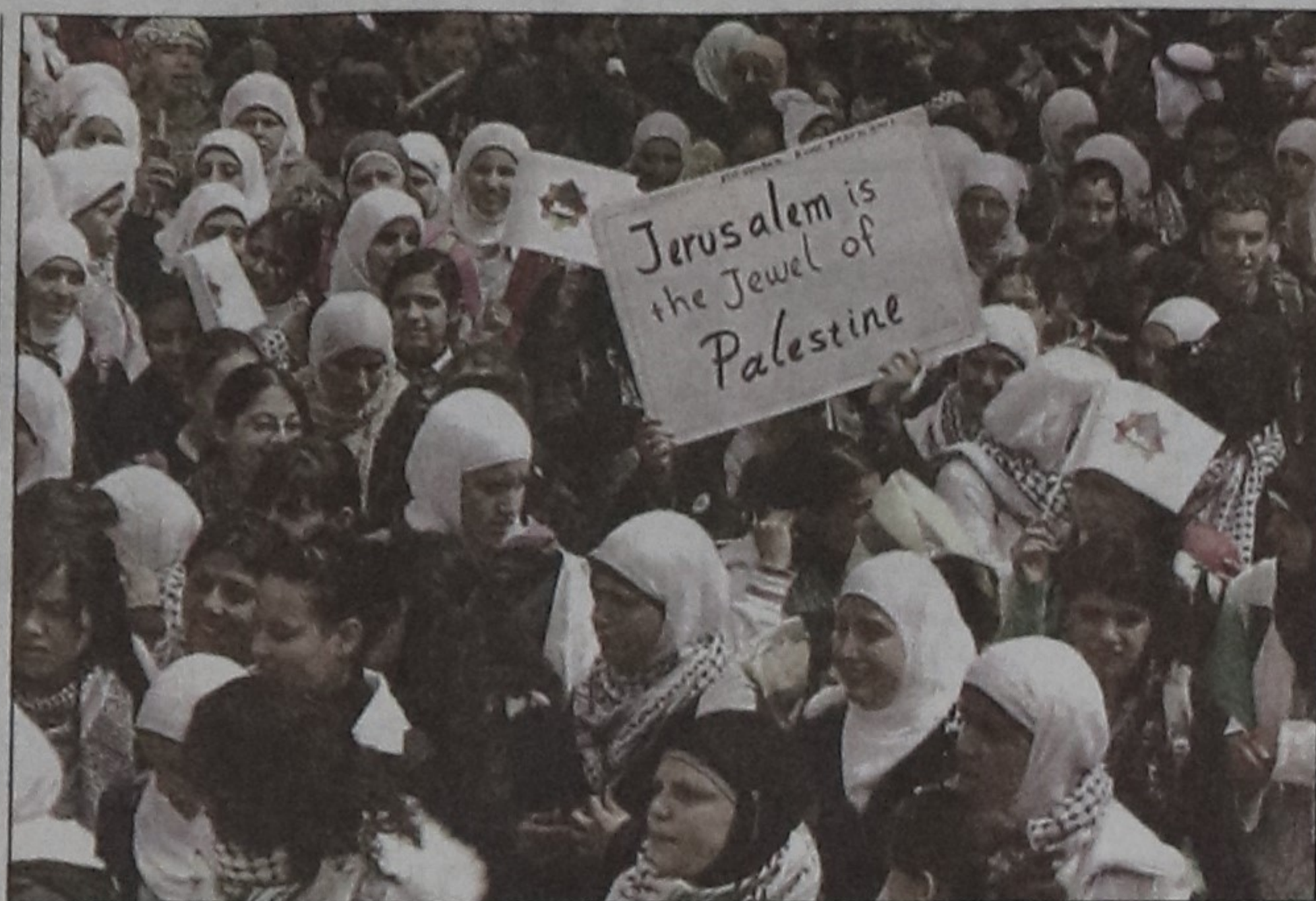
Chaudhry has not said what his priorities as chief justice will be.

At the start of his first hearing Tuesday, Chaudhry thanked Pakistanis for supporting him but warned that the population often viewed the courts as corrupt.

"Lawyers should help us end corruption," he said. "You should point out those cases in which you see elements of corruption. It is a must for justice to end corruption first."

The judge is likely to face strong scrutiny, especially in politically sensitive cases like the fate of several hundred people believed detained during Musharraf's rule.

The issue could prove embarrassing to the United States because some of the missing may have been turned over to American authorities. The US Embassy in Islamabad declined comment.



Palestinian students attend a demonstration in support of Jerusalem's designation as the 2009 "capital of Arab culture" yesterday in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The Palestinian Authority had organised cultural activities in annexed, mostly Arab, east Jerusalem to celebrate the city's proclamation as this year's capital of Arab culture. Damascus held the title in 2008.

