

Daily Times, 1 September 2007

Govt activates diplomatic channels: Last-ditch efforts to clinch deal with BB, block Sharifs' return

Following a deadlock in the Musharraf-Benazir talks and Nawaz Sharif's decision to land in Islamabad on September 10, the government made a last-ditch effort on Friday by activating two different diplomatic channels to "clinch" a deal with Benazir and "stop" Nawaz from returning to Pakistan. Sources told Daily Times that contacts were established with the British and Saudi governments after the president consulted and briefed the PML leaders on the "proposals" being discussed with Benazir, and Nawaz's decision to return. Inside sources said that after Benazir declined to postpone the joint meeting of her party's central working committee and federal council beyond August 31, it was decided to involve a "common friend" through diplomatic channels to act as guarantor and broker a "deal" between the president and the PPP chairwoman. The "common friend" is the British government and a meeting between a senior British official and Benazir took place before the latter chaired her party meeting...

Daily Times, 1 September 2007

No deal yet: BB

Benazir Bhutto said on Friday that her party's talks with the government were continuing, but an agreement has yet to be reached, APP reported. Benazir said this as PPP federal council met here for talks on whether to accept a power-sharing agreement with President Musharraf. The daylong session ended without a conclusion, but talks will continue today. Benazir could return in early October, said party spokesman Wajid Hasan, adding that PPP was waiting for answers to questions raised with Musharraf's aides. Benazir was told in the meeting that she should not leave the field to Nawaz Sharif and must return to Pakistan soon...

Dawn, 1 September 2007

Musharraf likely to seek Faz's help: NWFP CM attends high-level meeting

President Pervez Musharraf on Friday discussed with his negotiating team and legal and political aides various contentious issues that, in their view, were blocking a power-sharing deal with Benazir Bhutto. He also discussed with them an alternative plan to get himself re-elected by winning the support of Maulana Fazlur Rehman. It was decided that Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain would launch a campaign to gain support for Gen Musharraf's re-election. The high-level meeting was attended, among others, by the four chief ministers. The presence of NWFP Chief Minister Akram Durrani at the deliberations has given another twist to the unfolding story. The meeting decided not to compromise on the PPP chief's proposal for dissolution/suspension of local bodies before the elections, change in the law on two-time prime ministers and repeal of Article 58(2)b -- the law empowering the president to dissolve assemblies before the expiry of their term...

Daily Times, 1 September 2007

Lal Masjid opening demanded

Hundreds of students of Jamia Faridia on Friday gathered outside the Lal Masjid to protest the continued closure of the mosque. They offered Friday prayer on a nearby

ground. Maulana Naseeruddin Usmani led the prayer. The students were shouting slogans against the government demanding opening of the mosque and enforcement of Shariah in the country. Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal MNA Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz addressing the gathering said despite killings of the innocent children in the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa operation the government failed to defeat the commitment of the Lal Masjid students for enforcement of Shariah. Meanwhile, Islamabad district administration has assured ulema that Lal Masjid would be opened for prayers before next Friday. "Islamabad Deputy Commissioner has assured me that the administration would open the Lal Masjid for prayers before next Friday," said Maulana Aziz while talking to Daily Times...

The News, 1 September 2007

Pakistan, India to hold more talks on Wullar barrage

Pakistan and India have emphasised the need for an early and amicable resolution of the Wullar barrage issue in accordance with the provisions of the Indus Waters treaty of 1960 for the socioeconomic development of the people of both countries. This was stated in a joint statement issued on the conclusion of two-day secretary-level talks on Friday. Reaffirming their commitment to the Indus Waters treaty, they also agreed to hold further discussions, including at the technical level, on mutually acceptable dates. Both sides looked forward to the next round of talks under the composite dialogue with a view to resolving the issue at an early date, the statement said. The statement further said the talks were held in a cordial and constructive atmosphere. Both sides discussed their respective positions on the project and had a better appreciation of each other's views...

Daily Times, 1 September 2007

Waiting for Nawaz Sharif? (Editorial)

Nawaz Sharif says he will be back in Pakistan on September 10 after a seven-year exile. He has dared the government to stop him when he lands in Islamabad and leads a caravan of buses and cars down the GT road to Lahore. His top partymen have convinced him that he will get a better reception than the one Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry got after getting fired by President General Pervez Musharraf in March this year. There is no doubt that if he is allowed to make the journey, the PMLN will manage to bring out crowds on the Islamabad-Lahore route. Mr Sharif will make his thundering speeches and salute the newly-gained independence of the judiciary and promise a bright future for democracy in Pakistan without the interference of a "military dictatorship". He will also arouse public passions that President Musharraf fears as a factor of instability to his own re-election and the general election he prefers holding later this year...

Dawn, 2 September 2007

Benazir leaves door open for clinching deal: Return date to be announced on Sept 14

Contrary to expectations, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has put off at least by 13 days the decision on when to return home, perhaps still hoping to hear from President Musharraf on the seemingly deadlocked talks on the proposed power-sharing arrangement between them. She told a crowded press conference here on Saturday at the end of a two-day meeting of PPP's Central Executive Committee that on Sept 14 her

party would make known in Pakistan the date of her return home. Despite being closely questioned on the matter she assiduously avoided agreeing with the suggestions that the talks had failed or were even in a deadlock mode. Ms Bhutto said she had gathered from the media that some elements within the ruling party were objecting to some points in the proposed draft deal. Media has been reporting that PML-Q chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, the chief ministers of Punjab and Sindh, other senior leaders of the party like Farooq Leghari and the MQM had raised a number of objections to the proposed deal...

Dawn, 2 September 2007

Musharraf to quit army before polls, says Shujaat

Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, the chief of the Pakistan Muslim League (Q), said in an interview published on Saturday that President Pervez Musharraf "would not risk resigning his military post before his re-election to another presidential term was assured". "If the chief justice attacks him, he can stay as army chief," Chaudhry Shujaat said in carefully chosen words. "These are our recommendations. Nothing is final." In the interview with the New York Times, he said "the driving factor behind the general's decision to resign was the newly independent Supreme Court and the likelihood that the chief justice would declare his continued military rule unconstitutional". The Times pointed out that the timetable laid out by Chaudhry Shujaat was the clearest indication of Gen Musharraf's plans as his presidential term and a constitutional amendment allowing him to hold the dual posts of army chief and president both expire. "He will take off the uniform before general elections" for a new parliament over the winter. He told the newspaper "some supporters are urging the general to keep his military post", but that he (Shujaat) was among those urging the general to relinquish it...

Dawn, 2 September 2007

'Govt to take allies into confidence'

A delegation of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement called on Pakistan Muslim League president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain at his residence here on Saturday and discussed with him issues relating to the president's re-election and the government-PPP dialogue. Mr Hussain assured MQM's deputy convener Dr Farooq Sattar and Rabita Committee member Shoaib Bokhari that the government would take all decisions by taking coalition partners into confidence and in accordance with the law and the Constitution. The MQM leaders said the party would continue to support President Pervez Musharraf but a final decision on his re-election in uniform would be taken by the party's central leadership. The PML chief was also supposed to meet MMA secretary-general Maulana Fazlur Rahman, but it could not be confirmed if the two had met...

Dawn, 2 September 2007

No accord on pipeline fee: India

The Indian government has said that no formula has been finalised yet on the transit fees payable to Pakistan under Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Indian Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Murli Deora said that the issue of transit fees was discussed during the last India-Pakistan Joint Working Group meeting in June this year where it was agreed that the charge should be based on "the cost of service to be achieved through international competitive bidding."

But, he said, there was no agreement yet. The Hindu said in a report that during the fourth tripartite meeting held in Tehran pricing formula on gas on the Iran-Pakistan border was agreed between Iran and Pakistan, subject to approval from their governments. But, the report added, the Indian side informed Iran that the total price payable for the gas on the India-Pakistan border would also "depend on transportation cost and transit fees payable to Pakistan." The report quoting Murli Deora said since there was no clarity on these matters, it would not be possible for India to decide the final price...

Dawn, 3 September 2007

No role to bail out Musharraf: Fazl

The Supreme Council of the six-party Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) is holding its crucial meeting here on Monday amid reports that Maulana Fazlur Rehman has been in contact with the leadership of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League. However, Maulana Fazl denied the reports that he had held several rounds of "secret" talks with the Chaudhrys, and told Dawn on Sunday that "they have been sending messages for such a meeting but so far no meeting is scheduled." He laughed off reports doing the round in Islamabad about his talks with the government based on an offer for the prime ministership after the general election in exchange for supporting President Gen Pervez Musharraf's re-election from present assemblies. When asked whether he expected to be questioned by some top leaders of the MMA on the issue of talks with the PML leaders, the Maulana said: "No, this is no more an issue as it is already a settled matter because we are determined not to offer any help to anyone that helps prolong the tenure of Gen Musharraf" ...

Dawn, 3 September 2007

'Unrealistic' PPP demands stalled talks, says Durrani

Minister for Information and Broadcasting Muhammad Ali Durrani on Sunday rejected Benazir Bhutto's assertion that the PML leadership had derailed the Musharraf-PPP talks and blamed what he termed her unrealistic demands for the deadlock. Addressing a press conference here, he denied that Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain had disrupted the talks. "The talks have been stalled because of PPP chairperson's unrealistic demands." About objections raised by the ruling party and its allies to PPP's demands, the minister particularly mentioned Ms Bhutto's insistence on dissolution of local body governments and said it would be against public interest because local governments had empowered people at grassroots level. "The dialogue process does not mean that the government will allow a specific group or individual to get certain benefits. It is against the spirit of dialogue to hurt the stability of state institutions." He said that the demand to repeal the Article 58 (2-b) of the Constitution was also unrealistic in the present situation since it acted as a safety valve against military interventions...

Dawn, 3 September 2007

Nawaz reassures US over war on terror

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif assured the United States on Sunday that if elected, he would be more effective than President Pervez Musharraf in fighting terrorism. "It's very simple: we're all against terror," said Mr Sharif in an interview with CNN. "I am against terror as much as anybody else in this world." Political analysts see this statement

as an effort to improve his image in Washington where his previous links to Pakistan's religious political parties are often over emphasised. US media reports - including some in mainstream newspapers - claim that Mr Sharif also had contacts with Al Qaeda while in power, a charge he denies. In his interview, Mr Sharif tried to dispel the impression that Washington needs a strongman like President Musharraf to keep Pakistan on its side in the war against terror. "You can't fight terror as the way Mr Musharraf is fighting. He needs the threat of terror for his own survival. We will fight out of conviction," Mr Sharif said. "So I think a democratic government can effectively fight terror with the support of the parliament, with the support of the people of the country, which is of course not there with Mr Musharraf."...

Daily Times, 3 September 2007

'Musharraf-BB talks can still be salvaged'

Power-sharing talks between President General Pervez Musharraf and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto have stalled but political compulsions are likely to push both back to the table, analysts said. According to Reuters, Musharraf and Bhutto have been sounding each other out for years but with Musharraf's terms as both president and army chief due to end soon, they have intensified efforts to reach an agreement. But Bhutto said in London on Saturday the talks had stalled and she would announce details of her return on September 14 even without a deal. Any agreement would likely see Musharraf stepping down as army chief before he stands for another term, while clearing the way for Bhutto to return to politics. While some analysts said the mistrust between Musharraf and Bhutto was too deep for them ever to reach a broad pact, others said they needed each other. "Both will try to the last, I do not think it's over," political commentator Nasim Zehra said on Sunday. "It's a political compulsion for both of them given their objectives - for one to stay in power and for the other to come back very actively in the political sphere."...

Dawn, 3 September 2007

'Time for US to demand access to Dr Khan'

Current political troubles in Pakistan allow the United States to demand direct access to Dr A. Q. Khan, says a Washington-based pressure group, the Centre for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. In a report released by a US news agency, UPI, Travis Sharp, the group's military policy analyst, and Max Postman, a researcher, argue that now is the time to seek direct access to the man who the United States believes headed a network of international proliferators. "Pressuring a weakened strategic ally by reopening old wounds carries a certain amount of risk," the authors concede, but argue that in the current circumstances Islamabad can be persuaded to accept the US demand. "With Musharraf vulnerable and looking for support, now is the time for US officials to ask for access to Khan ... agreement on dealing with Khan would be a good first step toward negotiating the thornier issue of eliminating terrorist encampments in Pakistan's tribal areas," the authors argue. They say that the issue of alleged Al Qaeda hideouts in the tribal area will figure prominently in US-Pakistani relations "regardless of whether Gen Pervez Musharraf, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif or some combination of the three is leading Pakistan."...

Daily Times, 4 September 2007

Govt-BB talks resume today

The stalled talks between aides to President General Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairwoman Benazir Bhutto on a power-sharing deal will resume in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today (Tuesday). Ms Bhutto flew to the UAE on Monday, while presidential aide Tariq Aziz was already there. "The talks will be held on Tuesday," sources told Daily Times. Ms Bhutto's spokesman Farhatullah Babar maintained that no meeting was held on Monday with the presidential emissaries. "She came to Dubai on Monday and no such meeting was scheduled and no meeting is on the cards," Babar said. However, officials said the meeting would take place on Tuesday. The sources told Daily Times that the talks would focus on the cases pending against Ms Bhutto. "She wanted that the cases against her be blanketed under an amnesty law to be passed by parliament. This is the main hurdle," the sources said, adding that it was not possible for the government to offer her "blanket cover" because the nature of the cases against her varied...

Daily Times, 4 September 2007

Benazir, Sharif may be barred from polls: Aziz

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has said that former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif may be constitutionally barred from contesting elections if they return from exile. According to Bloomberg, he said in an interview in Islamabad at the weekend, "There are legal complications and it will be up to them to decide what their future ought to be. It will be better for Pakistan that they come back after the elections so that the current environment doesn't get destabilised." He pointed out that Bhutto demands "require changes in the constitution that cannot be the subject of political arrangement. There are several court cases pending against her and the discussions have been on finding a way out on settling these issues through the legal process." Aziz, who ends his term in November, said he might seek a second five-year stint after parliamentary elections...

Daily Times, 4 September 2007

Musharraf duping West on terror war: Sharif

Exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif vowed to fight terrorism "with conviction" if re-elected and accused President Pervez Musharraf of deceiving the West over his commitment. Sharif plans to return to Islamabad next week to challenge the president, who is under pressure from the West to stand down as head of the army before seeking re-election. "When I was prime minister we extended full cooperation to everybody... We condemn all kinds of terrorism...and we'll continue to fight terrorism," Sharif told Reuters in an interview. "Musharraf needs the threat of terror for his own survival. He is doing something in Pakistan and he is telling something else to the outside world. I think he is hoodwinking the West," he said. Analysts say the US may have doubts about Sharif's commitment to fighting militancy because of his sympathies for Islamist parties. Sharif, 57, last month aligned his Pakistan Muslim League with mostly religious parties to form the All Parties Democratic Movement...

Daily Times, 4 September 2007

'Pakistan will not enter arms race'

Pakistan will not enter an "arms race" in the region but will take steps to maintain a strong deterrence, Foreign Office Spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam told a regular press briefing on Monday. "We will take all steps required to keep a strong deterrence but we will not be part of an arms race," Aslam said, answering a question on India's bid to buy more than 100 fighter jets. "Our principle is to keep the defence strong and unassailable," she said, adding Pakistan wanted to make Jammu and Kashmir a nuclear-free and demilitarised zone. She said Adrian Levy and Catherine Scott-Clark's book, 'Deception: Pakistan, the US and Secret Trade in Nuclear Weapons', was a "pack of lies" aimed at discrediting Pakistan's nuclear programme. "Some people cannot digest our nuclear capability and are involved in negative propaganda but Pakistan is an anchor of peace and stability in the region," she said, adding Pakistan's nuclear assets were under a strong institutional framework. She said the people who blamed Pakistan for nuclear proliferation should realise that Pakistan did not commit the "original sin" of bringing destructive weapons to the region. "Those biased against us are opposed to Pakistan's nuclear status," Aslam added...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

Bomb blasts kill 25 in Rawalpindi cantonment

At least 25 people were killed and 66 injured on Tuesday in two suicide bomb blasts in Rawalpindi cantonment's high security areas during morning rush hour, officials said. "The initial investigation suggests that these were suicide attacks," military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told Daily Times. The first blast took place at 7:15am near Qasim Market where a Defence Ministry bus carrying around 38 civilians and uniformed officials was hit, killing 18 people. Five minutes later, a second blast took place near RA Bazaar, behind General Headquarters. The police said the blast was caused by explosives fixed to a motorcycle, which blew up killing seven people on the spot. Interior Ministry spokesman Brig (r) Javed Iqbal Cheema said the blasts were suicide attacks probably carried out by the same terrorist network responsible for two attacks in Islamabad in July. He also suggested the blasts were an extension of events in the tribal areas. The injured from the attacks, many of them in critical condition, were rushed to hospitals in Rawalpindi, where an emergency was declared...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

Nobody can prevent my return to Pakistan: Nawaz

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif reiterated that no one could prevent him from returning to Pakistan, adding Gen Musharraf and his government cannot bar people from receiving him at Islamabad airport on September 10. In an interview with Geo News, Sharif said he had never bowed before any dictator and the people were with him. "I will not leave any stone unturned to solve the people's problems," Sharif said, adding that September 10 would change the political scenario of Pakistan. He criticised US President Bush, saying that instead of interfering in Pakistan's affairs, the US should take stick to its own boundaries. He said only dictators bowed before every US order, while the democratic rulers took their decisions independently. Sharif claimed he would oust Gen Musharraf from Pakistani politics after next general elections, saying Musharraf's tenure was ending on October 15 and he had no right to stay in presidency after that date. He

said he would lead the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz after reaching Pakistan and would oppose Musharraf's re-election from the present assemblies by any means. He said his party would launch a countrywide movement against Musharraf if he were arrested upon his return...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

'Progress' reported in Musharraf-BB talks

Talks between emissaries of President General Pervez Musharraf and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto moved forward on Tuesday with both sides confirming that a meeting took place in Dubai to discuss the contentious issues which had earlier stalled negotiations in London. National Security Council Secretary Tariq Aziz and the president's Chief of Staff Lt-Gen (r) Hamid Javed represented Gen Musharraf in the talks. Sources said that "positive" development took place when the talks were briefly stopped for Mr Aziz to consult with Gen Musharraf. "When Tariq Aziz talked to the president, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi were also present at Army House," the sources said. Mr Hussain said the "real issues" had not been discussed. "Negotiations are continuing but issues like general elections were discussed. The president's uniform, 58(2b) and the bar on becoming prime minister for a third term were not discussed," he told Daily Times. He said the talks remained inconclusive but would continue, and they had moved forward from "nine to ten percent"...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

APHC attempts to reopen talks with India

Leaders of the moderate faction of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) are attempting to reopen negotiations with the Indian government here on Tuesday after declaring that talks had broken down. Hurriyat leaders Bilal Gani Lone and Prof Abdul Gani Bhat will join APHC Chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq - who has already been in the Indian capital for two days preparing for the talks - on Wednesday to begin the dialogue. Last week, Farooq had stated that the dialogue process with New Delhi had remained inconclusive because of lack of political will. He was concerned, he said, that a historic chance has been missed. Sources said that the Kashmiri leaders had sought an appointment with opposition leader LK Advani and Communist Party of India (M) General Secretary Prakash Karat to bring them up to date about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. They said the Kashmiris were trying to make the Indian leaders see that failure of talks at this juncture would push the Kashmiri youth towards extremism...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

Another era of uncertainty (Dr Manzur Ejaz)

A post-Musharraf government, led by Sharif, Bhutto or anyone else will run into trouble they are not bargaining for at the moment. Pakistan is entering another era of uncertainty. It has to be seen how this phase of history will conclude itself. The Pakistani community in the United States is feeling euphoric about the political change in Pakistan. Other than the core members of the MQM, most of the activist community is jubilant over the anticipated departure of General Pervez Musharraf and the expected return of democracy. Everyone is also pinning great hopes on the return of the two ex-prime ministers, Nawaz

Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. However, the US government and Pakistani specialists associated with think tanks are seemingly confused and losing track of the fast changing political situation in Pakistan. Once PPP jialas used to dominate the expatriate politics. But they have been replaced by staunch supporters of Sharif. Now, Sharif's supporters are more prominent in every city while PPP has been left with a small clique of elitist, expatriate business people and high-income professionals. While Sharif's jialas have been campaigning selflessly, the PPP elite has been pursuing opportunistic agendas...

