

# Indemnity sought for Zardari

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lahore

With Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari facing the prospect of being jailed after the corruption cases against him are reopened, a petition has been filed in the Lahore registry of the Supreme Court seeking constitutional indemnity from prosecution for his office.

Barrister Zafarullah of the little-known Watan Party said in his petition filed Monday that the president, under Article 242 of the constitution, could not be summoned to any court of the law as he is the head of the state.

It said a Supreme Court order on reopening corruption cases against some 250 politicians, bureaucrats and retired military officers who had benefited from a graft amnesty that the court has invalidated did not apply to Zardari as he was the president.

Zardari has been on tenterhooks since the

Supreme Court last month invalidated the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) that had enabled him and his slain wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto to return home from self-exile.

Then president Pervez Musharraf had promulgated the NRO in October 2007.

Zardari is on an extremely sticky wicket as the Supreme Court itself will rule on whether or not he enjoys constitutional immunity from prosecution.

And, given the court's judicial activism since last July, when it first declared the Nov 3, 2007 emergency Musharraf had imposed as unconstitutional and then its order against the NRO, it is highly unlikely to oblige Zardari, analysts here.

On Monday, Online news agency had reported that Zardari had been advised to quit when it became known that the Supreme Court would strike down the NRO.

# Iraq prepares to sue Blackwater

BBC Online

Iraq has begun collecting signatures for a class action lawsuit on behalf of people killed or wounded in incidents involving US security firm Blackwater.

It will seek compensation for a number of such cases, the office of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said.

Incidents include the 2007 killing of 17 Iraqis in Baghdad's Nisour Square.

Last month, a US judge dismissed charges against five Blackwater guards over those killings, which Iraqi officials described as "regrettable".

Immediately after the US decision, the Iraqi government issued several angry statements pledging that it would continue to "act forcefully and decisively to prosecute".

It has become a notorious incident in Iraq, with the government now taking the initiative in organising the families of the victims to launch civil suits against Blackwater, says the BBC's Jim Muir in Baghdad.

About 50 family members turned up at the prime minister's office after being invited to a meeting at which most of them signed powers of attorney, authorising the government's lawyers to sue the company on their behalf.

# JYOTI BASU'S FINAL JOURNEY BEGINS



PHOTO: AFP

A mourner holds flowers outside the Assembly House in Kolkata to catch a glimpse of late veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu during a procession on Tuesday. Tens of thousands of people thronged the streets of Kolkata to pay their last respect to Jyoti Basu, who was the longest serving chief minister in Indian political history, headed the world's most electorally successful communist party for two decades.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan activists of the National Freedom Front hold demonstration opposite of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo on Tuesday. They were demonstrating against the alleged funding of a legislator in order to extend support to the main opposition challenger in the next week's presidential election.

# Gunmen assassinate Iranian prosecutor

AP, Tehran

Attackers gunned down an Iranian court prosecutor outside his home in the country's northwest, state media reported yesterday.

Two gunmen opened fire at Vali Hajgholizadeh, described as a prosecutor with an excellent anti-corruption record, outside his building late Monday in the town of Khoj, about 470 miles (780 kilometres) northwest of Tehran.

The prosecutor died later of his wounds in a hospital, state television said.

The town of Khoj is close to the Turkish border in an area that has seen occasional clashes between security forces and separatist Kurdish groups.

The English-language state Press TV said initial reports indicate the prosecutor had received death threats over the past few days. It said an investigation was under way to identify and arrest the culprits.

# 2 Koreas hold talks despite North's threats

AP, Seoul

North and South Korea opened talks yesterday on further developing their joint industrial complex in the North despite Pyongyang's recent threat to break off all dialogue and negotiations, an official said.

Following reports of a South Korean contingency plan to handle any unrest in the isolated North, Pyongyang threatened last week to launch a "sacred nationwide retaliatory battle" and vowed to cease all communication with the South.

Still, the two sides were meeting in the North's border city of Kaesong, Unification Ministry spokeswoman Lee Jong-joo said. She had no other details.

During the two days of talks, officials were expected to assess their joint tour of industrial parks in China and Vietnam undertaken in December to get ideas about how to further develop the Kaesong complex.

