

Pakistan won't be bullied by India, says Musharraf

Islamabad seeks more reward from US

REUTERS, Rawalpindi

President Pervez Musharraf said on Sunday Pakistan would not be bullied by India and insisted he wanted peace in the region—but not on India's terms.

Relations between the nuclear-armed rivals have thawed in the last two months, since Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee opened the door to talks over Kashmir, a Himalayan region over which they have fought two of their three wars.

But Musharraf, a general who took power in a 1999 military coup, told Reuters in an interview late on Sunday he was not convinced of India's genuine commitment to peace.

"I am not 100 per cent sure," he said. "Talks should take place, they are moving very slowly, they need to move faster, they can move faster. Whether we move forward on the Kashmir issue, we will see, time will tell."

Musharraf's words appeared to throw further cold water on hopes for quick progress in easing tensions in South Asia.

In April, Vajpayee promised a final bid for peace with Pakistan in

his lifetime, and both sides have since put forward confidence-building measures, including agreeing to restore full diplomatic ties.

The New Delhi government says it will not agree to start talks until Pakistan takes action to end the infiltration of Muslim militants into Jammu and Kashmir, something Pakistan says it has already done.

"The problem with India is they are too conscious of their large size and they believe in coercing their neighbours," Musharraf said. "They want to dictate terms to us, they want to dictate their version of a solution. We will not take that."

"We will not compromise our sovereign equality," he said. "Within these parameters we want peace, we want harmony. We will take three steps if they take one, but let them not treat us like any small country around. We are a powerful nation."

He said India took every opportunity to malign Pakistan, and had tried to bully it last year by stationing hundreds of thousands of troops along the border after an attack on the Indian parliament which the New Delhi government blamed on Pakistani militants.

Earlier on Sunday, India said it

was "deeply disappointed" by Musharraf's response to recent peace overtures, in particular by recent remarks he made to an Indian television channel.

In that interview, Musharraf appeared not to rule out a recurrence of clashes in 1999 in the Kargil region of Kashmir, comments New Delhi said condoned "military adventurism".

But Musharraf said he had been quoted out of context.

"They are looking for an excuse to malign us, or to target me personally," he said. "The issue is what I said. I said 'if we don't resolve this... anything can happen'."

"Why are they pinning it on me as though I am going to do something? I am not going to do anything."

"We have fought three wars in the past, so what is the guarantee in the future there won't be any further action? That is not an aggressive statement, it is a statement of fact."

Musharraf was commander-in-chief of Pakistan's armed forces when the Kargil clashes erupted in 1999, and was widely blamed for sabotaging a peace initiative at the time between Nawaz Sharif's civil-

ian government and India.

Facing the sack over the whole episode, he later deposed Sharif in a coup.

Musharraf sets off later this week for a visit to Britain, the United States, Germany and France, crowned by a meeting with US President George W Bush on June 24.

He said he wanted the United States to put more pressure on India over Kashmir and to accept that the dispute must be resolved for peaceful progress in the region.

Meanwhile, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said he would be going to Washington later this month to tell the US government it should do more to reward Pakistan for its cooperation in the war on terror.

Musharraf told Reuters in an interview on Sunday that many Pakistanis feel short-changed by Washington, even though Islamabad has received over a billion dollars in debt forgiveness and hundreds of millions in aid since throwing its weight behind the US-led "war on terrorism."



PHOTO: AFP

Turkish State Minister Ali Babjani (L) and Pakistani Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat (R) sign an agreement on drug trafficking at the prime minister's house on Sunday in Islamabad as Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (back-L) and his Pakistani counterpart, Zafarullah Khan Jamali (back-C), look on. Erdogan, who was on a one-day trip to Pakistan, held talks with high officials to discuss various issues.

15 killed as train, bus collide in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

Fifteen wedding guests were killed and seven critically injured early Monday when a train hit a bus at a level crossing in Indonesia's Central Java province, police said.

The bus, carrying 22 people to a wedding, was hit by a train at the town of Sragen around 2:00 am, they said.

The train, travelling from Jakarta to Malang in East Java, dragged the bus for hundreds of meters (feet) before it stopped.

