

Zardari vows to fight Taliban 'until the end'

Militants claim responsibility for killing of cleric

AFP, AP, Islamabad

President Asif Ali Zardari said Saturday that Pakistan was battling for its "sovereignty" a day after scores of people were killed amid an escalating offensive against the Taliban.

Zardari said Pakistan would fight "until the end," as US defence officials in Washington confirmed that Islamabad was stepping up its operations against militants in the country's troubled northwest.

"We are fighting a war for our sovereignty," Zardari said in a television address. "We will continue this war until the end, and we will win it at any cost."

"The Taliban are the enemies of innocent people. They want to terrorise the people and to take control of the country's institutions."

Zardari's pledge came after suicide bombings targeting Friday prayers at two mosques killed at least six people, includ-

ing a prominent Muslim cleric, and wounded more than 100.

The explosions confirmed fears that Taliban militants would avenge an offensive against them in the northwest, where the military said Friday 39 insurgents and 10 soldiers had been killed in fresh fighting.

The Taliban claimed responsibility Saturday for recent suicide attacks in Pakistan, including the assassination of a leading moderate cleric and the bombing of a Peshawar hotel frequented by foreigners.

Thousands of people were expected to gather Saturday for the funeral of Sarfraz Naemi, whose death in a blast at his seminary in Lahore triggered a wave of anger and revulsion toward militants in the country's cultural capital.

Police said the bombing was a targeted assassination of the cleric, who had recently condemned suicide attacks as un-Islamic, denounced the Taliban as

murderers and "a stigma on Islam." He also threw his support behind the military operation against the Taliban in the Swat Valley region.

Religious scholar Sarfraz Naemi, who had spoken out against Taliban suicide bombings, was among two people killed in one of the mosque attacks, in the eastern city of Lahore, police said.

Lahore police chief Pervez Rathore said a suicide bomber had entered the room where Naemi was sitting with others after Friday prayers, and blew himself up.

Naemi had issued a fatwa (edict) against suicide bombings carried out by Taliban militants.

Shops, offices, banks and schools in Karachi and Lahore, Pakistan's two largest cities, were closed Saturday in protest at Naemi's killing, officials said.

Protests to condemn the killing were also held by religious groups in several Pakistani cities.



Pakistani Sunni Muslim activists from Jamaat Ahle Sunnat shout anti-Taliban slogans during a protest rally in Karachi yesterday. Hundreds of activists staged the anti-Taliban demonstration against the killing of a cleric in a suicide bombing in the eastern city of Lahore.

Don't doubt sincerity in Mumbai probe

Says Pakistan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan said Saturday India should not doubt its intentions in the probe into the 26/11 Mumbai carnage and called on New Delhi to resume the sub-continental dialogue process with Islamabad.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik, during a meeting with Indian High Commissioner Sharad Sabharwal Saturday, said resumption of the Pakistan-India dialogue "is imperative for regional peace" and India should not doubt Pakistan's sincerity in bringing the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice.

Malik's remarks come against the backdrop of an ice-breaking meeting next week between

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg where the two leaders will attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

This will be their first meeting since the Mumbai attacks that India has blamed on elements operating from Pakistan, but does not signal the resumption of the sub-continental dialogue process.

As Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon put it Friday, "there can be nothing more authoritative than what the prime minister said on the floor of the house" on resuming the dialogue process which was frozen in the wake of the Mumbai attacks.

Trouble deepens in BJP as Sinha quits

PTI, New Delhi

Trouble in BJP deepened today with Yashwant Sinha quitting as Vice President even as party President Rajnath Singh threatened action against leaders violating party discipline and airing their views in public.

Significantly, minutes before Singh addressed a press conference virtually imposing

a gag order on leaders talking to media on party matters, formally or informally, news filtered out that Sinha has resigned.

Sinha, elected from Hazaribagh in the recent elections and is understood to have been upset over recent appointments by LK Advani in the Parliamentary party, sent his resignation to Rajnath Singh. Singh said he has not

received the letter and he came to know about it only through the media.

At the press conference that comes amidst bitter infighting in the party, Singh acknowledged media reports that spoke of disarray in the leadership but refuted them saying they were united in analysing the reasons for the defeat. "The media reports are far from truth."

