



Pak minister removed over news report

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Pakistan's Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid has been removed from office over a newspaper leak that sparked a rift between the army and government earlier this month.

"Evidence available so far points to a lapse on part of the information minister, who has been directed to step down from office to enable holding of an independent and detailed inquiry," a statement by the prime minister's office said on Saturday.

Sources from the Information Ministry said Rashid stepped down until the inquiry confirms whether he was the source for an explosive story detailing a top-level meeting at which security services were accused of assisting armed groups in Pakistan.

The inquiry is seeking to identify the source of an article by the English-language Dawn newspaper, published on October 6. It gave an account of a tense meeting between military and civilian officials on tackling militancy.

The article, written by investigative journalist Cyril Almeida, reported some people in the government had complained at the meeting that they were being asked to do more to crack down on armed groups - yet whenever law-enforcement agencies took action, "the security establishment ... worked behind the scenes to set the arrested free".

Government and diplomatic sources say the article soured relations between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's ruling PML-N party and the military, with army officials blaming PML-N for the leak and demanding the source be punished.



New quake sows terror in Italy

AFP, Norcia

Italy's most powerful earthquake in 36 years struck a new blow to the country's seismically vulnerable heart yesterday, terrifying residents for the third time in nine weeks and flattening a revered 600-year-old church.

The national civil protection agency said there had been extensive damage to many historic buildings but no fatalities had been registered some five hours after the quake.

The shallow quake struck at 7:40am near the small mountain town of Norcia, unleashing a shock felt in the capital Rome, where the metro was partially shut down, and even in Venice, 300 kilometres away. It measured 6.6 on the so-called moment magnitude scale, according to US geologists, while Italian monitors estimated it at 6.5.

It was Italy's biggest quake since a 6.9-magnitude one struck the south of the country in 1980, leaving 3,000 people dead.

Norcia's 14th-century Basilica of Saint Benedict, built on the reputed birthplace of the Catholic saint, was reduced to rubble. The church is looked after by an international community of Benedictine monks based in two local monasteries which attract some 50,000 pilgrims every year.

The quake's epicentre was located at a very shallow depth of one kilometre (just over half a mile), six kilometres north of Norcia, according to the US Geological Survey.

It came four days after quakes of 5.5 and 6.1 magnitude hit the same area and nine weeks after nearly 300 people died in an August 24 quake that devastated the tourist town of Amatrice at the peak of the holiday season.

Saudi-led raid on prison kills 60 people in Yemen

Say officials; Hadi rejects fresh UN peace plan

REUTERS, Sanaa

Arab coalition warplanes bombed a security complex near the Yemeni port city of Hodeidah, killing 60 people including inmates of a prison on the site, a regional official, relatives and medical sources said yesterday.

The prison in the city's al-Zaydiyah district was holding 84 inmates when it was struck three times late on Saturday, Hashem al-Azizi, deputy governor of the Houthi rebel-controlled Hodeidah province of the same name, told Reuters.

Local officials said the site lies within a security complex for the area guarded by Houthi militiamen but that only prison security guards were present during the night-time air strike.

The Saudi-led coalition has been fighting Yemen's armed Houthi movement since March 2015 to try to restore the internationally recognised President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who was driven into exile by the Iran-allied group in late 2014.

A Reuters witness at the security complex said the entire building was destroyed and medics pulled about 17 bodies away - many of them missing limbs - while others remained stuck under the rubble.

A spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Rights groups have said the raids may amount to war crimes, but an investigative body set up by the coalition largely defended its methods in an August report which concluded that Houthi rebels regularly deploy to civilian sites.

The bombing may signal a renewed uptick in violence a day after President Hadi rejected a new UN peace proposal to end the turmoil in the impoverished Arabian Peninsula country, saying the deal would only be a path to more war and destruction.

Speaking after meeting UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in Riyadh, Hadi said the agreement would "reward the rebels and penalise the Yemeni people and legitimacy", according to the government-controlled Saba news agency.

According to a copy of the proposal seen by Reuters, the plan would sideline Hadi and set up a government of less divisive figures.

Rebel rockets kill 38 civilians in Aleppo

AFP, Aleppo

Syria's regime and rebels were locked in fierce clashes yesterday on the western edges of Aleppo, where 38 civilians have been killed in two days of opposition rocket fire, a monitor said.

Among those killed over the two-day period were 14 children, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Another 250 civilians have been wounded in heavy bombardment by anti-government factions since Friday morning, according to the Britain-based group.

The barrage is part of a major assault by rebels and allied jihadists to break a three-month government siege of Aleppo's eastern half, where more than 250,000 people still live.

Another 10,000 civil servants fired in Turkey coup purge

Erdogan confident of bringing back death penalty

AGENCIES

Turkish authorities have fired over 10,000 additional civil servants as the government presses a crackdown over the failed July coup, the official gazette said.

A total of 10,131 government employees were removed, mainly from the education, justice and health ministries, according to announcements published late Saturday.

The government also announced the closure of 15 pro-Kurdish and other media outlets.

University rector elections have also been suspended, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan set to pick the winners from a pool of candidates selected by the nation's education authority.

The moves came three months after the government declared a state of emergency following a failed bid by a rogue faction of the army to oust Erdogan.

More than 35,000 people have been arrested since then, and many dozens of teachers, police officers and judges have either been suspended or fired.

Meanwhile, Erdogan has said he will ask parliament to consider reintroducing the death penalty.

Erdogan said he was "convinced" his proposal to punish those behind July's failed military coup would be approved.

"I am convinced that parliament will approve it, and when it comes back to me, I will ratify it," he said.

The death penalty was abolished in Turkey in 2004 as the nation sought accession to the European Union. However, in practice it had not been enacted since 1984.

