

## Pakistan willing to formalise nuke test ban

Islamabad, Delhi inch towards talks: Jamali

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan is prepared to discuss formalisation of a moratorium on nuclear testing with India, the country's foreign secretary was quoted as saying.

The state-run Associated Press of Pakistan said Riaz Khokar made the statement at a session of the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Thursday.

"It is important for both India and Pakistan to engage in serious discussions for nuclear and strategic stability in our region," APP quoted him as saying.

Khokar said Pakistan and India were already observing a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing and added: "This could be formalised."

APP reported him saying there were several measures Pakistan was prepared to discuss, including non-deployment of nuclear weapons.

He said a formal agreement by the countries to notify each other of ballistic missile tests would constitute an important confidence-building measure.

This month, amid a thaw in ties

with India, Pakistan offered to scrap its nuclear weapons, if India did the same.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee rejected the suggestion, saying India's security concerns were not limited to Pakistan.

Citing regional concerns, India conducted underground nuclear tests in May 1998 and declared itself a nuclear weapons state. Pakistan responded with tests of its own.

According to APP, Khokar also said preserving the conventional balance in South Asia was critical and a major responsibility of countries that exported weapons.

He said transfers of new weaponry, including anti-missile and early-warning systems, would oblige Pakistani countermeasures.

His comments followed a report that the United States had dropped objections to Israel selling India the advanced Phalcon radar system.

The United States persuaded Israel to suspend the sale in early 2002 because of tension between India and Pakistan.

But Israel's Haaretz newspaper said with New Delhi and Islamabad working on better ties, the United States had withdrawn its opposition.

Israel played down the report saying while negotiations had been underway since 2001, nothing had been signed.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali said on Thursday that Islamabad and New Delhi were moving towards the resumption of peace talks and urged the promotion of economic and cultural ties.

"We are moving toward dialogue... we are going step by step," Jamali told reporters on a visit to Karachi.

Jamali said Pakistan was ready for talks on boosting economic, sporting and cultural ties, but stressed that Islamabad would not abandon its "principled stand" on Kashmir.

The two countries went close to a fourth war after suspected Pakistan based militant attacked India's Parliament in late 2001, but have announced steps in the past month to ease tensions.

They have announced a resumption of full diplomatic ties and plans to restore transport links. Pakistan has also proposed a resumption of sporting ties.

Asked when talks between the two countries would resume, Jamali said he thought a recent statement by Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha's was "indicative".

