



PHOTO: AFP

A Kashmiri man displays the picture of a missing relative during a hunger strike in Srinagar on Thursday. Score of children, woman and men, relative to missing people, began a hunger on the eve of Indian prime minister's visit in the troubled state.

## Troops on high alert for Vajpayee's Kashmir visit

AFP, Srinagar

Indian security forces battling Islamic insurgency in Kashmir have gone on high alert ahead of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's two-day visit to the restive region, officials said Thursday.

Vajpayee, who will be in the state on Friday and Saturday, is scheduled to address a public rally in the summer capital Srinagar, the first by an Indian premier in 16 years.

The last was in 1987 by then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Two former Indian premiers -- H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral -- have addressed rallies in villages south and north of Kashmir, but not in Srinagar, which is considered an urban hub of Muslim militants.

"It is a big event and we don't want to take chances," said K. Srinivasan, a senior officer of India's Border Security Force (BSF) -- one of the main forces battling Muslim rebels in Kashmir.

"We have taken all the necessary measures to thwart any ill designs of militants," he told AFP.

Members of the BSF, army and police earlier this week began patrolling areas around Srinagar's Sheri-Kashmir Cricket Stadium -- the venue for Friday's rally.

Patrolling by the security forces has also intensified in areas surrounding the venue.

"Over the past two days the army has been regularly patrolling our locality," said Javed Ahmed, a government employee of Sonawar locality.

Residents are frisked for arms and ammunition, and their identities ascertained.

"Even the tenants have been asked to register their names with the local police stations," said Yaqoob Ahmed of Ikhrajpora.

Residents living around the venue say nearly two dozen youths have been detained from the area ahead of Vajpayee's arrival in Srinagar.

## 'Dialogue, not force, is only solution to Kashmir row'

### Powell rules out use of force to end terrorism

IANS, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell has ruled out use of force as a means to end terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Asserting that dialogue is the only "right solution" to the problem in Kashmir, he said the US would continue to work with India and Pakistan to lower tensions in the region and "to see whether or not opportunities can be created for the two sides to enter into a dialogue".

He was replying to questions at a press conference for foreign journalists at the Foreign Press Center in Washington on Tuesday.

To a question on how dialogue could help, especially when it had failed to provide a solution in the last 50 years, Powell said: "Dialogue has been difficult over the years. But to solve this kind of problem, I think, dialogue is the right solution and a resort to force would not be the appropriate solution."

Describing "terrorism as a curse on the face of civilisation", he said it affects nations throughout the world.

As such the US has "condemned terrorist attacks across the Line of Control (the military ceasefire line) on the subcontinent and we will continue to do so. We will continue to work with

the government of Pakistan and the government of India as we move forward and we will continue to do everything we can to lower the temperature in that part of the world," he added.

AFP adds: Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha discussed the situation in Iraq and tensions in South Asia, including terrorism, over the telephone with US Secretary of State Colin Powell, an official said Thursday.

Sinha's call to Powell late Wednesday lasted about 30 minutes, the official said.

The conversation follows a number of statements from New Delhi and Washington about the use of pre-emptive strikes.

Sinha in a series of interviews in the past fortnight has repeatedly said Pakistan was a "fit case" for military action as it had weapons of mass destruction, sheltered terrorists and lacked democracy.

In an interview with AFP on April 2, Sinha said the world realised that "India has a much better case to go for pre-emptive action against Pakistan than the US has in Iraq."

He was alluding to an upswing in violence in the Indian-ruled zone of Kashmir, which has stirred new tensions with Pakistan.

Sinha's statements drew sharp reactions from Pakistan with Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali saying Tuesday that Islamabad would "go to any extent," when it "comes to the sustenance and defence of the country."

Last week, Powell said there were no parallels between the situations in South Asia and Iraq.

On Wednesday, Powell condemned "terrorist attacks" in Indian-Kashmir emanating from the Pakistani-controlled sector of the region, but pledged to work to contain resurgent South Asian tensions.

India accuses Pakistan of supporting terrorism by arming and training Muslim militants in Kashmir. Islamabad denies the charge but says it offers moral and political support to what it describes as Kashmiris' legitimate struggle for self-expression.

More than 38,000 people have died in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, since the launch of the armed insurgency by Islamic guerrillas in 1989 in the Himalayan territory.

On Wednesday, US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill met Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani to discuss US plans for rebuilding war-ravaged Iraq, media reports said.



PHOTO: AFP

A young boy has his temperature taken by having a thermometer put in his ear at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok airport to test for signs of a killer pneumonia on Thursday. Those passengers found to have high temperatures would be examined at their own expense and if found to have the disease known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) would be barred from travelling.

## Armitage, Rocca to visit India-Pakistan in May

PTI, Islamabad

As tension between India and Pakistan mounted over the issue of cross border infiltration, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca plan to visit both the countries next month on a "peace mission", according to Pakistan officials in Islamabad.