Police said they were questioning a crossing guard who failed to close the barrier before the train arrived.

Accidents at level crossings and elsewhere are common on Indonesia's dilapidated railway system.

Floods engulf more areas in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

At least 400,000 people have been left homeless in India's northeastern state of Assam by flash floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains, an official said Monday.

"Eight districts have been hit by the first wave of floods with four districts severely affected so far," Assam Revenue Minister Mithias Tudu told AFP.

"A total of up to 400,000 people spread over nearly 450 villages were displaced in the floods."

The worst-hit districts were Hailakandi and Karimganj in the south, western Nalbari, and Dhemaji in the east.

"Thousands of people in Hailakandi and Karimganj were taking shelter in makeshift tents and in government buildings and schools, besides some on embankments as well," Tudu said.

"We are providing relief and medicines to the flood-hit people."

Assam's Flood Control Minister Nurzamal Sarkar said hundreds of villages in the province's western Goalpara and Dhubri, northern Sonitpur and eastern Morigaon districts were flooded overnight.

"The situation in these four districts is not very severe although several low lying areas were inundated by floodwaters," Sarkar told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

Senior Congress Party leader Manmohan Singh (L) speaks as Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) and opposition leader and Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi (C) listen, during a meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. Vajpayee met main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi to forge a consensus on sending Indian troops to Iraq as part of a stabilisation force.

Lanka makes fresh offer to salvage peace

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka said Monday it would offer unspecified administrative and political powers to Tamil Tiger rebels in a desperate bid to salvage the Norwegian-brokered peace process.

Sri Lanka's chief peace negotiator G. L. Peiris said the government would shortly present the basic outline of a structure that could be finalised after discussions with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The government offer was an effort to end the impasse in peace talks and bring the negotiating process back on track, said Peiris, who is also the government's constitutional affairs minister.

"It is necessary that the parties talk to each other to carry the process forward," Peiris told reporters here.

Advani eyes dual citizenship law soon

PTI, London

The Dual Citizenship Bill, currently before the standing committee of Parliament, will become a law by the end of this year, Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani said here on Sunday night.

Replying to a largely-attended reception in his honour hosted by the Indian High Commissioner Ronen Sen at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre here, Advani said he had the privilege to pilot the Bill in the Lok Sabha.

"It has been referred to the Standing Committee. After two to three months, it will come back to Parliament and before this year end the bill will become law," he said.

The reception was attended among others by Lord Swraj Paul, Ambassador for Overseas British Business, Lord Navnit Dholakia, President of the Liberal Democrats, Piara Singh Khabra, Lord King and film producer Shekhar Kapur.

India, US begin talks on troops for Iraq

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

A team of senior American defence officials held talks with Indian foreign ministry mandarins Monday to provide vital inputs on the possibility of deployment of Indian troops for "stabilisation" in Iraq as New Delhi asserted it would take a final view on the issue only after consultations with major parties on both sides of the political divide and Iraq's neighbours.

The Pentagon officials led by Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Peter Rodman arrived here late Sunday night following New Delhi's seeking of clarifications from Bush dispensation on different aspects of possible deployment of Indian troops in post-war Iraq.

The US is reportedly keen to have a division of Indian soldiers in Iraq and the issue was raised by

none other than American President George W Bush when he had a meeting with Indian Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani in Washington last week.

But India's main opposition Congress, the Left parties and other opposition parties have strongly opposed sending of Indian troops to Iraq unless under the United Nations aegis.

In fact, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi had on June four written a letter to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee opposing deployment of Indian troops in Iraq under any command other than that of the UN.

She said sending troops to Iraq under the command of US and British forces would be a gross violation of the fundamentals of Indian foreign policy.

Advani did not make any commitment to Bush and conveyed to him that India would take a decision only

after getting clarifications about certain aspects relating to the command and control structure of the Indian troops before taking a decision.

Bush promptly agreed to send a team of Pentagon officials in a bid to address Indian concerns.

Shortly before the arrival of the Pentagon team, Vajpayee held a 70-minute meeting with Sonia Gandhi last evening discussing the issue of sending Indian troops to Iraq.