Daily Times, 5 September 2007

Al Qaeda attacks converge on the army (Editorial)

Precisely targeted suicide attacks in Rawalpindi's cantonment area yesterday yielded 24 dead to the account of the Al Qaeda-Taliban combine. The 70-passenger Defence Ministry bus carrying "security personnel" to their offices when a suicide bomber in the bus blew himself up because there was apparently no security check before the bus was taken out on the road. The second blast was also a suicide attack, though initial reports said it was caused by a parked motorcycle which was detonated through a remote-control device. There should be no difficulty in joining the dots here. The security agencies are being targeted by the Al Qaeda deputy Baitullah Mehsud who today rules in South Waziristan and has established authority there as a deputy of Osama bin Laden, based on a complete taxation system and provision of services in a territory separated from Pakistan and annexed to Al Qaeda. When the army and paramilitary forces went into South Waziristan to at least "show flag" the state run by Baitullah Mehsud kidnapped hundreds of their troops. The Rawalpindi strikes have to be connected to the ongoing campaign of Baitullah Mehsud to attack and demoralise the army and the police in Pakistan...

The Nation, 5 September 2007

Political uncertainty may dampen FDI (Erum Zaidi)

A slowdown in FDI is expected in the near future due to the political uncertainty without substantial withdrawal of foreign capital from the country, as most investments have been attracted through the FDI route which should keep forex reserves and the exchange rate stable, finds Merrill Lynch report published on Pakistan Economy. The report titled "The slow will go on" revealed that there would be no continuation of the key economic achievements of the past five years - deregulation, privatisation, structural reforms, a free press, and importantly, an independent judiciary - to be reversed. Report disclosed that dramatic changes in politics increases uncertainty which has raised several questions on the outlook for Pakistan. Both foreign and local investors are being raised some quarries about the impact of the political uncertainty on FDI and what will be the source of current account financing and will public spending on developmental projects like to sustain? This is an election year, so large public outlays are expected that should sustain domestic demand. In the federal budget, the entire focus was on higher developmental expenditure and subsidies to the relatively poor segments of the economy...

Daily Times, 6 September 2007

President's two offices apparently end with term'

Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokhar of the Supreme Court said on Wednesday that

President General Pervez Musharraf apparently could not hold two offices after his term as president expires, as the court heard a petition from the Jamaat-e-Islami challenging the 'President to Hold Another Office Act 2004'. "I think the president cannot hold another office when his term expires and (then) Article 43 will be activated," Justice Khokhar said, after Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, counsel for the president, was unable to answer Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry's question about when the president's term ended. Pirzada said he would seek the president's instructions before mentioning the date his term ends. "The case is adjourned for tomorrow (Thursday) as Pirzada wants to seek instructions from the president as to when his term expires," the chief justice said. Akram Sheikh, counsel for the petitioner, argued that all presidents other than President Musharraf were elected under Article 41 of the Constitution and that the state was now being run by a "de facto" president...

Daily Times, 6 September 2007

Benazir wants to meet Musharraf face-to-face

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto told AFP on Wednesday she wanted to have a face-to-face meeting with President Pervez Musharraf after making progress in talks on a power-sharing deal between them. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairwoman said she would return home from self-exile in London and Dubai in "weeks, not months," ahead of upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. "There has been progress in some areas and we are working on those areas," she told AFP after negotiations resumed this week. "I prefer face-to-face negotiations between himself and myself (but) I also appreciate that he has got a country to run and that might be very difficult," she said when asked if she would meet the military ruler. Talks between aides to Bhutto and Musharraf ended in deadlock last week but the negotiations resumed in Dubai this week. She said one of the key issues in the negotiations - whether Musharraf will quit his role as army chief - was "resolved". "As far as we [PPP] are concerned, we cannot have a president in uniform," she added...

Dawn, 6 September 2007

Nawaz to make 'new approach' to Saudi king

PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif said on Wednesday that he would make a "new approach" to Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah after the kingdom publicly advised him to abide by an asylum deal that bound the former prime minister not to return to Pakistan or take part in politics for 10 years. The Saudi demand, made in a statement issued by a government spokesman on Tuesday night, came as a bombshell for the Pakistan Muslim League-N plans to give its leader a rousing welcome on his return on Sept 10 after more than six and a half years' exile. Talking to a private television channel from London, Mr Sharif vowed to return home on the announced date to answer what he called "on call of my conscience" and to "free the country from clutches of the dictatorship". He refused to discuss the contents of the Saudi statement, carried by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA). The statement quoted an unnamed official spokesman as denying Pakistani press reports that Riyadh supported the return of Mr Nawaz and his family to Pakistan...

Dawn, 6 September 2007

Only a few loose ends remain to be tied up: Benazir deal

The proposed power-sharing deal between President Pervez Musharraf and PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto has been done but for a few loose ends to be tied up, sources close to official circles as well as those who claim to be knowledgeable about PPP affairs confirmed here on Wednesday. Gen Musharraf's emissaries are said to have returned to Islamabad from Dubai with an agreed draft of a compromise package and briefed the president who, it is believed, will convey his response one way or the other in a day or two. Meanwhile, Ms Bhutto is said to have convened a meeting of advisers within the party as well as some local and foreign consultants on Friday to discuss the final package which she expects to receive from Gen Musharraf by that time. When asked if the president had agreed to dilute his powers to dissolve the assemblies by seeking prior approval of the Supreme Court or if the Chaudhry cousins and the MQM had agreed to vote for lifting the two-time prime minister bar, the sources said: "When you make a deal compromises have to be made."...

Dawn, 6 September 2007

Musharraf may declare emergency: Shujaat

President Gen Pervez Musharraf, boxed into a political corner by his rivals, may declare a state of emergency to salvage himself, ruling PML chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain told the Washington Post. The Post noted that later this month, President Gen Musharraf faced re-election by parliament and provincial assemblies, but civil unrest was turning violent and he had significant opposition in parliament. President Gen Musharraf also faces constitutional hurdles, the report adds. Under the law, government employees must resign and wait for two years before they can run for president and Gen Musharraf is a government employee in his role as chief of the army. The report notes that the Supreme Court is already dealing with the issue and the government fears that the court may decide against the president. In his interview to the Post, Mr Hussain said if the court ruled against the president, he might have no option but to declare a state of emergency and to postpone elections for up to a year...

Dawn, 6 September 2007

Nawaz's stand against Musharraf carries serious risks: WSJ

A major US newspaper warned on Wednesday that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's tough stand against President Gen Musharraf carried political risks, adding that a confrontation with the government could incite more violence and allow the military to re-assert control over the country. "That Mr Sharif is now in a possible position to determine Pakistan's fate marks the latest chapter in a long political career during which he has often benefited from going along with the military -- not against it," the Wall Street Journal said...The WSJ said that Mr Sharif's political fortunes had soared recently after he fashioned himself as a champion of democratic rule at a time when Gen Musharraf's political stock has plummeted, forcing the president to seek an alliance with another old foe, Ms Bhutto, who also has been living abroad. The newspaper said that Mr Sharif's supporters believe he fits into Pakistan's moderate middle that many Western governments find politically palatable...

Daily Times, 6 September 2007

Investigators say Mehsuds behind Rawalpindi attacks

Preliminary investigations into Tuesday's suicide attacks near General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi indicate that they were carried out by the Baitullah Mehsud group based in Waziristan, sources told Daily Times on Wednesday. Investigators found evidence that the bomb-hit bus belonged to the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), sources claimed. They said an investigation agency had recovered a small Russian-made device called MUV-2 from the bus. The device triggers the explosives when the suicide bomber pulls out a pin, they said. Investigations from the Qasim Market blast scene suggest the device was not like the one used in Islamabad in July, but was similar to ones used in attacks on paramilitary forces by the Baitullah Mehsud group, the sources said. Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director General Tariq Pervez confirmed that the device was similar to the ones used in suicide attacks in Peshawar, Charsada, Dera Ismail Khan and at a Mosque in Kohat on July 19...

Daily Times, 6 September 2007

India wants fresh terror talks with Pakistan

India has proposed new talks with Pakistan as part of an initiative to share information and intelligence on terrorist attacks, an Indian foreign ministry official said on Wednesday. The anti-terror panel initiative was unveiled late last year when top Indian and Pakistani diplomats resumed peace talks in New Delhi after the July 2006 train bombings in Mumbai in which around 186 people died. It was supposed to meet quarterly, but after its first meeting in Islamabad in March - which focused on the firebombing of a train linking the two countries that killed 68 people - no further talks have taken place. "We have suggested some dates (in October-November) through diplomatic channels. We are waiting for a response," said the Indian official, who requested anonymity. Another official said that political turmoil in Pakistan could be a cause of delays in contacts. "With the kind of fluid situation that Pakistan is witnessing right now, it is natural that the anti-terror panel is not a priority at the moment," said the official, who also asked not to be named...

Dawn, 7 September 2007

'Re-election in uniform'

A top level meeting held at the President's House on Thursday decided that President Pervez Musharraf would seek re-election in uniform, between Sept 15 and Oct 15. The meeting, chaired by President Pervez Musharraf, was attended by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, president's top confidant Tariq Aziz, president's chief of staff Gen Javed Hamid, Attorney-General Justice (retd) Malik Abdul Qayyum and representatives of some agencies. It lasted well over six hours, a knowledgeable source told Dawn. The meeting also ended speculations about early dissolution of assemblies and decided that the matter would be discussed after the president's re-election. The attorney-general briefed the meeting in detail on the constitutional position of president's re-election and highlighted some aspects of the legal battle being fought in the Supreme Court. The meeting was informed that the schedule for the presidential election was expected to be announced by the Election Commission by Sept 15...

Daily Times, 7 September 2007

Musharraf's term will end on Nov 15, SC told

President Gen Pervez Musharraf's term will end on November 15 but he will continue to stay "until his successor enters upon his office" according to Article 44 (1) of the Constitution, the president's lawyer Sharifuddin Pirzada told the Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday. The SC made Aitzaz Ahsan, SM Zafar and Abdul Hafeez Pirzada "friends of the court" in a constitutional petition filed by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) challenging the "President to Hold Another Office Act 2004" and fixed the case for regular hearing from September 17. A seven-member larger bench headed by CJP Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry declared that the assistance of the attorney general of Pakistan (AGP) was also mandatory and heard formulation points of the counsel for the petitioner, the federation and the president. AGP Malik Qayyum said that the federation felt no need to reply to the JI petition in view of an SC decision in 2005 on a petition filed by the Lawyers Forum on the 17th Amendment...

Dawn, 7 September 2007

Deal will cause PML's demise, fear veterans

Pakistan Muslim League president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain is reported to have severely criticised the likely deal between President Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan People's Party. At a meeting with the party's old guard at his residence, he said that time was fast running out for the deal and the required constitutional amendments because all the major demands of Benazir Bhutto were going to be rejected. He said the PPP's demands for dissolution of local governments ahead of general elections, repeal of Article 58(2)b and allowing her a third term to become the prime minister had been rejected in the ongoing talks. And the decision of President Musharraf hanging up his uniform would be taken by the president himself. He said that all issues would be discussed threadbare by the PML central executive committee on Saturday. Later, accompanied by Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvaiz Elahi, the PML president called on Gen. Musharraf to inform him that the old guard had reservations over the deal as they feared it would put the PPP in the driving seat...

Dawn, 7 September 2007

Generals waiting in the wings

Handling two former prime ministers - for diametrically opposite reasons - and worrying about a possible legal challenge to his re-election as the country's president may well be occupying General Pervez Musharraf's mind most of the time these days. But another equally, if not more, important decision that he has so far kept close to his chest, and which he is expected to announce within the next couple of weeks is of the appointment of two four-star generals who would replace the outgoing chairman of joint chiefs of staff committee (CJCSC) and vice-chief of army staff (VCOAS) in early October. Certainly, more crucial of the two appointments is that of VCOAS because, unlike the incumbent Vice-Chief, General Ahsan Salim Hayat, the new appointee may, within a matter of a few months, replace Gen Musharraf as the army chief once he decides to doff his uniform. In fact, with the controversy about the presidential election acquiring a new dimension with the Supreme Court's judicial intervention, the possibility of Gen Musharraf relinquishing his military position earlier, and directly appointing his successor can also not be ruled out...

Daily Times, 7 September 2007

Not much 'Opposition' when it comes to foreign policy

The proposed foreign policy of the PPP and PML-N is not much different than the present government's foreign policy, according to the manifestos of the leading Opposition parties. The foreign policy mentioned in the PML-N's manifesto is similar to the ruling PML's policy, even though PML-N Chief, and former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif ridicules the ruling PML as a group of defectors. The PPP opposes terrorism and it has declared in its manifesto that it would continue the current policy and ally itself against the forces of terror. The PML-N vowed in its manifesto to never compromise with terrorists and to take all necessary steps to clean the country from sectarian violence and terrorism. It says that Pakistan has had a longstanding, mutually beneficial relationship with the US, the EU States, Russia and Japan. "PML-N will cooperate with these countries to promote international peace and security," it stated...

Dawn, 7 September 2007

US urges action against 'militants' safe heaven'

Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns has said that the United States wants Pakistan and Afghanistan to coordinate their efforts to defeat militants hiding in the tribal zone along their border. In an interview with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, Mr Burns said that for the United States both Afghanistan and Pakistan were critical countries in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. On Wednesday, the State Department announced that Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte will visit Pakistan and Afghanistan next week for talks aimed at removing differences between the two neighbouring states. Afghanistan blames Pakistan for allowing the militants to enter its territory for carrying out attacks against Afghan, US and coalition forces. Pakistan denies the charge and says that Kabul is trying to hide its own failure in dealing with the militants by blaming Islamabad for its troubles...

The Times of India, 7 September 2007

Pakistan link to foiled Germany terror plot: Report

A US intelligence intercept of suspicious communications between Pakistan and Germany was the initial breakthrough that helped authorities foil a terror plot this week, it was reported on Friday. The Los Angeles Times, citing unidentified officials, reported that communications referring to "apparent terrorist activity" were first detected by US intelligence last year before the lead was passed to German officials. "The US counter-terrorism community supported efforts to draw links, to do intercepts and to monitor communications between Pakistan and Germany," a US counter-terrorism official told the Times. The official said the initial intercept was "a key factor" that "helped build the case." "It led to a very long period of surveillance, and the arrests," the official added. The intercepts continued after the suspects were placed under surveillance, the report said. A further communication between the cell in Germany and militant handlers in Pakistan, who urged the suspects to accelerate the timetable for the plot, was also intercepted, the report added, citing German officials...

Daily Times, 8 September 2007

'Musharraf not standing down'

President Pervez Musharraf's spokesman has rejected a report aired by Geo TV that the government was considering a proposal for President Musharraf to step down to have Defence Minister Rao Sikandar Iqbal elected as president, APP reported. He regretted that the news channel had chosen to air "such a speculative and baseless report without bothering to verify or consult with any responsible government official". He asked the media to exercise restraint and refrain from airing or publishing unverified reports on an issue as important as the election of the President of Pakistan. Citing sources close to the government, the channel said once he was elected and had assumed office, Rao Sikandar could give Gen Musharraf another extension in the all-important office of COAS. It said the proposal had already been discussed with the PPP leadership and that the latter had no objection to the arrangement...

Dawn, 8 September 2007

'Plan ready to arrest Sharifs on arrival'

The government is reported to have decided to arrest former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif when they land in Islamabad on Monday. Informed sources told Dawn that the government was still in the process of working out a plan to manage the crowd expected at the Islamabad Airport on the day to greet the PML-N leaders, which might get out of control on hearing the news of the arrest of their leaders, the sources said. They said the Sharif brothers would be arrested for their alleged involvement in three corruption cases filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in accountability courts. The judge of an accountability court in Rawalpindi observed on Friday that the NAB chairman had the authority to issue arrest warrants for the Sharifs when they arrived in Pakistan on Sept 10. The court made the observation when NAB counsel stated that under Section 24-C of the NAB Ordinance, its chairman had the authority to issue arrest warrants even against an under-trial accused...

Dawn, 8 September 2007

Musharraf-Benazir deal has collapsed, says Sheikh Rashid

A power-sharing deal between President Gen Pervez Musharraf and PPP chairperson Ms Benazir Bhutto has collapsed mainly because of the latter's demand to third-term prime ministership, according to Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad. "It is finished. The president said 'no'," the outspoken minister told Dawn on Friday. When asked if it was really over, he said: "If you insist, there are very thin chances of salvaging it " just 1 or 2 per cent. "PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and secretary general Mushahid Hussain Sayed are fiercely opposing any cooperation with Ms Bhutto." He added: "Maybe some last-minute attempt is made today (Friday) to salvage the deal. But personally I am not at all hopeful, the reason being Ms Bhutto's insistence that prime ministers must be allowed a third term." In his opinion, presenting any new constitutional package in parliament for a deal "is fast becoming a difficult proposition". Though the government, he said, had accepted as many as 17 demands of Ms Bhutto, including those concerning the uniform and withdrawal of cases against her, the issue of third term scuttled the deal....

The Times of India, 8 September 2007

US would invade Pakistan to eradicate terror cells'

Criticising the Bush administration for its counter-terrorism policies, Democratic Presidential candidate John Edwards said he would invade Pakistan to eradicate terror cells if there were actionable intelligence and the US-ally refuses to act. "I want to be clear about one thing. If we have actionable intelligence about imminent terrorist activity and the Pakistan government refuses to act, we will," Edwards said at a campaign rally at Pace University in New York. Maintaining that the US has not used every available tool in the book to pressurise countries like Pakistan to shut down terror camps, the 2004 vice-presidential candidate said, "We ought to use our tremendous tools - diplomacy, arm sales, trade, foreign aid - to get states to shut down terror cells. "The recent national intelligence estimate found that Al-Qaida had established a safe haven in the northwest tribal areas of Pakistan," he said, adding we have given Musharraf government billions of dollars of aid in last several years, yet they have done little to get control over these areas...

