

India proposes intelligence sharing with Pakistan

Hizbul backs Indo-Pak peace moves

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha proposed a "joint mechanism" with arch-rival Pakistan to share intelligence to fight Islamic militants, a report said Saturday.

"The terrorists move around Pakistan, go into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and then cross over to this side. It is not possible that there is no knowledge about their activities," Sinha was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency.

"So let us have intelligence-sharing under a joint mechanism. If, as they (the Pakistanis) claim, these things are happening outside their control, then they should have no problem in agreeing to cooperate with us."

India accuses its neighbour of fomenting a 14-year-old insurgency in its only Muslim state of Kashmir by training and arming

Muslim guerrillas and letting them cross the de facto border in the Himalayan region.

Pakistan says it only provides moral and diplomatic support to an "indigenous" movement.

Kashmir is divided between the nuclear-armed rivals and has been the focal point of two of their three full-fledged wars.

Tensions have eased over the past month after Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee offered a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan. The two countries have announced a resumption of air and diplomatic links.

Sinha, however, said: "The pace for resumption of dialogue has to be from both sides. It cannot be from one side alone."

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said Friday a resumption of dialogue with Pakistan was "not very close."

Sinha said Pakistan should prove its sincerity by dismantling the "terrorist infrastructure" for rebels and cutting off their financing.

He welcomed reported restrictions imposed by Pakistan on Kashmiri rebel group Hizbul Mujahideen after it was put on a "terrorist" watch list by the United States.

"We welcome any step taken by Pakistan against terrorists, their networks and support systems," Sinha said.

Pakistani police said Wednesday they had booked two bodyguards of the outfit's Pakistan-based supreme commander Syed Salahuddin for carrying arms in public.

Pakistan has, however, denied a flurry of Indian media reports that the group, the largest rebel organisation operating in Indian Kashmir, had been banned.

Meanwhile, Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest militant group in Jammu and Kashmir, on Saturday said it would react positively to any initiative to find a resolution to the Kashmir dispute.

"If India is serious in resolving the problem, accepts the disputed nature of Kashmir and starts talks, the Hizbul will give a positive response," the group's Pakistan-based supreme commander Syed Salahuddin told a Kashmir-based news agency Current News Service (CNS).

But he said India would have to talk to Pakistan and the Kashmiris simultaneously.

Formed in 1989, Hizbul is the largest Kashmiri militant group.

Hizbul called a unilateral truce in July 2000, but withdrew it after New Delhi refused to involve Pakistan in talks over Kashmir.



Local residents wake up after spending the night in a field on Saturday on the road from Algiers to Boumerdes. The human toll from the May 21 earthquake in northern Algeria has risen to 1,723 dead with 7,605 injured, the country's interior ministry announced on Saturday.

Musharraf needs time to quit one post: Jamali

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister has called on the opposition to stop pressuring President Pervez Musharraf to relinquish his position as head of the armed forces, saying the general should be allowed to decide the timing of such a move.

Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali said Musharraf agrees with opposition leaders that he should not hold the posts of head of state and chief of the armed forces simultaneously, but said the opposition should not insist on a time frame for him to give up his military role.

"There is no ambiguity on this

issue," Jamali said Friday of Musharraf's position.

On Thursday, a coalition of hard-line Islamic groups, called Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal or United Action Forum, demanded that Musharraf give up his military post by Aug. 14, Pakistan's Independence Day.

Musharraf, an army general who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, has said he would not give up military command until he deemed it to be in the country's best interest. Opposition lawmakers have refused to accept his dual roles and the deadlock has crippled parliament. No legislation has been debated or passed since February.

Under international pressure, Musharraf held elections in October to refill the parliament he disbanded when he seized control.

Jamali, a Musharraf ally, was elected prime minister during the vote and runs the day-to-day affairs of the government. But Musharraf still has ultimate power as president, with the right to dissolve parliament and sack the prime minister as he sees fit.

"We have told Jamali that Musharraf will have to face street protests if he does not quit by August 14," Hafiz Hussain Ahmad, an opposition legislator and member of a hardline Islamic coalition that won unprecedented support in the October vote, told The Associated Press.

Resignation of ministers rocks Indian govt

AFP, New Delhi

India's Hindu-nationalist coalition government was rocked by the resignation of two ministers Friday evening, a day ahead of a planned cabinet reshuffle.

India's junior Finance Minister Ginge N Ramchandran submitted his resignation following the arrest of one of his aides for taking a bribe to help an official secure a plum posting, an official said.

Federal detectives had this week arrested Perumal Swamy, an assistant to Ramchandran, who had allegedly received 400,000 rupees (8,330 dollars) from a revenue department official for giving him a choice posting.

Within minutes of Ramchandran's resignation, Agriculture Minister Ajit Singh followed suit, albeit for a different reason -- reportedly because of frictions between his regional RLD party and the ruling federal BJP party.

His party leaders said that Singh was unhappy as he felt the government was not doing enough for farmers.

The resignation of Ramchandran overshadowed that of Singh as the "bribes-for-transfer" scandal has embarrassed the government and likely to tarnish its image, regardless of the cabinet makeover, observers say.

Opposition leaders have demanded the junior finance minister's head, saying that the case showed how deep corruption ran in the government.

Aid rallies to Algeria

BBC ONLINE, Algiers

Nations from South Africa to Germany have been pledging aid to Algeria, where the death toll from Wednesday's earthquake is now believed to be more than 1,600.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - which has a team of experts on the scene - is coordinating relief efforts.

The agency has already requested \$1.5m to provide assistance including medicines, food and blankets.

