

Iran's supreme leader warns opposition to back down

Referendum can end election crisis, says Khatami

AP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader told politicians yesterday not to disturb the country's security in a strong warning to the opposition to back down after one of its top figures called for a referendum on the government.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei addressed Iran's elite and warned them to be cautious in the positions they take on the turmoil that has shaken the country since the disputed presidential election on June 12.

He said that hurting Iran's security was "the biggest vice," adding that "anybody who drives the society toward inse-

curity and disorder is a hated person in the view of the Iranian nation, whoever he is."

Khamenei did not mention



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

any names, but the comments reported on state radio were clearly directed at Mir Hossein Mousavi, the pro-reform candidate who claims to have won the election, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the powerful cleric who on Friday criticised the leadership over the elections in a clear challenge to Khamenei.

Khamenei, who holds final say in all state matters in Iran, has declared valid the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and has demanded a stop to questioning the results. Mousavi and his camp claim Ahmadinejad's win was fraudulent and that the new government he is to form next

month will be illegitimate.

Emboldened by Rafsanjani's support for the opposition in a Friday prayer sermon last week, a leading reformist, former President Mohammad Khatami, called for a referendum to rule whether Ahmadinejad's government is legitimate and for a neutral body to oversee the vote.

"The durability of order and continuation of the country's progress hinge on restoring public trust," Khatami said Sunday according to reformist Web sites. "I openly say now that the solution to get out of the current crisis is holding a referendum."



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) gestures while talking with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (L) during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Hillary hoped to seal a defence pact boosting US arms sales to India in talks.

56 go on trial in Turkey over 'coup plot'

AFP, Siliuri

Two retired Turkish generals and 54 co-accused went on trial yesterday over an alleged coup plot in a case, which has deepened the rifts between secularists and the Islamist-rooted government.

Some 200 protestors demonstrated outside the courthouse near Istanbul to brand the charges as a fabrication as the suspects appeared in the dock.

The generals, accused of being the plot's ringleaders, are the most senior military figures to stand trial on coup charges in a country where

the army has toppled four governments since 1960.

Other defendants include journalists and academics known as critics of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the moderate offshoot of a banned Islamist group, which opponents accuse of undermining Turkey's secular system.

The 1,909-page charge sheet says Sener Eryugur, former commander of the gendarmerie forces, and Hursit Tolon, former top army commander, "began implementing the coup plans they drew up in 2003-2004 while in office and continued their activities after they retired."

No future for Musharraf in politics, says Rashid

ANI, Lahore

Former President Pervez Musharraf should not join politics, as it would be a big mistake, said Awami Muslim League President Sheikh Rashid Ahmed.

Talking to Daily Times Editor-in-Chief Najam Sethi on Dunya TV, Rashid said he did not foresee a future for Musharraf in politics.

He said PML-Q dissident leader Humayun Akhtar and his colleagues had lost the

battle for the PML-Q and should leave the party honourably.

Earlier, a large group of Britons of Pakistani origin in London, "Lovers of Musharraf", planned to relaunch him into politics.

The members of the group believe that Musharraf was the best thing that had ever happened to Pakistan and that the country never had it so good except during his tenure.

Obama has made Hillary nearly invisible

Says New York tabloid

ANI, New York

Is US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton being politically marginalised by President Barack Obama? An article in the New York Daily News certainly thinks so.

According to the tabloid, Obama has made Hillary Clinton nearly invisible, something his predecessor George W Bush could never manage.

Hillary's recent speech at the Washington-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) was designed to highlight her heavyweight status within the Obama administration, but according to the NY Daily News, it did just the opposite, confirming the sense she is being marginalised on foreign policy.

"The campaign to puff her up was too obvious. She stacked the room with aides and her team talked up the 'muscular' approach she would take toward Iran. To get ready for her closeup, Hillary shed the sling she has worn since breaking her elbow. All for naught. The appearance raised fresh questions about her reduced role because the speech was a tired rehash of existing themes and broke no new policy ground," says the paper.

"A damp squib" one disappointed critic called it.

It certainly didn't help that Obama upstaged her by appearing at about the same time to talk about health care.

Kashmir part of composite dialogue framework Says Pakistan

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan has welcomed US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's remarks that New Delhi and Islamabad should settle the Kashmir problem bilaterally, and said it looked forward to resumption of the composite dialogue to discuss the issue.