Kaesong, which combines South Korean capital and technology with cheap North Korean labor, is the most prominent symbol of inter-Korean cooperation. About 110 South Korean factories employ some 42,000 North Korean workers.

On Monday, North Korea issued a statement renewing the country's demand that international sanctions be lifted before it will return to stalled negotiations aimed at ending its nuclear weapons programs.

The statement, issued by North Korea's Foreign Ministry, said "it is nonsensical for the (North) to sit at the negotiating table with those

countries that violate its sovereignty."

Last year, Pyongyang quit the six-party talks with China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States in anger over international condemnation of a prohibited long-range rocket launch.

The North "is not opposed to the six-party talks and has no ground whatsoever to delay them," the statement said, but added that it would not return to them while under sanctions.

"The dignity of (North Korea) will never allow this to happen," the statement said.

The UN Security Council slapped tough new sanctions on the North in June, strengthening an arms embargo and authorizing ship searches on the high seas, following the missile launch and an underground nuclear test.

The North's main Rodong Sinmun newspaper reiterated Tuesday the country's demand for the signing of a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War, noting the treaty will help end its hostile relations with the US and promote the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. Fighting in the 1950-53 conflict was stopped by a truce, not a treaty.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry has said the issues of sanctions and a treaty could be discussed only after Pyongyang makes progress toward denuclearisation.

Despite a series of threats last week, the impoverished North has also been reaching out to its rival in Seoul in what could be an attempt to win economic aid to relieve some of the pressure of the UN sanctions.

# Taliban attacks tighten Kabul's security

Karzai orders security review

AP, AFP, Kabul

Afghan forces tightened security in Kabul yesterday, a day after a brazen Taliban assault on the city centre left 12 people dead and raised concerns about the government's ability to protect the people.

Troops searched vehicles entering the capital and increased the number of checkpoints in the city, along with foot patrols and vehicle patrols, said deputy police chief Mohammad Khalil Dastiyar.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday ordered a review of security in the capital after audacious attacks by Taliban militants highlighted the vulnerability of the city's defences.

Karzai called in security officials to discuss how the Islamist militants could have brought their war to the gates of his fortified palace on Monday morning, gunmen and suicide bombers bringing the city to a standstill.

# Gates calls for closer defence ties between India, US

AP, New Delhi

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates appealed yesterday for closer military cooperation between America and India to bring stability to South Asia.

In an opinion piece published in The Times of India ahead of his visit here, Gates said the two nations have been drawn together by their shared values and should push for even greater cooperation in confronting new security threats.

"We must seize these opportunities because the peace and security of South Asia is critical not just to this region, but also to the entire international community," he wrote.

Gates was scheduled to arrive in India on Tuesday afternoon for a two-day visit that would include meetings with the prime minister, foreign minister and defence minister.

The visit was expected to focus on regional security, Afghanistan and the tense relations between India and Pakistan.

Indian government officials declined to comment on Gates' visit, which comes as India ponders whether to buy scores of fighter aircraft, as well as other expensive hardware, from US military contractors.

"There are also a lot of other defence acquisitions that are on the table," Lalit Mansingh, former Indian ambassador to the United States, said, adding that India was also interested in hearing of US progress in fighting Islamic militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It will be the first high-level talks between the two nations since Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was honoured at the White House in November at the Obama administration's first state dinner.

# 5 top Taliban leaders killed in US drone strikes since December

PTI, Islamabad

Five top Taliban commanders were among several militants killed in recent US drone strikes carried out in Pakistan's lawless Waziristan tribal region.

The US has stepped up drone attacks in Waziristan since the December 30 suicide attack on a forward operating base in neighbouring Khost province of Afghanistan that killed seven CIA operatives.

Taliban commanders Shahidullah, Hafiz Nizamuddin Storikhel, Khwarey and Mohhtaj were among 20 militants killed in a drone strike in Shaktoi area on Sunday, officials were quoted as saying by Dawn News channel.

# Pakistan traces out 20 terrorists

ANI, Lahore

Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has claimed to have traced down 20 terrorists, who were wanted in connection with the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

The FIA's Special Investigation Group (SIG) has booked all the wanted extremists, who allegedly provided logistical and monetary support to the 10 gunmen who attacked Mumbai on 26 November 2008, The Daily Times reported.