The Hindu, 8 September 2007

Pakistan to get state-of-the-art jet fighters

The U.S. recently delivered two used F-16B state-of-the-art fighter jets to Pakistan and announced plans to donate another two dozen, said the Arms Control Today journal has said. Pakistan will not pay for the used, older model F-16s, whose flying conditions vary, but will assume the costs for refurbishing and modernising them, a Department of Defence spokesperson told the journal. The U.S., in a deal announced last September, is also set to sell Pakistan 18 new F-16C/D fighters for delivery in 2010 and upgrades for its fleet of 34 F-16 combat aircraft. Washington cleared Islamabad last year for about \$2.1 billion of weapons, avionics, engines, and other equipment for F-16 fighters. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush (Senior) blocked arms sales to Pakistan because his administration would not certify under U.S. law that Islamabad did not possess a nuclear device. Seeking Pakistan's allegiance after the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush waived the prohibitions. Pakistan is supposed to begin receiving the 18 top-of-the-line F-16C/Ds in three years and has the option to purchase 18 more...

Dawn, 8 September 2007

Boucher's early arrival sparks speculations

American Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher reached Islamabad on Friday morning on an unannounced visit to ostensibly prepare for the second round of the broad-based Pakistan-US Dialogue that begins here next week. Initially his visit was scheduled for next week but according to diplomatic sources as Mr Boucher was in Europe he decided to come here early instead of going back to Washington and then travel back to Pakistan the next day. Apparently Mr Boucher's early arrival came as a surprise to the Foreign Office and some of its senior officials who were contacted by Dawn had no clue about it. There were unconfirmed reports that during the day Mr Boucher met President Gen Pervez Musharraf at his Camp Office in Rawalpindi. However, there was no official word either from the Foreign Office or the US embassy about the reported meeting...Speculations were rife in the capital the entire day about the reasons for Mr Boucher's early arrival which coincided with media reports claiming that the government was trying to prevent former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's arrival in

Pakistan with the US help...

The Tribune, 8 September 2007

A nation still at crossroads, Modernists, Islamists, and the military vie for power in Pakistan (Kuldip Nayar)

Give me a new cliché to describe the situation in Pakistan. The old one that "the country is at the crossroads" has worn out. But strange as it may sound, this phrase is the closest to the reality. Pakistan can return to democracy; it can go fundamentalist or it can be pure military's rule all over again. A few days ago when I was at Lahore, I saw all the three possibilities and people discussed them endlessly. It is understandable why Benazir Bhutto, chairperson of the largest organization, Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has repeatedly warned that Pakistan can go to religious parties if democracy is not revived without further loss of time. The bomb blasts - the recent ones at Rawalpindi are by the jihadis - indicates that religious terrorists are more determined and more committed than Islamabad imagined them to be. When the Taliban and the Al-Qaida forces are strong enough to "rule" over Waziristan in the NWFP and kidnap the Pakistani soldiers at will, the situation should evoke serious concern...

Daily Times, 8 September 2007

A dangerous season of party splits (Editorial)

Apparently, splits are occurring in political parties on both sides of the divide. The heat thus produced is causing a political and ideological squall as never before. The big news is that the ongoing negotiation for a "deal" between the PPP and the PMLQ government is causing fractures in both sides, with benefit possibly going to the PMLN. This has led some people - not us - to argue that the PMLN will benefit to the extent of "sweeping" the next general elections. In the event, Mr Nawaz Sharif's double comeback, physically and politically, will lead him to where he left off in 1999. The PMLQ chief, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, seems to be reacting more sharply than ever to President Pervez Musharraf's relentless wooing of the PPP. Seemingly, he has taken the isolationist path of blaming the "goras" for pressuring President Musharraf into talking to Ms Bhutto. But in so doing he blithely ignores the barely hidden contradiction between the inward-looking worldview of the PMLQ leadership and an outward-looking President Musharraf that has hounded the eight-year regime's efforts at opening up and liberalising the country...

Daily Times, 8 September 2007

Transitions (Salman Tarik Kureshi)

The military rulers in our country have each time initially professed to being both provisional and temporary and only intending to establish 'basic' or 'Islamic' or 'genuine' democracy before handing power back to the people. Each time, they have in fact worked to establish their own permanence in power, with horrific consequences for the country. The less than two decades that have passed since the dictator Zia-ul Haq fell in flames from the sky have seen a tremendous enlargement in the number of states around the world governed under formally democratic systems. Country after country has gone through a sometimes painful and often shaky transition from an authoritarian regime, whether a single-party civilian or a military dictatorship, to some form of constitutional, popularly elected government. These transitions have often been incomplete and have by

no means always resulted in benign, efficient governance...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Muqrin, Hariri urge Nawaz to honour agreement

A Saudi prince said on Saturday that Nawaz Sharif would be welcome to return to Saudi Arabia, as the Saudi government and an influential Lebanese politician urged the former prime minister to honour his agreement to remain in exile for 10 years. Saudi intelligence chief Prince Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz and Lebanese politician Saad Hariri arrived separately in Islamabad on Saturday morning, the former with a message from Saudi King Abdullah and the latter after a meeting with Nawaz Sharif in London. After meeting President General Pervez Musharraf for two-and-a-half hours, Prince Muqrin and Hariri addressed an unprecedented joint press conference at Army House, telling journalists that Nawaz was bound under the agreement not to return to Pakistan before ten years in exile. "We sincerely hope that Nawaz Sharif honours this agreement," Prince Muqrin said. He indicated that Sharif would be welcomed back to Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia is for all our brothers and sisters from all over the Muslim world," he said...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

I am coming, says Nawaz

Former premier Nawaz Sharif said on Saturday he would return to Pakistan on Monday despite a request from Saudi Arabia to abandon his planned trip, AP reported. "I will go back to Pakistan on September 10 with my brother because my country needs me," he told a press conference in London. Nawaz said he had not broken any promise and accused President Pervez Musharraf and Lebanese lawmaker Saad Hariri of going back on their word because the promised duration of the exile was five years, but he had spent seven years away from his country. Nawaz said that he had tried his best to refrain from saying anything on the "agreement" due to its sensitive nature, but Hariri's press conference in Islamabad had compelled him to disclose "some hidden facts". Nawaz said that Hariri visited him in Attock Fort in 2000 with an understanding under which the Sharif family would have to remain in exile for 10 years in Saudi Arabia. The former PM said that he objected to the duration of the exile and insisted that it be reduced to five years...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Govt may deport Nawaz, detain Shahbaz

The government is considering the option to deport former premier Nawaz Sharif and arrest his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, following the failure of all efforts to stop them from returning to Pakistan on September 10, sources told Daily Times. The sources said that the action would be in line with the package offered by President Pervez Musharraf to Nawaz through Saad Hariri that the government would accept Shahbaz if Nawaz postponed his schedule for the time being. They said that another option would be to deport both the Sharifs to Saudi Arabia but this would be against the spirit of the announcements for national reconciliation made by some prominent PML leaders and President Musharraf. "Another option is the arrest of both the Sharifs but this would worsen the political crisis," the sources said, adding that the government would make a final strategy by Sunday night...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

PML one against deal with PPP, divided on Sharifs' return

The PML Central Working Committee (CWC) on Saturday unanimously rejected the deal talks between President Gen Pervez Musharraf and PPP Chairwoman Benazir Bhutto, but the committee was divided on the expected return of former premier Nawaz Sharif to Pakistan, sources told Daily Times. The CWC, co-chaired by PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, discussed in detail Nawaz's return, the president's re-election in uniform and the Benazir-Musharraf "deal". Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi and Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed did not attend the meeting. The CWC rejected the abolition of Article 58(2b), the restriction on prime minister serving a third time, and the suspension of the local government system before the elections. "These three issues are trump cards and the government must not give them up," the sources quoted the members as saying. The sources said that Law Minister Zahid Hamid told the CWC that President Musharraf would remove his uniform before taking a fresh oath of office...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Boucher in Pakistan for US-Pak dialogue agenda

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard Boucher is in Pakistan to work on the agenda for the impending US-Pakistan strategic partnership dialogue scheduled for next week, the State Department said on Friday. A State Department official said Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte would lead the US in the dialogue. The US and Pakistan entered a strategic partnership in 2006 in Islamabad after talks between President Pervez Musharraf and President George W Bush, under which the two allies cooperate in wide-ranging areas. The dialogue includes cooperation in counter-terrorism, education, science and technology, and enhancing economic opportunities...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Suicide attackers training in Pakistan'

More than 80 percent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report on Saturday that showed attacks running at record levels this year. Most of the perpetrators in Afghanistan are poor, young and uneducated, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers in Afghanistan, other militants and security officials. The report urged US and other NATO forces to try and prevent civilian casualties, avoid humiliating property searches and if possible deploy forces from Muslim nations as ways to blunt support for the bombers. "The first line of defence consists of understanding and removing 'root causes' that create demand for terrorism," the 137-page report said. While the report stressed that many if not most of the attackers were Afghan nationals, it also underlined the importance of refugee camps and Islamic schools (madrassas) in tribal areas of Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Is 9/10 going to be Pakistan's 9/11? (Editorial)

Most people in Pakistan know that a new phase of dangerous confrontation between the

government and the opposition will start on September 10. But few know the extent of its potential destructiveness. Unfortunately, a lot of articulated opinion is in favour of the confrontation or face-off. Narrowing the focus on the long-standing issue of civil-military relations, the protagonists of the "struggle for democracy" are prepared to wage the war on the basis of the motto "let the chips fall where they may". In this looming confrontation, it is scary to contemplate the experience of the state apparatus in recent years of handling public agitation. These days half a city can be burned down without the government going into any pangs of conscience. Sometimes, it even allows destruction of property and disruption of economic activity in the expectation that ordinary people whose lives are disrupted will be riled against the protesters. Thus the PML government is getting ready to confront the APDM threat of violence and is taking measures that may further negatively affect its standing among the people...

Daily Times, 9 September 2007

Political crisis and general elections (Dr Hasan-Askari Rizvi)

The planned return of the Sharif brothers poses an additional challenge to the government agenda to hold presidential elections later this month. Even if the Sharif brothers are deported or they are arrested, the negative fallout of these developments can lead to open confrontation between his supporters and the government. Deal or no deal, civilian political forces will continue to challenge the Musharraf government known for centralisation of power and the presidency's domineering role. The current military-civil hybrid power structure in Islamabad cannot cope with the political pressures by relying on the state apparatus or manipulation of the opposition. A good number of people in the ruling circles are oblivious of the political realities when they argue that control of the provincial governments of the Punjab and Sindh would enable them to secure General Pervez Musharraf's re-election and sustain the present political order...

Daily Times, 10 September 2007

Nawaz lands today, Shahbaz later

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif left for Islamabad late on Sunday on Pakistan International Airlines flight PK-786, AP reported. Shortly before leaving for Pakistan, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Quaid asked his brother former Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif to stay in Britain so that he can lead the party in case anything happens to him (Nawaz Sharif). "We are going, nothing can stop us," Sharif told reporters after checking in for his flight. "We are happy we are going back to our country after seven long years in exile." He earlier told Reuters Television that his security "is in the hands of God and of course the people of Pakistan". Asked about the detention of his supporters, Sharif said, "Thousands of people have been arrested but by the grace of God our supporters are in the millions. That is not going to deter us." "I know that this is a risky course for me and there can be dangers in it," he told Geo TV channel on Sunday.

Dawn, 10 September 2007

Stage set for tense face-off: Islamabad airport on red alert, Over 2,000 PML-N workers held

A major showdown between thousands of riot police and supporters of Nawaz Sharif looked imminent on Monday as a massive security force started to block all entry points

to the Islamabad airport and several thousand supporters of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and its allied parties vowed to gather in the area to receive the former prime minister when he arrives in the morning by prematurely ending his ten-year term of exile. The Islamabad Airport was put on red alert while Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi airports were on high alert late on Sunday night. A PIA flight being used by Nawaz Sharif for the return was expected to touch down at Islamabad around noon, but security drill to prevent opposition supporters was likely to start in the early hours of the morning. Commenting on the last-minute decision which meant Shahbaz Sharif would not accompany his brother, highly informed sources in the airline industry told Dawn that there was a possibility that Shahbaz Sharif may take a Gulf Air flight for the homeward journey...

Dawn, 10 September 2007

Deportation plan ready

The security agencies have put in place a plan to deport former prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Saudi Arabia when they land at Islamabad airport on Monday morning, highly informed sources said. It is, however, believed that the authorities may give a go-ahead to the plan in the morning taking all aspects of the issue in view. An airbus A-310 with tail number APBGO was brought to the Islamabad airport sometime on Sunday and was put on stand-by, according to airport officials. The deportation plan, the sources claimed, was on top of other options considered by the government so far, including arresting the former prime minister on various charges and keeping him in Attock prison. Another option under study was to take him to his Raiwind residence in a helicopter from the airport and put him under house arrest. Sources said it appeared the government was not ready to give Nawaz Sharif a free hand. Some PML-N leaders also expressed their apprehensions that their leader could be deported...

Daily Times, 10 September 2007

Benazir Bhutto 'back to basics'

Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan, vowed that she would go "back to basics" and invoke her late father's name to win her way back into power, in an interview with UK newspaper The Guardian's Sunday edition The Observer. Bhutto said her campaign would be inspired by the old slogan of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) - 'food, clothing, shelter'. "Under my leadership, the PPP will bring moderation, democracy and the basics that the nation's poorest need," she said. "We represent the underprivileged, the peasants, women, young people, the minorities, all those who have been neglected by elite governments." Bhutto confirmed talks with representatives of President General Pervez Musharraf. "Pakistani politics is a rollercoaster ride," Bhutto told The Observer. "We were 80 percent there, then negotiations stalled, then we started off again. My return will take place irrespective of the dialogue process." "I am doing this for the Constitution, not for personal benefit," Bhutto said.

Dawn, 10 September 2007

PPP says president must shed uniform

Pakistan People's Party Deputy Secretary-General and Opposition Leader in the Senate Mian Raza Rabbani has said the party will never accept President General Pervez Musharraf in uniform and will oppose his re-election by the sitting assemblies. He was

speaking at a PPP workers' meeting organised by the party's Karachi division on Sunday at a ground near Bilawal House. The meeting was part of the preparations to greet party chairperson Benazir Bhutto on her arrival in the country. People's Party Sindh President Syed Qaim Ali Shah, Nisar Khuhro, Fehmida Mirza, Aftab Shahban Mirani, ARD central leader Mufti Naeemuddin Hazarvi and local PPP leaders also spoke at the meeting. Mr Rabbani said the PPP would accord Ms Bhutto a historic welcome and "wash out anti-PPP forces from the country." He ruled out any alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) which, he said, "was the party of plunderers and believed in the politics of looting the wealth of the country." ...

The Nation, 10 September 2007

Days of extraordinary developments (Nadeem Syed)

Extraordinary developments are taking place in the country as Nawaz Sharif's celebrated homecoming is approaching. A sizable portion of the ruling party is not opposed to the return of former prime minister. This is diametrically opposed to the position taken by the government, which is pretty desperate to stop him. The PML (Q) is in a mood of defiance. It has most successfully stalled the progress towards the finalisation of a deal between President Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto. The PML (Q) leaders in a recent meeting have rejected all the main items in the deal including removal of restriction to become prime minister for third time, 58-2(b) and suspension of district governments before the general elections. The party is not only standing up to Establishment but also the US and UK governments, which are very keen on bringing both Benazir and Musharraf together, probably as a bulwark against terrorism...

Dawn, 10 September 2007

An ungovernable Pakistan (Tasneem Siddiqui)

If we were to prepare a world index in terms of violence and ungovernability, where would we place Pakistan? Somalia, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan will no doubt top the list, but then these countries are the victims of imperialist designs and superpower intrigues. Nigeria and Pakistan, also at the top of the list, are in a different league altogether. They started off well, but have gradually become ungovernable because of the greed, lust for power and ineptitude of the ruling elite. Defenders of the present regime can argue that during the last eight years, Pakistan has made strides in economic development and signs of prosperity can be seen everywhere. But this article is not about macro-economic stabilisation, or the lack of it. This is about governability. People are worried that this country, which was peaceful and well-managed 30 years ago, is fast becoming ungovernable. Signs of deterioration can be seen everywhere, from the civic services to the maintenance of law and order...

Dawn, 10 September 2007

Search for democracy (Editorial)

With the government getting more rattled by the day, Mr Nawaz Sharif has further upped the ante by announcing a date for his return to the country. Whether the former PM will follow the schedule announced in London still remains to be seen, as does the administration's response to his expected arrival on Sept 10. The attorney-general is clear on one point: there will be no violation of the Supreme Court's ruling that the Sharif

brothers have "an inalienable right to enter and remain in the country". In its Aug 23 decision, the SC had also asked the government not to obstruct their return "in any manner". As such it is unlikely that there will a repeat of the events of May 11, 2004, when Mr Shahbaz Sharif was arrested on arrival in Lahore and promptly deported. But there are legal cases pending against the Sharifs - indeed more could be framed or reactivated - and their immediate or subsequent detention cannot be ruled out. The Sharifs, in turn, will be looking to the courts for remedy...

Daily Times, 11 September 2007

Nawaz Sharif sent packing to Jeddah

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was on Monday arrested and deported to Saudi Arabia four-and-a-half hours after he arrived in Islamabad from London to challenge the rule of President General Pervez Musharraf. PIA flight PK-786, carrying the former prime minister, his party workers and journalists, landed at 8:45am at Islamabad International Airport, but Nawaz refused to leave the aircraft for about 90 minutes. All other passengers were allowed to leave the plane and a team of officials, accompanied by black-uniformed commandos, went on board to "discuss various options" with Nawaz. Surrounded by the commandos, Nawaz eventually stepped off the aircraft and was escorted to the Rawal Lounge, where he refused to hand over his passport to immigration officials. Sources said officials again held talks with him but he remained steadfast in his decision to stay in Pakistan. An official said Nawaz was shown arrest warrants for corruption and money laundering charges and a copy of his 2000 exile agreement...

Daily Times, 11 September 2007

Govt says Nawaz deported due to Saudi pressure

Nawaz Sharif was sent back into exile in Saudi Arabia because of mounting pressure on Pakistan from the Saudi government insisting that the former PM honour his agreement, according to government officials. They also said Nawaz was given the choice upon landing at Islamabad of being put under arrest or deported, and he chose the latter option. "Nawaz Sharif has gone to Saudi Arabia according to the same agreement that took him there earlier," Information Minister Mohammad Ali Durrani told reporters. Religious Affairs Minister Ejazul Haq also said Nawaz was sent back under pressure from Saudi Arabia. PML President Chaudhry Shujaat also said Nawaz was given the two options, though he made conflicting statements about which choice the former prime minister made. While Nawaz was still at the Islamabad airport, Shujaat Hussain said in a statement reported on AP that Nawaz had chosen arrest over exile. However, in a later statement issued in Islamabad and reported on Geo after Nawaz was deported, Shujaat was quoted as saying that Nawaz had chosen to go into exile rather than be arrested...

Daily Times, 11 September 2007

PML-N challenges deportation in SC

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Monday filed a contempt of court petition with the Supreme Court (SC) challenging the deportation of its leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in defiance of the court's recent verdict. The SC on August 23 allowed exiled leader Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif to return home as citizens of Pakistan and ordered federal and provincial government agencies not to

obstruct their homecoming. PML-N Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Khawaja Asif, moving a petition in the SC under Article 204 of the Constitution before Sharif was deported from the Islamabad airport, pleaded that the former premier be produced in the court so that he could be dealt with under the law. Khawaja told reporters that he would amend his petition, or file a separate one if required, in consultation with his counsel, Fakhruddin G Ebrahim. He said the government had committed contempt of court and subverted the constitution by exiling Nawaz Sharif. He said his party would seek to charge President General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz with treason...