Scores of bodies continue to be pulled from the rubble of Algeria's earthquake as rescuers race against time to find remaining survivors.

Among the reported successes was the rescue of an two-and-half-

year-old girl, pulled alive from the remains of a collapsed building.

The discovery - reported by state radio - gave hope to those combing the rubble as international rescuers and aid workers stepped up their efforts, sending specially trained dogs and listening devices.

But a spokesman for the German Red Cross said time was running out.

"You can hear people scream under the rubble, but nobody can get to them," a spokesman, Luebbo Roewer, told the Associated Press news agency.

In addition to the 1,600 people thought to have died in Wednesday's quake, more than 7,000 have been injured.

The rescue of the baby in Boumerdes, near Algiers and the

worst hit area of the country, took place 36 hours after the tremor hit.

Pulled out of the ruins of a five-storey building wearing just a torn orange T-shirt, the girl was given oxygen and taken away for treatment.

The girl's father told reporters rescue workers had initially thought they would have to amputate the girl's arm to pull her free.

Hundreds or even thousands may still be trapped under collapsed buildings.

Algeria has begun three days of national mourning, but there will be no pause in the rescue effort.

Medical and rescue teams have been despatched from across Europe, while South Africa sent recovery teams and relief and China's Red Cross donated \$50,000.



Acehese primary school children salvage materials from their school, which was burned down as the Indonesian troops battled with GAM (Free Aceh Movement) militants at Ceurogok, in northeast side of Aceh on Saturday. The war has left at least 328 schools burned down in attacks blamed by the military on GAM, leaving around 100,000 children with nowhere to study. The rebels say the army is behind the arson attacks aiming to smear GAM.

Indonesia plans new Aceh ID cards

REUTERS, Banda Aceh

Indonesia said on Saturday civilians in Aceh, scene of its biggest military crackdown in decades, would be given new ID cards to stop separatist rebels blending in with the population.

With the United Nations warning of a looming humanitarian crisis after five days of fighting, a military spokesman predicted the plan would help restore normality to parts of the staunchly Moro province at the northern tip of Sumatra Island.

"The ID card will have signatures from the local region, the local police and the local military," a military spokesman, Major M. Solih, said. "This is for the sake of the people to normalise the situation in parts of Aceh."

Police say Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebels have been confiscating people's old identification cards, but it was not clear when the

new cards would be introduced.

Indonesia declared martial law and attacked the rebels on Monday after a five-month peace agreement collapsed.

Officials said on Friday that 23,000 civilians had fled their homes in the province, which is rich in gas and oil. The United Nations said basic health services had collapsed in places.

More than 10,000 people, most of them civilians, have been killed in a 27-year war in the province, one of two separatist hotspots in the sprawling archipelago. Papua province in the far east is the other.

The military says 58 rebels have been killed since Monday. The rebels say 53 civilians have been killed, along with 12 GAM fighters and 43 soldiers and police.

The casualty tolls could not be independently verified, but the Indonesian military denies causing civilian deaths.

US, Japan won't tolerate nukes in North Korea

AFP, Crawford

US President George W. Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi vowed Friday that they "will not tolerate" nuclear weapons in North Korea, advancing US efforts to forge a united front in the region.

"The prime minister and I see the problem exactly the same way," Bush said after meeting with Koizumi at his Texas ranch.

"We will not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea. We will not give in to blackmail. We will not settle for anything less than the complete, verifiable and irreversible-

ible elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program."

Neither side laid out any specific new steps, but agreed that Japan and South Korea should eventually join the talks begun last month in Beijing gathering China, the United States and North Korea.

Koizumi said that "coordination among Japan, the United States and the Republic of Korea is crucial" to resolving the crisis peacefully.

"Continuation of the multilateral talks is important, and participation by Japan and the Republic of Korea is essential," he said.

At the Beijing talks, North Korea offered to ditch its nuclear and missile programs in return for economic and diplomatic payoffs.

The United States sees such proposals as "blackmail," and has sought to line up other nations in the region in opposing the North Korean stance.

The two leader's remarks echoed almost verbatim the statement made last week after South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun met Bush in Washington, calling for more diplomacy but warning of tougher measures if the North Korean crisis escalates.

Opposition vehemently opposes LTTE demand

THE ISLAND/ ANN, Colombo

The People's Alliance (PA) the main opposition party led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga vehemently opposes the LTTE demand for a "Internal administration outside the constitutional framework of Sri Lanka," as a prerequisite for their participation in the 'donor conference' at Tokyo in June to break the impasse in the peace talks.

This stand of the PA was disclosed at a press briefing of the PA by its spokesman Dr. Sarath Amunugama yesterday at the Opposition leader's office.

Amunugama reiterated that President Kumaratunga had once suggested to the LTTE an internal administration within the constitution of Sri Lanka with other significant conditions such as 'laying down of arms' and renunciation of violence by the LTTE. Protection of human rights and the plurality issues of the Muslim and the Sinhala communities in the north and east should also be addressed, he said.

He further charged that it is ironical for Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to have taken the oath of allegiance three times as an MP, Minister and Prime Minister in accordance to the present constitution, and now to tamper with this same constitution, the fundamental law of the country to satisfy the LTTE. This is a joke, he said.



A young woman flies a kite on the Great Wall at Badaling, 80km outside Beijing to support the fight against SARS on Saturday. Beijing has seen a "notable downward" trend in the disease known as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) cases over the past week. Officials expressing confidence said the capital can beat the outbreak but warn of a new challenge as people return to normal routines.