Pakistan 'unhappy' over 'stringed' US aid

ANI, Lahore

The Pakistan government is miffed over the benchmarks attached to the US' annual aid bill of worth 1.5 billion dollars being offered to it.

Pakistan Ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani said his government is unhappy about the conditions attached to the aid.

Haqqani said he hopes that the Senate would remove the conditions after the passage of the aid package is completed.

Earlier, the US House of Representatives approved an annual non-military aid worth 1.5 billion dollars for Pakistan

over the next five years.

According to the restrictions included in the 'Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement Act' (PEACE), an evaluation of efforts would be undertaken by the Pakistan government to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other extremist and terrorist groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and other regions.

The act also asks for a crack-down on all terrorist camps operating inside Pakistan, including those of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

Nepali turmoil won't stop peace move

Says new PM

AP, Katmandu

The political turmoil that has roiled Nepal in recent weeks will not stop its peace process from moving forward, the country's prime minister said yesterday, adding that the former Maoist guerrillas still must prove that they are committed to negotiations.

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, whose coalition government has been all but paralysed by Maoist strikes and internal bickering since he came to power last month, said he expected the peace process and the new constitution to be completed by the

May 2010 deadline.

The government "has extended its hand of cooperation to the Maoists," he told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview, and the Maoists have pledged to negotiate seriously.

"If they are really honest in their words, then I hope... we will be able to take the peace process to a positive conclusion," Nepal said.

While the Maoists' true commitment to the process remained unclear, he said he was still optimistic that "with some ups and downs, with some twists and turns, things will move forward."

UK under serious terror threat from home-grown Jihadis, warns expert

ANI, London

A British defence expert has warned the UK police and MI5 to get ready to counter a new generation of home-grown jihadis.

Michael Clarke, director of the defence think tank, the Royal United Services Institute, warned that violent Islamic terrorists intent on murdering people in high-profile outrages "will not wither away".

"The phenomenon will not wither away in the near future: it is likely to be genera-

tional. All the available evidence is that radicalisation of alienated Muslim youth in the UK can take place very rapidly as long as it is based somewhere on personal contact," Sky News quoted Clarke, as saying.

He warned that a series of successful police operations might have turned prisons into "universities of terror."

"Prisons around the world are universities of terror and there is no reason to believe that the UK's will not be the same."

Myanmar court sets date for Suu Kyi appeal

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's High Court has set a date for a hearing on Aung San Suu Kyi's appeal against a ban on two witnesses in her trial on charges of breaking her house arrest rules, the opposition leader's party said yesterday.

The Supreme Court will hear the application on June 17 after previously saying this would be postponed to a later date, said Nyan Win, one of Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyers and spokesman for her National League for Democracy (NLD).

"The Supreme Court announced the date on the notice board yesterday... We have to give our arguments for admission (of the appeal) on that day," he said.

Manmohan to meet Zardari in Russia

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In the first summit-level interaction since the Mumbai terror attacks in November last year, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will meet Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari at an international summit in Russia on June 16.