"The two countries have agreed to discuss this issue bilaterally by agreeing to the composite dialogue framework. And Kashmir dispute is a part of

that framework," said Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit.

"We look forward to discuss the Kashmir issue along with other issues including terrorism," he told an Indian news channel.

When asked if his comments meant that Pakistan would be happy if US was not a broker on the issue, Basit said: "I am not saying that. I am just saying that it's a part of composite dialogue and we are looking forward to discussing that."

Britain lowers terror threat level

AFP, London

Britain downgraded its terror threat level to "substantial" on Monday, its lowest for at least three years, but stressed that it still faced a "real and serious" threat.

The new level means an attack is a strong possibility, but is down from "severe", meaning an attack is highly likely in Britain, four years after suicide bombers killed 56 people in London.

"I urge the public to remain vigilant," said Home Secretary Alan Johnson, adding: "The police and security services are continuing in their thorough efforts to discover, track and disrupt terrorist activity."

The five-grade threat level was first made public on August 1, 2006, when it was set at "severe."

It was twice briefly raised to the top "critical" level -- meaning an attack is expected imminently -- first on August 10, 2006, after a series of arrests linked to an alleged plot to down transatlantic airliners; and again at the time of failed attacks in London and Glasgow in June 2007.

But it has not been as low as "substantial" since the threat level was made public.

Johnson said the decision to lower the level had been taken by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), a unit within the MI5 domestic intelligence agency.

"This means that an attack on the UK is a strong possibility. JTAC make their judgments based on a broad range of factors, including the intent and capabilities of international terrorist groups in the