According to sources, the SIG had also gathered the photographs of the attackers and several other important information from the arrested terrorists.

# Nepali premier slams Prachanda over allegation on India

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Slamming Maoist leader Prachanda for alleging Indian interference in Nepal's affairs, Premier Madhav Kumar Nepal has said his charges expose the "bias" of an "unpredictable" person against the neighbouring country.

Nepal asserted that his country was a sovereign nation and all talk about his government taking "dictation" from India is "baseless". Prachanda, after resigning as Prime Minister in May last year, is "restless and creating all sorts of problems", he said in an interview here.

"At times he is behaving responsibly. So he is behaving in an unpredictable manner," the Prime Minister said about the Chairman of Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

Asked about Prachanda's allegation recently that India was interfering in his country's affairs and dictating to its leaders, Nepal said, "I have not seen any interference. I have not seen any dictation."

Prachanda, whose actual name is Pushpa Kamal Dahal, has recently been engaged in a sharp attack on India and went to the extent of describing it as "master" of Nepalese leaders.

Nepal said if Maoists had "knowledge of dictation or interference, they should elaborate."

He said Prachanda had resigned as Prime Minister in May last year of his own will and "not out of pressure from outside".

"If he (Prachanda) resigned under pressure from outside, then he should tell people clearly. If he resigned of his own will, then why create hue and cry," the Nepalese Prime Minister said.

Prachanda had quit after President Ram Baran Yadav overruled his order sacking the then Army Chief Gen R Katawal. He was in power for nine months from August 2008.

"How can he (Prachanda) claim we are dictated? These are all false accusations, wrong allegations. There is no solid ground behind (the allegations)," Nepal asserted.

# 7 Kashmir policemen injured in blast

BBC ONLINE

A landmine explosion has injured six policemen in Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said.

The incident took place in Tral township, 40km (25 miles) south of the summer capital, Srinagar.

Police said the mine was planted on an iron bridge. The explosion was very powerful and shook nearby buildings, as well as damaging the bridge.

The BBC's Altaf Hussain in Srinagar says there has been a sudden surge in violence in Kashmir.

# 7 in 10 want Palin to stay out of polls

ANI, Melbourne

Seven in ten Americans do not want former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin to run for 2012 presidential elections, a new poll has revealed.

A CBS poll found that 71 percent Americans say they do not want the former Republican vice presidential nominee to run for president, while 21 percent say they do want her to run.

Among them, 56 percent of Republicans say they do not want her to seek the office and 30 percent do.

Meanwhile, 88 percent of Democrats do not want her to run. Among independents, 65 percent do not want her to run and 25 percent do.

The poll also finds that more people view Palin negatively than positively and that her book tour did not improve overall views of her.

Twenty six percent view Palin favourably and forty-one percent view her unfavourably, while nineteen percent of people in the current poll are undecided about Palin.

# Thailand extends emergency rule in south

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand extended a nearly five-year state of emergency in the troubled Muslim-majority south yesterday, as a bomb attack by suspected insurgents blew off a senior soldier's legs.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said his cabinet had renewed emergency rule in the kingdom's southernmost provinces bordering Malaysia for a further three months until April 19.

But he said he would push at a meeting of the national Security Council next month for the imposition of a law granting an amnesty to Islamist militants in the south and their sympathisers.

More than 4,100 people have died since shadowy separatist militants launched an insurgency in the region in January 2004. Emergency rule was imposed in mid-2005.

Suspected rebels detonated a roadside bomb with a mobile phone signal as a military truck escorting teachers passed by in Yala province early Tuesday, wounding four soldiers, security officials said.

The captain of the teacher protection unit lost both legs in the blast and another of the troops was seriously wounded, they said.

The militants in the impoverished south often target teachers, deeming them a symbol of the Bangkok government's efforts to impose Buddhist culture on the predominantly Muslim region.

Rights groups have however blamed the continued state of emergency for encouraging a culture of impunity for alleged rights abuses by the security forces.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian schoolgirls, dressed in outfits of the Punjabi traditional folk dance, the Giddha watch kites flying on the eve of Basant Panchami, the Festival of Spring in Amritsar on Tuesday. Kite-flying is the major and most colourful event of the festival which is characterised by the colour yellow which dominates the festival.