Armitage and Rocca would be visiting Islamabad for consultations with the government local daily Dawn quoted Pakistan Foreign Office officials as saying.

During the US officials' visit, the two sides will discuss "bilateral and regional issues" with particular focus on the Pakistan-India stand-off, Iraq and Afghanistan, a senior Pakistan govern-

ment official said while referring to the Armitage's visit.

The two officials will also be visiting India in what is seen as a "peace mission" to the region, they said. However, they have not indicated firm dates. The US Embassy here too declined to indicate dates.

"Whenever Pakistan and India tension level rises, Armitage gets deeply involved," remarked one Pakistani official, pointing out that the Deputy Secretary of State had visited the two South Asian capitals twice last year, when they were on the brink of nuclear war.

The crisis was finally averted after Armitage held talks with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

## ULFA rebels pulling out of Bhutan bases

AFP, Guwahati

An Indian separatist group appears to be pulling out of bases in Bhutan and shifting to new locations inside India along the border with Bangladesh, an official said Wednesday.

The outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), fighting for an independent homeland in the northeastern state of Assam, has been operating out of well-entrenched bases inside Bhutan for years.

"It (now) appears the ULFA have been relocating their bases from Bhutan to areas in the northeastern state of Meghalaya (bordering Bangladesh)," a senior Indian Border Security Force

(BSF) official told AFP.

India's security forces last week made two large hauls of arms and explosives in the West Garo Hill district of Meghalaya, a few kilometers (miles) from the Bangladesh border.

The seizures included a large number of rocket propelled grenades, AK-56 assault rifles, communication sets and huge quantities of explosives.

"The arms consignments reached Meghalaya by a non-conventional river route and heightens our suspicion that the ULFA has begun shifting their request-in-anonymity. Intelligence officials say ULFA was

under pressure from Bhutanese authorities to vacate their camps inside the Himalayan kingdom after National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra last month met King Jigme Singhye Wangchuk.

Mishra expressed India's "serious concern" at the continued presence of Assamese militants in Bhutan and asked for the immediate expulsion of the ULFA rebels from the kingdom.

"It could be possible that the Bhutan authorities have asked the ULFA leadership to leave the kingdom without their armoury," the BSF official said requesting anonymity. "The official said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Japanese Ground Self-Defence Force soldier digs up some of the 800 unexploded shells believed to be from World War II at a construction site at Yokohama, in Kanagawa prefecture, suburban Tokyo on Thursday as construction workers (L) look on. The 800 shells, believed to be from World War II, were found by the construction workers as they were digging. Police said no danger of an explosion as most of the ordnance had no fuses.

## First confirmed case of SARS in India

AFP, New Delhi

India has recorded its first confirmed case of the deadly SARS virus, an official of the National Institute of Virology said Thursday.

"We have received a sample from Goa and we have diagnosed it positive for the coronavirus which is responsible for SARS," said Dr A.C. Mishra, director of the institute in the western city of Pune.

The case involved a man in the western state of Goa, the official said.

"He fell sick two days ago. He is from Goa but he had been travelling in Hong Kong, Singapore, Bombay and then he came to Goa," he said.

Mishra said the man had probably been infected 10 to 15 days ago but had displayed the symptoms much later.

Local media said he was a 32-year-old marine engineer.

The medical superintendent of the Goa medical college, where the man is being treated, named him as Prashant Vardhe and said he is suffering high fever.

## Indo-Pak singers team up for peace concert

AFP, Karachi

A top Pakistani rock band Junoon and a popular Indian vocalist calling for peace between the rival South Asian neighbours Wednesday joined hands to wage a "global peace" struggle with a mega concert in violence plagued Karachi this weekend.

The concert comes amid war in Iraq and rising tension between India and Pakistan over the festering Kashmir dispute that has caused two of their three wars since independence from Britain in 1947.

"The world has seen too much blood since September 11, 2001 and too many burnings of effigies in protest rallies," Junoon's singer Ali Azmat told a press conference.

Junoon and famous Indian singer Anaida will hold their first joint concert in Karachi on Saturday, Azmat said, stressing that it would be attended by thousands of fans.

"Anaida will perform to negate

the theory of war," he said.

Both Azmat and Anaida called for better ties between the two countries and said "singers on both sides of the borders are ready to play their role."

"People to people contact is the best voice for peace," she said.

Junoon has been designated by the United Nations as its ambassador in the fight against AIDS and HIV. The popular group also performed at the UN headquarters soon after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

"It is disturbing that people are dying in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq and I have brought a message for peace," Anaida told AFP.

Azmat said besides Junoon, eight other Pakistani bands will also participate in the Karachi concert. "They will only sing for peace and will say no to war."

"We will also go to Bangladesh and Dubai for similar concerts," Azmat said, adding: "Junoon would love to perform in India, if allowed."