Daily Times, 11 September 2007

EU appeals for return, UK 'concerned'

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif should be allowed to return from exile and be allowed to defend himself against corruption charges in court, European Union said Monday, while Britain said it was "concerned". According to AP, EU spokeswoman Christiane Hohmann told reporters that Pakistan's government should respect the ruling by its Supreme Court that allowed Sharif to return without being stopped. "In our view the Supreme Court ruling is very clear and should be respected," Hohmann said. "So if there is any legal case against Sharif, he should have a chance to defend himself in a court." Meanwhile, a spokeswoman for the British Foreign Office said that internal politics were "a matter for Pakistani politicians and the people of Pakistan", adding that Britain was, however, "concerned" about the developments in Pakistan. According to AFP, she said, "We call upon the government of Pakistan to ensure that due legal and judicial process is followed and the rule of law upheld." agencies...

Dawn, 11 September 2007

US denies role in exile arrangement

The United States has strongly reacted to Islamabad's decision to deport former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, calling it a violation of an earlier order of the Supreme Court, which forbade the government from doing so. "The government's decision to deport Mr Sharif to Saudi Arabia runs contrary to the Supreme Court's decision," a State Department official told Dawn. The official made it clear that the US has played no part in the arrangement for sending Mr Sharif to Saudi Arabia. "With regard to the pledge that Mr Sharif made not to return to Pakistan, these are matters between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Mr Sharif himself. The US plays no part," the official said. The State Department not only denied any US involvement in Mr Sharif's deportation, it also emphasised its strong support to a positive change in Pakistan. "It is important that the transition to a new, elected government proceed in a legal and constitutional manner," the official said. "We hope that all involved in the current political transition will act peacefully and avoid violence."...

The Tribune, 11 September 2007

Deportation an internal matter of Pak: Pranab

India today steered clear of dabbling in Pakistan's internal politics, which in a way conveys that New Delhi is not yet prepared to rock President Pervez Musharraf's boat. This was quite apparent when external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee refused to

comment on the deportation of former Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif to Saudi Arabia soon after his arrival in Islamabad. Mukherjee described the Nawaz Sharif episode as an "internal matter" of Pakistan. However, he added that India wanted to have a stable neighbour. "We want all our neighbours to be stable, peaceful and prosperous," Mukherjee said...

Dawn, 11 September 2007

Benazir plans October return

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto aims to return from exile in October to contest national elections, a spokesman said on Monday. "Ms Bhutto has decided to travel to Pakistan," spokesman Wajid Hassan told Reuters Television in an interview. "She has planned it next month, probably. She will announce it on Sept 14 as to the date of her arrival in Pakistan." "She has got to go back and lead the party into the elections, to campaign for the party in the elections," her spokesman said. "So far they have not signed any deal. They have been engaged in talks for peaceful transition to democracy through free and fair, transparent elections," Mr Hassan said. He said an agreement was close but had not yet been struck as there were some issues to be resolved...

The Indian Express, 11 September 2007

Europeans get terror training inside Pakistan

The accused conspirators in a bombing plot disrupted last week in Germany were part of what the authorities say is a small, but growing, flow of militants from Germany and other Western countries who are receiving terrorism training at camps in Pakistan. Beginning early last year, at least five of the suspects travelled to the tribal regions of Waziristan, where they learned to prepare chemical explosives and military-grade detonators that they intended to use to build three car bombs, according to German officials and a confidential German intelligence document that details the allegations. The authorities said the man they had identified as the leader of the plot, Fritz Martin Gelowicz, 28, apparently found his way to the camp in Waziristan through contacts he made at an Islamic centre he attended in Neu-Ulm, Germany. Other suspects in the suspected conspiracy then followed Gelowicz to the camp, where their instructors included militant Islamists from Uzbekistan who are aligned with al-Qaeda according to the confidential document...

Dawn, 12 September 2007

Contempt petition filed in SC

Piqued by his forced deportation to Saudi Arabia in exile, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his Pakistan Muslim League (N) on Tuesday filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the government for what he called defying the apex court's order and held Gen Pervez Musharraf responsible for "subverting" the law of the land. The 10-page contempt of court petition also contained an affidavit of Lord Nazir Ahmed, member of the British House of Lords, who travelled along with the petitioner on Sept 10 to Islamabad from London. It alleged that Nawaz Sharif never consented to go with the law-enforcement officers and was deported against his will. Jointly moved by Mr Sharif and the PML (N), the petition named 13 persons as respondents. In his petition, Mr Sharif sought a direction of the court for securing his return to Pakistan and subsequent

production before the court. He said he had been illegally abducted and removed from the territory of his country without even his passport...

Dawn, 12 September 2007

'Schedule for presidential polls soon'

Chief Election Commissioner Justice (retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq said on Tuesday that the schedule for election to the office of the President of Pakistan would be announced in a few days. He said that the election would be held in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Official sources told Dawn that the schedule was most likely to be announced on September 17. President General Pervez Musharraf is so far the lone candidate in the field, with his declared intention to get himself re-elected in uniform. Opposition leaders have already filed petitions in the Supreme Court challenging Musharraf's holding of dual office of the president and the army chief. The apex court is to commence hearing of one such petition on September 17. Official sources, however, say that the president would doff his military uniform if the talks for a deal with PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto prove fruitful. They said in such a case, a constitutional package would be brought before the parliament that would remove legal obstacles in the way of election of Musharraf as president...

Dawn, 12 September 2007

'Deportation to pave way for deal with Benazir'

President Pervez Musharraf's strong move against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif "would enable him to stand up to Mr Sharif's allies in Pakistan" and go ahead with the power-sharing deal with another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, a Bush administration official was quoted as saying by the New York Times on Tuesday. The newspaper said in a report that the "Bush administration official, declining to be identified because he was not authorised to speak publicly about the issue, said the deportation was "not necessarily the worst thing that could happen". "While the United States is loath to appear publicly as if it is interfering in Pakistan's politics, the Bush administration has been urging Gen Musharraf to agree to a power-sharing deal with another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto." The power-sharing pact was viewed within the Bush administration as a way to both shore up Gen Musharraf's rapidly flagging support in Pakistan and stop him from exercising emergency powers, as hardliners within his party have urged, the NYT said...

Daily Times, 12 September 2007

'Benazir also vulnerable to deportation'

Pakistan People's Party Chairwoman Benazir Bhutto is also vulnerable to deportation, as the government has deported two-time former premier Nawaz Sharif, PPP Member of the National Assembly Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan said on CNBC Pakistan television on Tuesday. Regarding a Supreme Court verdict in Nawaz's favour, Aitzaz said the judiciary was not as strong under military rule as it had been during civilian governments. He criticised the Saudi government's role in the deportation and said the Pakistani government had committed "forced human smuggling" by deporting Nawaz. About the Bhutto-government power-sharing talks, he said one should not negotiate with a military ruler, adding that a deal was unlikely. "Bhutto is a shrewd politician and aware of

President General Pervez Musharraf's weak position," he said...

Daily Times, 12 September 2007

Intelligence agencies executed Nawaz deportation

The country's three top intelligence agencies coordinated and executed the plan to deport former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to Saudi Arabia within hours of his landing at Islamabad airport on Monday, Daily Times has learnt. Sources said that Col U of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Col K of Military Intelligence (MI) and Mr A of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) - their names have been withheld for security reasons - led the operation to bundle Sharif onto a Jeddah-bound PIA plane from Islamabad. The plane, a PIA Airbus 310, had been parked on the tarmac three days ago. The sources said that once Nawaz was seated in the airport's Rawal Lounge, Col (r) Afzal of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) approached him and gave him two choices: jail or exile to Jeddah. Nawaz refused to go into exile. The NAB official then announced the former prime minister's arrest and served him a notice in a money laundering case concerning the Hodaybia Paper Mills owned by his family...

Dawn, 12 September 2007

APDM, lawyers in a black mood

The fresh wave of protests took the tide in most parts of Punjab on Tuesday as the opposition parties, particularly the PML-N, took to the street and lawyers boycotted courts against various issues. Aggressive and more spiteful than in the previous demonstrations, the opposition parties united under the banner of the All Parties Democratic Movement to condemn the deportation of PML-N leader Mian Nawaz Sharif. While the lawyers took exception to the killing of senior lawyer Raja Riaz in Karachi, MQM men's storming the Sindh High Court and violation of the apex court's verdict in favour of the Sharif brothers. Dera Ghazi Khan saw an outburst of anger in front of the press club against banishment of the PML-N leader. There was, however, lukewarm response from the traders and even the PML-N district officials failed to muster support in the district considered to be a stronghold of party provincial head Zulfiqar Ali Khan Khosa...

Daily Times, 12 September 2007

Pak-US strategic dialogue today

The second round of Pak-US strategic dialogue between senior officials of the two countries begins here today (Wednesday) at the Foreign Office (FO) to expand and deepen bilateral relations and cooperation in various sectors. Diplomatic sources said that though technically it would be the second round, it formed the first substantial round, as the earlier round held last year in Washington was mostly ceremonial and both the sides used it to formulate the mode of dialogue and discussion in the next meetings. Sources also attach great importance to the current round due to presence in Islamabad of Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, who would lead the US side in the talks. Negroponte was US ambassador at the UN and later on head of National Security before his appointment as deputy to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice...The range of issues picked for the dialogue showed the seriousness of the talks. FO Spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said on Monday that the two sides would discuss cooperation in education,

energy, science and technology and issues of regional and international importance...

Daily Times, 13 September 2007

Negroponte backs crisis-hit Gen Musharraf

US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte offered broad support on Wednesday for President Gen Pervez Musharraf as Washington's key ally faces mounting opposition and Al Qaeda-linked violence, AFP reported. "We welcome Pakistan's leadership as a voice of moderation and reason in the Islamic world. Your nation remains a valuable ally in the war on terror," Negroponte, who arrived on Wednesday from Kabul for a one-day strategic dialogue between the US and Pakistan, told a press conference. Negroponte said former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's deportation was a "legal matter" and the people of Pakistan should decide it. Negroponte said: "It (Nawaz's deportation) is a legal matter but whatever is done should be done in a peaceful manner so that a peaceful evolution continues in Pakistan." He said that the issue had not been discussed in the strategic dialogue meeting between the representatives of the two countries at the Foreign Office. He said the US backed a peaceful political process and election in Pakistan to ensure a smooth transition of power...

Daily Times, 13 September 2007

40 rebels killed in Razmak

Up to 40 suspected tribal militants were killed in a military operation backed by gunship helicopters and artillery in North Waziristan on Wednesday, the army said. "According to local sources, 30 to 40 militants were killed in the operation," military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad said of the operation south of Razmak town. He could not say if any foreign militants were among the dead. Security forces launched the operation on Tuesday night. "The miscreants were occupying mountaintops to launch several attacks on troops. We used artillery and Cobra gunship helicopters to dislodge them," Gen Arshad told AFP. "The ground troops have started reaching the area for mopping up operations once the firing ends," Arshad said, adding that the clash was ongoing. Security forces said they had killed a top pro-Taliban militant commander, Ismatullah Khan, last week in the same region along with five other militants...

Daily Times, 13 September 2007

Cabinet supports Musharraf election in uniform

The federal cabinet on Wednesday unanimously backed the re-election of President General Pervez Musharraf in uniform from the present assemblies. Chairing the cabinet meeting here, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said that the schedule for the presidential election would be announced in two or three days. Representatives of all government coalition partners present at the meeting agreed that President Musharraf's re-election was "essential for the country's stability, security and growth". The cabinet also reviewed the prices of essential goods and directed the authorities concerned to implement the Ramazan Package so goods are available at cheaper rates at utility stores. The government is providing subsidies of Rs 1.5 billion on 700 items available at 3500 utility stores across the country. The cabinet was told that the ban on wheat export had stabilised the price of flour in the open market...

Daily Times, 13 September 2007

Osama more popular than Gen Musharraf in Pakistan

Al Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden is more popular in Pakistan than President Pervez Musharraf, according to a poll released on Wednesday. Nearly three-quarters of Pakistanis also oppose unilateral US military action against Islamic insurgents in Pakistan's tribal areas, said the poll for Terror Free Tomorrow, a US-based organisation. It said it polled 1,044 people across Pakistan between August 18 and August 29. Military ruler Musharraf is the biggest in from the poll. It said his approval rating was 38 percent behind 46 percent for Bin Laden. Bin Laden's ratings jumped to 70 percent in the Islamist-ruled NWFP. Former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif enjoy favourable opinions of 63 percent and 57 percent respectively. Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad haudhry had a 69 percent favourable rating, the survey said. Three-fourths said suicide bombings are never or rarely justified, while only 36 percent said they prayed five times a day regularly...

Daily Times, 14 September 2007

15 killed in blast at SSG mess

At least 15 soldiers were killed and 11 injured in an apparent suicide blast at an army officers' mess in Tarbela Ghazi near Tarbela Dam on Thursday. Military spokesman Major-General Waheed Arshad said that 15 soldiers had been killed in the explosion and 11 wounded. He said the cause of the blast was being investigated, and it could have been a gas cylinder explosion rather than a suicide bombing. Another government official said the toll could rise as six soldiers were critically wounded. However, two intelligence officials told AP that it was a suicide attack, and that the bomber rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the canteen where dozens of commandos of the Karar company of the Special Services Group (SSG) were eating. The Tarbela facility, about 100km south of Islamabad, is the headquarters of a counter-terrorism quick reaction force. Geo TV said the death toll was 20 killed and 25 injured in the blast...

Dawn, 14 September 2007

Aziz, Shujaat discuss fallout of Nawaz's deportation

Pakistan Muslim League president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Thursday discussed the political situation, especially the fallout of the deportation of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to Saudi Arabia. Sources say senior PML leaders are not happy over the deportation decision, which, according to them, was against the recommendation of the majority of the 200-member central working committee of the party. The two leaders also discussed issues relating to President Pervez Musharraf's re-election and the general elections, which area likely to be held in January 2008. A handout said that the meeting discussed the PML's election strategy and reiterated that the PML and allied parties strongly supported President Pervez Musharraf's re-election in order to maintain consistency and continuity of policies. Prime Minister Aziz said the PML and allied parties would participate in the coming election on the basis of their policies and performance...

Dawn, 14 September 2007

PPP to announce Benazir's return date today

The Pakistan People's Party will announce on Friday the date and venue of party chairperson Benazir Bhutto's return to the country. PPP spokesman and former senator Farhatullah Khan Babar told Dawn that Ms Bhutto's return schedule would be announced by party leaders in news conferences to be held simultaneously in eight cities, including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Muzaffarabad, Gilgit and Fata. The main news conference to be held at the PPP's Central Secretariat in Islamabad will be addressed by party's vice-chairman Makhdoom Amin Fahim and information-secretary Sherry Rehman. Mr Babar declined to give any specific date of Ms Bhutto's return. However, party sources said the former prime minister was expected to land in the country by the end of next month, possibly between Oct 20 and 25. Responding to a question, Mr Babar said that Ms Bhutto's return had no connection to the ongoing power-sharing dialogue with the Musharraf regime. When asked to comment on reports that the talks between Gen Musharraf and Ms Bhutto had failed, he said: "Doors are not closed, but we can't say at this moment that they are close to any agreement."...

Daily Times, 14 September 2007

Negroponte urges fair elections

US Deputy Secretary of State John D Negroponte has said the United States wants free and fair elections and a peaceful transfer of power to strengthen democracy in Pakistan. Negroponte said this during a meeting with President General Pervez Musharraf in Rawalpindi, sources in the presidential camp office told Geo TV. The US official briefed the president about progress in the Pakistan-US Strategic Dialogue. Gen Musharraf told Negroponte that Pakistan's commitment to the war on terrorism was beyond doubt, as the fight was in the country's interest. He reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to fight extremism and terrorism and highlighted the efforts it was making to address these challenges, said a statement issued by Foreign Office. The president said "negative provisions" of the US 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act that affected relations between the two countries must be addressed. Gen Musharraf sought forward movement on "Reconstruction Opportunity Zones" (ROZs) in the tribal areas, US support for the FATA Development Plan and capacity building of the Frontier Constabulary...

Daily Times, 14 September 2007

State interest and people's passion (Editorial)

The US Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, has assured Islamabad that the US was "both a close friend and long-standing reliable ally" of Pakistan. To the dismay of the public in Pakistan, he has also observed that the "deportation" of Mr Nawaz Sharif was an "internal affair" of Pakistan and therefore of no concern to the US. According to opinion surveys, the public in Pakistan is anti-American and judges its political leaders on this yardstick these days. Should the politicians follow where the people want Pakistan to go? Rhetoric apart, the rough statement that one should follow the verdict of the people is mediated by the elected parliament and the party that rules the country on the basis of its majority in parliament. Opinion polls in the country may tell us that the people hate the foreign policy followed by the government, but as long as the ruling party has a majority in parliament it can pursue "the interest of the State" against "the will of the People" if it construes it to be in the "national interest". Always, the popular verdict on how a government performs and what the people think of its policies comes with a new

general election. That is how democracy works...

The Hindu, 15 September 2007

'Sea change' in India's policy: Musharraf

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said there was a 'sea change' in India's Kashmir policy, acknowledging its "core issue" status in relations with Pakistan, while Islamabad had not given up "anything" on its position on the issue. Responding to questions at a weekly television programme, in which he interacts with an invited audience, the President denied that efforts to improve relations between the two countries had stopped. President Musharraf acknowledged it was not going as fast "as it should have been," but he also spoke of "a lot of improvemen" in the relations. The programme, "Aiwan-e-Sadr Se" (From the President's Office), on the state-owned Pakistan Television, is widely seen as an image-improving public relations exercise by Gen. Musharraf in the run-up to his proposed re-election, which has generated controversy, political resentment and opposition...

Dawn, 15 September 2007

Benazir to land in Karachi on Oct 18

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on Friday announced that its leader Benazir Bhutto would return to Pakistan, ending her eight-year self-imposed exile, on October 18, and land in Karachi. "I want to give a good news to the millions of millions of the people of Pakistan that Benazir will return to Pakistan on October 18," announced PPP's senior vice-president Makhdoom Amin Fahim at a crowded news conference amid cheers and slogans from supporters and a barrage of firecrackers. He was accompanied by spokesman Farhatullah Babar, information secretary Sherry Rehman and other parliamentarians. Similar news conferences were held simultaneously in eight places, including four provincial capitals, Azad Kashmir and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) where senior office-bearers announced Ms Bhutto's return plan. Activists of People's Students Federation, People's Youth Organisation and women's wing of the party chanted slogans of "Wazir-i-Azam Benazir" and "Long Live Benazir" as soon as Mr Fahim announced the return date...

Dawn, 15 September 2007

Benazir won't be deported, says govt

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto can return to Pakistan but will have to face corruption cases against her, the government said on Friday. Ms Bhutto will not be deported in the manner of another former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, a government spokesman said. In an interview on Friday, Deputy Information Minister Tariq Azim drew a clear distinction between the rights of Mr Sharif and Ms Bhutto to return to Pakistan. "Nawaz Sharif's case was different. He went back to Saudi Arabia because of an undertaking he had with the Saudi government," Mr Azim told The Associated Press. "She (Bhutto) was always allowed to come back" Asked about pending corruption cases against Ms Bhutto, he added: "It's for the law to take its own course. Everybody has to face cases against them and the same applies to her." Mr Azim said the talks with Ms Bhutto were snagged over her desire for the corruption cases to be closed, for a constitutional amendment to let her seek a third term as prime minister, and over the

president's re-election...

