

## US interested in setting up military bases in India

PTI, New Delhi

United States, which has lined up several joint military exercises with the Indian armed forces, is interested in establishing access to military bases in the country, claims a US defence specialist quoting a latest Pentagon report.

The report, quoted by the American specialist who advises US industry and policy-makers, says, "American military officers are candid in their plans to eventually seek access to Indian bases and military infrastructure."

The report based on interviews of senior US and Indian military officials has been quoted by the specialist, John E Carbaugh Jr, in a website US-India friendship.net.

"India's strategic location in the centre of Asia, astride the frequently

travelled Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) linking Middle East and East Asia, makes India particularly attractive to the US military," Carbaugh said quoting the recent Pentagon report, entitled Indo-US Military Relationship: Expectations and Perceptions.

Carbaugh, in his paper on the same issue, said, "currently, the Pentagon is undertaking a major review of the future of US bases in Asia in order to have more flexibility in responding to regional crises and to deal with terrorism."

He quotes the Pentagon report as saying that for many American military personnel "India is the most attractive alternative. For these reasons, several Americans underscored that eventual access to Indian military infrastructure represents a critical strategic hedge

against dramatic changes in traditional US relationships in Asia".

Carbaugh quoted US armed forces officials as saying the US navy wanted a relatively neutral territory on the opposite side of the world that could provide ports and support for operations in the Middle East.

"India not only has a good infrastructure, the Indian Navy has proved that it can fix and fuel US ships. Over time, port visits must become a natural event," the US officials were quoted as saying and adding that India was "a viable player in supporting all naval missions, including escorting and responding to regional crises".

In the same vein, "the US air force would like the Indians to grant them access to bases and landing rights during operations, such as

counter-terrorism and heavy airlift support," the American military officials said.

The report also said that although the Pentagon was rethinking its strategies to deal with modern threats such as terrorism, "US officials are still concerned over the more traditional geo-political problems in the region, notably a rising China."

Carbaugh quoted the Pentagon report as concluding that "the US and India should forge a long-term security alliance partly aimed at containing China."

"Strategic engagement with India could become a future investment of growing value if Asia becomes a hostile environment," it says, adding that Pentagon felt India "should emerge as a vital component of US strategy."



(L to R) Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, Information Minister Shaikh Rasheed Ahmed, Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali, parliament leader for the ruling party Chaudhary Shujat Hussain, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz and Communications Minister Abdul Sattar Lalika join hands to show solidarity after delivering the 2003-2004 budget in parliament in Islamabad on Saturday.

## Pak FM expects talks with India by July

IANS, Islamabad

Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri expects talks with India to resume by next month and said his country would "positively respond" to every Indian move aimed at normalising ties, a report said.

He told The News on Friday that the roadmap for talks between India and Pakistan "would soon come to light", after which the two countries would "gradually" move towards a dialogue.

He hoped the talks would be held this month or in early July.

Pakistan, Kasuri said, would "positively respond" to every Indian move aimed at normalising ties and improving bilateral relations.

He said durable peace could come to the region with the settlement of all issues, including Kashmir.

Kasuri said Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali had announced steps for building confidence under which train and bus services would soon resume between the two countries.

## NC to back new PM if he calls polls

AFP, Kathmandu

The leader of Nepal's largest political party, Girija Prasad Koirala, has said he will support new prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa if he calls a general election or reinstates the dissolved parliament.

"If Thapa's cabinet passes a resolution recommending to the king the reinstatement of the parliament or declaration of general elections we will support him and contest the elections," Koirala told journalists late Saturday.

Koirala, as well as the leaders of most other parties, have said they would not support Thapa, who was appointed by King Gyanendra on Wednesday.

Gyanendra sacked the elected prime minister in October and appointed royalist Lokendra Bahadur Chand, prompting protests from political parties, who said his move was undemocratic.

At the same time Gyanendra postponed elections to the parliament which had already been dissolved ahead of the polls.

Chand resigned on May 30 after weeks of protests by the political parties, saying he wanted to end the discord.

The five main political parties



Nepali opposition Leader G P Koirala had put forward the name of Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) as their choice for prime minister.

"But the king grossly ignored our recommendations and appointed Thapa as the new prime minister," Koirala said.

"It is a violation of the constitution and people's democratic rights to discard the recommendation of more than 75 percent of the parliament."

