

BIN LADEN KILLING

Pak opposition for independent probe

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's opposition leader Nawaz Sharif yesterday demanded an independent inquiry over Osama bin Laden and the US raid that killed him, rejecting an internal military probe ordered by the state.

"We completely reject the prime minister's committee. It is powerless and cannot investigate the matter in depth," he told a news conference shortly after returning to Pakistan from medical treatment in Britain.

"We must get to the bottom of the issue. If not, then history will not forgive us," he said, lashing out at the government and the military.

"This commission should ascertain the full facts of Osama bin Laden's presence and the American operation in Pakistan," he said.

PM Yousuf Raza Gilani on Monday announced that a lieutenant general would head an inquiry "to get to the bottom of how, when and why" bin Laden had been hiding in the garrison town where he was killed by US forces.

Pakistanis have been outraged at the per-

ceived impunity of the US raid, while asking whether their military was too incompetent to know bin Laden was living close to a major forces academy, or, worse, conspired to protect him.

US President Barack Obama has also pressed Pakistan to probe how bin Laden managed to live for years under the noses of its military, saying he must have been supported by locals.

Sharif, considered the most popular politician in Pakistan, demanded that the government establish a judicial commission within three days headed by the country's top judge, which should complete its work in 21 days.

Gilani has vigorously defended the military, where the real power in Pakistan is seen to lie, dismissing allegations that they colluded with Al-Qaeda and saying intelligence failures are not limited only to Pakistan.

But Sharif said the government and military had failed to find "satisfactory answers" over the perceived US violation of sovereignty and how bin Laden had managed to live, possibly for five years, without being detected.

US had full right to kill Laden: Russia

AFP, Moscow

Russia believes the United States was fully authorised to hunt down and kill al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview released yesterday.

Lavrov added that Russia also did not have any qualms about the fact that bin Laden had been shot dead despite being unarmed, noting that it was expecting to receive a full account of the US raid at a later date.

"Our position is very simple," RIA Novosti quoted Lavrov as telling the Moskovskie Novosti paper in an interview due to be published today.

"After September 11, 2001, the Security Council adopted a resolution recognising the United States right to self-defence," Lavrov said.

Pak president to hold talks with Russia



Asif Ali Zardari

AFP, Moscow

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was expected in Moscow yesterday for talks with Russian leaders on his first major foreign visit since the killing of Osama bin Laden by US forces.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will host Zardari for talks today at the Kremlin where officials from the two countries were also expected to sign agreements on cooperation in agriculture, aviation and energy, a spokesman for the Pakistan Embassy in Moscow told AFP.

"Economics will be the focus of the visit," said the spokesman, Raja Abdul Qayyum.

The three-day visit to Russia will be Zardari's first high-profile trip abroad since Laden was killed.

The Kremlin hailed the death of bin Laden as a "serious success... in the war against international terrorism" but Pakistan has expressed fury that US forces carried out the raid without informing Islamabad first.

Zardari visited Kuwait at the weekend for talks with its leaders and business executives while Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani is due to visit China next week as Pakistan looks to bolster its alliances at a time of crisis.

Zardari's programme includes a tour of Skolkovo, a future high-tech centre billed as Russia's answer to Silicon Valley and a trip to the former imperial capital Saint Petersburg.

LADEN KILLING AFTERMATH

Obama to deliver speech to Muslim world

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama will deliver a speech reaching out to the Muslim world, in the aftermath of the killing of Osama bin Laden and amid ongoing unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, the Wall Street Journal reported yesterday.



Obama is preparing a wide-ranging address to be delivered as early as next week in which he'll make the case that bin Laden's death, paired with popular uprisings sweeping the region, underscores the US view that the al-Qaeda extremist group is a spent force in the Muslim world.

US will lose if it alienates

Pakistan: Musharraf

AFP, Washington

Former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf warned in an interview yesterday that the United States will be "a loser" if it alienates Pakistan in the war against al-Qaeda and Islamic militants.

"The requirement is absolutely Pakistan and US relations must be good... But if there is mistrust and we are pulling in different directions, trust me, we are losing the battle against terror," he added.

Death could spur peace talks: US general

AFP, Washington

The death of Osama bin Laden could encourage Afghan insurgents to lay down their weapons and spur a possible peace settlement to end the war, a top US general said Tuesday.

"There's a great potential for many of the insurgents to say, 'hey, I want to reintegrate'" back into Afghan society, Major General John Campbell, who commands Nato-led forces in the east, told reporters via video link.

Defence Secretary Robert Gates said last week that the removal of bin Laden could be a possible "game-changer" in Afghan war.