Dawn, 15 September 2007

Musharraf may be elected unopposed, says Afgan

President Pervez Musharraf will be deemed to have been elected unopposed for another term if the opposition parties did not put up any candidate against him, according to the federal minister for parliamentary affairs. Dr Sher Afgan Niazi said on Friday that the Election Commission would not have to hold the poll if there was no other candidate. Opposition parties do not plan to nominate a candidate, especially if the existing assemblies are asked to re-elect Gen Musharraf. They want the new assemblies to choose a new head of state. Dr Niazi said the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) had "passed away" after its poor show on Sept 10. According to him, Maulana Fazlur Rehman's party had higher stakes in the provinces of the NWFP and Balochistan and, therefore, it would abstain from the electoral process, irrespective of the decision of other APDM parties. The PPP, the minister claimed, would adopt the same course. As a result, Gen Musharraf would have no challenger against him, and the Election Commission would declare him elected unopposed for a second term...

The Nation, 15 September 2007

Presidential poll likely on Oct 8

The government is likely to hold presidential elections on October 8, TheNation learnt reliably on Friday. Ironically, Oct 8 is the same day when a deadly earthquake hit Pakistan, two years ago, killing about 100000 people in North and left millions homeless in Kashmir and NWFP. A final proposal in this regard has been sent to Chief Election Commissioner Justice (Retd) Qazi Muhammad Farooq for approval, sources privy to the development revealed. The Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan is the final authority to approve the election schedule for the presidential elections. After the formal approval of the Chief Election Commissioner, the election schedule will be made public, the sources added. According to legal experts, the regime is bound to hold the presidential elections between September 15 and October 15, the date which brings an end to the present tenure of President General Pervez Musharraf...

The Nation, 15 September 2007

US paper voices frustration over political situation in Pakistan

While analysing the political situation in Pakistan, a major American newspaper Friday expressed frustration that it was unable determine which form of government is better for the country. "In Pakistan the only thing worse than a civilian government is a military government, and vice versa," The Chicago Tribune said in an editorial, Poor Pakistan. "The strange tango between President Pervez Musharraf and former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif makes you wish for a third kind of government there. Giving brief history of how Ms. Bhutto, Sharif were toppled on corruption charges and the emergence of President Mushrraf in a military coup, the Tribune said that the three were political survivors, and at least one of the three will be in charge following elections. But, the newspaper said that Musharraf "has generally been considered one of the better leaders Pakistan has had."...

The Asian Age, 15 September 2007

Pak leads in missile technology

Pakistan is leading missile technology in South Asia and is making significant advances, the country's top nuclear scientist said on Friday. "Pakistan has achieved significant development in missile technology due to the efforts and dedication of its team of researchers and scientists. We are moving forward," said Dr Samar Mubarikmand, chairman of National Engineering and Science Commission (Nescom). Talking to reporters in London at the International Defence and Equipment exhibition, which concluded on Friday, he said having tested a number of missiles of different range and capacity over the past years, the country has reached the position to deliver them to the armed forces...According to Dr Mubarikmand, five organisations working under Nescom are engaged in research and production of defence equipment and have been able to meet the relevant requirements of the country's Armed Forces. "Apart from meeting our defence needs, Nescom is also earning around \$ 40 million annually by exporting its products to countries in West Asia, South East Asia and Africa," he said...

Dawn, 16 September 2007

Musharraf asks PML to hold talks with PPP : Papers for re-election to be filed after SC ruling

PML president Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Parvaiz Elahi and party secretary-general Mushahid Hussain Sayed on Saturday discussed with President Pervez Musharraf issues relating to power-sharing talks with Benazir Bhutto and the president's re-election. Sources privy to the meeting said it was decided that nomination papers for the president would be filed keeping in view Supreme Court's verdict in the dual-office case. The meeting, also attended by the president's chief negotiator Tariq Aziz, discussed the strategy in case of an unfavourable verdict by the Supreme Court on the president's re-election. According to the ruling PML leadership, the Constitution allowed the president to be re-elected in uniform. The sources claimed that Gen Musharraf had advised the PML leadership to enter into "direct negotiations" with the PPP on a post-election power-sharing formula in order to ensure a strong performance. The meeting discussed the campaign launched by the APDM following the deportation of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to Saudi Arabia and chalked out a strategy to counter it...

Dawn, 16 September 2007

President's aide meets CJ; judges appointed

Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry on Friday established his first contact with the presidency since being restored in office on July 20 when he called in the President's Chief of Staff Hamid Javed to discuss judicial matters. "The CJ called the CoS in his chamber on Friday to discuss matters relating to filling vacancies in different high courts," Supreme Court Registrar Dr Faqir Hussain told Dawn. The confirmation of a few and elevation of some other judges to fill vacant seats in the high courts of Sindh, Punjab and the NWFP were being delayed, because of which work in the superior judiciary was being adversely affected with an increasing backlog, the registrar said. He brushed aside the impression that matters relating to pending petitions challenging retention of dual offices by President Pervez Musharraf had been discussed in the meeting that lasted for

half an hour...

Dawn, 16 September 2007

SC to hear request for full court

A nine-member Supreme Court bench constituted by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry to hear petitions against holding of two offices by President Pervez Musharraf, will also hear the request by the petitioners to constitute a full court for the purpose. The Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf chairman Imran Khan have requested the Supreme Court to constitute the full court to hear their petition from Sept 17. The nine-member bench...will resume hearing on a set of identical petitions on Monday moved by the JI and its chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed against retention of the office of chief of army staff, Imran Khan challenging the two offices of President Musharraf, Jameel Ahmed against the President for holding two offices, Prof Anwarul Haq seeking permission to contest the election for the office of the President and Shahid Orakzai against holding two offices by the President. In his order the CJ has directed the office of the Registrar to refer all the requests by the petitioners for the formation of the full court before the larger bench when it will commence hearing on the petitions from Monday...

Dawn, 16 September 2007

Musharraf urges US to show 'understanding': Anti-terror war discussed with congressional team

President Pervez Musharraf told a visiting US Congressional delegation on Saturday that the US must avoid negative elements as proposed in the 9/11 Commission's recommendations which placed conditions for cooperation with Pakistan. "The US needs to understand Pakistan's efforts in fighting terrorism," he said. The president was talking to a seven-member bi-partisan US Congressional delegation, led by Minority Leader in the House of Representatives Congressman John Andrew Boehner, which called on him. "There is no safe haven for terrorists and that Pakistan was determined not to allow its territory to be used by anyone for terrorist activity," he added. He stressed the need for better understanding in the United States and its media of Pakistan's efforts to curb terrorism. The delegation members agreed with the need for mutual understanding and avoiding elements that could harm the relationship. According to an official announcement, Gen Musharraf also reiterated Pakistan's strong resolve to fight extremism and terrorism...

The News, 16 September 2007

PML-Q assures Musharraf of re-election

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League has assured President Pervez Musharraf he would be re-elected to a new five-year term after voting, likely to be held in the first week of October, top officials said on Saturday. An announcement of the date by the Election Commission is shortly due, they said. "As far as the ruling party is concerned, we have finalized our strategy to elect the president for another five-year term, we have 56 per cent votes to easily elect President Musharraf for another term," said Tariq Azeem, a senior official in the PML-Q. Two ruling party officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said the vote would be held in the first week of October, ignoring the suggestion of Benazir, who wanted Musharraf to seek a

vote from the new Parliament after the parliamentary elections. The president, whose term expires on Nov 15, is elected by an electoral college of all national and provincial lawmakers. The five-year term for the current Parliament expires later this year. The officials said a delegation of the ruling party headed by its chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain had assured Musharraf of their support in his re-election...

The News, 16 September 2007

There is more to Benazir's return than meets the eye (Ansar Abbasi)

Benazir Bhutto has agreed to an unwritten understanding with the Presidency that she would be an advocate and part of a smooth transition once she is back and would not be a problem for the powers that be in any way. Ms Bhutto's announcement to end her eight-and-a-half-year self-exile and return on October 18 is the result of this understanding and the consequence of the US assurance that all cases against her in the foreign courts would be "taken care of". About the corruption cases that are pending against Ms Bhutto and her spouse Asif Ali Zardari in the country's courts, the strategy is to knock them out by softening the prosecution. One of the three presidential aides, who had recently held a dialogue with Ms Bhutto, is quoted by a source having said that although there is no formal "deal" struck between the two sides, Ms Bhutto has agreed to an understanding that she would follow the present regime's rules of the game for the next few months and not work as a spoiler...

The News, 16 September 2007

China agrees to import Pak products at zero duty

In a major development, Beijing has agreed to import Pakistani products at zero duty, which are to be manufactured in China-specific Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Pakistan, a senior government official told The News. China-specific Special Economic Zones will be established in various parts of the country and the Economic Coordination Committee has already approved the establishment of SEZs for China in Kalashah Kaku near Lahore. The Punjab government has acquired land for this ambitious project. About 250 companies are ready to invest in the China-specific Economic Zones for trade with China. "The Pakistan government would, in return, permit Chinese companies which would make 40 per cent investment in the China-specific Special Economic Zone to import the machinery at zero duty to be installed at the said zone." Pakistan will be able to have the biggest market of one billion people of China by exporting the products to be manufactured in the SEZs at zero duty. Beijing has also extended a special incentive under which Islamabad can initiate banking services in China just with the deposit of \$250 million with sovereign guarantee...

Dawn, 17 September 2007

APDM vows to block re-election: Legislators to quit assemblies

The All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) on Sunday condemned efforts to re-elect Gen Pervez Musharraf as president and declared that it would block the move by all means at its disposal. Contending that under the Constitution, Gen Musharraf was ineligible for the office of the president, leaders of the alliance said that he could not hold the office of the chief of army staff and they would resist his attempts to retain either of the posts. In an apparent effort to compensate for its failure to measure up to people's

expectations on Sept 10 and 11, the APDM decided to observe countrywide protests on Sept 21 to condemn Nawaz Sharif's forced deportation to Saudi Arabia. The APDM leadership called upon the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia not to support the dictatorial government against people's struggle for civil freedoms and democracy. They also criticised the Musharraf government for involving the rulers of a brotherly country to advance its own agenda...

Dawn, 17 September 2007

Benazir hits out at Musharraf's allies; threatens tough action

Exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto on Sunday accused allies of President Gen Pervez Musharraf of pushing Pakistan towards a dangerous crisis by refusing to share power and restore democracy. Ms Bhutto also told The Associated Press that her party may join other opposition groups in resigning from parliament and taking to the streets to try to force the president from office. In a telephone interview, Ms Bhutto said that the group was advising Musharraf to contest a presidential election due by Oct 15 without stepping down as army chief. "We all know that any election in uniform would be illegal. But they prefer to play with the Constitution and create a crisis rather than have a smooth transition to democracy," Bhutto said. "Pakistan can ill afford confrontation and anarchy." Bhutto has been in talks with Musharraf for months on a pact that would include constitutional amendments to defuse legal challenges to his re-election bid and let her return to Pakistan and compete in parliamentary elections due by January...

The News, 17 September 2007

Underhand deal to keep 'real deal' secret

Benazir Bhutto and General Pervez Musharraf have quietly struck a new "deal" to keep the real power-sharing "deal" a secret for the time being in order to stem the growing resentment among the supporters of the two camps, sources have confirmed. The Americans and the Britons, who are playing guarantors, have asked the two sides not to spill the beans till certain important decisions are taken. The decision to keep the new understanding about the deal secret has been taken after the backfiring of earlier public announcements by Ms Benazir Bhutto and the federal railways minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed about the deal. So much so that the claims of a deal even jeopardized the chances of Musharraf's re-election because of the unease in the ruling League. The sources privy to this new deal claim that the real power-sharing deal has been struck, but both sides are feigning ignorance for different reasons...

Dawn, 17 September 2007

Poll rule changes can't be challenged: Afgan

Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Sher Afgan has claimed that amendments made to the rules for presidential elections by the Chief Election Commissioner are not open to judicial scrutiny. According to him, the decision to amend the presidential election rules, 1998, was in line with apex court judgments holding that disqualification under Article 63 of the Constitution did not apply to presidential elections. Talking to Dawn here on Sunday, he said that the amendment to section 5(3) (a) of the rules was in exercise of CEC's powers under the second schedule of the Constitution which authorised him to make and amend the rules to hold polls in a free and fair manner. He said the

amendment had been made to bring the rules in conformity with the Supreme Court judgments. He said that under the Supreme Court rules, a decision by a bench of the court could be reviewed only by the same bench if it felt there were some anomalies in the verdict. That could be done within 30 days, he said...

Dawn, 17 September 2007

Resignations not to affect presidential poll: Aziz

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz sees no political impact on the presidential election if all members of the opposition alliance APDM resign from assemblies. "The present assemblies are going to complete their term within a couple of weeks and the masses will not give any importance to the resignations by the opposition members," the prime minister told newsmen at the Governor's House on Sunday. However, he said, it would be better if all parties took part in the process. "The opposition members reserve the right to vote against Gen Pervez Musharraf," he said. The process of the presidential election will begin after the announcement of the election schedule by the Election Commission under the provisions of the Constitution. Exemption from the two-year rule for the presidential election had been given under the constitutional provision, Mr Aziz said, claiming that the Supreme Court had already given its ruling in this regard. He said petitions and other reservations about the uniformed president had been with the apex court. The government, he added, had great respect for the Supreme Court and would honour all its verdicts...

Dawn, 17 September 2007

Jirga claims progress in talks for soldiers' release

Tribal negotiators have claimed a breakthrough in talks with militants for release of nearly 300 soldiers in return for withdrawal of troops from some of the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan. A tribal jirga led by MNA Maulvi Mirajudin and Senator Salih Shah briefed political agent Hussainzada Khan in Wana on Sunday on the talks they had held with the militants holding the soldiers hostage. Sources said senior military officers were also present on the occasion. Senator Salih was optimistic about the release of the soldiers taken hostage on Aug 30 by militant group of commander Baitullah Mehsud. "There is some understanding between the two sides under which security forces will be pulled out of two areas in return for the soldiers' release," Senator Salih told Dawn by phone. He said troops would be withdrawn from Ghet Ser and Shin Ser areas of the troubled region. However, ISPR director-general Maj-Gen Waheed Arshad expressed ignorance about any progress in the talks, particularly about withdrawal of troops from some areas...

The Nation, 17 September 2007

US demands military action in Waziristan

The United States wants Pakistan to launch a full-fledged military operation against Al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants in Waziristan, and this renewed demand has been conveyed to Islamabad through the diplomatic channels. "The Bush administration has conveyed its demand to Pakistan that a new military offensive be launched to flush out the foreign and local militants from the tribal region of Waziristan," said a diplomatic source here on Sunday. He said that fierce clashes were continuing between Pakistani security forces and

militants in Waziristan in which dozens of militants had been killed in the last few days. However, the US administration had asked for a full-scale operation that could curb the growing militancy in Waziristan besides, halting cross border attacks by suspected Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan, the source said. He said the United States believed that Pakistan's border areas had become a safe haven for Taleban and Al-Qaeda, and their elimination from Waziristan was imminent for durable peace in Afghanistan...

Dawn, 18 September 2007

'Musharraf to doff uniform by Nov 15'

President Gen Pervez Musharraf plans to quit as army chief to become a civilian leader, removing a key objection to his proposed re-election in October, a senior ruling party official said on Monday. "We expect that after his re-election process next month, General Musharraf would take his oath of office as a civilian president before Nov 15," Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, secretary-general of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League, told Reuters. Giving up the army role would undoubtedly dilute Musharraf's power in a country that has been ruled by the military for more than half the 60 years since it was founded. It will also be a wrench for a life-long soldier who described his uniform as a "second skin", but aides say he has been reconciled to quitting the army for months. Senator Syed said that Musharraf would abide by the Constitution and quit the army before the end of 2007...

Dawn, 18 September 2007

Changes not for one person, says EC

The Election Commission has said the amendment to the Presidential Election Rules, 1988, is not person-specific and will apply to all presidential candidates at the time of scrutiny. This is the first indication that under the new rule anyone who retired from government service within the last two years will be eligible to contest the presidential election. In a statement issued here on Monday, Chief Election Commissioner Qazi Mohammad Farooq cited Article 41 (2) of the Constitution which says that "a person shall not be qualified for election as President unless he is a Muslim of not less than forty-five years of age and is qualified to be elected as member of the National Assembly". He said that in 2005 a five-member bench of the Supreme Court had held in the Pakistan Lawyers Forum and other cases that the president was only required to be qualified to be a member of parliament as provided under Article 62 and disqualifications containing in Article 63 of the Constitution did not apply to him...

Dawn, 18 September 2007

'No hitch in re-electing Musharraf from sitting NA'

Former NA speaker Gauhar Ayub Khan has said that there is no constitutional hitch in re-electing Gen Pervez Musharraf as president from the sitting National Assembly. "There is no mention of the Senate and provincial assemblies as the electoral college for presidential election in the Constitution and the NA can elect him with a simple majority," he told newsmen here on Monday. He claimed that the majority General Musharraf needed for his re-election was very much there, with the ruling coalition ready to vote for him. He said the credibility of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League had improved in the public and it would form the next government, which would again be a

coalition. However, he was nor sure which party was going to be the partner of the PML...

The News, 18 September 2007

No patch-up with Musharraf, Nawaz tells Saudi king

Two-time former premier Nawaz Sharif told Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud in plain words that he would never indulge in any sort of patch-up with President Pervez Musharraf. I will not talk with Gen Musharraf under any circumstances, sources quoted Nawaz as telling opposition leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman about contents of his meeting with King Abdullah the other day. According to sources, King Abdullah and Nawaz Sharif had discussions on two points, the patch-up with Musharraf and unprecedented reaction of Nawaz s support over his exile to Saudi Arabia on and after September 10. The former premier apprised Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who had a two and a half hour meeting with him at his Jeddah palace, about the two-point agenda taken up in his the first ever meeting with the Saudi King after deportation. The Saudi King raised with Nawaz the reaction shown by the Pakistanis over his deportation to Saudi Arabia. He expressed his regrets over the slogans and the demonstration staged in Pakistan, the sources said...

The Times of India, 18 September 2007

'ISI should be roped in to tackle terror'

As India and Pakistan gear up to hold the second meeting of their joint anti-terror mechanism, a security expert on Tuesday suggested that the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) be roped in to tackle the menace. Describing Pakistan's ISI as "a powerful pillar" of that country's establishment, the expert said "it could be realistic enough to hold dialogue with the ISI and aim at a new set of confidence building measures and mutual cooperation." In a forthcoming book Transnational Terrorism, its editor Chintamani Mahapatra said New Delhi "should have woken up to the reality of the existence of a powerful pillar of Pakistan's ruling establishment" like the ISI. Mahapatra, a professor of international affairs in the Jawaharlal Nehru University here, recommended opening of a dialogue with the ISI for a "diplomatic solution of a quasi-military problem"...

