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## Pakistan court orders Musharraf to appear over treason



Pakistan's top court summoned former dictator Pervez Musharraf to appear Tuesday over allegations of high treason and barred him from leaving the country, dealing another blow to his homecoming. It is the first time the Supreme Court has summoned a former military ruler over allegations of misconduct in Pakistan. Elections next month will mark the first democratic transition of power in the country's 66-year history. Musharraf returned last month from four years of self-imposed exile to stand in the May 11 poll, saying he wants to "save" the nation. But lawyers sought to have the ex-general face trial under Article Six of the High Treason Act 1973 for imposing emergency rule and arresting judges in 2007. Lawyer Hamid Khan told the Supreme Court that Musharraf had subverted the constitution and should be "punished with death or be jailed for life". Judge Jawad Khawaja said it was the "obligation" of the state to take effective measures against Musharraf "and others who subverted the constitution". "The office shall ensure service of notice to the respondents for tomorrow," Khawaja told the court, referring to both Musharraf and a representative of the state. Government officials should "ensure that the respondent does not leave the jurisdiction of Pakistan", the judge added. Musharraf's All Pakistan Muslim League party said lawyers were currently deciding whether he would appear in person. "They will take a final decision. But my personal understanding is that he will not appear in person. He will be represented by his lawyers," party information secretary Aasia Ishaque told AFP. "The general is taking advice from his legal team and a formal decision in this regard will be taken tonight," said Syed Afshan Adil, one of his lawyers. His legal team say only the federal government can initiate a treason case. Pakistan is currently being overseen by an interim administration until a new government can be sworn in after the elections. Musharraf was authorised Sunday to stand as a candidate in the remote northern area of Chitral, although a lawyer has vowed to appeal that decision, but he was rejected in three other seats. Nuclear-armed Pakistan is afflicted by an economic malaise and near-daily attacks by the Taliban and other militants. But Musharraf's homecoming on March 24 was muted and the 69-year-old faces a number of other legal cases dating back to his 1999-2008 rule. He has been bailed over the 2007 killing of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and a Baluch rebel leader in 2006, and for arresting judges during emergency rule in 2007. Musharraf sacked around 60 top judges including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who was held under house arrest. The judges were belatedly reinstated by President Asif Ali Zardari, who was elected to replace the general in March 2009 following months of protests. Some analysts doubt that the Supreme Court will force the case against Musharraf and believe he will be free to run for the Chitral seat. "I don't think the Supreme Court will order his prosecution, this will be seen as settling accounts with Musharraf," political analyst Hasan Askari told AFP. "If the Supreme Court takes any action then the argument will be that it is a personal vendetta." Since he left power in 2008 the former military leader's powerbase has shrivelled. Last month he suffered the indignity of having a shoe thrown at him by an angry lawyer -- a deeply insulting gesture in the Muslim world. His APML party, founded in exile with the help of Pakistani expatriates, is not thought likely to win more than a couple of seats.