Netanyahu wants to be 'peace partner'

But pledges to expand settlements in West Bank

BBC ONLINE, Jerusalem

Israel's prime minister designate, Benjamin Netanyahu, said yesterday his government would be a "partner for peace" with the Palestinians.

The Likud leader pledged to work for peace, security and "rapid development of the Palestinian economy".

Correspondents say the right-winger is trying to temper his image as an opponent of the peace process.

He is under international pressure to commit to a peace formula based on the creation of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu was speaking at an economic conference in Jerusalem yesterday, a day after broadening what had been a narrow right-wing and far right coalition to include the centre-left Labour party.

However, there was no word about a possible two-state solution, which Palestinian negotiators have been urging him to adopt.

In a televised news conference on Tuesday, US President Barack Obama - who also backs Palestinian statehood - said peace efforts would not get "easier" with a Netanyahu gov-

ernment, but were "just as necessary".

Netanyahu meanwhile has struck a secret deal with one of his coalition partners, pledging to expand settlements in a highly-contentious area of the West Bank, army radio said yesterday.

The agreement is not included in the official coalition deal between Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and the ultra-nationalist Yisrael Beitenu party of firebrand Avigdor Lieberman but the two men struck the understanding during their coalition talks, the radio said.

According to the plan, some 3,000 housing units are to be constructed in the so-called E1 Sector in the occupied West Bank which runs between annexed east Jerusalem and the Maale Adumim settlement.

There was no immediate comment on the report from either party.

Israel had pledged to freeze the E1 project as part of its commitments under the international roadmap for peace which was launched in 2005 but has made little progress since then.

Palestinians bitterly oppose the project as it effectively cuts the occupied West Bank in two, making the creation of a viable Palestinian state highly problematic.

Congress lauds PM's Pakistan policy

Pledges Manmohan as premier again if they win a second term

THE DAWN, New Delhi

India's ruling Congress party on Tuesday officially announced a second term for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh should it win the April-May polls and said his temperate Pakistan policy had produced much better results than the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign for aggression towards Islamabad.

"Dealing with terrorism aided and abetted from across our borders does not require a 'muscular' foreign policy as advocated by the BJP," the party's manifesto claimed. "The country knows the heavy price that was paid for such a 'muscular' foreign policy: surrender in Kargil, Operation Parakram."

The examples cited as failures of the BJP's policy towards Pakistan have been challenged by the opposition party. BJP officials say it was the military pressure mounted by the Operation Parakram in 2001-2 that resulted in a declaration by Pakistan in 2004 in which it promised not to allow its territory to be used for terrorism against India.

"What India needs is an intelligent and wise foreign policy, a foreign policy that is rooted in our traditions, gives us strength through our unity and common purpose, and radiates confidence," the Congress said in its poll promise.

It claimed that after the November attacks on Mumbai, the Congress-led UPA government mounted a forceful diplomatic campaign. "It was this campaign that led to Pakistan admitting, for the first time, that Pakistani citizens were responsible for the attacks. That admission was a notable victory for our well thought out foreign policy."

The party said its "patient but forceful diplomacy" had got Pakistan to admit that its citizens were responsible for carrying out the terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

The Congress party 'has striven for an enduring peace and for close economic relations with Pakistan.'

Congress president Sonia Gandhi officially named Dr Singh as the prime ministerial candidate, but it was not clear if he would contest the Lok Sabha polls or continue to play it safe as member of the upper house.



Indian men sit at a wholesale shop selling political party campaign flags in New Delhi yesterday. Election season means spending season in India, where the world's largest democratic exercise triggers a cash splurge on everything from leasing private planes to buying individual votes. Indian voters are set to go to the polls in five phases across the country for general elections from April 16 - May 13.



A US tourist browses a selection of traditional Kurdish hats at an exhibition hall in the Citadel of Arbil, in the northern Kurdish city on Tuesday. A group of 13 US tourists are in northern Iraq touring the sites, the second such group in a matter of months as war-torn Iraq attempts to lure visitors back to its rich tapestry of cultural heritage.

10 civilians die in east Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

A roadside bomb ripped through a van carrying civilians on a road used by foreign troops in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, killing 10 and wounding six, officials said.

In the south, three Australian soldiers were wounded in another blast.

The attacks are a reminder of the dangers facing Afghan and foreign forces as thousands of new US troops roll into the country to try to reverse the Taliban gains of the last three years.

They also came a few days before President Barack Obama unveils his plan to tackle the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, which is battling an Islamic insurgency of its own.