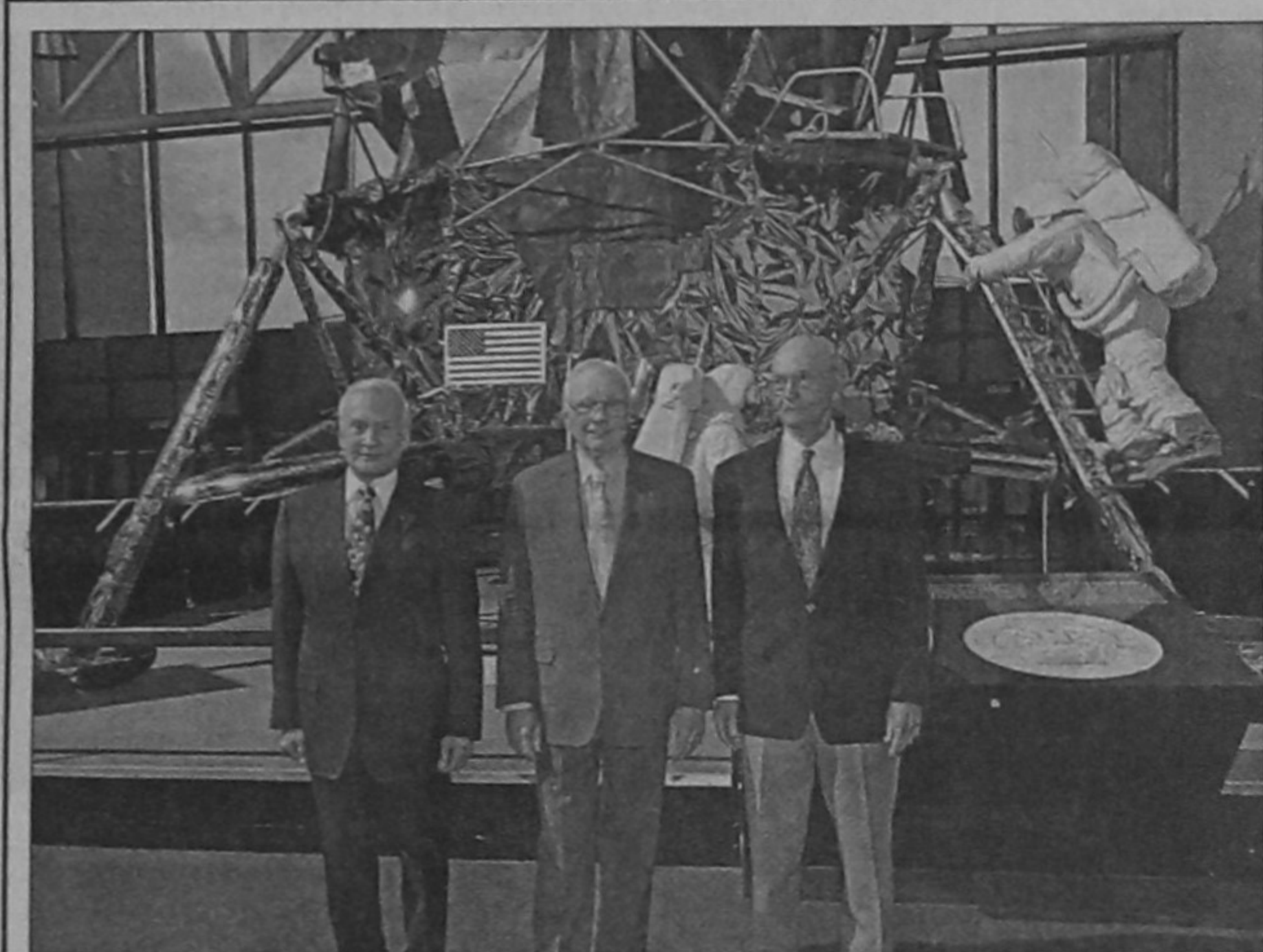


PHOTO: AFP

(From L) US astronauts Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins pose in front of the Lunar Module at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington on Sunday. The Apollo 11 astronauts who were the first to land on the Moon 40 years ago, have urged Americans to set their sights on Mars.

Apollo 11 astronauts call for trip to Mars

AFP, Washington

The Apollo 11 astronauts who were the first to land on the Moon 40 years ago, have urged Americans to set their sights on Mars.

Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins, both 78, and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, 79, went to the National Air and Space Museum on Sunday and used the rare appearance together to press calls to head for new frontiers in space.

Armstrong paid tribute to US physicist Robert Goddard, who developed the liquid-fuel rocket engine in the 1920s.

He said that the Apollo 11 mission in 1969 was part of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, as the rival powers sought to establish themselves in outer

space. But he said the rivalry served a valuable purpose.

"It was the ultimate peaceful competition: USA versus USSR. It was intense," he recalled. "It did allow both sides to take the high road, with the objectives of science and learning and exploration."

He added that eventually, the race provided a mechanism for laying the foundation of cooperation between Russia and the United States.

"In that sense, among others, it was an exceptional national investment for both sides," Armstrong concluded.

Aldrin urged Congress and the American people to use the memory of Apollo 11 as inspiration to prepare for a space journey to Mars.

Unauthorised troops pulling out of Sudan oil district: UN

AFP, Khartoum

The UN mission in Sudan said on Monday that unauthorised military units in the contested oil district of Abyei were pulling out ahead of a decision by an international court on its borders.

Abyei sits on the tense border between the Muslim north and mainly Christian and animist south and many fear Wednesday's court ruling on the rival claims of the Khartoum government and southern former rebels could stoke new conflict.

"We believe that action has been taken to ensure that the area will be clear of such ele-

ments, and that is very reassuring," UN special representative Ashraf Qazi told reporters in Khartoum.

The UN had said on Saturday that it was alarmed by reports of forces in and around Abyei who were involved in bitter fighting in the district last year that killed some 100 people and forced many thousands to flee.

Qazi stood by previous "reports and confirmations" that southern police and military units from the former rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) were in the Agok region south of Abyei, in breach of previous deals.

Killers of Benazir will be exposed, punished soon

ANI, Islamabad

The killers of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto will be exposed and punished soon, said Faisal Raza Abidi, the Political Secretary of President Asif Ali Zardari.

"An independent inquiry into Benazir Bhutto's assassination (by a United Nations Commission) has begun. People will know within days, not months, as to who killed her, and see them being brought to justice," Abidi told reporters here.

The UN inquiry commission probing the assassination of Benazir has completed its first round of investigations and left the country.

Asean approves rights body

AFP, Phuket

Foreign ministers from Southeast Asia endorsed the region's first human rights watchdog Monday, rejecting criticisms that it would be powerless to tackle rogue members such as Myanmar.

Officials were also to express "grave concern" over North Korea's nuclear programme and condemn the hotel bombings in Jakarta after meeting in the Thai resort island of Phuket ahead of Asia's main security forum this week.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) will officially launch the long-awaited rights commission at a summit in October after years of claims

that it is too soft on military-ruled Myanmar and communist Vietnam and Laos.