Emerging from the meeting, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha told reporters that a decision on sending Indian troops to Iraq would be taken in the "best national interest" and after consultations with "interested" political parties, including constituents of India's ruling alliance, as well as countries in the neighborhood of Iraq.

Kashmiris freedom struggle is not terrorism: Jamali

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali used a visit by his Turkish counterpart to rail against India's depiction of the 14-year insurgency

in Kashmir as "terrorism," state media reported Monday.

"Kashmiris' valiant struggle for their right to self-determination is cynically sought to be portrayed by India as terrorism," he said at a

banquet he hosted late Sunday for Turkey's prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been struggling for their right to self-determination pledged to them by the United Nations Security Council more than half a century back," he said in reference to resolutions, dating back to 1948, urging a plebiscite.

Jamali's comments came as both Erdogan and Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who also visited Islamabad on Sunday, urged Pakistan and India to resolve the 56-year-old Kashmir dispute through talks.

Pakistan and India are currently trying to bridge tensions by restoring ambassadorial, transport and direct business links severed since December 2001, when New Delhi blamed Pakistan for an attack on its parliament and mobilised hundreds of thousands of troops to its western borders.

Indian MPs embark on peace mission to Pakistan

AP, Lahore

Encouraged by the recent peace overtures, a delegation of Indian lawmakers will arrive in Pakistan on Tuesday for talks on ways to promote peace in the region, an independent peace advocacy group said.

Indian parliament member Kuldip Nayyar is leading the delegation of up to 14 lawmakers from New Delhi, said Kamran Khan, spokesman for the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy.

Pakistan and India have been at odds since they gained independence from Britain in 1947. They have fought two out of their three wars over the disputed region of Kashmir.

The two countries imposed diplomatic sanctions and severed travel links after a December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, which New Delhi blamed on two Pakistan-based militant groups and Pakistan's spy agency, Pakistan however, denied any involvement.

Pakistan and India recently announced they would restore diplomatic and communication links, raising hopes for peace in the subcontinent.

Khan said the delegation will arrive in the eastern city of Lahore for a weeklong visit after passing by road through the Wagah border crossing.

"The Indian lawmakers are coming to Pakistan in response to Pakistani lawmakers' recent visit to India to promote peace through people-to-people contacts," he said. Several Pakistani parliamentarians went to India in May.

Khan said the delegation will spend three days in Lahore, two days in Islamabad, and two days in the southern city of Karachi before returning home.

"We will continue encouraging Pakistan and India to resolve their disputes through talks and negotiations," he said.

Pakistan and India have not, as yet, set any dates for formal peace talks.

Russia-Pakistan ties not at India's cost: Ivanov

PTI, New Delhi

Russia on Monday assured India that its desire to improve ties with Pakistan would not be at the cost of New Delhi.

The assurance was given by the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov at a 45 minute meeting with the Defence Minister George Fernandes.

"Any improvement in ties with Islamabad would not be at the cost of our long standing relationship with New Delhi," Ivanov told newsmen after the meeting.

The Russian Minister's remarks assumes significance as it comes in the wake of his just concluded visit to Islamabad, where Pakistani military authorities reportedly evinced keen interest in the purchase of strategic Russian weaponry including missile shields and aircraft.

Officials said India and Russia held wide ranging talks on cooperation in combating terrorism, defence technology tie-ups as well on prevailing situation in the region during the meeting.

Ivanov, who arrived here on Sunday night, is also understood to have discussed certain key Russian defence sales to India, particularly the acquisition by Indian Navy of the Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier.

The negotiations for the multi-million dollar deal are almost at the final stages with the deal likely to be signed very soon, defence officials said.

Fernandes briefed the Russian minister about the situation on the Indo-Pak border, conveying that the level of infiltration across the Line of Control had not reduced despite peace overtures by India.



Prof. Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director of Grameen Bank, was received by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his visit to Turkey last week. After the landslide victory of his party Erdogan invited Prof. Yunus to launch a Grameen microcredit programme in Turkey. During the visit Prof. Yunus launched a microcredit project in the south-eastern district of Diyarbakir under the supervision of a team of senior Grameen Bank staff.