

# Indian media's word of caution for Musharraf

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NEW DELHI, Sept 11: Even as India officially declined to comment on the second exile of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, most newspapers in New Delhi on Tuesday had a word or two of caution for President Gen Pervez Musharraf about the turbulence ahead.

Gen Musharraf has "often claimed that he is Pakistan's only true democratic leader," *The Hindu* recalled in its comment on Monday's showdown in Islamabad. "Had that been within shouting distance of the truth, he would have respected the Supreme Court verdict allowing former prime minister Nawaz Sharif to return to his country — a fundamental right of all citizens."

On Monday, Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee described Mr Sharif's second forced exile as an internal affair of Pakistan. "We want a peaceful, prosperous and stable neighbour," he had added cautiously.

*The Times of India* was worried about the fallout of any future instability in Pakistan on the rest of the region.

"New Delhi, of course, has little leverage in Pakistan and cannot hope to play the sort of role there that it did in Nepal's case," the Times rued. "But it can alert the international community to the dangers of a civil insurrection in Pakistan. Those who have leverage on Musharraf — the US in particular — must influence him to adopt a moderate course."

*The Times* also wondered if a grand alliance between former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and Mr Sharif's party was in the offing. "What is Musharraf going to do if Bhutto follows Sharif to Pakistan and announces a grand alliance with his party and other democratic forces to oust Musharraf?" the newspaper asked.

"More political turbulence is the last thing Pakistanis need now. But going by the latest developments in their country, they don't seem to have a choice," said the Hindustan Times. It added that President Musharraf had "played his cards well by allowing Mr Sharif to land on Pakistani soil — as ordered by the recent Supreme Court verdict — and then packing him off to serve out the rest of his original exile term of ten years."

The *Indian Express* vented its foreboding candidly. "The surest sign of a fading dictatorship is self-delusion," the newspaper said. "With no possibility of legally extending his tenure either as president or as army chief, Musharraf might have to fall back on martial law. As he sinks, Musharraf may want to take Pakistan with him. But that is not where the people of Pakistan want to go."

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