Relations between Brussels and Ankara have been strained since Turkey responded to the coup by launching a relentless crackdown

against alleged plotters in state institutions, amid calls from the EU to act within the rule of law.

He blamed US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen for the coup and his supporters who are known as the "Gülen movement". It is critical of Mr Erdogan who they see as supporting a 'political Islam' rather than a 'cultural Islam' in his presidency.



Hillary Clinton, singer Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony wave at the crowd during an event in Florida, on Saturday.

EMAIL PROBE

FBI actions 'deeply troubling' Says Clinton

AFP, Daytona Beach

US presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton declared Saturday that the FBI's decision to announce a renewed probe into her use of email just ahead of voting was "unprecedented" and "deeply troubling."

"It's pretty strange to put something like that out with such little information right before an election," the Democratic nominee complained, addressing cheering supporters at a rally in the must-win state of Florida.

News reports citing FBI sources said the emails were found on a laptop used by Clinton's aide Huma Abedin and her husband Anthony Weiner, who is subject to an unrelated investigation for sending explicit messages to a minor.

But it is not clear whether the emails had any connection to Clinton's work at the State Department, and Comey's statement said only that investigators were studying to see if they are "pertinent" to the server probe.

Democrats have reacted with fury, arguing that FBI chief Comey had been so vague in his letter that he was feeding unproven conspiracy theories.

"It's not just strange, it's unprecedented," Clinton told the Daytona Beach rally.

"And it is deeply troubling because voters deserve to get full and complete facts. So we've called on Director Comey to explain everything right away, put it all out on the table."



Popular Mobilization Forces members watch as smoke rises from an Islamic State suicide bomber attack on the outskirts of the town of Hammam Al-Alil, south of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Inset, Newly displaced people are pictured at a screening center in Qayyara. Iraqi troops and security forces edged closer to Mosul on two southern fronts yesterday.

Gap narrows Latest poll puts Clinton one point ahead of Trump

AFP, Miami

Polls showed the US election tightening yesterday as Hillary Clinton campaigned in the crucial state of Florida, grappling with the fallout from the FBI director disclosing more of her emails were under review.

With the US elections now just eight days away, an ABC News/Washington Post poll put the former secretary of state just one point ahead of her bombastic Republican challenger, Donald Trump, at 46-45 percent of likely voters in a four-way race.

In Florida, which is a must-win if Trump is to have any hope of victory, the tycoon overcame a one-point deficit to lead, according to a New York Times Upshot/Siena College Research Institute poll.

The poll gave Trump 46 percent of likely voters compared to Clinton's 42 percent, with former governor Gary Johnson dropping to four percent and Green Party candidate Jill Stein on two percent.

While the 69-year-old former first lady looking to make history as America's first female commander-in-chief is still overwhelmingly expected to win the November 8 ballot, Trump was quick to crow yesterday.

"We are now leading in many polls, and many of these were taken before the criminal investigation announcement on Friday -- great in states!" the 70-year-old real estate tycoon tweeted to his followers.

FBI boss James Comey wrote to lawmakers on Friday, announcing that his agents are reviewing a newly discovered trove of emails, resurrecting an issue that the Clinton campaign thought was behind it.

A previous FBI probe was declared finished in July, after Comey's agency found no evidence that Clinton had broken any laws through her controversial use of a private email server while secretary of state.



Indian firing destroys 4 Pak military posts

REUTERS, Srinagar

The Indian army said it had destroyed four Pakistani military posts on Saturday along its contested border, the latest escalation of tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

The attack comes a day after India and Pakistan traded accusations that each had killed civilians in cross-border shelling in the Kashmir region, which is claimed in its entirety by both countries but controlled in part by each.

"Four Pak posts destroyed in massive fire assault in Keran Sector. Heavy casualties inflicted," the Indian army's Northern Command said in a statement late on Saturday.

On Friday, a Pakistani official said three civilians were killed as Indian troops shelled villages along the Line of Control in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Indian officials, meanwhile, said two civilians died when Pakistani shells hit India-administered Kashmir.

The Indian army on Friday said in a statement that militants at the border mutilated the body of an Indian soldier they had killed before crossing back into Pakistan. The army vowed "response".

Shelling by both sides in the divided and disputed Himalayan regions has been going on since gunmen killed 19 Indian soldiers in September at an army camp in Kashmir, an attack India blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

INFLUENCE-PEDDLING SCANDAL IN SOUTH KOREA

Presidential aides resign as call grow for Park's ouster

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

South Korean President Park Geun-hye has accepted the resignations of her top presidential aides, including the chief of staff, the presidential office has said, amid a deepening political crisis.

The departure of the top presidential officials comes as Park is grappling with a recent influence-peddling scandal involving an old friend, Choi Soon-sil.

Choi returned to South Korea from Germany yesterday as the political crisis engulfed Park over allegations that she allowed Choi to use her friendship to exert improper influence and benefit personally.

Jeong Yeon-guk, a spokesman for the presidential office, announced yesterday that three long-time Park aides had also stepped down.

Park has been facing calls to reshuffle her office and cabinet after acknowledging on Tuesday she provided long-time friend Choi Soon-sil drafts of her speeches for editing.

There's also media speculation that Choi, who holds no government job, meddled in government decisions on personnel and policy and exploited her ties with Park to misappropriate funds from nonprofit organizations.

The resignations come after thousands of South Koreans hit the streets on Saturday evening calling for Park to step down.

Holding candles and signs reading "Who's the real president?" and "Park Geun-hye step down," the protesters marched through downtown Seoul after holding a candlelight vigil near City Hall.

Despite Sunday's resignations, there are still more protests planned over the next few days, reports said.

Prosecutors on Saturday widened their investigation by searching the homes of presidential officials suspected of interacting with Choi and receiving their office files from the Blue House - the presidential office and residence.