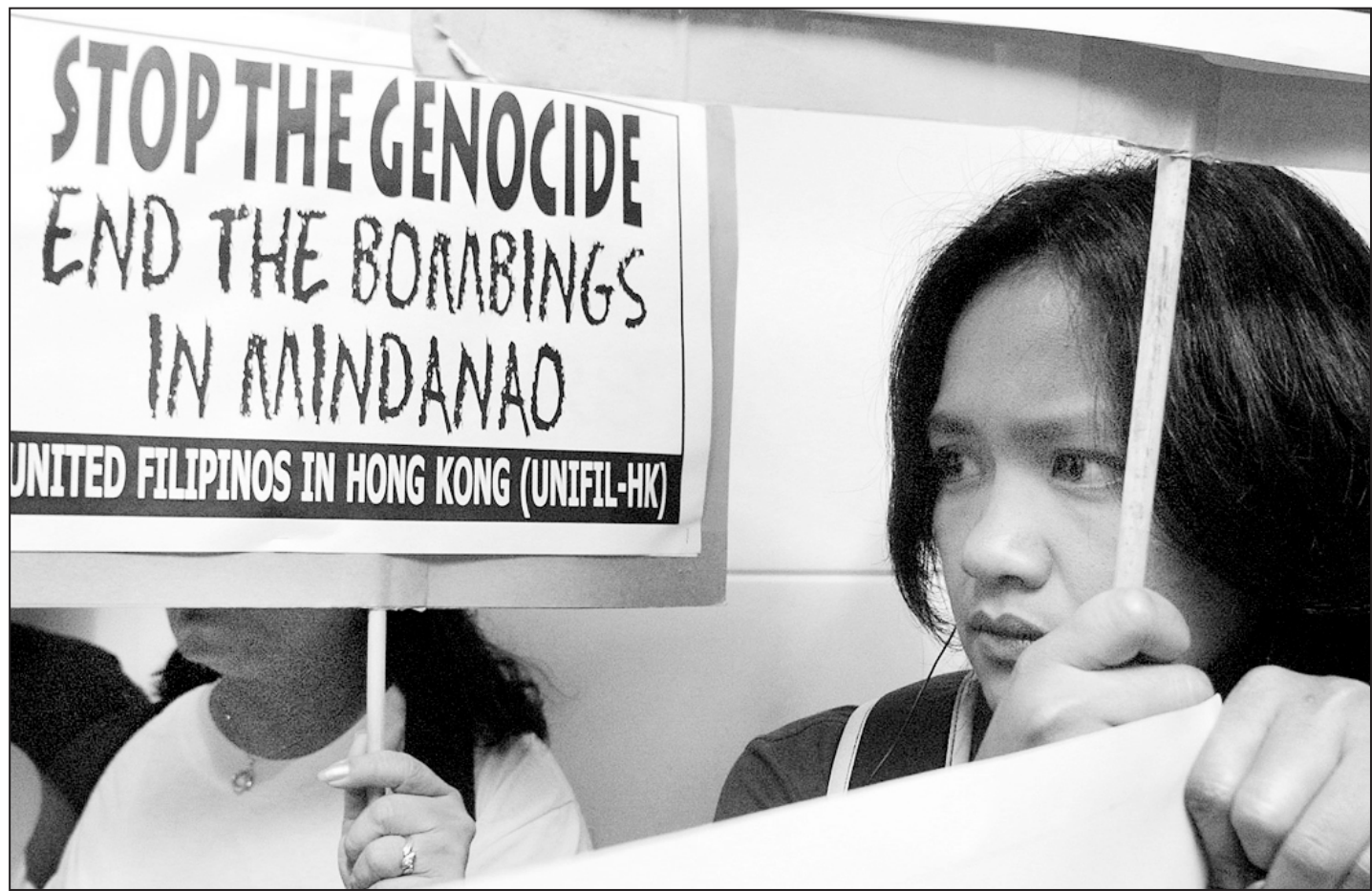
On Thursday, Pakistani newspapers quoted Sinha as saying that the two countries showed a seriousness about resuming dialogue.

India earlier this month has announced its new ambassador to Pakistan. Jamali said his government would soon follow suit.

"Three or four names are under consideration," he said.

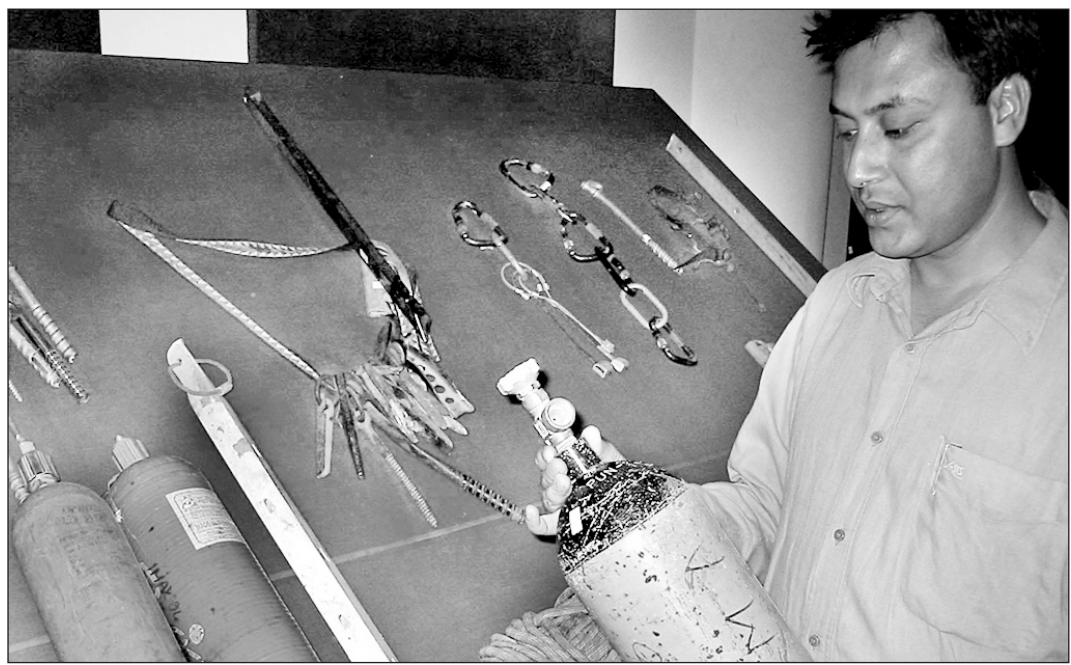
Jamali's comments came even as the Indian army said it had killed 12 militants on Thursday as they tried to slip into Kashmir from Pakistan.

