

# World

## GOVERNANCE



Former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif gestures during a news conference in Islamabad yesterday. EMILIO MORENATTI/AP

## Pakistan's coalition collapses

Nawaz Sharif's party joins the opposition, sending the country deeper into political turmoil

BY SAEED SHAH ISLAMABAD

Pakistan sank into a new political crisis yesterday with the collapse of the ruling coalition after Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N left the government in protest over the future of the nation's judiciary.

The Muslim League-N will now join the opposition, blaming the coalition leader, the Pakistan Peoples Party, for failing to fulfill a pledge to reinstate the 60 judges fired by former president Pervez Musharraf last November.

The fate of the short-lived coalition marks the failure of an attempt at national unity after democracy was restored in Pakistan with elections in February.

The coalition was always fragile. The ousting of the parties' common enemy, Mr. Musharraf, as president just a week ago, was meant to end the infighting in the coalition; instead, it left them with little to hold them together.

Islamabad is now likely to remain focused on political intrigue, rather than the violent challenge from Islamic extremists based in its North West Frontier Province and the tribal territory that borders Afghanistan. That will dismay Washing-

ton, which wants Pakistan to tackle the Taliban-inspired militancy in the Federally Administered Tribal Area, a base for the insurgency in Afghanistan.

"The law and order situation in NWFP and FATA will not be solved until there's a stable government in Islamabad," warned Asfandyar Wali Khan, leader of the party that runs the provincial government of NWFP. "Saving lives should be the first issue, then we can look at the judges."

The government will not fall in the short term, but the PPP is reliant on the support of new partners, including the MQM, a party that was close to Mr. Musharraf.

Mr. Sharif also announced that he will put up his own candidate for president, to challenge the PPP chairman Asif Zardari - Benazir Bhutto's widower - who declared over the weekend that he will run for the post. Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddiqui, a Supreme Court judge who retired in 2002, will be Mr. Sharif's candidate.

At a press conference in Islamabad, a bitter Mr. Sharif brandished an agreement forged with the PPP earlier this month, which promised the restoration of the judiciary within 24 hours

of ousting Mr. Musharraf. It was the third deadline missed by the coalition for the judges, a cause that Mr. Sharif has made the centre-point of his politics. The deal, said Mr. Sharif, also included having a non-partisan new president, until the powers of the presidency were reduced.

Mr. Zardari, pleading for Mr. Sharif to reconsider, admitted that the sticking point was reinstatement of deposed chief justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, an activist judge. The PPP chairman has seemed determined not to restore Mr. Chaudhry, because, many believe, he fears for the legal amnesty that he was granted last year which saw dozens of criminal charges against him removed.

Mr. Sharif and the Pakistan Peoples Party were vicious rivals in the volatile 1990s, alternating in power, amid scheming that saw neither party's government complete its terms in office. That culminated in the army staging a coup in 1999 - its fourth - led by then army chief Mr. Musharraf, who described the period as the "dreadful decade of democracy." That power struggle, now revived, is likely to be first felt over the provincial government of the Punjab, the most popu-

lous and politically important region, which is currently held by Mr. Sharif's party.

"Are we now a laughingstock for those who didn't want democracy in Pakistan? For them, it's a victory, but we're both losers," said PPP member of parliament Fauzia Wahab. "By fighting each other, you are actually defeating democracy."

Mr. Siddiqui, the candidate for president put forward by Mr. Sharif, is a respected non-party figure who is highly unlikely to defeat Mr. Zardari but could attract enough support to embarrass the PPP chairman.

The scale of the terrorist threat in Pakistan was underlined yesterday. A rocket attack on the home of a provincial member of parliament in Swat, part of NWFP, killed his brother, two nephews and five guards. Pakistan belatedly banned the main insurgent group, the Tehreek-e-Taliban, signalling that hopes of holding dialogue with the militants had evaporated.

"The world is losing the war. I think at the moment they [the Taliban] definitely have the upper hand," Mr. Zardari conceded in an interview with the BBC on Sunday.

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## CIVIL WAR

## Military moving in on Tamil capital, Sri Lankan officials say

BY JASON MOTLACH COLOMBO

For the first time in more than a decade, Sri Lankan government forces are deep inside the Tamil Tigers' northern stronghold and within striking distance of the Tamil capital, according to military officials who insist an end to one of Asia's deadliest civil wars nears by the day.

Some observers say it's still too soon to talk of the end of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's 25-year armed struggle for a Tamil state. But there's no dispute that the latest military offensive has unprecedented momentum thanks to an international crackdown on the Tigers' fundraising and smuggling networks and high-level defections that have undermined support for its iron-willed leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Since January, when it scrapped a Norway-brokered ceasefire and vowed to crush the Tigers by the end of the year, the government has poured \$1.5-billion into an all-out, multiple front offensive. About 6,000 rebels have been killed and their last stronghold in the island's northern Wanni region reduced by nearly 75 per cent, according to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence.

Front lines remained static for months until June, when forces finally punched through rebel lines to seize the strategic Mannar Peninsula. On July 16, a major naval base was overrun, followed by four more key bases.

The military says some advance units are now within artillery range of Kilinochchi, the Tigers' de facto capital and nerve centre, where Mr. Prabhakaran is believed to operate from an underground complex. Fierce clashes are expected there, as hundreds of the Tigers' elite fighters are thought to have dug in awaiting a final showdown.

After taking back the Jaffna Peninsula, the northernmost part of the island, in 1995, the army finally consolidated an advantage over the Tigers last March when the LTTE's eastern commander, Colonel Karuna Amman, broke away and took 6,000 loyal cadres

with him. According to Col. Karuna, who says he left the Tigers due to Mr. Prabhakaran's repeated failure to pursue a political solution at critical moments, this slashed the Tigers' fighting strength by 60 per cent. Four months later, the LTTE was ousted from the east.