The explosion that killed the civilians happened in Sabari district of the eastern Khost province while the van was on a road also used by foreign and Afghan troops, said Police Chief Abdul Qajum Bakizoy. He blamed Taliban militants for planting the bomb. The blast killed

seven instantly, while three others died later of their wounds in the hospital, said Wazir Pacha, the police spokesman.

The Taliban and other insurgent groups regularly use roadside bombs in their attacks against Afghan and foreign troops, but the majority of the victims in such attacks have been civilian. The number of such incidents rose by 30 percent in 2008, according to NATO.

Sabari district is known for militant activity and clashes between U.S. coalition troops and insurgents.

In the southern Uruzgan province, a blast wounded three Australian soldiers and their interpreter, Australia's Defense Department said in a statement Wednesday.

The Australians were attacked by the Taliban while patrolling alongside Afghan soldiers, the statement said.

"The wounded soldiers and interpreter were given combat first aid by the patrol and moved by helicopter to the Dutch hospital at Tarin Kowt, when the tactical situation allowed," the statement said.

UN issues Darfur aid warning

BBC ONLINE, AFP, Darfur

More than a million people in Darfur will go without food rations by May unless new aid agencies are deployed, a joint Sudanese-UN assessment says.

It also says there could be major water shortages within two weeks.

The warning follows Sudan's expulsion of 13 large foreign aid agencies, mostly from Darfur.

Beshir accuses them of spying for the International Criminal Court, which has issued an arrest warrant against him for alleged war crimes in Darfur.

Four of the expelled non-governmental organisations (NGOs) served some 1.1 million people, the report released on Tuesday said.

The assessment team toured Darfur from 11-19 March, and the report was co-signed by UN and Sudanese officials.

UN humanitarian affairs coordinator Ameerah Haq told journalists in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum that "the most critical needs are being filled for now".

"However, by the beginning of May, as the hunger gap approaches, and unless the World Food Programme has found partners able to take on the mammoth distribution task, these people will not receive their rations," she said.

The assessment also warned "major water shortages could develop within two to four weeks, as from March 18, if fuel, incentives and spare parts are not continuously provided."

Since the expulsion of aid agencies, Sudan has said Sudanese groups have been filling the gaps, denying that there is any problem with the distribution of aid.

But UN humanitarian head John Holmes said the Sudanese government had not done enough, and that it had agreed in the report that gaps existed.

"We and the NGOs that are left, and the government, can do band-aid solutions, can make sure there is fuel available this week, maybe provide a consignment of chlorine tablets to purify water in some places," he said.

Meanwhile, Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir arrived in Egypt yesterday, an airport official said, flaunting his freedom in defiance of an international arrest warrant for alleged war crimes in Darfur.

Teachers of terror

FROM PAGE 1

correspondents were visiting the spot yesterday. The notebook reads name of a BDR soldier of 18 battalion in Rangamat district and the soldier, M Akhter Hossain, had spent a night on May 3, 2007, while the construction of the centre was going on.

Locals said construction work of the building began in 2007 and the orphanage-cum-Madrasa was opened earlier this year.

The Daily Star correspondents talked with the people of Sasa Union about the activities of the orphanage-cum-madrasa but locals failed to provide any information.

"General people were not allowed to enter the area and they only knew that orphans

were taught here," said Lt Col Mamunur Rashid who led the operation on Tuesday.

Locals said they could not enter the centre as it is circled by a trench-like canal and the only way was a hanging bridge. During nighttime, militants connected electric line with canal water so that no one could enter the center.

They added that they sometimes heard the sound of gunshots and vehicles entering the centre at midnight.

During interrogation, four arrestees admitted that real militant came to the centre sometimes at midnight by vehicles and left at midnight too. They also admitted that militants gave them training in the name of running the orphanage.

The ten-acre militant training centre has mainly a student learning centre and a teachers' dormitory. The centre also contains two ponds, one playground, three to four flower gardens and a hanging bridge, which is the only way to get in and out.

Local and law enforcers said there is no other well-decorated modern structure like the madrasa in the coastal district.

The floors of all the nine rooms of student learning centre are covered with tiles. There are well-decorated blackboards in the rooms and such blackboards are not available in normal school and college or other education institution.

RAHUL GANDHI SAYS

LTTE is a 'terrorist' group

HINDUSTAN TIMES, New Delhi

In a rare occasion, Congress General Secretary Rahul Gandhi spoke about the LTTE during a press conference in Puducherry yesterday.

"LTTE is a terrorist group. It killed my father so I am not particularly fond of it," Rahul said.

On Varun's controversial speeches in Pilibhit, Rahul said, "These are his views. I have my views. ... I was surprised by Varun's views. But life is full of surprises."

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