

# ISI chief offered to resign



REUTERS, Islamabad

Lieutenant-General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, head of the military's main Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency, told parliament in a closed-door briefing he was "ready to resign" over the bin Laden affair, a legislator said.

The resignation claim flared up the suspicion that Pakistani security agents knew where the al-Qaeda chief was hiding. Pasha, who was asked tough questions by some members of parliament, told the assembly he did not want to "hang around" if parliament deemed him responsible, legislator Riaz Fatyana told reporters. "I am ready to resign," Fatyana quoted the ISI chief as saying. The embarrassment over bin Laden has given the civilian government an opportunity to exert greater control over the powerful military establishment, which largely determines security and foreign policy. Opposition leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif said civilian leaders, not the security agencies, should be deciding policy toward India, the United States and Afghanistan. "The elected government should formulate foreign policy. A parallel policy or parallel government should not be allowed to work," Sharif told a news conference.

## DOUBLE SUICIDE BLASTS IN PAKISTAN

# Nato urges united front against Taliban

## Death toll rises to 89, US condemns attack

AFP, Brussels

Nato Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen yesterday urged Pakistan to stand united with its Western allies to tackle Taliban extremists, who were behind a double suicide bombing in the country.

"It is with shock and sadness that I learned the death of some 80 paramilitary cadets killed in a terrorist attack," Rasmussen wrote in a letter to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari.

"This attack is a stark reminder that Pakistan and Allies must stand united to defeat the scourge of violent extremism," he added.

The United States Friday condemned what it called a "heinous" attack in Pakistan said to be the first major act of revenge for Osama bin Laden's death, and said it shows the need to defeat al-Qaeda.

"This is a heinous attack," State

Department spokesman Mark Toner said.

"It only highlights the existential threat that these kind of extremist organizations pose for Pakistan, and underscores why it's so important that we continue to work together both on defeating and dismantling al-Qaeda as well as its affiliates."

The death toll from the bombing rose to 89 yesterday, police said. The death toll was revised from a previous figure of 80.

Pakistan's Taliban said Friday's attack in the town of Shabqadar, which also wounded around 140 people, 40 of them critically, was to avenge the death of Osama bin Laden at the hands of US forces.

It was the deadliest attack this year in the nuclear-armed country where the government is in crisis over the killing of the al-Qaeda chief earlier this month.

Friday's explosions took place as newly trained paramilitary cadets, dressed in civilian clothes, were getting into buses for a 10-day leave, police said.

# Musharraf to return to Pakistan for polls

AFP, Dubai

Former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf plans to return to his homeland next year to stand in elections, an Emirati newspaper reported yesterday.

"I am going to land in Lahore" by March 23, Pakistan's national day, Musharraf told reporters in Dubai, quoted in The National.

Musharraf, who seized power in a coup in 1999, was Pakistan's president until 2008 when he resigned under pressure.

He now lives in self-imposed exile in London but is wanted in connection with the 2007 murder of ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, accused of failing to provide her with enough security.

## LADEN KILLING AFTERMATH

# Seized files contained pornography: Report

AFP, Washington

The computer files taken by US special forces from Osama bin Laden's home contained a considerable quantity of pornographic videos, The New York Times reported yesterday.

Citing unnamed US officials, the newspaper said these officials declined to say whether there was evidence that bin Laden or the other men living in the house had acquired or viewed the material.

The disclosure could tarnish the legacy of the founder of al-Qaeda and erode his appeal to followers, the report said.

In a 2002 "letter to the American people," bin Laden denounced American culture for its exploitation of women's bodies, The Times reminded.

Bin Laden was killed by a team of Navy commandos on May 2 during a raid on his secret compound in the

# Conservative group files suit for releasing death photos

CNN ONLINE

A conservative legal watchdog group has filed the first lawsuit seeking public release of video and photographs of the U.S. military raid and aftermath that left al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden dead.

Judicial Watch is asking the Department of Defence to comply with a Freedom of Information request for the material, especially photos of the September 11 mastermind lying dead on the third floor of his Pakistan hideout. The legal complaint to force compliance was made in federal court in Washington on Friday.

The group says it is being "irreparably harmed" by the Obama administration's "unlawful withholding of requested records."

Judicial Watch made its initial request the day after the commando assault by Navy SEALs. A similar request for material was filed against the CIA.

# Pak may send more militants in India: Indian Army

PTI, Srinagar

The Indian Army yesterday said Pakistan may sneak in more militants into Jammu and Kashmir to divert attention from its "internal problems" after the killing of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

"It is quite likely that Pakistan under pressure ... could adopt a strategy of diverting attention which they have always done," General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Army's northern command Lt General K T Parnaik told reporters on the sidelines of a function here.

He said as one of the tactic, Pakistan can send an

# US charges six over Taliban aid

AFP, Washington

US officials arrested three Pakistani Americans including two imams yesterday, charging them and three others with providing or seeking to provide "material support" to the Pakistani Taliban, the Justice Department said.

Three of the defendants, including a 76-year-old imam of a Miami mosque, "are also charged with providing material support to the Pakistani Taliban," namely the transfer of funds to finance the group, which Washington lists as a terror organization.