The Hindu, 18 September 2007

Pakistan conveys protest

The Pakistan Foreign Office said it summoned Indian Deputy High Commissioner Manpreet Vohra here on Monday to lodge a protest against the Indian Army's plans to take tourists for trekking to the Siachen glacier. The Indian Army said last week that it was taking the first group of trekkers this month to the glacier, located at an altitude of 6,300 metres. Foreign Office spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said Siachen was "illegally occupied" by India in 1984 in violation of the Shimla Agreement. The issue was under discussion within the framework of the composite dialogue between the two countries, and its final status was still not agreed upon. "The Indian Deputy High Commissioner was called to the Foreign Office today and was told that the Indian plans to open up the disputed territory for tourist purposes is viewed with deep concern," Ms. Aslam said at her weekly media briefing. The spokesperson said that Siachen remained a conflict zone, and the reported move by India could vitiate the atmosphere between the two countries...

The News, 18 September 2007

Tailor-made and immoral (Editorial)

What can one say of the government's move to exempt the president from Article 63 of the Constitution except to remark -- and of course with some exasperation -- that, oh well the show now has well and truly begun. And what exactly will this 'show' be? The show to re-elect the president, who also is the army chief and has been so for almost nine years (will be nine years on Oct 6) and only now, under much international and domestic pressure, is planning to give that up, but not before he is guaranteed a five-year term. And Monday's revelation that this is exactly what has been done - a report carried by the state-run APP news agency quoted a senior official of the Election Commission of Pakistan as confirming that a change has indeed been made to exempt the president from the applicant of Article 63 which disqualifies any individual from being eligible for membership of parliament if they have been a government servant within the last two years of such an election...

Daily Times, 18 September 2007

Crunch time for brawling politicians (Editorial)

As the Election Commission (EC) gets ready to accept the nomination papers of General Pervez Musharraf for his re-election to the post of the President of Pakistan, the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) has announced that all its legislators in the National and Provincial assemblies intend to resign on the day the EC accepts his nomination papers. Apart from the constitutional-legal implications of this resignation decision, there will be consequences of the APDM's decision to also launch a "mass protest" movement. The EC's decision to change the rules of presidential election in the light of two rulings of the Supreme Court in 2002 and 2005, setting aside the disabling application of Article 63, has divided all kinds of opinion in the country. The opposition politician has cried foul in unison, but the lawyers too are divided according to where they stand on the "movement for judicial independence" that began in March this year. The opposition lawyers say that the EC cannot change its rules without reference to the Supreme Court which is in the process of hearing cases tantamount to a review of its earlier decisions...

Dawn, 19 September 2007

Musharraf to hang up uniform...if re-elected

In a significant move, President Gen Pervez Musharraf through his counsel declared before the Supreme Court on Tuesday that he would step down as army chief if he was elected president for a second term by the parliament and four provincial assemblies. The statement is the first official announcement by President Musharraf himself to quell all kinds of speculations about the timing of taking off his uniform. "If elected for the second term as the president, General Pervez Musharraf shall relinquish charge of the office of the Chief of Army Staff soon after election, but before taking oath of office of the president of Pakistan for the next term. "The nomination paper of Gen Pervez Musharraf should be scrutinised by the Chief Election Commissioner/Returning Officer independently and in accordance with the law," said the statement submitted by Sharifuddin Pirzada, senior counsel for Pervez Musharraf...

The Nation, 19 September 2007

Opp rejects President's uniform plan

Taking strong exception to the undertaking given by government's counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada that General Musharraf would doff his uniform if re-elected from the present assemblies, all mainstream opposition parties have termed this move illegal and unconstitutional. The spokesperson of Pakistan Peoples Party Farhatullah Babar while reacting to Sharifuddin Pirzada's assurance said PPP was surprised and disappointed to listen that General Musharraf will contest his re-election as President of Pakistan from the present Parliament in uniform. Mr Babar said PPP was under the impression that General Musharraf would seek re-election after leaving the post of army chief from the present Parliament. "While PPP believes that it is unconstitutional for a public servant, which General Musharraf is as army chief, to contest for elections until a period of two years has lapsed, it still expected General Musharraf to leave the post of army chief prior to seeking re-election," he maintained...

Dawn, 19 September 2007

It's a political response to a legal challenge

President Pervez Musharraf seemed to have given a political response to a legal challenge to his power when he promised to the Supreme Court on Tuesday to give up as army chief if he were elected for another term, in a move that could arouse more frowns than smiles. Political and legal sources said the move, during the court's hearing of petitions challenging the legality of the president's dual offices, could throw up more dust in a raging controversy even outside the courtroom and hardly block more legal challenges when he formally becomes a candidate for election to the office he is holding for more than seven years. What government spokesmen depicted as a major initiative towards a transition to full democracy was seen by opposition sources as a veiled threat for political purposes rather than making any difference to the existing legal position...

Dawn, 19 September 2007

PPP's terms for not quitting assemblies

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has said it will not participate in Gen Pervez Musharraf's re-election as president but it will not resign from the assemblies provided its three conditions are met. "Once Gen Musharraf files his nomination papers, the PPP will decide whether it will resign from parliament or boycott the elections. In any event, the PPP will not vote for Gen Musharraf as president from this parliament either in uniform or even after leaving the post of the Chief of the Army Staff believing he is barred from contesting unless there is a constitutional amendment," said PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar in a statement on Tuesday. However, Mr Babar said if Gen Musharraf would first leave the COAS post prior to seeking his re-election as president from the present parliament, take measures for national reconciliation by passing a law giving immunity to those parliamentarians who had not been proved guilty by any court in the last 10 years and repeal the ban on the twice-elected prime minister being eligible to contest for a third time, the PPP would not resign and leave the issue of eligibility to the superior judiciary to determine...

Dawn, 19 September 2007

'Military to resist move to end its control over govt'

The military may counter any move that prevents President Gen Pervez Musharraf from seeking re-election by imposing martial law, warns I. A. Rahman, a leading Pakistani intellectual. Mr Rahman, who is visiting Washington, told a group of South Asian journalists that the military in Pakistan was not yet willing to transfer control to a civilian set-up and would resist any move to end its control over political institutions, such as the government. He said the military had tremendous interest in the civilian economy and was not willing to give it up any time soon. Mr Rahman believed that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's attempt to return home failed to bring the people out in the streets because his party had not made sufficient preparations for the event. The PML-N, he said, also expected the Jamaat-i-Islami to bring its workers to Islamabad airport but the Jamaat failed to deliver. The JI leaders, he said, were focused on keeping the MMA intact and were not yet ready to accept another major political task...

Dawn, 19 September 2007

Uniform issue internal matter: White House

The Bush administration on Tuesday refused to take any position on whether President Pervez Musharraf should quit the military before or after his re-election, although in previous statements senior US officials repeatedly reminded the general that he had pledged to settle the uniform dispute before the elections. Earlier on Tuesday, a senior lawyer for President Musharraf told the Supreme Court in Islamabad that he plans to quit his post as army chief if he wins forthcoming presidential elections. At a White House briefing, spokeswoman Dana Perino refused to get involved in the dispute over Gen Musharraf's uniform. "As regards to the Pakistani supreme court looking into this matter of the uniform, that is an internal Pakistani matter that we'll let them debate," she said. "What we would like to see is free and fair elections in Pakistan," she added. The State Department also expressed similar views, adding that the United States "wants to see Pakistan succeed as a modern democratic country..."

The Asian Age, 19 September 2007

'Pak's safety record in nuke power is excellent'

Pakistan has an excellent safety record in nuclear power operations, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) chairman Anwar Ali said on Tuesday. "Pakistan accords highest priority to safety in its nuclear facilities and it has an excellent safety record in nuclear power operations," Mr Ali said. He added, "Our safeguards record has remained immaculate over the past several decades and a comprehensive export control act is in place to ensure control over materials, goods, technologies and equipment related to nuclear and biological weapons and their delivery systems." Addressing the 51st general conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as the head of the delegation from Pakistan at Vienna, Austria, he said Pakistan has benefited a lot from the nuclear safety expertise available through the IAEA. Mr Ali said that with growing emphasis on meeting higher standards of safety, international cooperation is essential for necessary equipment to ensure safety and reliability of nuclear facilities...

The Nation, 20 September 2007

17th Amend result of political deal: SC

Many faces among the audience in Court Room No 1 of Supreme Court turned red on Wednesday when Justice Javed Iqbal observed that the political parties took an extra-constitutional step by entering into compromise with President General Pervez Musharraf for approving 17th Amendment in 1973 Constitution. Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) leaders Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Hafiz Hussain Ahmed and Liaquat Baloch were prominent on the occasion when the remarks came from Justice Javed Iqbal, a senior member of the nine-member bench of the apex court, while hearing a set of identical constitutional petitions challenging dual offices of General Musharraf and disputing his candidature for another term in Presidency. MMA leaders, who are now vehemently opposing the re-election of General Musharraf, had played a vital role in legitimizing his rule from 2001 till date by entering into a deal that resulted into the passage of 17th Amendment in the Constitution by the parliament after being elected in 2002...

Dawn, 20 September 2007

Musharraf urged to separate 2 offices

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon urged President Gen Pervez Musharraf on Wednesday to hang up his military uniform before the end of his current presidential term. Mr McKinnon, who arrived here in the morning along with a high-level delegation on a three-day visit to Pakistan, is reported to have stressed during his meeting with the president that the process of democratisation in the country would succeed only if the two offices were separated. A member of the delegation, however, said that Mr McKinnon did not ask Gen Musharraf to quit his army post before the presidential polls. "We are not here to tell Musharraf what to do and what not to do. The Commonwealth's position is well known to all," he remarked. He said the secretary-general reiterated Commonwealth's position on the issue of the president's retention of the two offices, as spelt out by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Malta in November 2005...

Dawn, 20 September 2007

Govt to accept SC verdict: Shujaat: Uniform issue

The government will accept the Supreme Court's verdict in the president's dual offices case and will act in accordance with the Constitution, according to the chief of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. Talking to reporters at the party's secretariat, he ruled out the possibility of imposition of martial law and said that the government would adopt other constitutional options to end the crisis, like extending the assemblies' tenure. About the ongoing debate on the issue of president's uniform, he said: "This issue must not be considered in the light of the wishes of the government or the opposition. It is better left to the Supreme Court. We will accept the Supreme Court's verdict," he asserted. Referring to APDM's threat of resigning from assemblies if the Election Commission accepted Gen Musharraf's nomination papers, Chaudhry Shujaat said: "Time for resigning has passed because the tenure of assemblies is nearing its end."...

The Nation, 20 September 2007

BB warns of confrontation if dictatorship strengthened

Former premier and PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto has said that she can hold talks with

President Gen Pervez Musharraf if he advocates democracy in the country. She warned "confrontation" in case he (Musharraf) strengthened dictatorship. In an interview with a British TV channel on Wednesday, she said that Musharraf's statement alone that he abandons his army rank in case he gets himself re-elected for second term "is disappointing" because he had not fulfilled his promises in the past. When asked about her return, she said, "I will return home on October 18 in any case whether there is any deal or not." Earlier, talking to BBC, she underlined that she is utterly disappointed over the fact that President Musharraf will retire from the Army post after being re-elected President of the country. "Agreement or no agreement! I will be back at any cost in Pakistan," Benazir said...

The Nation, 20 September 2007

Shujaat's naïveté (Editorial)

PML(Q) President Ch Shujaat Hussain promised to give the nation good news but has only come up with a warning that national and provincial assemblies will be suspended if General Musharraf cannot be re-elected by the existing electoral college. Talking to a delegation of retired British bureaucrats who met him in Islamabad on Tuesday, he reiterated the official stance that the Election Commission had amended the law governing presidential election keeping in view legal and constitutional aspects. It was no surprise to hear from him that "uniform" is a non-issue and the opposition continue to talk about it in a bid to draw political mileage out of it. The ruling leadership's desperation to get General Musharraf re-elected to the presidency in uniform is not difficult to understand. It knows very well that without the support of a powerful president the ruling coalition may be completely routed in the next general elections...

The News, 20 September 2007

Not good enough, Mr President (Editorial)

The president's intention of leaving the post of army chief after being re-elected to his post, as conveyed by his lawyer to the Supreme Court during a hearing on Tuesday unfortunately is not good enough and is only going to make the next presidential election all the more controversial. A nine-member bench hearing the case was told that "if elected" the president "shall relinquish charge of the office of the Chief of Army Staff soon after election, but before taking oath of office of the president of Pakistan for the next term". This means that the president would seek re-election not as a civilian but as army chief but would take oath as a civilian, not army chief. Clearly, this may present a legal conundrum as well because if this is the plan that the president wishes to implement, then his status as a presidential candidate will be very different from that when he takes oath for another term...

The News, 20 September 2007

Tense times for the military (Dr Adil Najam)

These are tense times for the Pakistan military. The chief of army staff (COAS) is enmeshed in and distracted by the pressures of political wheeling and dealings. There is an escalating civil war-like situation on our northwestern frontiers where soldiers are routinely being killed or kidnapped on a nearly daily basis, military installations are being attacked, and military casualties are piling up. Most importantly, public resentment

against the military as an institution is as high as one can ever recall, and growing. Arguably, not since 1971 has the Pakistan military been under such internal strain. All indications suggest that despite the strain, the Pakistan military remains a professional institution. There is no evidence that these pressures have created serious internal fissures in either rank or file. At least, not yet. However, in looking to the future, we must be concerned lest these pressures grow to an extent where they begin to undermine the integrity of the institution. After all, the integrity of the military is a key ingredient in the integrity of the state...

Dawn, 21 September 2007

Countdown begins, poll on Oct 6

The Election Commission announced on Thursday the schedule for what has been termed the country's most controversial presidential election, despite the fact that certain key issues relating to the election are at present being adjudicated by the Supreme Court. According to the schedule, votes will be cast on Oct 6, six days ahead of the eighth anniversary of the coup that brought Gen Musharraf into power. Chief Election Commissioner Qazi Mohammad Farooq, who announced the schedule, will be the returning officer. He will preside over a joint session of the two houses of parliament to conduct the poll proceedings. Chief justices of the four high courts will be presiding officers in provincial assemblies. The polling will be held from 10am to 3pm. Returning and presiding officers will receive nomination papers till 12 noon on Sept 27. Papers will be scrutinised in Islamabad on Sept 29 at 10am, and Oct 1 is the date set for withdrawal of candidature with 12 noon as the time limit. The list of final contestants will be issued at 1pm the same day...

Dawn, 21 September 2007

APDM hits out at poll commission: Threat of en masse resignation

The All Parties Democratic Movement has described the announcement of the presidential election schedule ahead of a Supreme Court decision on petitions challenging the holding of two offices by Gen Pervez Musharraf, as a step to facilitate the president's re-election in uniform. Talking to journalists after a meeting with Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon here on Thursday, Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Ahsan Iqbal said that members of the APDM would resign en masse from parliament in protest against Gen Musharraf's nomination. He said the alliance would hold a meeting on Friday to chalk out a plan to block Gen Musharraf's election from the present assemblies. He said the APDM parties had already decided to resign en bloc from assemblies if the Election Commission accepted the nomination papers of Gen Musharraf. He said the APDM was opposed to the presidential election from the current assemblies and considered it an unconstitutional step on the part of the ECP...

Dawn, 21 September 2007

Benazir opposes re-election of Musharraf

Indicating her frustration with the government's move to amend a law to ensure President Pervez Musharraf's re-election, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto argues that as a government servant, the general is precluded from seeking re-election in or out of uniform. In an article published in The Washington Post on Thursday, Ms Bhutto points

out that the law requires a two-year wait before a member of the military can run for the presidency. "The general can respond to the people's desire for legitimate presidential, parliamentary and ministerial elections, or he can tamper with the Constitution," she adds. "The latter choice would risk a fresh confrontation with the judiciary, the legal community and the political parties. Such a confrontation could lead to another declaration of martial law, civil unrest, or both," she warns...

Dawn, 21 September 2007

Lawyers plan to besiege EC offices

Lawyers will lay siege to the offices of the Election Commission of Pakistan on Sept 29 - the day of scrutiny of the nomination papers of President Gen Pervez Musharraf.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Supreme Court Bar Association president Munir A. Malik, Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan, Hamid Khan and Ali Ahmed Kurd said that lawyers would continue their peaceful struggle for supremacy of rule of law. Mr Malik accused the government of using negative tactics to suppress the lawyers' movement. He said that on Sept 29 the lawyers would besiege the Election Commission building and take out rallies throughout the country to express their resentment. Hamid Khan said the government had resorted to violence and was using brutal tactics to suppress lawyers' struggle. Two eminent lawyers had been killed in Karachi and cases had been registered against lawyers holding a peaceful rally in Chakwal, he said...

The Nation, 21 September 2007

Musharraf may quit army post on Oct 7

The election schedule announced by the Election Commission on Thursday addresses an abiding concern of President Gen. Pervez Musharraf on some crucial changes in army's top hierarchy before he sheds his uniform. Defence analysts while underlining the significance of October 6 as the polling date, speculated that Gen. Musharraf will get elected on October 6 and immediately name the new army chief and chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. Musharraf's counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada filed a statement before the Supreme Court on Tuesday that if elected, the President would quit as army chief soon after election and before taking fresh oath of office for second term as president on November 16. "The appointment of the new army chief will coincide with the declaration, most likely on October 7, that he is relinquishing the charge of army chief", according to a senior retired general who preferred not to be named...

Dawn, 21 September 2007

Bin Laden declares 'war' on Musharraf in new tape

Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden called on Muslims in Pakistan to wage holy war against the government of President Pervez Musharraf in a new audio message issued on Thursday. Bin Laden declared Al Qaeda's intention to retaliate for the blood spilled by "champions of Islam," in the new recording produced by the terror network's media arm As-Sahab and monitored by the US-based SITE Intelligence Group. "It is obligatory on the Muslims in Pakistan to carry out jihad (holy war) and fighting to remove Pervez, his government, his army and those who help him," said the voice in the tape. The recording was accompanied by video footage of the Western world's most wanted man, including scenes of him firing a machine gun and walking in a mountainous area with his deputy

Ayman al-Zawahiri. The SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors extremist websites, said the video footage had been previously released. The threat from bin Laden was swiftly dismissed by Pakistan. "We are already committed to fighting extremists and terrorists -- there is no change in our policy," chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told AFP...

Dawn, 22 September 2007

APDM lawmakers to resign on 29th: Decision to launch countrywide struggle

Legislators of the All Parties Democratic Movement will quit national and provincial assemblies on Sept 29 as part of the alliance's plan to foil President Gen Pervez Musharraf's bid to get re-elected in uniform from the present assemblies. The alliance also decided at its meeting held here on Friday to launch a countrywide struggle from Sept 30. Briefing journalists after the meeting, Pakistan Muslim League-N chairman Raja Zafarul Haq said the alliance would hold a protest demonstration outside the Supreme Court building on Monday when the court would resume hearing of petitions challenging the holding of two offices by the president. He said a sit-in would be staged outside offices of the Election Commission on Sept 27, the date for filing of nomination papers for the presidential election. From Sept 30, he said, parties in the APDM would hold daily demonstrations all over the country. Leaders of the APDM said they had been in touch with MMA secretary-general Maulana Fazlur Rehman and claimed that he had backed all decisions taken by the alliance in two meetings held in his absence...