Violence has increased in Kashmir since Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee began the recent thaw with Pakistan by urging talks on the territory.



Members of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFIL) protest at the Philippine consulate in Hong Kong on Friday criticising Philippine President Gloria Arroyo and calling for an end to the US-assisted Philippine military campaign against Moro guerrillas. Arroyo, who met with US President George W. Bush on May 19 in Washington during her week-long visit, ordered a military offensive last weekend against the 12,500-strong Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao.

PHOTO: AFP



Project manager Nabin Ghimire of the International Mountain Museum displays a 5-kg oxygen bottle in Pokhara on May 12, which was used in early mountaineering expeditions. Designed to showcase Nepal's role in international mountaineering, the museum so far hasn't managed to attract a single exhibit from the country's pride and joy Mount Everest.

PHOTO: AFP

## Everest speed climbing record broken

AFP, Kathmandu

A Nepalese Sherpa on Friday smashed the Everest speed climbing record as the stamped to reach the summit of the world's highest peak ahead of celebrations marking its conquest 50 years ago.

The Sherpa, 39-year-old Pemba Dorje, summited in a time of 12 hours 45 minutes, the Nepalese tourism ministry said.

The previous record was 16 hours 56 minutes, set in 2000 by legendary Sherpa Babu Chhiri who died after falling into a crevasse on Everest the following year.

The 39-year-old Dorje, making his 10th ascent of Everest, set out from Base Camp at 5:00 pm (11:15 GMT) Thursday and climbed through the night, reaching the top at 5:45 am (24:00 GMT) Friday.

Unlike Chhiri, Dorje used bottled oxygen from South Col, the ministry said in a statement.

## Pakistan, US officials hold security talks

AFP, Islamabad

A senior US official held talks Friday with top Pakistani defence officials on bilateral relations and the geo-political situation in the region, a statement said.

Assistant Secretary of State for US Political and Military Affairs Lincoln P Bloomfield met Defence Secretary Hamid Nawaz Khan at the defence ministry in the nearby garrison city of Rawalpindi, it said.

The two sides discussed matters related to professional interests and the "geo-political situation of the region and its implications on Pakistan," it said.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is due to hold crucial talks with US President George Bush at Camp David on June 24, as nuclear rivals Pakistan and India prepare to engage in a dialogue which Washington strongly supports.

## US asks Pakistan to snub terror funding

ANI, Islamabad

In what is seen as a serious move to check Pakistan's ill designs of propagating terrorism, the US recently directed the present day administration to immediately stop funding the banned terrorist organisations operating on its soil and make foolproof laws to uproot this trend.

Following the US' "advice", sources say, Pakistan is contemplating to make a few important amendments in its Anti-Terrorism Act 2002.

Certain amendments which have been proposed in the Act entail provisions whereby those found guilty of funding such terrorist organisations would be awarded exemplary punishment.

The Nation reported on Friday that the US conveyed its apprehension about terrorist outfits collecting funds from moneyed people,

who donate in the name of "helping Muslims across the world".

Sources at the finance ministry said legislation only would not do, and strict measures would have to be adopted to curb the menace of terrorism. According to them, all the provincial governments have been directed to seize offices of the banned terrorist outfits and "take legal action against those resisting the move."