At least five of the defendants are members of the same family.

Each face up to 15 years in prison per count.



Activists of the 'Freedom Flotilla Two' committee protest yesterday in Rome. The international committee is planning to send a second flotilla of aid to the Gaza Strip in late June, over a year after nine Turks were killed in a raid on the first Gaza-bound flotilla in May 2010. PHOTO: AFP

# US welcomes India's Afghan support

AFP, Washington

The United States on Friday welcomed India's boost in assistance to Afghanistan and called New Delhi a regional leader, despite expected concerns in Pakistan over the aid.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday pledged \$500 million in fresh aid to Afghanistan, raising the Indian contribution to \$2 billion, on a visit to Kabul that came days after Pakistan was jolted by Osama bin Laden's killing.

Robert Blake, the US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, said that Singh "recognised India's enhanced position as a regional leader."

His visit to Kabul "underscored India's strong efforts to support international efforts to rebuild a secure and stable Afghanistan," Blake said at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a think-tank.

Blake also hailed Singh for reaching out to Pakistan. Singh invited Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani to watch a World Cup cricket match in March, the first time in a decade that a Pakistani leader visited the historic rival.

Blake said that better ties between India and Pakistan could bring wider economic integration to the region.

India and Pakistan have fought three full-fledged wars since independence in 1947 and New Delhi remains enemy number one in the view of many Pakistan strategists.

US experts believe that Pakistan has maintained ties with Afghanistan's Taliban guerrillas in hopes of keeping leverage once US troops leave Afghanistan, fearing a strong Indian role.

# NEWS IN brief

## Mubarak's wife in intensive care after heart attack



AFP, Cairo

Ousted Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's wife, Suzanne, was in intensive care yesterday after state television reported she had suffered a heart attack following her remand in custody in a corruption probe.

"Suzanne Thabet has been moved to the intensive care unit at Sharm el-Sheikh hospital after suffering a heart attack," the television reported, referring to the Red Sea resort where she and her husband moved after being forced from power in February. "Her condition is stable", said hospital authority.

## Martelly takes oath as Haiti's president

AFP, Port-au-prince

Michel Martelly took the oath of office yesterday as Haiti's new president, assuming the leadership of a country still in ruins from one of the most destructive earthquakes of modern times.

He assumed the office from outgoing president Rene Preval in the first democratic transfer of power from one

## Globalisation creates new forms of slavery: Pope

AFP, Vatican City

Globalisation creates "new forms of slavery" by generating more poverty and oppression, Pope Benedict XVI said yesterday.

"Globalisation often characterised by profit-seeking increases the number of poor, migrants (and) the oppressed," he said as he met with delegates of the Superior Council of missionary societies at the Vatican.

"New problems and new forms of slavery appear in our era (in both) the well-off and rich world (which) suffers from uncertainty over its future" and in devel-

## Malaysia arrests 2 Iranians in \$12.6m drug bust

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian customs officials said yesterday they had arrested two Iranian men and seized heroin worth \$12.6 million in the country's biggest drug haul of the year.

Central Selangor customs director Azis Yacub told state media that officials seized 278 packages of the drug during checks on five containers filled with cement bags at Port Klang on April 28, following surveillance by authorities.

## AFTER POLLS

# Mamata invites Congress to join Bengal govt

## Karunanidhi, Congress chief step down in Tamil Nadu

PTI, Kolkata, Chennai

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee invited congress to join Bengal government a day after she dealt a crushing defeat to the Left Front in West Bengal.

Trinamool's ally, the Congress, sent its emissary Pranab Mukherjee along with Shakeel Ahmed to discuss Mamata's offer to join the state government.

"We want the honourable Prime Minister and Congress president Sonia Gandhi to be present on the day of our swearing-in," said Mamata.

"I will accompany Pranab Da to Delhi and invite them, and will decide on the date of swearing-in accordingly. We have also offered the Congress to join the state government in Bengal," she added after her meeting with Pranab Mukherjee.

Though there is no clear answer to Mamata's offer yet, both leaders said that they had a productive meeting.

Earlier Pranab Mukherjee, Indian finance minister, said the Centre would give all assis-

tance and cooperation to Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee.

"The Centre will provide all assistance and cooperation to Mamata Banerjee so that the massive mandate received by her in the assembly election is translated into reality," Mukherjee, who arrived here to hold talks with the Trinamool Congress chief, told reporters.

He said he is here to hold talks with PCC President Manas Bhunia and other Congress leaders. "I will also talk to Mamata Banerjee who is the architect of this victory."

The Trinamool Congress Legislature Party will meet on Sunday to elect its leader.

Meanwhile, a day after the DMK led alliance in Tamil Nadu were decimated in the Assembly polls, DMK president Muthuvel Karunanidhi and congress president K V Thangakabalu announced their resignation, accepting moral responsibility for the defeat.

Addressing reporters here, Thangakabalu said he will send his resignation letter to Congress president Sonia Gandhi soon and will abide by the party high command's decision on the matter.

