

Pak court summons Musharraf

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top court has summoned former President Pervez Musharraf to appear in court over his 2007 firing of several dozen independent-minded judges.

Wednesday's notice allows Musharraf to send a lawyer in his place.

The case could rattle Pakistan's political scene at a time when the US wants the nuclear-armed nation to focus on fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban along the Afghan border.

Faced with growing challenges to his rule, Musharraf declared a state of emergency on Nov 3, 2007, suspending the constitution and dismissing the judges.

Under pressure, Musharraf lifted the emergency rule and allowed parliamentary elections. The vote brought his foes to power, and they ultimately pushed him to resign.

US airlines apologises to former Indian president

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

America's Continental Airlines yesterday apologised to India's former President APJ Abdul Kalam for frisking him at the Indira Gandhi International Airport here violating the protocol.

"We have tendered a formal apology to Kalam for any inconvenience caused to him. We never intended to offend either Kalam or the people of India," said the airlines in a statement a day after it had maintained that its staff had carried out a body search of Kalam at the airport before boarding a flight to Newark, the US, on April 21 this year.

Indian Civil Aviation rules exempt a certain number of VIPs, including former Presidents, from security searches at airports.

The news about the frisking of Kalam, who was President from 2002 to 2007, had sparked an uproar in Parliament on Monday after which the government ordered lodging of a FIR against the staff of the airline and an inquiry into the incident.

Responding to demands from Parliament members cutting across party lines for action against the airline, Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel said the frisking was "absolutely unpardonable" and a show-cause notice has been issued to the airline or willful violation of law.

The members voiced resentment against the treatment meted out by the airlines to Kalam at the airport.

Kalam's office, however, said the former President did not have any problem with frisking and took it in stride.

"He did not complain when he was frisked and took it in his stride. Everyone was being checked and so was he," Kalam's personal secretary H Sheridan said.

Pakistan demands US arm its soldiers

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan urged the United States yesterday to share intelligence from spy flights and arm its soldiers against militants accused by Washington of plotting attacks on the West from the Afghan border.

"Continued drone attacks in FATA (federally administered tribal areas) have proved counterproductive," Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani's office quoted him as telling US regional envoy Richard Holbrooke in Islamabad.

US President Barack Obama's trouble-shooter for Afghanistan and Pakistan was visiting for a second time in seven weeks for talks the White House said would focus on economic and security issues -- and 1.9 million displaced civilians.

Gilani said drone attacks -- around 50 of which have killed more than 500 people since August -- have "seriously impeded Pakistan's efforts towards rooting out militancy and terrorism."

He urged the United States to provide drone technology, "much-needed equipment and ammunition to Pakistan's armed forces enabling them to ensure successful completion of the ongoing operation against the militants".

Gilani stressed that the United States "should share real time, credible and actionable intelligence with Pakistan," said the statement.

Islamabad publicly opposes US strikes, saying they violate its territorial sovereignty and deepen resentment among the populace.

Last May, US military commander Admiral Mike Mullen said the United States had shared with Islamabad surveillance data from drone flights over Pakistan, before requests ceased over the previous month.

US missiles have increasingly targeted strongholds of Pakistan Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud, branded by the US State Department as a key Al-Qaeda facilitator, with rewards for his capture posted by Pakistan and Washington.

Washington has put Pakistan at the heart of the fight against Al-Qaeda, and Obama has ordered an extra 21,000 troops to neighbouring Afghanistan in a bid to stabilise the country for elections as part of a sweeping new war plan.

The United States military does not confirm individual drone attacks, but its military and the CIA alone deploy unmanned aircraft in the region.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian policemen secure the area outside a clinic where one of their colleagues' remains were taken after a fatal car accident on the road that leads to the Freeport goldmine in Timika, in Indonesia's Papua province yesterday. One Indonesian policeman was killed in a traffic accident on a stretch of the road that runs from the coast to the highland mine, whilst three police were wounded in a shooting five miles further up the same road, police said. The police were wounded in an attack on a convoy of Freeport buses on the road to the mine, close to the site of a series of ambushes earlier this month that killed three people.

India, China not rivals, but partners

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, Phuket

Setting aside recent strains in bilateral ties, India's External Affairs Minister S M Krishna held his first meeting with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi and stressed that India and China are not rivals but partners in an emerging Asia.

"India and China may be competitive in economic and trade areas, but they are not rivals. There is enough space for both India and China to grow," Krishna told Indian journalists after his 20-minute talk with Yang on the sidelines of the India-ASEAN ministerial meetings in this Thai island resort.

Describing his meeting with Yang as a "very useful, cordial and friendly exchange of views," Krishna said: "We reciprocated the mutual

desire to deepen our multi-faceted cooperation between India and China."

Rejecting speculation about the Chinese threat, Krishna said he conveyed to his Chinese counterpart India's desire to forge "a lasting friendship and partnership" in the region.

