

# US asks India not to use Iraq as a pretext for attack on Pakistan

## Delhi asks Islamabad to give up 'politics of terrorism', Indo-Pak troops exchange fire along LoC

AP, AFP, Washington/ New Delhi

The Bush administration has said that India must not use the US-led pre-emptive war against Iraq as a pretext for an attack on Pakistan.

"Any attempts to draw parallels between the Iraq and Kashmir situations are wrong and are overwhelmed by the differences between them," State Department spokeswoman Joanne Prokopowicz said on Friday.

She was responding to a comment by External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha on Friday that India would be justified in taking pre-emptive action across the Pakistan border.

Citing Iraq's 12-year refusal to disarm in the face of UN Security Council resolutions, Prokopowicz said the circumstances that made military actions necessary in Iraq do not apply in the subcontinent and should not be considered a precedent.

"The US recognises the very serious nature of the situation in Kashmir," she said. "Our joint statement last week with the United Kingdom made clear our repugnance of the killings of innocents that have been taking place in Kashmir with alarming frequency."

Meanwhile, India reacted angrily to military warnings from Pakistan on Friday and said instead Islamabad should "give up its politics of terrorism" in order to improve ties between the two nuclear enemies.

India's counter-attack came a day after Pakistan warned India of grave consequences if it conducted pre-emptive military strikes at what New Delhi argues are Muslim guerrilla camps in the Pakistani zone of disputed Kashmir.

Pakistan's warning revolved around Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha's remarks in an interview with AFP that international opinion regarding India's stand on Kashmir had been boosted by the precedent set by the US-led military invasion of Iraq.

"Any misadventure by India will be met with full force," Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said Thursday.

In response Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said: "These are knee-jerk reactions which arise out of Pakistan's sense of vulnerability which in turn arises out of its sense of guilt."

"If Pakistan was to give up its politics of terrorism, then there would be no tensions and no talk of pre-emptive (military) strikes," Sarna told a news conference.

India accuses Pakistan of funding and arming Muslim militants who cross into Indian Kashmir to fight a rebellion against Indian rule. The 14-year-old insurgency has claimed more than 38,000 lives. Islamabad denies the charge of subversive actions.

The pair came to the brink of war last year over the issue of cross-border terrorism with hundreds of thousands of troops deployed on

their shared borders. The troops were pulled back late last year.

India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani Friday blamed a pro-Pakistan Muslim rebel group for a string of recent attacks including the massacre of 24 Kashmiri Hindus and a politician's murder.

"Whether it is the Pulwama massacre, the blast in train in Bombay in which several people died or the Ahmdeabad incident in which our senior colleague was murdered -- the Lashker-e-Taiba was behind all these three incidents," Advani said.

The Lashkar, which once had bases in Pakistan, is waging an armed insurgency in the Indian zone of disputed Kashmir.

Advani attacked the pan-Islamic guerrilla force at a conclave of his Hindu nationalist BJP party in this northern Indian town.

The deputy prime minister also blamed Lashkar gunmen for assassinating Haren Pandya, former BJP home minister in the western state of Gujarat.

PTI adds: Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged small arms firing and shelling along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) in Jammu region on Friday night without causing any casualty or damage, official sources said yesterday.

Pakistani forces fired 240 rounds of mortar shells on Bhawani and Kalsia areas of Noushera sector in Rajouri district last evening, the sources said.



United States Ambassador to Pakistan Nancy J. Powell (R) exchanges agreement documents with Waqar Masood Khan (L), Pakistan's Secretary for Economic Affairs Division, in Islamabad on Saturday. The agreement writes off a one billion US dollar debt owed by Islamabad to Washington. Finance Advisor Shaukat Aziz (C) also attended the ceremony where Powell reiterated that the US was committed to a long-term relationship with its key ally in the 18-month old war against terrorism.



A woman in a protective mask is the only passenger waiting at the lobby of the domestic airport in Taipei on Saturday. The number of air passengers has sharply decreased for both international and domestic lines in the wake of the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that has infected 19 people in Taiwan.

## WHO, Chinese experts meet to find source of SARS

### Killer disease spreads in Canada, US takes pre-emptive measures

AP, Guangzhou, China

A World Health Organisation (WHO) team looking in southern China for clues to unlock the mystery of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) met yesterday with Chinese experts who are trying to trace the source of the disease.

