

# Vatican on damage control mission

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**Iraq on brink of civil war: Amman warns of danger of strife if present trends continue. pg. 12**



**ROME:** The Vatican launched a diplomatic offensive in Muslim countries on Monday to clarify Pope Benedict XVI's position on Islam following outrage over his remarks linking the religion with violence.

As the Holy See's move to appease Muslim anger got underway, the pope consulted his top diplomatic adviser, Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, in an audience at his summer palace outside Rome.

The 79-year-old head of the Roman Catholic Church also held talks with bishops from predominantly Muslim Chad, his first meeting with clergy from a largely Muslim country since the row erupted over his remarks.

Bertone earlier told the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* in an interview that envoys from the Holy See had been asked to explain the full meaning of Benedict's speech

to political and religious authorities in Muslim countries.

He said Vatican ambassadors, or papal nuncios, would highlight passages of the lengthy speech which would help to clarify its true meaning but which had been ignored in the furore.

But Vatican appeasement risked being drowned out by protests which reverberated around the Muslim world, with Al Qaeda in Iraq declaring a holy war in reaction to the remarks as protesters burned an effigy of the pope.

In Caracas, Venezuela, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Monday expressed respect for the pope and said the pontiff had "modified" his remarks that offended Muslims worldwide.

"We respect the pope and all those interested in peace and justice," Ahmadinejad told a news conference. - AFP