"What impressed me was the spontaneity and warmth of the Chinese foreign minister," Krishna said while stressing that the purpose of the short meeting was to build rapport and understanding between the two foreign ministers.

"We will continue to be in touch with each other and share our concerns," said Krishna who became India's foreign minister nearly two months ago.

The Chinese foreign minister conveyed that Beijing was

looking forward to the visit of President Pratibha Patil later in the year, Krishna said.

The two foreign ministers expressed satisfaction with the dramatic expansion of economic ties, despite political differences over issues like the boundary dispute and recent strains in ties due to China's opposition to a development loan for India with the Asian Development Bank.

Bilateral trade between the two neighbours is estimated to surpass \$60 billion by 2010.

Beijing recently opposed a loan for India at the Manila-based ADB as it included an allocation for Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeast state which is claimed in its entirety by China.

The meeting took place ahead of the 12th round of boundary talks that will be held in New Delhi August 7-8.



Rescue workers remove debris to search for survivors in Hofu city, in western Japan's Yamaguchi prefecture yesterday. Hundreds of troops joined the search in western Japan for 10 people missing a day after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that killed at least six people, officials said.

New ambush near world's largest gold mine: 2 dead

AP, Jakarta

Gunmen opened fire yesterday on buses carrying employees of U.S. mining company Freeport in Indonesia's impoverished Papua province, killing two people in the latest attack on the world's largest gold mine, witnesses and the state news agency said.

The state news agency Antara reported two dead, but it did not identify the victims or say if they were shot.

An Associated Press reporter was told by a policeman who witnessed the shooting that a police vehicle escorting the convoy flipped. He declined to be named because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Several injured officers were taken to a local clinic, the AP reporter said, one of them in critical condition. Two body bags were later seen being removed. The police officer did not think any Freeport employees had been hurt.

Since July 11, at least a dozen people have been killed or wounded in ambushes along a road leading to the mine, prompting a massive security operation in the militarized zone that is off limits to foreign journalists.

Freeport declined comment, referring inquiries to police who did not return phone calls.

Arizona-based Freeport has been targeted

with arson, roadside bombs and blockades since production began in the 1970s during the U.S.-backed Suharto dictatorship.

Freeport CEO Richard Adkerson said Tuesday that 15 arrests had been made in connection with the shootings in which a Freeport guard, an Australian mining expert and a policeman died. He said six people had been charged, including a man who apparently acknowledged being a sniper.

"We have been assured from the highest levels of government in Indonesia they are committed to provide safety for our people and for our operations," Adkerson said in a conference call detailing their latest earnings.

Freeport staff were ordered to stop traveling the road last week, and hundreds have been unable to return to work. The buses were turned back when the firing began, Antara reported.

APT Freeport spokesman in Indonesia, Mendo Pangaribuan, said early Wednesday morning that "secure transports have been arranged to transport personnel and deliver supplies."

Papua is home to a four-decade-old, low-level insurgency against the government, and members of the Free Papua Movement who see Freeport as a symbol of outside rule were initially blamed by authorities for the latest violence.

'Go ahead and hang me', says Mumbai gunman

AFP, Mumbai

The sole surviving gunman of last year's Mumbai attacks told the judge in his trial yesterday that he was prepared to be put to death after making a dramatic confession of his role in the operation.

In an exchange in open court, Judge M.L. Tahaliyani asked the defendant, Pakistani national Mohammed Ajmal Kasab: "Do you want the world to punish you?"

"Please go ahead and hang me," Kasab replied, "if that's the punishment."

His statement came as the court considered whether to accept Kasab's sudden decision Monday to confess, in lengthy detail, to being one of the 10 militant gunmen who took part in the November attacks, which left 166 people dead and more than 300 injured.

His confession took the judge, prosecution and even his own lawyer by surprise.

He had initially pleaded not guilty to 86 charges, including one of waging war against India. If convicted, he faces a possible death sentence.

AL yet

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units to send their lists by July 20, party insiders said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, some of the party leaders, who have been entrusted with the task of preparing the draft list of councilors from the district units, said the units which failed to send their lists could give those until the council begins at 10:00am tomorrow.

Moreover, five to six district units including those of Narayanganj and Nilphamari, and Chittagong city unit sent more than one list of councilors each, indicating feuds within those. This made the central leadership busy resolving the disputes through discussion with the rival factions.

Meanwhile, party central leaders have to prepare lists of councilors from some 11 organisational districts including Feni, Narayanganj, Barisal (north) Barisal (south) and Kishoreganj, where the party either did not have full-fledged committees, or council of the units were long due.

According to AL Office Secretary Abdul Mannan Khan, 5,253 leaders from 73 organisational district units are expected to join the national council as councilors. They include 1,552 from Dhaka Division, 1,211 from Rajshahi, 1,076 from Chittagong, 587 from Khulna, 325 from Barisal and 319 from Sylhet divisions.

