Politics this week
November 10, 2007

Citing the threat of Islamist extremism and the obstructive behaviour of the judiciary, General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's army chief, declared a state of emergency tantamount to martial law. Opponents said he feared the Supreme Court would rule that his re-election as president last month was illegitimate. Hundreds of politicians, lawyers and activists were detained and private television-news channels were closed. After earlier suggestions that elections might be postponed, General Musharraf on November 8th was said to have promised they would be held by February 15th.

Scores of people were killed in a suicide-bombing in Baghlan province in northern Afghanistan. The dead included schoolchildren and six members of parliament visiting from Kabul for the opening of a sugar mill. The Taliban denied responsibility.

Sri Lanka's rebel Tamil Tigers suffered a setback with the death in an air-raid of S.P. Tamilselvan, their political commissar. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government was embarrassed by the detention on immigration charges in Britain of the former Tiger commander known as Colonel Karuna, who since breaking with the Tigers in 2004 has become a government ally.

The ruling junta in Myanmar rejected a proposal by the new United Nations' envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, to mediate in talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained opposition leader. The junta also said it would not renew the visa of the UN's co-ordinator in Myanmar, Charles Petrie, following a statement he made mentioning anti-government protests.

Inundated

In the worst natural disaster in Mexico for two decades, floods forced some 800,000 people from their homes in Tabasco state. At least 16 people were feared dead in a landslide in neighbouring Chiapas.

Álvaro Colom, a businessman, was elected as Guatemala's next president. He defeated a former army general in a run-off ballot.

In Trinidad and Tobago, whose gas-rich economy is booming, the ruling People's National Movement of the prime minister, Patrick Manning, increased its majority in a general election.

A fire started by inmates after a failed escape bid killed 33 prisoners at a jail in Santiago del Estero in Argentina.

Overturning objections from Iran, Interpol approved the issuing of arrest warrants for five Iranians and a Lebanese man in connection with the bombing of a Jewish centre in Buenos Aires in 1994, in which 85 people were killed.

Georgian rage

Days of protests in Georgia turned nasty when police broke up demonstrations using tear-gas and water cannon. An opposition television station was taken off the air and a state of emergency was declared. The opposition wants President Mikheil Saakashvili to call elections; he blames Russia for the unrest.

After a brutal crime, Italy passed a decree authorising the expulsion of any Romanian immigrant who is deemed to be a danger to public safety. Italian ministers said European Union rules on free movement were inadequate to cope with Italy's huge influx of migrants from Romania, which joined the EU in January.

Italian police captured Salvatore Lo Piccolo, reportedly the main boss of the Sicilian Mafia since last year's
arrest of Bernardo Provenzano.

At least eight people were killed in a mass shooting at a school in southern Finland. The shooting came a few days after a video was posted on YouTube by the perpetrator predicting the massacre.

It was a busy week for European leaders in America. France's Nicolas Sarkozy met George Bush and won rapturous applause for an address to Congress, in which he called for a "strong dollar" policy. Germany's Angela Merkel travelled to Texas to meet Mr Bush at his ranch. And Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan secured a promise from Mr Bush of tougher action against fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq.

Meanwhile

Leaders of countries neighbouring Iraq met in Istanbul but failed to find new ways of bringing peace to that country. Instead, they focused mainly on how to dissuade Turkey from invading Iraq to deter PKK guerrillas from attacking Turkish troops in Turkey.

Kenya's National Commission on Human Rights blamed the police for the execution-style killings, earlier this year, of 500-odd members of the Mungiki, a sect drawn from the Kikuyu ethnic group. Mungiki gangs had terrorised people going in and out of Nairobi, the capital, for years. The police deny responsibility.

Ten Europeans who worked for a French charity, Zoe's Ark, were charged in Chad with trying to airlift 103 children illegally out of the country to France, where they claim they were taking the children for adoption. Four Chadians were charged with complicity.

Close allies of South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, bid to take over one of the country's largest media groups, Johncom, which owns several newspapers that have sharply criticised the government, such as the Sunday Times.

Now on to the Senate floor

The Senate Judiciary Committee endorsed Michael Mukaseyas America's next attorney-general. His nomination had run into trouble over his equivocation as to whether waterboarding counts as torture, but two senior Democrats on the committee changed tack and backed him.

The Democrats did well in a smattering of state and local elections, winning Kentucky's election for governor and control of Virginia's state senate. With less than a year to go before the general election, the results could spell trouble for the Republicans.

Rudy Giuliani's bid for the presidency received a big boost with an endorsement from Pat Robertson, a prominent televangelist. Mr Giuliani has been attacked by many on the right for not being willing to ban abortion.

Another Republican candidate received a fillip--to his coffers. Ron Paul raised $4.3m in just one day of online fundraising, thought to be a record. The anti-war libertarian thinks he is placed to do well in New Hampshire's primary.

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