Somalia's Islamists vow to avenge death

AFP, Mogadishu

Somalia's al-Qaeda-inspired insurgents vowed yesterday to avenge the killing of Osama bin Laden by US special forces in Pakistan.

"We are sending a message to (US President Barack) Obama and (Secretary of State) Hillary Clinton that we will avenge the death of our leader Sheikh Osama bin Laden very soon," Hamami, a top official of the Shebab Islamist group, told reporters during a Shebab meeting in Afgoye town west of the capital Mogadishu.

Indian PM to visit Afghanistan

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is to visit Afghanistan for the first time in six years to discuss aid to the country and regional security, a government official said yesterday.

"Terrorism will form a part of the agenda, but there will be other issues. A major focus is how we can strengthen our capacity to help Afghanistan further," the official, who asked not to be named, said.

The date for the trip, which will see Singh meet Afghan President Hamid Karzai, was not disclosed.

India has committed 1.3 billion dollars to Afghanistan since 2001 for projects ranging from building new roads to electricity lines and even constructing the new national parliament.



Libyan teenagers, who are not being sent to fight on the frontline, control the traffic at a busy junction in the eastern rebel stronghold city of Benghazi as seen on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Libyan rebels capture Misrata airport

AFP, Misrata

Libya rebels yesterday captured Misrata airport after a fierce battle with Muammar Gaddafi's troops, marking their first significant advance after weeks of being pinned back by the loyalists.

The airport of Libya's third city, which had been besieged for almost two months by Gaddafi's forces, fell to the rebels after fighting that raged through the night, said an AFP correspondent at the scene.

They celebrated the victory by cheering in the streets and setting ablaze tanks left behind by Gaddafi troops.

Three bodies slain Gaddafi soldiers were seen lying nearby.

The capture of the airport is seen as significant as the city had been cut off from the outside world by Gaddafi's forces, with the port being the only route in or out of the city.

Rights groups have warned of a looming humanitarian catastrophe in the city of 500,000 people, who have been facing acute shortages of food and medical supplies.

Insurgent forces captured 40 Grad rockets

from the regime troops, whose mortar fire injured 13 rebels, the correspondent said.

"We took full control of Misrata airport and pushed back Gaddafi forces around 15 kilometres from airport," said Abdel Busin.

"The airport is in our control but is not free because it is still within range of Grad rockets" fired by Gaddafi retreating forces.

Meanwhile, a volley of missiles struck east of the Libyan capital Tripoli yesterday after intense overflights by Nato-led aircraft, a witness said. There was no immediate confirmation from the Western alliance.

Nato said on Tuesday that since the alliance took over military operations on March 31 to protect civilians from pro-Kadhafi forces, jets have conducted almost 6,000 sorties, including more than 2,300 strike missions.

Italian Defence Minister Ignazio La Russa said Gaddafi is a legitimate target if he is inside a military installation.

Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said Gaddafi has until the end of May to agree his exile before an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court is issued against him.

NUCLEAR TALKS

Iran offers nothing new Says EU

AFP, Brussels

Iran offers nothing new in a letter in which it agrees to resume international talks on its nuclear programme and it does not seem to justify a new meeting, the European Union said yesterday.

"We are surprised to hear the Iranians talking about meetings. They have not been in touch with us with any proposals," said Maja Kocijancic, spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

"On its own, Dr Jalili's letter does not contain anything new and does not seem to justify a further meeting," she said, referring to chief Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili.

"We will be in touch with the Iranians with the aim to create the basis for a new dialogue," the spokeswoman added.

Security forces kill six in Yemen

SANAA

Yemeni security forces shot dead six anti-government protesters and wounded 50 in Sanaa and Ta'ez on Wednesday, medics said, as Gulf states urged all sides to sign up to a proposed transition plan.

Security forces and plainclothes gunmen opened fire on thousands of demonstrators who marched from Sanaa's University Square, the focal point of protests in the capital, towards government headquarters, witnesses said.

They fired when demonstrators got to within 200 metres of the government building, which is about one kilometre away from the square.

Two protesters were killed and 45 wounded, medics said.

Indian Congress set for election boost

AFP, New Delhi

Election results due on Friday are expected to give a boost to India's embattled Congress, according to exit polls, with the ruling party and its allies tipped to win in at least three of five states.

The surveys show firebrand politician Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, in alliance with Congress, is set to deliver a crushing defeat to the world's oldest democratically elected Communist government in West Bengal state.

The findings by AC Nielsen gave Banerjee's coalition 215 of the 294 assembly seats that would end 34 years of Soviet-style economic management of the eastern state.

Banerjee, a populist who casts herself as a champion of the poor, has ridden a wave of popular discontent with the Communist government's handling of the economy that has left industry in decline and the state neck-deep in debt.

