

Rallying Story

'Terrorist' Imran Khan arrested

8:23AM Thursday November 15, 2007

By Zeeshan Haider

ISLAMABAD – Police detained cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, after he emerged from hiding to lead a student protest against Musharraf, who declared emergency rule in nuclear-armed Pakistan on November 3, suspending the constitution, getting rid of hostile judges, rounding up opponents and curbing the media.

Police said Imran would be charged under anti-terror legislation.

Pakistani opposition parties tried to forge a united front overnight against military president Pervez Musharraf, who insisted his state of emergency was vital for fair elections.

"We are ready to set aside our differences with the People's Party," former prime minister Nawaz Sharif told Reuters by telephone from Saudi Arabia, referring to the party of another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto.

Bhutto, who had been in power-sharing talks with Musharraf for months, returned home in October from eight years of self-imposed exile and aimed to work with the president on a transition to civilian rule.

Then came the crackdown. After police stifled a protest by Bhutto on Tuesday and put her under house arrest, she announced her talks with Musharraf were over, and for the first time called on him to step down as president as well as army chief.

She also contacted old rivals including Islamist alliance leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed and Sharif's party to try to unite on a "minimum agenda"; the ouster of Musharraf and formation of a neutral government to organise fair elections, an aide said.

"I'm sending this letter to leaders of different parties, to invite them to Karachi on November 21 and I'd like to work with them in sharing views with what could be a common agenda for all of us to rally around," Bhutto told Reuters by telephone.

She said her party might boycott a parliamentary election Musharraf has promised to hold by January 9 and would discuss that with opposition colleagues next week.

Sharif and Bhutto were bitter rivals during the late 1980s and 1990s. They each served two terms as prime minister until Musharraf ousted Sharif in 1999.

Both faced corruption charges, which they denied.

Underscoring the difficulty of uniting a fractious opposition, students loyal to religious alliance leader Ahmed briefly detained Imran Khan when he emerged from hiding to lead a campus protest in Lahore. Police later detained Khan.

–RUETERS



Imran Khan. Photo / Reuters

Copyright ©2007, APN Holdings NZ Limited

Served by: **Lily** Instance: **static** | 16 Nov 2007 19:30:07 | 5,003