The meeting at Zhongshan University in hard-hit Guangdong province followed an extraordinary apology on Friday by a Chinese health official amid criticism of the government's slow release of information on SARS.

"We apologise to everyone," said Li Liming, director of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control.

"Our medical departments and our mass media suffered poor coordination," Li said at a news conference in Beijing. "We weren't able to muster our forces in helping to provide everyone with scientific publicity and allowing the masses to get hold of this sort of knowledge."

SARS has killed at least 82 people in

Asia and Canada and sickened at least 2,200 in more than a dozen nations. Mainland China accounts for more than half the fatalities.

Yesterday the WHO team met experts at Zhongshan University who collected hundreds of specimens of blood, lung fluid and other materials from people who died of SARS and those who recovered, said Dr. Robert Breiman, the team leader.

Experts abroad have linked SARS to a new form of coronavirus, which usually is found in animals. But Chinese authorities say they found a rare form of airborne chlamydia -- a virus usually transmitted through sexual contact -- in many who died.

The WHO specialists say a key part of their search will be to draw on knowledge of Chinese experts who know the region and physicians with experience treating SARS patients. No cure for SARS has been found, though health officials say most sufferers recover with timely hospital care. Symptoms include high fever, aches, dry cough and shortness of

breath.

On Friday, the WHO team visited Foshan, an industrial city in Guangdong where provincial officials say the world's first known SARS case occurred in November. Guangdong accounts for 40 of the 46 deaths reported by China.

Meanwhile, SARS worries plagued North America yesterday, with the count of possible cases nudging 200 in Canada, and the United States authorising quarantine by force if necessary to prevent its spread. Canada has been the country worst hit outside Asia by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). With nine new reports of possible cases, the nationwide total was 187 Friday. Seven people are believed to have died from the disease in Canada.

The WHO team said one key to the disease's speedy -- yet seemingly erratic -- transmission could lie in how the apparent first case, a businessman who was not identified, passed it to four people without infecting his own four children. He survived and was released from the hospital in January.

## Governor gives nod to prosecute Laloo, Mishra

PTI, Patna

Governor VC Pandey has given nod on prosecution of former Bihar Chief Ministers Laloo Prasad Yadav and Dr Jagannath Mishra in yet another case relating to the multi-crore fodder scam.

Raj Bhavan sources said yesterday the Bihar Governor accorded sanction to CBI for prosecution of Yadav and Mishra after consulting legal experts recently.

CBI had submitted its proposal seeking gubernatorial nod to file charge sheet against former chief ministers long back.

Former state Animal Husbandry Ministers (AHD) CP Verma, Vidyasagar Nishad, RJD MLA RK Rana and independent legislator Jagdish Sharma besides several AHD officials are also named accused in the case.

The case relates to fraudulent withdrawal of over Rs 50 lakh from Bhagalpur and Banka treasuries by AHD officials through forged and fake bills between 1994-1996 when Yadav was the chief minister.

Yadav and Mishra have already secured regular bails in the instant case.

Yadav's name figured in seven of around 49 cases related to fodder scam including the Disproportionate Assets case which charges Yadav with having accumulated huge wealth worth over Rs 46 lakh disproportionate to his known sources of income.

The RJD supreme is on bail in all the cases against him.

Meanwhile, CBI is giving a final touch to the charge sheet in the instant case, which is likely to be submitted to the court of designated CBI judge SK Mishra here shortly.

## US writes off \$1b in Pak debt

AP, Islamabad

The United States wrote off \$1 billion in Pakistani debt in a ceremony in the capital yesterday, one of the rewards for President Gen. Pervez Musharraf's support for the war on terrorism.

The debt relief represents nearly one third of what Pakistan owes the United States. The rest of the money was rescheduled on more favourable terms last year with approval from Congress.

"Today's signing represents a promise kept and another milestone in our expanding partnership," US Ambassador Nancy Powell said at a signing ceremony with Pakistani officials.

Powell added that "the United States is in Pakistan for the long-term."

## Outcome of assembly polls crucial: Vajpayee

PTI, Indore

Declaring that the outcome of coming Assembly elections would prove decisive and set the direction for the country's future politics, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said yesterday the performance of the government would be the ultimate barometer and asked BJP to reach out to the minorities and weaker sections.