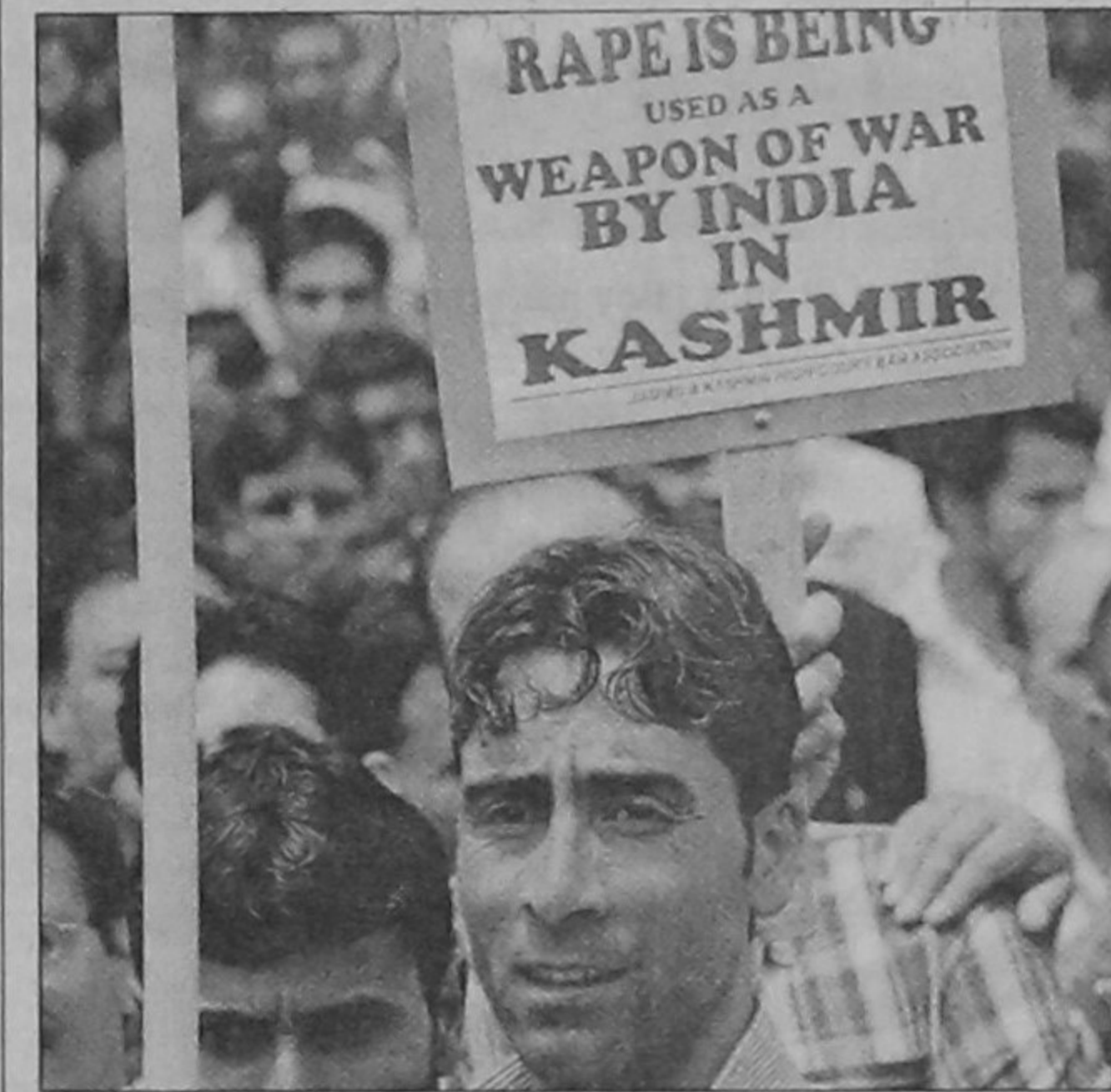
Singh will travel to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg on Monday for a three-day visit during which he will attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit where Zardari will also be present.

Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon told media persons here on Friday evening that Singh would meet Zardari and shake hands with him at the SCO summit scheduled for June 16. However, he declined to characterise the exact nature and content of their meeting.

"They (Singh and Zardari) will be in the same place at the same time. I am sure they will meet but what sort of meeting it is difficult to say at this point. I am sure they will meet and shake hands," Menon said.

India and Pakistan, along with Iran, have observer status at the SCO summit which groups Russia and China with Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Singh had last met Zardari on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September last year.



Members of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association (JKHCB) shout slogans during a protest over the alleged rape and murder of two Muslim women in Srinagar yesterday. The Association demand the punishment of the culprits involved in the alleged rape and murder of the two Kashmiri women or face more protests.

Musharraf's pals in multibillion rupee railway scam probe

ANI, Islamabad

Two Former military generals and close associates of former Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf have been summoned by the National Assembly's Special Committee on Railways for their alleged involvement in a multibillion rupee scam.

Lieutenant General Saeedul Zafar and Lieutenant General Butt have been asked to appear before the special committee to clarify their role in giving 141 acres of PR land on ludicrous terms and conditions to an influential private company apparently owned by a close relative of Musharraf.

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