But rights groups said the proposed watchdog lacks teeth to punish violators, has no monitoring powers and would merely make the bloc's members provide internal reports on rights conditions inside their countries.

Asean officials confirmed that the foreign ministers had endorsed the terms of reference for the rights body at their meeting on Monday.

"It's better to make a start than to leave this hanging with no progress at all," Thai premier Abhisit Vejjajiva said, adding that the body would focus on the "promotion and protection" of human rights.



PHOTO: AFP

Prince Mohamed Bolkiah (L), Brunei's minister of foreign affairs and trade, speaks to Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (R) during a photo call at the start of the 42nd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Ministerial Meeting/ Post Ministerial Conference and 16th Asean Regional Forum in Phuket yesterday.

Civil war fear for Honduras after talks collapse

AFP, Tegucigalpa

An international mediator warned of civil war in Honduras after the failure of talks between representatives of the country's rival governments.

Talks broke down late Sunday after representatives of the de facto rulers rejected a proposal by mediator Oscar Arias, the Costa Rican president, that ousted leader Manuel Zelaya go back as president in charge of a "reconciliation" government.

Arias, who has won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work resolving conflict in Central America, warned Honduras was at the brink of "civil war and bloodshed".

"We have started organising internal resistance for my return to the country," Zelaya told reporters in Nicaragua, where he has been based since he was forced out by the army on June 28.

Arias pleaded for the talks to resume after a 72-hour break but there was no sign his appeal would be heeded, though sources close to the negotiations said the two sides might meet

again Wednesday.

Neither Zelaya nor the head of the de facto government, congress leader Roberto Micheletti, were in Costa Rica for the talks.


Micheletti's representatives took exception to Arias's use of the words "civil war." Its deputy foreign minister, Martha Lorena Alvarado, accused the Costa Rican president of "taking us towards a situation of near-panic" with the phrase.

She welcomed the call for 72 hours' reflection, but ruled out allowing Zelaya's return as president.

Micheletti's government has promised to arrest Zelaya if he does return and prosecute him for treason and 17 other charges.

Zelaya's supporters in Honduras, however, said they would intensify their protests pressing for his reinstatement. They called a strike for Thursday and Friday.

The leader of the National Front Against the Coup d'Etat, Berta Caceres, told AFP her group opposed Arias's plan for a reconciliation government that included what she termed "the putschists."



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Request for Expression of Interest
For Appointment of a Facilitator to Develop an Effective Market for Quality Seeds in Bangladesh

Katalyst is a project implemented under the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) of the Government of Bangladesh by Swisscontact and GTZ International Services. The project is jointly funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Since Katalyst's inception in 2002, the project has achieved significant jobs and income impact by increasing the competitiveness of micro, small and medium sized enterprises in selected urban and rural sectors. Katalyst follows a pro-poor, market development approach in promoting economic growth. It partners with a wide range of private and public sector organizations in order to leverage its resources and maximize impact.

Katalyst has been working in the Seed sector since 2006 with a vision to develop a vibrant seed market that will be able to cater to all the farmers with best quality seeds on time at an affordable price and increase farm productivity. Katalyst invites Expression of Interest from organizations who share a similar vision and approach for pro-poor development. The organization must fulfill the following criteria:

- Substantial experience in the seed sector of Bangladesh
- An ample pool of human resources with seed sector experts
- Experience in working on market development projects
- Ability and willingness to liaison and collaborate with relevant stakeholders from both public and private sector.
- Expertise in conducting monitoring and evaluation of market development projects and translating project outcomes in a comprehensible, presentable manner.
- Ability and willingness to reach out to farmer communities from remote areas and work in remote yet potential markets.
- Reasonable understanding of the goals and objectives of Katalyst and adherence to its market development strategies and principles

Interested firms are requested to send in their 'Expression Letter of Interest' elaborating their expertise and suitability for this assignment along with a profile of their organization and team addressed to the **Group Manager, Industry & Rural Sectors Group, Katalyst, House 20, Road 6, Baridhara, Dhaka** mentioning "EOI for a Facilitator to Develop an Effective Market for Quality Seeds in Bangladesh" on top of the envelope by **26 July, 2009**. Only short listed firms will be notified of a meeting on methodology and terms of reference. Following which proposals will be sought and final selection will be made. This is a two year contract and shall start no later than 15 August, 2009.