A July, 2007, report by Jane's Intelligence Review said that at their peak, the Tigers have raised as much as \$300-million (U.S.) a year - 90 per cent from abroad - making it the second-highest budget among separatist groups after Colombia's FARC.

But a worldwide dragnet on fundraising operations and weapons procurement has cramped the Tigers, which are listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and Canada. They have been credited with pioneering the use of suicide bombers, and have been called the "most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world" by the FBI.

Dozens of LTTE financiers and arms smugglers have been arrested by authorities in the United States, Canada, Europe and India.

One Toronto-based non-profit group, the World Tamil Movement, wired more than \$3-million (U.S.) to overseas bank accounts linked to the Tigers before its operations were shut down by the Canadian government in June for alleged terrorist financing, according to an RCMP report released last week.

A joint India-Sri Lanka naval blockade of the Palk Strait waterway that separates the two countries has further diminished the inflow of desperately needed arms, provisions and materiel to the Tigers. Given the array of setbacks, defence officials determined they had a singular opportunity to crush the Tigers as a standing fighting force by the end of this year.

However, some defence analysts say the current offensive has yet to encounter the full weight of the LTTE and that boasts of imminent victory are premature.

The LTTE "must have something up their sleeve," said one Colombo-based observer who asked not to be named, noting that the rebels still have hundreds of hardened fighters and possibly chemical weapons for a counterattack. "They are very crafty and have given up territory in the past to draw the army in and then strike back hard."

And even if the LTTE is soon broken as a conventional fighting force, there is consensus that it could regroup in remote jungle areas, as it has done in the past, to wage a protracted guerrilla war. This would mean a greater reliance on suicide and hit-and-run attacks to "bomb themselves back onto the agenda," according to Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a think tank in Colombo.

Security forces in the Sri Lankan capital remain on high alert. Armed guards patrol streets littered with barricades and a gauntlet of checkpoints.

Despite the dogged military effort, Dr. Saravanamuttu said, unrest will not cease until the economic and political deprivations that fuel Tamil discontent are addressed in earnest.

"The LTTE has always played for the long haul," he said. "The only thing that can bring about a conclusion to the bloodshed is a political solution that cuts the ground from under their feet."

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## THE MIDDLE EAST

## Release of Palestinian prisoners a 'good step' but Rice warns against rushing peace process

BY ORLY HALPERN JERUSALEM

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived once again in Israel to give the Palestinians and the Israelis another push to reach a peace agreement before her boss leaves office in January, just hours after Israel released 198 Palestinian prisoners from its jails yesterday as a concession to its negotiating partners.

About half of the prisoners were due to be released next year, but 43 had five years remaining. Offences ranged from stone-throwing to shooting attacks and two of those released were guilty of killing Israelis.

Israel hoped the move would boost the popularity of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, who is struggling for popular support as the peace process continues and a peace agreement remains elusive.

"Obviously when one talks about releasing prisoners, specifically ones involved in terror against innocent civilians, it is not a simple matter," said Mark Regev, spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

"The release of this group fills



Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas holds a microphone during a release ceremony in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday, after Israel freed 198 Palestinian prisoners. JAAFAR ASHTIYEH/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

us with joy," Mr. Abbas told the crowd at a jubilant welcoming ceremony in Ramallah, "but we will not be satisfied until all prisoners are released, the 11,000 who are still waiting."

There will be no peace until

they are all released, he added, illuminating another of the gaps between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

Ms. Rice, who is here on her seventh visit since the Annapolis peace conference hosted by U.S. President George Bush last November, hailed the release as "a very good step." While she said she still believes the two sides can achieve an agreement by year's end, she warned against rushing the process. There has been speculation the Bush administration wants an interim statement signed before the UN General Assembly meeting in late September.

"It's extremely important just to keep making forward progress rather than trying prematurely to come to some set of conclusions," Ms. Rice told reporters as she flew to Tel Aviv. Her words echoed those of Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who last week said that "premature" efforts to bridge gaps could lead to "clashes." Ms. Livni is the front-runner to replace Mr. Olmert, who has agreed to step down following a corruption scandal.

The gaps over final status issues such as control of Jerusalem, borders and the return of refugees remain wide. The process has been complicated by renewed Israeli settlement expansion as well as political uncertainty due to Mr. Olmert's corruption scandal. Ms. Rice has spoken firmly against settlement expansion and urged Israel to allow Palestinians more freedom of movement.

Meanwhile, Palestinian fishing boats carrying Western activists yesterday sailed farther from shore than they have in five years, defying an Israeli-led naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. The fishermen complained that it was only the presence of the Westerners that kept the Israeli military from shooting at them.

On Saturday, Israel allowed two "Free Gaza" boats with 44 activists from 17 nations to sail to the Gaza Strip, despite earlier threats the boats would be treated as "pirates." Israel said it wanted to avoid an adverse media campaign. The activists hoped to bring attention to the blockade of Gaza.

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## On the advance

The Sri Lankan military is closing in on Kilinochchi, the Tamil Tigers' de facto capital, as the rebel group's control over northern Sri Lanka shrinks.



KATHRYN TAM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



## The name game: how do you say that again?

As workplaces grow more ethnically diverse, the Brians and Barbaras of the world are increasingly interacting with the Harbhajans and Hui Lings - and often finding themselves stumbling over painful misspellings and butchered pronunciations.

They not only look and sound bad but can cause irritation, frustration, awkwardness, embarrassment, failed communication, even workmates avoiding each other out of fear of botching a name.

Tomorrow in the Globe Careers section