The paper reported that Pakistan's investigating agency ISI has also launched a massive crackdown on the non-registered money-changers in Rawalpindi on the suspicion that they are involved in the transportation of money for alleged banned organisations.

Quoting official sources, the paper reported that similar operations would also be carried out in other parts of the country.

## US imposes sanctions on China, Iranian firms

Reuters, AFP, Washington

The United States has slapped sanctions on two major arms companies from China and Iran, accusing them of working in concert to help the Islamic government in Tehran modernise and expand its missile arsenal.

The penalties, which took effect May 9 but were announced by the State Department Thursday, call for termination of all existing contracts between the US government and the North China Industries Corporation, or NORINCO, and Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group, a leading Iranian missile manufacturer.

The order also bans all US assistance to the concerns and calls for the revocation of all export-import licenses they may have held to conduct business in the United States, according to State Department spokeswoman JoAnne Prokopowicz.

The two arms giants and their subsidiaries are also barred from selling goods and services in the United States.

"These penalties were imposed because the US government determined that these entities contributed materially to the efforts of a foreign country -- in this specific case Iran -- to use, acquire, design, develop, produce or stockpile missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction," Prokopowicz told AFP.

The measures will remain in effect for two years.

A key supplier of the People's Liberation Army of China, NORINCO also has a visible presence in the US market as an exporter of hunting rifles and other firearms.

It has a registered capital of about 30 billion dollars, is involved in more than 100 joint ventures around the world and, in addition to weapons, sells high technology products, chemicals and construction machinery, according to GlobalSecurity.org, a local research organisation.

Iran's Shahid Hemmat has already been targeted by the United States for alleged missile technology exchanges with North Korea.

In April 2000, the administration of president Bill Clinton imposed sanctions against it -- along with three other Iranian companies -- for "knowingly engaging in the export of military technology."

The company, which is known as a close partner of Russian defence firms, is believed to have played a crucial role in designing the Shahab-3, an intermediate-range Iranian missile, which experts say is an improved version of North Korea's Nodong.

The US Central Intelligence Agency believes the Shahab-3 is now "in the late stages" of development.

The State Department refused to disclose what specific transgressions the two firms had committed against the Missile Technology Control Regime.

But Prokopowicz noted that while China's non-proliferation performance has improved, "problems remain in the People's Republic of China's enforcement and implementation" of export controls adopted last year.



## Hillary in Nepal to mark Everest golden jubilee

AFP, Kathmandu

A visibly tired Sir Edmund Hillary, confined to a wheelchair, arrived in Nepal Friday to be the guest of honour on the 50th anniversary of his conquest with Tenzing Norgay Sherpa of Mount Everest.

The 83-year-old New Zealander was met by a barrage of reporters as he and his wife arrived by plane in Kathmandu, where he will be feted in marathon celebrations marking his May 29, 1953 ascent of the world's highest peak.

## Lanka pours more troops to boost flood relief

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was deploying more troops to bolster relief operations as floods receded in the island's south after leaving 265 people dead, the head of the island's Disaster Management Centre said Friday.

Karu Jayasuriya said security forces were being deployed to clear roads, repair bridges and distribute food, drinking water and medicine to thousands of people made homeless in the worst flooding in living memory.

He said the death toll stood at 265 and "between 10 to 15" people were still reported missing.

Jayasuriya, who is also the energy minister, said there had been up to 500 complaints in respect of individuals who had gone missing immediately after the flood, but most of them have now been accounted for.

However, the extent of damage to property was far greater than originally feared.

The minister said that 24,750 homes in southern and south-central Sri Lanka had been completely destroyed while another 32,426 were partly damaged by flood waters and mudslides.

"I don't say the relief operation is going all that well... in some places there are setbacks and drawbacks," Jayasuriya said. "We are sending more soldiers from the army and navy to help in."

About 20,000 families were able to return to their homes while another 177,000 families remained in public buildings and makeshift camps after the flooding, the minister said.

Sri Lanka's education ministry meanwhile called for urgent help to rebuild at least 300 schools damaged by the floods in the island's south where some 30,000 students lost their books.