## UN envoy has slim chance of meeting Suu Kyi

AFP, Yangon

UN envoy Razali Ismail has only a slim chance of meeting democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi who has been detained by the junta for over a week, a source close to his mission to Myanmar said Sunday.

Razali is expected to cut short his trip if the government refuses to allow him to see Aung San Suu Kyi, who was taken into custody after violent clashes in northern Myanmar in which she is believed to have been hurt.

After talks with military intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt and Foreign Minister Win Aung, Razali indicated Saturday he had not yet been granted a meeting, but that he was still hopeful of securing one.

"I am still discussing this with the government," he told reporters.

But officials with the envoy in Yangon said that although the tone of the meetings had been polite and friendly, he had made little progress in his goals of securing a meeting and pushing for her release.

"There is a 10 percent chance that he can see her. It will depend on the meeting tomorrow morning with the highest officials," the source said, adding that the talks would be with one of the junta's top-three generals.

## We serve as Pakistan's defence line: Hizbul

PTI, New Delhi

Pakistan cannot end its support to militant groups as they serve as a defence line for the country, says Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin.

In an interview with Pakistani magazine News Line, Salahuddin denied that Kashmiri militants were losing their support in Pakistan.

"No, it is not true. The Pakistani government and President Pervez Musharraf will not end their moral and diplomatic support to us. They are sincere to the Kashmir cause."

"The Mujahideen struggle serves as a defence line for Pakistan...if the movement weakens, the war could be fought inside Pakistan due to the naked aggression of the Indians. So one should stop thinking that Pakistan can distance itself from the Kashmiri movement," the chief of the Pakistan-based militant group said.

However, Salahuddin said that the militants did not have a clear picture of global and regional politics, but they are influenced by international events. They also see Pakistan's changed policy towards Afghanistan. However, they should

not lose their heart. Militancy will be strengthened..."

Commenting on ceasefire as suggested by Hurriyat Conference, Salahuddin said, "the Muttahida (United) Jihad Council has decided that the Mujahideen will continue their struggle. (Indo-Pak) talks and the militancy can take place simultaneously, as has happened in the past."

AFP adds: India's new negotiator on Kashmir, N.N. Vohra, was Sunday starting a week-long visit to the troubled Himalayan region to initiate peace talks, an official said.

"The visit to Jammu is aimed at taking the dialogue process forward with leaders across the political spectrum," said a government official in charge of Vohra's peace mission to the state's winter capital.

Vohra, a retired bureaucrat, was appointed as New Delhi's pointman on Kashmir in February and was authorised to initiate talks with elected representatives and other sectors of Kashmiri society.

## Vajpayee spells out peace package for Nagaland

PTI, New Delhi

In a bid to carry forward the peace process in Nagaland, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday announced conversion of Rs 365-crore loan to the state as a one-time grant.

"I have now decided to extend a peace bonus to Nagaland. An amount of Rs 365-crore extended to Nagaland as Ways and Means loans, will now be converted into a one-time grant. This will enable the state to meet all its past liabilities and will also result in an annual interest savings of Rs 44 crore by the state," the Prime Minister said in a statement here.

Stating that sustainable development was the only key to an enduring peace process, Vajpayee said the Naga peace process had attained momentum and needed to be sustained.

## N Korea threatens to counter US arms buildup in South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has threatened to counter United States plans for massive military enhancements on the Korean peninsula with a "corresponding powerful deterrent force."

The threat was issued late Saturday by the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in response to an 11 billion-dollar US plan to boost the war capability of American troops in South Korea.

The plan, disclosed last week during a trip here by US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, is part of US preparations to "ignite a war that may bring immeasurable disasters to the Korean peninsula," KCNA said.

"Our army and people will answer the US arms buildup with a corresponding powerful deterrent force and its pre-emptive attack with

a prompt retaliation to destroy it at the initial stage of war," it said.

The agency said North Korea's deterrent force would serve as a "merciless sledge-hammer to any aggressors".

"Now that what the US really seeks has become clear, the DPRK (North Korea) has the legitimate right to counter such moves."

The US plan calls for the deployment of more Patriot missiles, high-speed vessels and a light-armoured Stryker brigade that could be rapidly airlifted to reinforce the peninsula in a crisis.