Her win would give the federal coalition led by Premier Manmohan Singh a lift at a time when it is reeling from a slew of corruption scandals, including a high-profile telecom graft case, and surging inflation.

Results from the states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and the tiny union territory of Pondicherry over the past month are due to be released on Friday.

The voting has been seen as a mini-referendum on the popularity of Singh, 78, and his government.

In southern Kerala, most surveys published in the Indian media tipped the Congress-led United Democratic Front to oust the Communist government there.

But in southern Tamil Nadu state, most polls projected the fall of the incumbent Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a key Congress ally, and victory for the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) opposition led by ex-movie star J. Jayalalithaa.

A former DMK telecom minister is in jail over a mobile licensing scandal alleged to have cost the national treasury up to \$40 billion in lost revenues.

In northeastern Assam, a poll published in the Times of India indicated Congress would narrowly retain power.

There were no surveys on the outcome of elections in Pondicherry, but before the vote analysts gave Congress the edge.

Facebook may have leaked your personal information

REUTERS

Facebook users' personal information could have been accidentally leaked to third parties, in particular advertisers, over the past few years, Symantec Corp said in its official blog.

Third-parties would have had access to personal information such as profiles, photographs and chat, and could have had the ability to post messages, the security software maker said.

"We estimate that as of April 2011, close to 100,000 applications were enabling this

leakage," the blog post said.

"... Over the years, hundreds of thousands of applications may have inadvertently leaked millions of access tokens to third parties," posing a security threat, the blog post said.

The third-parties may not have realized their ability to access the information, it said.

Facebook, the world's largest social networking website, was notified of this issue and confirmed the leakage, the blog post said.

It said Facebook has taken steps to resolve the issue.

Assange awarded top Sydney peace prize

AFP, Sydney

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was yesterday awarded the Sydney Peace Foundation's top honour for "exceptional courage in pursuit of human rights", joining the likes of Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama.

Assange, an Australian former computer hacker who is fighting extradition from Britain to Sweden over alleged sex crimes, was praised and rewarded with the Sydney Peace Prize's Gold Medal.

Although the Peace Prize is awarded annually by the foundation only three other people in its 14-year history have been awarded the gold award for courage in pursuit of human rights -- the Dalai



Lama, Nelson Mandela and Japanese Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda.

The foundation paid tribute to Assange's determination to seek greater transparency and accountability from governments around the world, having challenged "centuries old practices of government secrecy".

"By championing people's right to know, WikiLeaks and Julian Assange have created the potential for a new order in journalism and in the free flow of information," said foundation director Stuart Rees.

Assange is the founder of the WikiLeaks whistleblowing website that has published thousands of cables in which US diplomats give their often candid views on world leaders, to US's acute embarrassment.

NEWS IN brief

Ban concerned by Egypt violence

AFP, Geneva

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said yesterday that he was disturbed by clashes between Christian Copts and Muslims in Egypt, days after deadly violence in Cairo.

Ban expressed concern that sectarian clashes could affect the recent progress towards democratic reform and a "more free, just and harmonious Egypt."



India seeks 50 fugitives in Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India has handed to Pakistan a list of 50 "most-wanted" fugitives, including top terror suspects, who are believed to be sheltering in the country, reports said yesterday.

The list, reported by the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency and other local media, includes Dawood Ibrahim, the alleged mastermind of deadly bomb blasts in Mumbai in 1993 and second on Interpol's "most-wanted" list.

India's CNN-IBN network, which said it had also seen the list, said the names were handed by Home Secretary G.K. Pillai to his Pakistani counterpart Chaudhary Qamar Zaman during talks in March in New Delhi.

French presidential votes on April 22 and May 6, 2012

AFP, Paris

France will hold the first round of next year's presidential election on April 22 and the second round run-off on May 6, the spokesman for President Nicolas Sarkozy's government said yesterday.

Parliamentary elections for the lower house National Assembly will follow on June 10 and 17, spokesman and Budget Minister Francois Baroin told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting.

Sarkozy is expected to stand for re-election for a second five-year term on a centre-right ticket, and will likely face challenges from a Socialist Party candidate on the left and the National Front on the far right.

Philippines jails two Swedes for life over cybersex

AFP, Manila

Two Swedish men were jailed for life in the Philippines for human trafficking after they were found running a cybersex den in which nude women performed for Internet clients, authorities said yesterday.

Bo Stefan Sederholm, 31, and Emil Andreas Solemo, 35, were given the unprecedented convictions on Tuesday in what the judge presiding over the case and the government said should deliver a warning to all human traffickers.

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