Skirting contentious issues, including Ayodhya, Vajpayee told the party's national executive that victory in Gujarat and subsequent defeat in Himachal Pradesh have sent out a clear cut message to the party to remain well prepared for the coming polls.

"The elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Delhi are very crucial. These polls would be decisive and set the trend for politics in

the days to come," Vajpayee said on the second and concluding day of the national executive.

BJP workers would have to reach out to the people in these states, he said adding that media could be of some assistance towards this but would not be fully sufficient.

"We will have to establish a live communication with the people and I am confident that the party would come out with flying colours in the four states," he asserted.

Vajpayee said the sweetness of the Gujarat victory had hardly dissolved when the bitter taste of the defeat in the Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh came.

He said while manifestos and speeches were important, ultimately the people's experience with the government would prove decisive.

## US, North Korea hold working level talks

### Pyongyang rejects any UN resolution on nuke

REUTERS, Tokyo

The United States held working level talks with North Korea this week for the first time since the nuclear crisis broke out on the Korean peninsula last October, Kyodo news agency said yesterday.

Citing sources close to the negotiations, the agency said the talks on the nuclear issue had taken place in New York from Monday to Wednesday.

US officials put forward the idea of six-way talks including South Korea, Japan, China and Russia, aimed at solving the crisis, the agency said. Pyongyang has so far insisted on bilateral talks with the United States on the issue.

Little progress was made, but the North Korean side expressed interest in continuing the talks, the article said.

The crisis was sparked in October, when US officials said North Korea had admitted to a secret nuclear weapons program.

Tensions escalated when North Korea expelled UN inspectors, pulled

out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and reactivated a mothballed powerplant.

Meanwhile, North Korea on Saturday said it would never recognise any United Nations resolution regarding its nuclear programme, saying the world body has lost its authority because of the US attack against Iraq.

"The nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula is not a matter that the United Nations should take up," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

"North Korea will declare any UN resolution null and void," it was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency, an official monitor of news from Pyongyang.

The statement came ahead of the UN Security Council's discussions on the North Korean nuclear crisis on Wednesday, according to John Negroponte, the US ambassador to the United Nations.



Demonstrators sit in a street of Colombo on Saturday during a rally in support of the ongoing Norwegian backed peace process between Sri Lanka's government and the Tamil Tigers. The seventh round of talks, aimed at ending the conflict that has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972, is to take place in Thailand from April 29 to May 2.

## Israel intensifying attacks on Palestinians: Mubarak

AFP, Cairo

Israel is using war in Iraq as a smokescreen to increase its attacks on Palestinians, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak believes, the official news agency MENA reported yesterday.

Mubarak said after a telephone conversation on Friday night with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat that the Israelis were "exploiting" world attention on the war in Iraq to carry out attacks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The two men denounced what they called "acts of violence and aggression carried out by the Israeli forces against Palestinians in the occupied territories, exploiting the fact that the rest of the world is preoccupied by the war against Iraq", MENA said.

They agreed on "the necessity of

immediate action to support

Palestinian demands to set out a 'roadmap' for peace after the Palestinians' commitment to reforms".

More than 100 Palestinians, including 26 children, were killed by the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in March, the Palestinian health ministry reported on Wednesday.

US President George W. Bush has repeatedly promised that he will shortly publish the so-called "roadmap" for peace drawn up by the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations, which includes plans for the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

## Cuban ferry captors nabbed, hostages freed

AP, Havana

A standoff between Cuban troops and the hijackers of a small ferry who had tried to sail to Florida ended as soldiers stormed the boat and hostages jumped overboard to safety.

None of the hostages, about 50 in all, was injured in the operation Friday at the port of Mariel, just west of Havana. Authorities took the hijackers to an undisclosed location.

"All of those who were on the boat were safely rescued without a shot or even a scratch," the Cuban government said in a statement.

## US appeals court upholds conviction of WTC bomber

AFP, New York

A US federal appeals court upheld Friday the conviction of the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, Ramzi Yousef.

"We have considered all of the defendant's remaining arguments and conclude that they are without merit," the appeals court said in its ruling.

Ramzi Yousef drew up the plans for the February 26, 1993 attack that left six people dead. He was sentenced in January 1998 to life in prison without possibility of parole after two trials.