

Musharraf visits China

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, under political pressure at home, left Thursday on a six-day visit to China for bilateral talks on trade and defense. Those traveling with Musharraf included Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Defense Minister Chowdhry Ahmed Mukhtar, the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported. Pakistan's Dawn newspaper reported Musharraf's trip will include a visit to the northwestern Xinjiang region bordering Pakistan, where there have been protests from ethnic Muslims against Chinese rule similar to those in Tibet. Chinese officials have blamed Islamic separatist groups for the unrest and Musharraf's visit as head of an Islamic state may help calm the situation. The Dawn report said some of the ministers belonging to the faction of the Pakistan Muslim League led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif refused to accompany Musharraf. The Sharif group, which won the second largest number of seats in the February national assembly elections, is a partner in Pakistan's new coalition government. Sharif was ousted in 1999 in a military coup led by Musharraf.

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