According to the AL constitution, the party council is empowered to adopt proposals to change, improve or amend it (constitution) and manifesto of the party, formulate any policy or strategy to achieve its objectives, and elect leadership of the party including its president, general secretary and presidium.

Asked about more than one list of councilors from party leader Mrinal Kanti Das, who has been involved in the process of making the lists, said primarily they are picking the common names from separate lists and then choosing senior and important leaders to prepare a single list. He ruled out any problems in this regard.

'Ban, Gilani may have discussed Kashmir issue'

PTI, United Nations

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's maiden visit to India has set Indo-US relations on a "new course" for the 21st century, UN media said yesterday, terming the strategic dialogue as a "symbolic acknowledgement" of New Delhi's growing global stature.

Hillary's just-concluded trip has strengthened and deepened strategic bilateral ties, the mainstream American media commented on the outcome of the high-profile visit.

The Washington Post said that the Obama administration had through Clinton's visit made it clear that it wants to "further deepen ties" with India.

Asked about the Secretary-General's meeting in Egypt last week with Gilani, the spokesperson said they discussed India-Pakistan relations, the work of the Bhutto Commission and the Group of Friends of Democratic Pakistan in Egypt.

"It (Kashmir) may have come up in passing, but that wasn't the focus of their discussion," UN spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters at the UN headquarters, in response to a question on this issue.

Solar eclipse shrouds Asia in daytime darkness

AP, Tokyo

Millions of Asians turned their eyes skyward yesterday for the longest solar eclipse of this century, a rare event that caused a fatal stampede of viewers on the Ganges River in India.

Millions of others seeing the eclipse as a bad omen shuttered themselves indoors.

The daytime darkness prompted fireworks displays in China and sent bewildered cows to their feeding troughs for dinner on a remote Japanese island.

Starting off in India just after dawn, the eclipse was visible across a wide swath of the Asian continent before moving over southern Japan and then off into the Pacific Ocean.

The eclipse is the longest since July 11, 1991, when a total eclipse lasting 6 minutes, 53 seconds was visible from Hawaii to South America. There will not be a longer eclipse than Wednesday's until 2122.

The celestial event was met by a mixture of awe, excitement and fear.

Cloudy skies and rain damped the show in many areas, but villagers in the town of Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganges in India, got one of the best views.

Thousands of Hindus took to the waters to cleanse their sins. The eclipse was seen there for 3 minutes and 48 seconds.

The gathering was marred when a 65-year-old woman was killed and six people injured in a stampede at one of the river's banks where about 2,500 people had gathered, said police spokesman Surendra Srivastava. He said it is not clear how the stampede started.

Others in India, though, were gripped

by fear and refused to come outdoors. In Hindu mythology, an eclipse is caused when a dragon-demon swallows the sun, while another myth is that sun rays during an eclipse can harm unborn children.

"My mother and aunts have called and told me stay in a darkened room with the curtains closed, lie in bed and chant prayers," Krati Jain, 24, who is expecting her first child, said in New Delhi.

Clouds obscured the sun when the eclipse began. But they parted in several Indian cities minutes before the total eclipse took place at 6:24 a.m. (0054 GMT; 8:54 p.m. EDT).

On the tiny Japanese island of Akuseki, where the total eclipse lasted 6 minutes and 25 seconds, more than 200 tourists had to take shelter inside a school gymnasium due to a tornado warning.

But when the sky started to darken, everyone rushed out to the schoolyard, cheering and applauding, said island official Seiichiro Fukumitsu.

"The sky turned dark like in the dead of the night. The air turned cooler and cicadas stopped singing. Everything was so exciting and moving," Fukumitsu said.

Some villagers reported that their cows gathered at a feeding station, apparently mistaking the eclipse as a signal that it was dinner time, he said.

"It was rather mysterious," he said. "It must have been a frightening experience for people hundreds of years ago."

Jubilant eclipse watchers in China set off fireworks near the banks of the Qiantang River in coastal Zhejiang province as skies darkened overhead for about six minutes. Visitors from countries including Britain, Germany and Australia joined curious Chinese onlookers. Heavy clouds blocked the full eclipse but watch-

ers saw a partial one.

The river bank in Yangtze village drew

an exceptional number of watchers because it was also the site of the world's largest tidal bore, a phenomenon triggered by the eclipse where a giant tidal wave runs against the river's currents.

In Beijing, a thick blanket of grayish smog blotted out the sky. In coastal Shanghai, eclipse watchers were disappointed by a light drizzle in the morning.

As the sky darkened fully for about five minutes, however, watchers became excited.

Holding a big green umbrella and wearing special glasses, Song Chunyun was prepared to celebrate the occasion in a new white dress.

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