# Mississippi Delta braces for historic flooding

## US to open key Louisiana spillway

AFP, New Orleans

US authorities were preparing yesterday to open up a major floodgate to ease pressure from the swollen Mississippi River hoping to save urban centres from historic flooding as rising waters swept south.

Louisiana's Morganza Spillway could be opened to stop flood waters from washing into major cities, the US Army Corps of Engineers said, aiming to ease the Mississippi's flow as it heads for the Gulf of Mexico.

Opening the spillway would see waters gush over thousand of acres of farmland and rural towns, prompting warnings of flash floods from forecasters and urgent evacuation orders in Louisiana and Mississippi.

The American Red Cross is already readying shelters for thousands of expected evacuees.

The river, cresting upstream in Arkansas, is set to eclipse the high water records set in the epochal floods of 1927.

The Mississippi is the third-longest river in North America and its watershed is the fourth-largest in the world.

If the Morganza Spillway is not opened in time, the Corps warned earlier this week, flooding reaching as high as 7.6 meters was expected to soak New Orleans.

The worst floods to hit the central United States in more than 70 years have already swallowed up thousands of homes, farms and roads in Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

# Bob Dylan denies 'China controversy'

AFP, Beijing

In a rare message to his fans, Bob Dylan has denied major performance on Aed claims his songs were censored by government authorities during his China tour.

The music legend, who played in Beijing and Shanghai on April 6 and 8, missed out some of his best known politically inspired songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind", sparking speculation he may have been censored.

In a post on his official website, Dylan admitted that authorities had asked for the names of the songs he would be playing ahead of the concerts, but he maintained none of the songs, verses or lines was censored.

Dylan was playing as part of a tour commemorating 50 years since his first trip 11, 1961.

# Iran defers blinding man in retribution punishment

AFP, Tehran

The court-ordered blinding of an Iranian man who hurled acid in the face of university classmate Ameneh Bahrami has been postponed, the ISNA news agency said yesterday without giving a source.

"The execution of qesas (retribution in kind) of Majid (Movahedi)... has been postponed to an unknown date," ISNA reported on its website.

Movahedi was sentenced to be blinded in both eyes in February 2009 after being convicted of hurling acid in the face of Bahrami when she repeatedly spurned his offer of marriage.

His victim had travelled to the Iranian capital from Spain in the expectation of it being carried out and had even said she was ready to do the blinding herself.

# Death toll mounts in Syria despite talks offer

AFP, Damascus

Syrian security forces killed at least four people yesterday in a border town, witnesses said despite a no-shoot order, dialogue offer and troop pullouts.

"The security forces, who had been encircling Tall Kalakh since the morning, fired machine guns. At least three people were killed and several were wounded" in the western town near the border with Lebanon, a witness said.

More than 500 people, mostly women and children, fled across the border from Tall Kalakh yesterday, town councillor Mahmud Khazaal said.

At least five people were killed on Friday, activists said, despite an order from President Bashar al-Assad for security forces not to open fire on protesters and a government offer of dialogue.

The United States expressed outrage and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe blaming Assad for the deadly repression.

Britain summoned the Syrian ambassador to London, in coordination with other European nations, warning of "further measures" if it fails to stop the crackdown.

Assad's office had reportedly promised that security forces would not open fire on demonstrators as the government announced plans to launch a "national dialogue."

He also said army divisions had started a gradual withdrawal from the flashpoint coastal town of Baniyas and its province after ensuring a "return of security."

Up to 850 people have been killed and at least 8,000 arrested since the protests started in mid-March, human rights groups say. The regime has blamed the deadly violence on "armed terrorist gangs" and kept out the foreign media.

# Mining blamed for islands' sinking beneath waves

BBC ONLINE

Two small islands in South Asia's first marine biosphere reserve have sunk into the sea primarily as a result of coral reef mining, experts say.

The islets were in a group in the Gulf of Mannar, between India and Sri Lanka.

The Indo-Pacific region is considered to contain some of the world's richest marine biological resources.

The group's 21 islands and islets are protected as part of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, covering an area of nearly 560 sq km.

Fishermen had indiscriminately and illegally mined invaluable coral reefs around the islets of Poamarichan and Villanguchalli for many decades, said S Balaji, chief conservator of forests and wildlife for that region of Tamil Nadu state.

"The absence of any regulations prior to 2002 led to illegal mining of the coral reefs, which came to an end when environmental protection laws were enacted," he told the BBC Tamil Service.

Balaji said rising sea level as a result of global warming was also a factor behind the islands' submergence.

But this was questioned by Simon Holgate from the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory in Liverpool, UK, who said observations showed that the sea level in the region had been rising slower than the global average.

"I think that global sea level rise had little impact on the disappearance of these islands and it must be due to other reasons, possibly the mining of coral reefs," Dr Holgate told BBC News.

Though these islets were only 3-5m above sea level, their submergence sounded an alarm bell about the danger many more small islands faced in the long run, according to Balaji, who is also director of the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve Trust (GOMBRT).

The Gulf of Mannar was chosen as a biosphere reserve by the Indian government in 1989 because of its biological and ecological uniqueness, and the distinctive socio-economic and cultural profile shaped by its geography.