The United States has already sent 24 long-range B-52 and B-1 bombers to the western Pacific island of Guam to bring them within striking range of North Korea. Six F-117A Stealth fighter-bombers have also been kept in South Korea since March.



Indian boys play football on a dry bed pond on the outskirts of Bhopal on Sunday. The water scarcity in the region is increasing as the relentless hot summer continues to take its toll with more than 1,400 people dying and many water resources drying-up.

## Pak heatwave to subside in 24 hours

AFP, Islamabad

Rain coupled with dust and thunderstorms are expected to bring relief to parts of Pakistan in the grip of a heatwave that has killed more than 160 people, an official said Sunday.

"The temperatures are likely to subside by one degree celsius (33.8 degree fahrenheit) in the upper parts of North West Frontier Province, upper Punjab province and southern Pakistan in the next 24 hours," Muhammad Hanif, a meteorologist at the Pakistan Meteorological Department told AFP.

"By Monday there could be some relief in sweltering weather as rain and thunderstorms are expected Sunday night in northern areas of Pakistan," he added.

## Lottery win for trio who used same cupid agency

AFP, Singapore

Three Singaporean men found more than just love when they turned to the same matchmaking agency in their search for a spouse, the Sunday Times reported.

The trio won more than 100,000 Singapore dollars (58,139 US) when separate bets placed by them using the four-digit license number "2858" of the same rented bridal car used in their weddings drew third prize in last week's draw, the report said.

"Winning the lottery is a double blessing. How often do you have marital bliss and strike the lottery at the same time?" said Mark Lin of Sin Ye International Matchmaker, an agency which unites Vietnamese women with Singaporean men.

The three men, aged between 28 and 46, each paid more than 16,000 dollars to go on a one week match-making tour of Vietnam organised by Sin Ye.

"I did not expect to win. I was just happy to marry her because she looked like the sort who would take good care of me," said 46-year-old Lim Lai Soon, who won 20,000 dollars with his bet.

## Indonesia bars foreigners from Aceh

AFP Jakarta

Indonesian authorities are to close the conflict-hit province of Aceh to foreigners following the shooting of two German tourist last week, a report said Sunday as authorities claimed a new death toll of 150.

Security minister Sudito Bambang Yudhoyono speaking in northern Aceh's Lhokseumawe, said the move to be made within two days would protect foreigners and keep them away from military strikes on rebels, Media Indonesia reported.

His comments came as military spokesman Colonel Ditya Sudrasono said a total of 150 rebels had been killed and 88 others captured since last month's launch of a major campaign against separatists.

Sudrasono said 95 rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) had surrendered to authorities, 12 soldiers and three policemen lost their lives while 27 soldiers and five policemen have been wounded.

He said total of 24,775 refugees have been registered across Aceh since it was placed under martial law last month when troops began recent operations against GAM rebels who have been battling for independence since 1976.

## Chandrika refuses to back Tokyo donors' conference

THE ISLAND/ ANN, Colombo

Troubled relations between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe have hit a new low as the president ignored a Japanese government request to issue a statement supporting the Tokyo donor conference opening on Monday, political sources said.

Wickremesinghe's government expects up to US \$ 3 billion from donors and international lending agencies over a three-year period to implement a rapid development programme covering the entire country.

"The request was made through her advisor Lakshman Kadirgamar, MP," the sources said.

"The Japanese were of the view that whatever the differences, the two parties should have made a joint appeal for international assistance," the sources said.

The conference hosts desired a video message from the president. It was to be telecast before Wickremesinghe's speech scheduled to be delivered immediately

after Japanese Premier Junichiro Koizumi delivers his speech opening the two-day meeting beginning on Monday. The president's office yesterday confirmed her decision not to issue a statement in Tokyo.

Her refusal came as the Tigers reiterated their decision to boycott the Tokyo meeting. The president has publicly criticised the Japanese for making a strong bid to persuade the Tigers to take part in the conference, co-chaired by Japan, the US, and Norway.

Earlier she cancelled a meeting with the Japanese special envoy Yasushi Akashi to register her protest against a deeper Japanese role in the Oslo-led peace process.

The president also refused to meet with Wickremesinghe before he left for Tokyo early Friday. The premier sought a meeting with the president ahead of his departure to brief her of the forthcoming meeting, the sources said. But the president snubbed him, the sources said.

"She was of the view that there was no point in a meeting as the government and the Japanese have decided on everything," they said.