Education Minister Karunasena Kodituwakku said the authorities were stretched to the limit and were seeking stationery, books and furniture to re-equip the schools

affected by the floods. He said at least 100 schools had been completely destroyed while another 200 were damaged.

"In some places, the school buildings have completely collapsed or been buried in mud," Kodituwakku said. "In all the 300 schools, we can't find any furniture or books. All that is lost."

"We can arrange school uniforms and text books, but we need help with other stationery and building materials. We are not in a position to do it ourselves at the moment."

## Suu Kyi, generals to talk soon

THE NATION/ ANN, Bangkok

Myanmar's military government and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will hold long-awaited talks within the next few weeks, Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai said.

"I have been informed that within the next few weeks there will be political dialogue between the leadership of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Aung San Suu Kyi," Surakiart told an audience at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Bangkok on Tuesday night.

## PA rejects demands of Tigers to revive talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party Friday flatly rejected demands by Tiger rebels for an interim administration in war-ravaged regions in exchange for reviving stalled peace talks.

Kumaratunga's People's Alliance party, whose support is crucial for any final settlement to Sri Lanka's drawn-out Tamil separatist conflict, said it was against the granting of administrative powers to Tamil Tigers.

"The PA rejects totally this demand and warns the Prime Minister (Ranil Wickremesinghe) that if he concedes, his government will be in peril," party spokesman Sarath Amunugama told reporters here.

The warning came two days after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) asked for the establishment of an interim administrative council for the island's north-

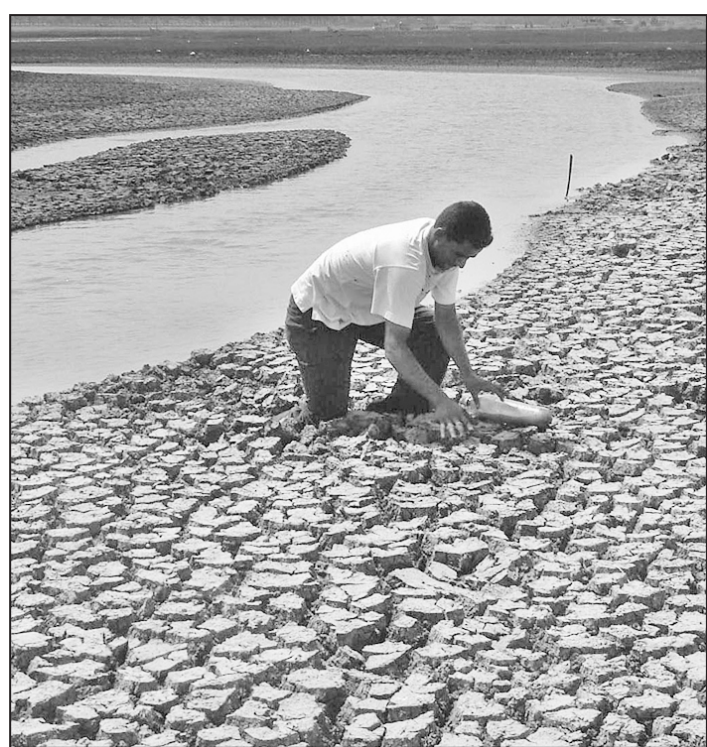
ern and eastern regions giving the rebels a majority stake.

The Tigers said they would re-enter talks and take part in a crucial donor conference Japan is hosting in June only if Wickremesinghe responded favourably.

"If the prime minister demonstrates that he could implement the decisions, it would be adequate for the LTTE to participate in talks," LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Thamilselvan, said Thursday.

Administration officials said the rebel demand was receiving the attention of the government keen to break the impasse and revive the internationally-backed peace process.

However, the cohabitation government of Wickremesinghe lacks the mandatory two-thirds majority necessary to re-write the constitution and must depend on his arch-rival Kumaratunga's party for support to make any statute changes.



An Indian man walks on the dried upper lake in Bhopal on Thursday. A scorching heatwave in India with temperatures close to 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) has killed up to 148 people and caused severe water-shortage.

PHOTO: AFP