Dawn, 22 September 2007

PPP describes APDM decisions as premature

The Pakistan People's Party rejected as premature the decisions taken by the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) on Friday and apprehended that they would backfire. PPP secretary-general Raja Pervaiz Ashraf said that his party would not take any decision in haste. "We'll first wait for a decision on petitions being heard by the Supreme Court. Then we'll call a meeting of the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy and take appropriate decisions," he said. He said his party would consider the option of resigning from assemblies only if the government did not accept the demands of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto. Mr Ashraf said his party wanted a smooth transition from military dictatorship to democracy through free and fair elections and would not let the rulers wriggle out. But, he regretted, the APDM had quite a different strategy because of which the nascent coalition could break up...

Dawn, 22 September 2007

Changes made in key army positions

President Gen Pervez Musharraf on Friday made some changes in key army positions, appointing a new head of the Inter Services Intelligence and commander of the Rawalpindi-based 10 Corps from among six major-generals promoted to the rank of lieutenant-generals. Maj-Gen Nadeem Taj, once regarded as Gen Musharraf's eyes and ears as head of the Military Intelligence, has been made director-general of the ISI and Maj-Gen Mohsin Kamal, who is little known in non-military circles, has been appointed as Corps Commander of Rawalpindi. As a brigadier, Gen Nadeem Taj had served as Gen Musharraf's military secretary. He was later promoted as a two-star general, but he

continued to serve in the same capacity when the army chief became the president. Later, he was appointed head of the Military Intelligence and apart from performing his routine job, he played a key role in overseeing the 2002 general elections and, at a later stage, in initiating a back-channel dialogue with Benazir Bhutto, chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party...

Dawn, 22 September 2007

Pakistan takes Osama's threat seriously

Osama bin Laden's call for Pakistanis to rise up against their US-allied military leader struck a chord among an angry, extremist minority but resonated little among the wider public and was dismissed by the government on Friday as "ridiculous." Still, it could feed into growing debate over whether Pakistan is sacrificing its own stability by supporting Washington's unpopular war on terror. The Al Qaeda chief's audio message, released on Thursday, urged Pakistanis to wage a jihad or holy war against Gen Pervez Musharraf, whose decision to send troops into the Red Mosque in the capital and against Islamic militants at the Afghan border has stoked an insurgency. The government on Friday dismissed the idea that many in Pakistan would respond to the latest call to arms. "If Osama bin Laden has spoken to the people and urged them to rise, and the people were really following him, they would have done so much earlier," said army spokesman Maj-Gen Waheed Arshad. He doesn't have much following here."...

The Nation, 22 September 2007

A lame duck parliament (Editorial)

The remarks by some of the judges sitting on the Supreme Court bench, which is hearing petitions against the president's holding of the dual office, should serve as an eye opener to political leaders. They rightly pointed out that political parties were themselves responsible for some of the problems for which the remedy was being sought from the courts. There were parties who welcomed the military takeover of October 1999 while others subsequently brokered an agreement with Gen Musharraf that indemnified actions taken by him and legitimised his holding of two offices. It was remarked that while those inside the court were busy in legal wrangling, some of the parties were busy conducting a power sharing deal with Gen Musharraf. A judge asked why the legislature supposed to be the supreme body failed to exercise its authority to dispense with the constitutional provision which validated President Musharraf's actions. Few would disagree that political parties too are responsible for a number of woes the country is facing today...

The Nation, 22 September 2007

Political sophistry (Shamshad Ahmad)

Finally the curtain on General Musharraf's scheme of things on "free and fair" elections in Pakistan is lifting. He proclaims himself to be "indispensable" for the country and wants to remain in power at every cost and under all circumstances. He says he will be re-elected as president by the current assemblies, and has already amended the related electoral rules to overcome any "constitutional" hurdles to his "eligibility." Through his attorney, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, known in Pakistan as the "wizard of Jeddah" and also seen as the country's unrivalled "judicial exterminator", General Musharraf has told the Supreme Court that "if elected for a second term as president, he will take off his uniform

before taking oath of office as president." In other words, the future of democracy in Pakistan is now predicated on General Musharraf's re-election as president for another full term and that too in uniform which he promises to doff once he has pocketed the presidency. The future of democracy in Pakistan is also predicated on letting his nomination papers "accepted" without any interference in accordance with the "law" which under his authority, the Chief Election Commissioner has already modified...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

Crackdown on APDM leadership: Hashmi, Hafiz Hussain served detention orders

In a surprise move, the government on Saturday night launched a crackdown on the leadership of the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM), detaining some opposition leaders in a bid to pre-empt their plan to stage a demonstration outside the Supreme Court building on Monday. Informed sources told Dawn that acting PML-N president Makhdoom Javed Hashmi, MNA Tehmina Daultana and MMA leader Hafiz Hussain Ahmed had been served detention orders at their apartments in the Parliament Lodges. Another MMA member of the National Assembly, Mian Mohammad Aslam, was picked from his residence and taken to the Adiyala jail. According to the sources, a police contingent raided the house of MMA President Qazi Hussain Ahmed, but failed to arrest him as he had already left the place. Another police team tried to arrest Syed Mohammad Bilal, the chief of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), Islamabad. Brig (retd) Javed Iqbal Cheema, a spokesman for the ministry of interior, confirmed the move, saying that the government had taken the step to maintain law and order in the wake of a call by the APDM to besiege the Supreme Court, which was expected to return a verdict on Tuesday on petitions challenging Gen Musharraf's candidature for the office of president...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

Fazl backs APDM decisions'

The Pakistan Muslim League-N and the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), two major components of the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM), claimed on Saturday that Leader of Opposition in National Assembly Maulana Fazlur Rehman had not opposed the APDM's decision to resign from assemblies but had only complained that he was not informed in advance about the date of submitting resignations. Talking separately to Dawn here on Saturday, PML-N information secretary Ahsan Iqbal and a senior leader of the Jamiat-i-Ulema-Islam-F Hafiz Hussain Ahmed asserted that Maulana Fazlur Rehman was fully behind the APDM's decision to resign from the assemblies on Sept 29. Both Mr Iqbal and Mr Ahmed said that Maulana Fazlur Rehman was present in one of the meetings of the APDM in which it had been decided that APDM's component parties would resign from the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies on the day the Election Commission of Pakistan would accept nomination papers of Gen Pervez Musharraf for presidential poll...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

'Assemblies' terms may be extended'

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on Saturday hinted that the government could exercise any option, including extension of the term of the present assemblies, if the opposition members resigned from the parliament. This indication came in his address at the Sindh

Chief Minister's House while he was discussing strategy for the upcoming presidential election. Responding to concerns expressed by some of the ruling party members over the evolving political scenario following the planned return of PPP chairperson Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister said there was no cause to worry. The government would deal with the situation when she returns, he added. Answering a question, he said the government was in contact with various political elements and parties because it believes that a better and stable political environment can be created through dialogue...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

Lawyers to besiege NWFP assembly on Oct 6

The city lawyers unanimously resolved here on Saturday to besiege the provincial assembly building in order to prevent NWFP legislators from casting vote in the presidential election on October 6. They called upon the Pakistan People's Party chairperson Benazir Bhutto and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman not to support General Pervez Musharraf in his re-election bid. Lawyers boycotted the courts in protest against a raid on the office of Ishtiaq Ibraheem, secretary general of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association (PHCBA), and taking away by force of two of his clients allegedly by intelligence agencies. Carrying banners and placards inscribed with anti- government slogans, they took out a procession from the high court. They were chanting slogans against General Musharraf and PML chief Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. Earlier, a joint general body meeting of the PHCBA and the Peshawar District Bar Association was held. Chaired by PHCBA president Abdul Lateef Afridi, the meeting unanimously adopted various resolutions...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

Governor hints at troop withdrawal from Fata

NWFP Governor Ali Muhammad Jan Aurakzai has hinted that the government will withdraw additional troops from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), saying that the decision has been taken in view of national interests. Mr Aurakzai told a group of journalists here at the Governor's House on Saturday that he did not rule out India's involvement in the current turmoil in the tribal region where militants had intensified attacks on security forces. "The government has credible evidence which proved Indian involvement in the area," he said, adding that New Delhi had opened 19 consulates and offices in Afghan provinces adjacent to the Pakistan border. He said that being a frontline state in the war against terrorism, Pakistan would keep army troops along western borders and a proposal was under consideration to remove additional forces from the tribal region. "We will take decisions to safeguard our national interest. We do not care if anybody likes it or not," Mr Aurakzai said...

Dawn, 23 September 2007

Opposition in disarray (Editorial)

It is difficult to say who between the government and the opposition is capable of demonstrating a higher degree of political gaucherie. The government's stubbornness is centred on President Pervez Musharraf's insistence on perpetuating himself in power. From this have followed policies that focus on giving the general another five years - though, mercifully, without uniform. If it were in his power, he would have sought re-

election as head of state while brandishing the swagger stick. However, thanks to the popular support to the "non-functional CJ" and the massive rebuff delivered by the Supreme Court, the general had the good sense to realise that the nation would no more tolerate him as a president in uniform. Hence the pledge to discard the uniform before taking oath as president. The opposition's ranks have been characterised by disunity bordering on chaos and lack of consistency in policies. The opposition consists of honest hardliners as well as conscientious soft-liners, besides turncoats, time-servers and the dubious like their counterparts in the "king's party". With less than a fortnight left for the crucial presidential vote on Oct 6, the opposition has failed to demonstrate even a semblance of unity...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

Move to thwart APDM show: Activists barred from entering capital

A crackdown on opposition leaders and activists belonging to parties in the All Pakistan Democratic Movement (APDM) alliance continued across the country for the second day on Sunday with the government having decided to use all means to stop them from staging a demonstration outside the Supreme Court on Monday, sources told Dawn. Over 40 opposition leaders and workers were arrested on Sunday in Islamabad and scores of opposition leaders, mainly from the NWFP, were being stopped from entering the capital. There were reports that the authorities had planned to round up around 700 political activists in an attempt to foil the opposition's plan to stage an "impressive protest rally" on Monday. "We have written to all provincial governments that leaders and workers of the APDM and other people would not be allowed to proceed to the Supreme Court," Chief Commissioner Islamabad Hamid Ali Khan told Dawn. Interior ministry sources confirmed that prominent politicians and activists of the APDM would not be allowed to enter Islamabad...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

Fazl advocates middle path; meets Nawaz

Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Maulana Fazlur Rehman says he will present his point of view at the APDM meeting in Peshawar on Tuesday so that appropriate decisions are taken keeping in view the ground realities. He said he was confident a consensus decision would be taken at the meeting. The Maulana told Dawn that he had already summoned a JUI-F meeting on Monday to formulate his party's strategy, before the APDM's Peshawar meeting. However, he cautioned that in the enthusiasm for the struggle for democracy one should not push the country towards another martial law. "I am striving to make my colleagues understand that we need to adopt a middle path, rather than extreme positions. Breakdown of institutions could lead to chaos and hurt the short- and long-term interests of the country. It may also encourage non-democratic forces to get in". He stressed that all decisions within his own party and within the APDM should be taken unanimously...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

Nawaz to come back after Eid: spokesman

Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) spokesman Dr Saeed Elahi has said that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif will return to the country soon after Eidul Fitr. He said that efforts

were under way at different levels to facilitate the return of the PML (N) leader from Saudi Arabia. Addressing a news conference at the press club on Sunday, he said the deportation of Mr Sharif was a mockery of the Supreme Court verdict that had allowed him to return to the country. Dr Saeed said that Nawaz Sharif was perturbed over the uncertain situation in Balochistan and assured that elements involved in the killing of Baloch people, including Nawab Akbar Bugti, would be held accountable for excesses committed by them. Condemning the oppressive policies of the government, he said that Muslims were killing each other in the holy month of Ramazan because of unwise policies of the government. Referring to the fighting between security forces and insurgents in Balochistan and Waziristan, he criticised President Musharraf for pitting the army against its own people...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

Benazir warns of civil uprising

Frustrated with slow progress in talks with the government, the chairperson of Pakistan People's Party warned General Pervez Musharraf on Sunday that failure to reach an "agreement" or a power-sharing deal might lead to an uprising in the country. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, the former prime minister said: "It is up to the government to decide whether it wants a peaceful transition to democracy through free and fair elections or face people's power." She again reminded that a "Ukrainian-style Orange Revolution" was possible in Pakistan. Protests erupted in Ukraine in 2005 following allegations that the government had rigged elections and ended only after opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko took over. Efforts to strike an understanding, Ms Bhutto said, were designed to achieve a "peaceful transition" to democracy and a stronger balance between the powers of the president and parliament...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

'Political turmoil affecting terror war'

"Political turmoil and a spate of brazen attacks by Taliban fighters are forcing Pakistan's president to scale back his government's pursuit of Al Qaeda," the Los Angeles Times said on Sunday quoting US intelligence officials. The newspaper observed in a report that "the development threatens a pillar of US counter-terrorism strategy, which has depended on Pakistan to play a lead role in keeping Al Qaeda under pressure to reduce its ability to coordinate strikes". "President Pervez Musharraf, facing a potentially fateful election next month and confronting calls to yield power after years of autocratic rule, appears too vulnerable to pursue aggressive counter-terrorism operations at the behest of the United States" the intelligence officials told the paper. At the same time, the Pakistani military has suffered a series of embarrassing setbacks at the hands of militants in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda figures are believed to be hiding, the paper says...

Dawn, 24 September 2007

'Changes in US not to affect aid'

The Bush administration has assured Islamabad that it will issue the required certification for Pakistan to continue to receive US aid, says Ambassador Mahmud Ali Durrani. Briefing Pakistani journalists on the second round of US-Pakistan strategic partnership

talks held in Islamabad last week, the ambassador said that any political change in Washington would not affect the US aid. The opposition Democrats are widely expected to win the 2008 presidential elections in the United States, causing some to speculate that it may affect Washington's relations with Islamabad. Democrat lawmakers played a key role in adding a Pakistan-specific clause to an anti-terrorism bill in the US Congress, which links the US aid to an annual certification from the White House saying that it is satisfied with Pakistan's performance in the war against terror. President Bush signed the bill into law on Aug 3...

Dawn, 25 September 2007

Justice Wajih comes out against Musharraf

As part of its challenge to President Pervez Musharraf's election, the lawyers' community on Monday nominated a retired Supreme Court judge, Wajihuddin Ahmad, as its candidate in the Oct 6 presidential election. "Justice (ret'd) Wajihuddin Ahmad will file his nomination before the Election Commission by Thursday," announced a former chief of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Tariq Mehmood, at the Supreme Court building. Tariq Mehmood was in the forefront of the campaign by the lawyers' community for the restoration of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry. Justice Wajihuddin had refused to take the oath of allegiance to a provisional constitution order (PCO) in 2001. The President of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), Munir Malik, was quoted as saying after the announcement that Justice Wajihuddin was the first judge to resist the Musharraf-led military rule...

The Nation, 25 September 2007

SC not office of RO, Dual-office judgment expected tomorrow, says AG

A nine-member bench of Supreme Court Monday dismissed the plea of three petitioners while hearing a set of constitutional petitions challenging the dual-office of President General Pervez Musharraf and disputing his candidature for another term in Presidency. However, the bench is still hearing the arguments of lawyers and counter arguments of government lawyers and amici curiae on five other petitions filed by Jamaat-e-Islami, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf, Communist Party of Pakistan and Dr Anwarul Haq, a senior medical specialist. Under Article 184 (3) of the Constitution, these petitioners are seeking disqualification of General Musharraf from next presidential elections and praying the court for barring him (Musharraf) from continuing to occupy President's office. Separately, declaring the dislodged petitions as infructuous, ineffective and not maintainable, the august bench turned down petitions of freelance journalist Shahid Orakzai, Moulvi Iqbal Haider of Awami Himayat Tehrik and Shahid Iqbal, a retired government official...

The News, 25 September 2007

Islamabad sealed to foil opposition's show

The federal capital administration on Monday used its full might to foil the opposition's protest in front of the Supreme Court as the apex court resumed the hearing of petitions challenging President Musharraf's re-election plan. The city was sealed and the Supreme Court building and its surrounding areas were cordoned off as law-enforcement agencies, assisted by the Punjab police, the Frontier Constabulary and the Rangers, as well as

horse-mounted units of the Punjab and Islamabad police, were seen all prepared to take on opposition protesters. The police arrested over 80 activists of opposition parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), from different parts of the metropolis while they were trying to break through the police barriers. "The secretariat police arrested about 30 workers of different political parties on Monday morning before they could reach the Supreme Court building," DSP Secretariat Gulfam Nasir told this correspondent...

The News, 25 September 2007

Parliament behind president in uniform: SC

Justice Javed Iqbal, member of the Supreme Court's larger bench hearing identical petitions challenging the dual office held by the president, on Monday observed that it was not the court but parliament that validated the president through the 17th Amendment and allowed him to continue in uniform. The judge made this observation when Engineer Jamil Ahmad Malik, one of the petitioners in the case, was presenting his arguments. Other members of the bench are Justice Javed Iqbal, Justice Abdul Hameed Dogar, Justice Sardar Muhammad Raza Khan, Justice Muhammad Nawaz Abbasi, Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokar, Justice Falik Sher, Justice Mian Shakirullah Jan and Justice M Javed. Engineer Jamil Ahmad Malik submitted before the nine-member bench headed by Justice Rana Bhagwandas that President Musharraf was prolonging his rule with the crutches of the Supreme Court. He expressed no confidence in three judges of the bench and said they were sitting on the Supreme Judicial Council that passed the restrained order of the chief justice on March 9; therefore, they were not impartial...

Dawn, 25 September 2007

Politics of resignations: opposition not to quit Senate

All the opposition parties, with some ifs and buts, are agreed to resign from the National Assembly to block Gen Pervez Musharraf's re-election as president but none is willing to quit the Senate. That looks intriguing to political analysts who say if the opposition is serious in making life difficult for President Musharraf it should quit the Senate which is a vital part of the president's electoral college. Resignations in the national and provincial assemblies would not create a crisis for President Musharraf but resignations in the Senate would - by creating a political vacuum by rendering the Senate, a permanent constitutional body, incomplete. It would be completed only after newly elected national and provincial assemblies elect the replacements for the resigning Senators. Both sides across the political divide have reasons to offer for resigning from the national and provincial assemblies but not from the Senate. Critics of the opposition's resignation strategy say that the anti-Musharraf parties know that the life of the assemblies ends in two months but the term of half of the members of the Senate expires after two years and that of the other half after five years...

Dawn, 25 September 2007

India-UK military exercise in disputed Kashmir criticised

Pakistan on Monday censured the holding of joint India-UK military exercises in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir and also termed the Indian-sponsored trekking expedition in the conflict zone of Siachen an "illegal" step. Responding to a question

about the joint India-UK military exercises in Ladakh and Indian plan to conduct similar exercises with the UK in the Siachen area, Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam told a weekly news briefing: "Yes, we are aware of it and we feel that this is not a legitimate activity because Ladakh is part of Jammu and Kashmir which is an internationally recognised disputed territory. Britain, more than anyone else, should be aware of it." The spokesperson disclosed that last week Pakistan had made demarches to both the British and the Indian governments. Referring to the text of the two demarches she added: "This was done last week here in Islamabad with the British High Commission and also in London. We made a demarche to the Indian High Commission and also conveyed our demarche to the Indian Government in Delhi."...

Dawn, 26 September 2007

Musharraf to remain COAS if not elected: AG's submission to SC

A government counsel on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that Gen Musharraf would continue to stay as army chief if he was not re-elected president for a second term. "If he loses, President Musharraf will continue to remain in uniform till the time another army chief is appointed by the new president," Attorney-General Malik Mohammad Qayyum submitted to a nine-member bench hearing petitions against President Musharraf holding two offices. He was replying to a question by Justice Javed Iqbal who was struck by the big "if" in a statement filed by president's counsel Sharifuddin Pirzada on September 18 which said Gen Musharraf would step down as army chief if re-elected president for the second term. "Gen Musharraf is not asking to continue as president for the next-five year term, rather he was contesting the presidential election in a normal manner," the AG said...

The News, 26 September 2007

Musharraf kicks off poll campaign from Balochistan

President Pervez Musharraf kicked off his formal election campaign here on Tuesday, mustering the support of 32 MPAs of the Balochistan Assembly out of a total of 61. Sources told The News that the president held talks with MPAs of the PML-Q, BNP-Awami and the JWP at the Governor House and sought their support for his re-election as the president. The PML-Q has 25 MPAs in the Balochistan Assembly, BNP-Awami has three seats while the opposition JWP has four seats. The sources said senators and MNAs belonging to these parties were also present in the meeting. They assured their full support to President Musharraf in his re-election. The MPAs of the coalition partner of the ruling Muslim League in Balochistan - the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal - which has 17 seats in the provincial assembly, neither attended the Iftar-dinner hosted by Governor Owais Ahmed Ghani in the honour of President Musharraf nor showed any interest in meeting the president...

Dawn, 26 September 2007

Differences in MMA over timing of resignations

The supreme council of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal here endorsed on Tuesday the All Parties Democratic Movement's decision to resign from the national and provincial assemblies in protest against President Pervez Musharraf's bid to get re-elected for another term. Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Maulana Fazlur Rehman

and Jamaat-i-Islami secretary-general Syed Munawar Hassan told reporters after the meeting that the MMA had decided to adhere to the APDM's decision. They, however, said that a mechanism for tendering resignations would be worked out at the APDM meeting to be held in Peshawar on Thursday. Attended by senior leaders of parties in the MMA, the meeting lasted for over three hours during which two major parties in the alliance - Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam and Jamaat-i-Islami - differed on when should the resignations be tendered. The JUI said the APDM decision had been taken without consulting its chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman who was in Saudi Arabia to perform Umra. Before the meeting, JI chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed told journalists: "ADPM's decision will be implemented in letter and spirit."...

Dawn, 26 September 2007

Benazir to give IAEA access to A.Q. Khan

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto said on Tuesday that a Pakistan People's Party government would give the Vienna-based UN nuclear watchdog access to Dr A.Q. Khan who lives under house arrest in Islamabad. "The International Atomic Energy Agency would have the right to question A.Q. Khan," not Western governments, said Ms Bhutto when asked at a Washington gathering if she would allow representatives from the United States and other Western countries to interrogate the nuclear scientist. Giving access to the IAEA, she said, would satisfy the international community desiring to know more about the network of nuclear proliferators Dr Khan allegedly headed. Ms Bhutto recalled that Dr Khan had confessed to violating the law which prevented him from sharing Pakistan's nuclear secrets with anyone. She said that a future PPP government would also hold parliamentary hearing to determine if Dr Khan alone was responsible for selling Pakistan's nuclear secrets to other states or "other elements were also involved."...

The News, 26 September 2007

Out of a blind alley (Farahnaz Ispahani)

General Pervez Musharraf and his political colleagues have taken the course that to them seems the most logical and safe for their survival in power. Pakistan's needs are adherence to the constitution, democratic norms and legitimacy of the political process but these are the rulers' last priority. In 2001, Musharraf had come up with the slogan "Pakistan First" to perpetuate himself in power. It is now becoming increasingly clear that it was --and most likely will always be -- "Musharraf First". General Musharraf's popularity has taken a major dent because of his attempts to cling to power at any price. Increasingly, civil society is asking questions about his legitimacy, which was on weak grounds to begin with. He should not expect an improvement in either his support or his standing in the eyes of the public in days to come because his election would be the product of a process that remains suspect in the eyes of the vast majority of Pakistanis. The misrule of the past eight years is apparent in the recent "wheat crisis." The disastrous law and order situation in the country is there for all to see, as is the complete alienation of the peoples of Balochistan and the break down of the state in Waziristan...

The Nation, 26 September 2007

Voice of the people (Basharat Hussian Qizilbash)

Pakistan is once again at the threshold of general elections. What are the key issues in the

minds of the people and which political parties and their leaders are likely to rule the country in the next five years are the probings of a survey conducted in Pakistan from August 18 to 29, 2007 by an American think-tank 'Terror Free Tomorrow' in collaboration with the Pakistan Institute for Public Opinion (PIPO) . The survey posed over two dozen questions to each respondent to elicit opinion regarding a range of external and internal challenges. The most talked-about issue in the last few weeks is the possible power sharing agreement between President General Pervez Musharraf and PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto. To the proposed question that if President Musharraf resigns from his army post but contests election as the President and Benazir returns and stands for election as the Prime Minister, the people of Pakistan stand equally divided - about 46% approve while 45% disapprove...There are several contradictions in the responses of the people because when it was asked which party would they vote for in the upcoming general elections, only three parties got the double digit approval i.e., 24% for PPP, 15% for PML-N and 13% for PML-Q...

The News, 27 September 2007

Musharraf's nomination papers filed

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, along with top leaders of the government coalition submitted the nomination papers of President General Pervez Musharraf as a candidate for the presidential elections with the Election Commission (EC) today. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, PML President Ch Shujaat Hussain, the chief ministers of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, along with the proposers and the seconders of the president, submitted the papers on the president's behalf. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz presented the nomination papers to the Chief Election Commissioner Justice (R) Qazi Muhammad Farooque. The chief ministers of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, Mushahid Hussain Syed, Rao Sikander Iqbal, Hamid Nasir Chattha, Babar Ghouri, Khurshid Kasuri, Sheikh Rashid, Aftab Ahmed Sherpao, Waseem Sajjad and other government leaders were also reached the election commission office. Chief Minister of Punjab Chaudhry Pervez Elahi talking to media said that he had earlier told that the president would contest elections in military uniform...

The News, 27 September 2007

President Musharraf will win presidential poll, says Aziz

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has expressed hope that President Musharraf will win the presidential election. Prime minister while talking to media after filing the nomination papers of President Musharraf said that every body has right to cast the vote according to his own will and Muslim League and its allies have filed the nomination papers. Chief Minister Punjab Chaudhry Pervez Ellahi on this occasion said that President Musharraf did a lot to strengthen political and economical conditions of the country and he would be re-elected in the uniform. Secretary General of Muslim League (Q) Mushahid Hussain Syed said that there is very little distance now left between General Musharraf and Mr. Musharraf. Mushahid Hussain said that the presidential election would be transparent and results would be acceptable for everyone. He said that government wants reconciliation with every political party including Peoples Party and dialogues with political parties underway in this connection...

The News, 27 September 2007

Make uniform part of judgment: Zafar

Barrister Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan on Wednesday told a larger bench of the Supreme Court that according to the Constitution, being the Chief of the Army Staff President Musharraf could not contest the election for the office of the president. Presenting his formulations before the nine-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Justice Rana Bhagwandas, he said that even the proposer and seconder of the Army chief would get 10-year imprisonment under PPC. Aitzaz Ahsan has been appointed by the Supreme Court larger bench as an amicus curiae to assist the court, hearing a set of petitions challenging the dual offices held by the president...Ahsan said General Pervez Musharraf was not eligible of becoming a candidate for the election as the Constitution forbade him from this office. He said the president, under the dual office act passed by parliament, could run for re-election but under the Constitution, an Army chief could not do it. He submitted that President Musharraf had secured constitutional and legal cover to continue with both offices till November 15. He said the tenure of the president would expire on November 15, 2007 and he was challenging the eligibility of General Musharraf as a candidate for the presidential election...

Dawn, 27 September 2007

Benazir reaffirms stance on Dr Khan

Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto on Wednesday reaffirmed her intention to allow a UN nuclear body to interview Dr A. Q. Khan if she comes to power, adding that it was in Pakistan's interest to assure the world that it had nothing to hide. Her original statement - given at a gathering in Washington on Tuesday - caused uproar in Pakistan where both government and opposition leaders opposed allowing any outside interrogators access to Dr Khan. At a news conference on Wednesday, Ms Bhutto said the issue of allowing or denying the International Atomic Energy Agency access to Dr Khan was based on a hypothetical question asked earlier and she had said that while she would allow IAEA inspectors to question the scientist, the Western governments would not be able to do so. "So far the IAEA has not made any request to me or to the government of Pakistan but if requested, we would certainly give them the access," she said, adding that "we would not cover up and will not collude in a cover-up of proliferation activities."...

Dawn, 28 September 2007

Presidential race: 43 candidates file papers

The controversial process for the election of the country's next president kicked off on Thursday with 43 people from diversified background filing 71 nomination papers. However, the exercise left little doubt that Gen Pervez Musharraf is the only serious contender who may have no problem on the ballot provided he is allowed to contest the elections by the Supreme Court. Included among those who filed the papers on Thursday are a few non-serious contenders, and some prominent politicians who appear to be cover candidates. Besides Gen Musharraf, two other serious candidates are Justice (retd) Wajihuddin Ahmed, who has been fielded by the lawyers' fraternity, and Makhdoom Amin Fahim, the nominee of the Pakistan People's Party. With the Election Commission building in Islamabad looking like a besieged place for most part of the day, it kept receiving nomination papers from the candidates. President Musharraf decided to stay

away from the venue, apparently to avoid any unpleasant situation, and his papers were submitted by leaders of the ruling PML and allied parties...

Dawn, 28 September 2007

Fazl accepts APDM's resignation plan

The All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) on Thursday announced that all its legislators would resign en bloc from the National and provincial assemblies on Oct 2. The decision was taken at a two-hour meeting of the alliance's action committee held at the residence of PML (N) general secretary Zafar Iqbal Jhagra. Addressing a press conference after the meeting, JUI (F) chief and Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly Maulana Fazlur Rehman said: "This august forum has decided that members of the National Assembly will hand over their resignations to central leaders of the parties in the APDM, while members of the provincial assemblies would send resignation to their provincial heads on Sept 29." When Maulana Fazl announced that the NWFP chief minister would send an advice to the governor on Oct 2 seeking dissolution of the provincial assembly, workers burst out into loud cheers and shouted slogans of Allah-o-Akbar and 'Long live the APDM leadership.'...

Dawn, 28 September 2007

Opposition in NWFP assembly planning no-confidence move

The combined opposition in the NWFP assembly on Thursday announced that it would resist the dissolution of provincial assembly by using all options, including moving a no-confidence motion or going to the court. It said the APDM's move to dissolve the assembly was aimed at depriving the legislators of the right to cast their votes in the presidential election to be held on October 6. The opposition in the NWFP assembly comprises the PPP (Sherpao), ruling PML and a group of independent members. It has lost the support of PML (N) and ANP MPAs who are now part of the APDM alliance. Speaking at a press conference here, NWFP president of the ruling PML and federal Minister for Political Affairs Amir Muqam claimed that the opposition had over 50 seats in the 124-member Frontier assembly, adding that the number could increase as a number MMA MPAs had contacts with him...

Dawn, 28 September 2007

Threat to besiege assembly on Oct 6

Frontier Lawyers urged MMA leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman and NWFP Chief Minister Akram Durrani on Thursday to dissolve the provincial assembly and warned that they would besiege the assembly building on Oct 6 to prevent its members from casting vote in the presidential election. The lawyers observed a complete strike in response to a call of Lawyers' Action Committee against the filing of nomination papers by General Pervez Musharraf. They did not appear in any of the courts in the provincial capital. A joint general body meeting of the Peshawar High Court and the Peshawar District Bar Association was held, followed by a protest demonstration. The meeting was presided over by PHCBA's president Abdul Lateef Afridi and addressed by Peshawar District Bar Association president Maulana Shamsul Haq, Qazi Mohammad Anwer, Abdul Hakeem Kundi, Sattar Khan, Barrister Baachha and Nek Nawaz Khan. The meeting adopted a resolution urging Maulana Fazl and Chief Minister Durrani to support the lawyers'

movement for the supremacy of the Constitution and to dissolve the NWFP Assembly before Oct 6, the date fixed for the presidential poll...

Dawn, 28 September 2007

US wants democracy and generals on its side, says Benazir

The United States is committed to democracy but also views President Pervez Musharraf as a key ally in the war against terror, says former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. Ms Bhutto was asked at a news conference on Wednesday what impression she got on the US commitment to democracy after a series of meetings she had in Washington this week with US lawmakers and officials. While commenting on her statement, State Department's deputy spokesman Tom Casey also emphasised that the United States continued to see President Musharraf as an important player in any future set up in Pakistan. "We do support the people of Pakistan and we do support the desire of Pakistanis for what is President Musharraf's and others stated objectives, which is to see Pakistan develop as a peaceful democratic, moderate Islamic state," he said. Such a state, obviously, should be "capable of working with us to fight extremism and terrorism," he added...

Dawn, 29 September 2007

The day of the General: Musharraf to run for president in uniform, Petitioners, lawyers' leaders livid

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed on technical grounds petitions against Gen Pervez Musharraf holding two offices, giving a legal boost to the president to contest the election for the second term in uniform. It was a majority (six-three) verdict by a nine-member bench headed by Justice Rana Bhagwandas. The bench threw out the petitions challenging the dual offices of the army chief and the president held by Gen Musharraf, declaring that these were not maintainable. In other words, the merit of the cases which had been debated for two weeks along with the issue of maintainability, became irrelevant as the majority of judges dismissed the challenge by declaring that the petitions could not be entertained at this forum. After suffering a series of setbacks from the superior judiciary over the past few months, such as the restoration of the chief justice, acceptance of Nawaz Sharif's right to return from exile and bail to Javed Hashmi, President Musharraf received the first good news from the Supreme Court. Government supporters termed the verdict a "great victory" and said the day clearly belonged to Gen Musharraf...

Dawn, 29 September 2007

Verdict disappointing, say opposition parties

Leaders of major opposition parties described the Friday's Supreme Court verdict in favour of President Pervez Musharraf as "disappointing" but said the question of his eligibility to contest the October 6 presidential election was still open. They said that petitions challenging Gen Musharraf's right to contest the election had been rejected "on the question of maintainability and not on merit". In any case, they said, the verdict did not come as a "surprise". Talking to Dawn, Pakistan Muslim League (N) chairman Raja Zafarul Haq said the opposition was considering the option of filing a review petition before the full court of the apex court. He said the question of Gen Musharraf's eligibility

to contest the election would be raised before the Election Commission and if he was allowed to contest the election, the issue would again come before the Supreme Court. Raja Zafar said that because the judges had not gone into the merit of the petitions, all the questions were still open...

The News, 29 September 2007

'PPP accepts SC judgment'

Opposition leader in the Sindh Assembly Nisar Khuhro and PPP MNA Syed Khurshid Shah on Friday, blaming the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) for the present constitutional crisis in the country, said the PPP accepts the Supreme Court decision on dual office of President Gen Pervez Musharraf. Talking to newsmen at an Iftar-dinner in Qasimabad along with other PPP leaders, Nisar Khuhro said the PPP had never entered into any deal with the government against the aspirations of the people and would never support dictatorship in future. He expressed his surprise over the announcement of resignations and dissolution of the NWFP Assembly by the APDM, saying the decision has been announced at a time when the assemblies are about to complete their tenures. He said the Supreme Court based its judgment on the 17th Amendment, which was passed with the support of the MMA, which had provided a safe passage to Gen Musharraf to continue his dictatorial regime. He said Makhdoom Amin Fahim would contest the presidential election against Musharraf at any cost...

The Nation, 29 September 2007

APDM, lawyers shocked; vow to continue struggle

Expressing its disappointment over the Supreme Court decision regarding dual-office petitions, MMA on Friday vowed to continue its legal and political struggle against the military rule in the country. President of MMA Qazi Hussain Ahmad, while commenting on the verdict, said that they would file a review petition for full court. "Our struggle against dictatorship will never cease and we will continue our fight for the independence of judiciary and supremacy of Constitution in the country", he added. He noted that it was a long struggle and the entire nation should take to streets for ousting the military rule from Pakistan. "Our case is in the court of Allah Almighty and the final decision will come from His court", Qazi further said. Deputy parliamentary leader of MMA Liaquat Baloch, while talking to TheNation said, "The decision was not unexpected and we sensed it on the day when our plea for full court hearing was rejected". He said the MMA would challenge the eligibility of General Pervez Musharraf in the Election Commission of Pakistan today (Saturday) and if it rejected its objections then they would again move the apex court against the Election Commission...

Dawn, 29 September 2007

Verdict based on constitution, says US

The United States said on Friday that the Supreme Court's decision to allow President Gen Pervez Musharraf to continue to hold two offices is based on the Constitution and the existing laws of Pakistan. "We are watching the situation closely and waiting to see how things unfold," said the US State Department when asked for comments on the judgment. The cautious reaction reflects the US administration's current approach of not getting involved in day-to-day developments in Pakistan and instead focussing on the

need to ensure that the forthcoming national elections are "fair, free and transparent", as a State Department official said. Lately, US officials have been particularly careful about making any remarks about President Musharraf because there's a general feeling in Washington that in today's politically-charged situation in Pakistan; even a positive US response may hurt him. Instead, the State Department official who commented on the judgment emphasised that the United States wanted to see Pakistan succeed as a modern and moderate country, led by the choice of the people...

The News, 29 September 2007

Scrutiny of nomination papers today

Election Commission will carry out scrutiny of 71 nomination papers filed by 43 presidential candidates today (Saturday) amid fears of agitation by the opposition parties and lawyers community against candidature of President General Pervez Musharraf. Tough security measures have been adopted around the Election Commission Secretariat. Only relevant persons would be allowed entry to the heavily guarded premises on the Constitution Avenue. The lawyer fraternity has threatened to besiege the Commission office against General Musharraf's contesting the election. Secretary Election Commission Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad told The News that special passes have been issued to media persons who would cover the proceedings relating to the scrutiny of nomination papers. Justice (Retd) Wajihuddin Ahmed, who is also among the presidential candidates, has already written to the returning officer Qazi Muhammad Farooq, hinting at the possibility of rigging at the time of polling. He is the lawyers and All Parties Democratic Movement candidate in the presidential race...

The News, 29 September 2007

Musharraf may take oath on Nov 15-16: Afgan

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Sher Afgan Khan Niazi on Friday said President Musharraf, if elected for the next term, would take fresh oath on November 15 or 16 and he will doff his military uniform by that time. Talking to a private TV channel, the minister said from November 16, there will be a civilian president in the country. He said following the Friday's verdict of the Supreme Court, the process of democracy will move forward. Niazi said hundreds of people had congratulated him from all parts of the country after the announcement of the verdict, adding he had even received calls from London. He said the people were jubilant on the decision because it will end the environment of confusion from the political scenario. To a question, he said fielding of Justice (retd) Wajihuddin Ahmed as the presidential candidate by the opposition was a gift for the government because it had validated the government's claim of the eligibility of the sitting assemblies to elect the president...