



Pakistani border personnel Sahi Marjan (2nd from L) shakes hand with his Indian counterpart D.K Sharma (R) after presenting him sweets on the occasion of Pakistan's 56th Independence Day at the Wagah border post yesterday. While Pakistan celebrates its Independence Day amid an unprecedented thaw in relations with India and a flurry of goodwill gestures between its people and lawmakers, Pakistani Prime Minister Minister Zafarullah Jamali said that peace with India hinged on Kashmir, the region at the center of bilateral tensions since the subcontinent was divided 56 years ago.

'Peace with India hinges on resolution of Kashmir row'

Jamali calls for peace on Independence Day address

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali called for peace with nuclear rival India yesterday, but said key differences between the two countries must be resolved. "Our forefathers did not lay the foundation of a new country to create enmity," Jamali said at an Independence Day ceremony ahead of India's celebration on Friday.

"I will also say to Bharat (India), if it wants to see the region free from the clutches of hardship, it has to settle its fundamental differences with Pakistan."

Last year, Pakistan and India came close to waging their fourth war since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, following a deadly attack on the Indian parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistani militants.

Relations have gradually thawed since April after Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, 78, vowed to make a final drive for peace in his lifetime.

The two countries reapointed ambassadors, resumed a suspended bus service across the border and are soon to discuss restoring air links. In a fresh goodwill gesture, India offered on Thursday to help Pakistan contain an oil spill that occurred after an oil tanker grounded off the port of Karachi.

"Should the Government of Pakistan respond positively, the Government of India would provide immediate cooperation through its capabilities, equipment and materials including pollution response equipment, dispersants and containment booms," Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Navtej Sama told reporters.

Pakistani officials had said on Wednesday they feared a major oil spill as the Greek tanker, carrying 67,500 tonnes of crude, had started breaking up.

Two of the wars between the rivals have been over Kashmir, which both nations claim in its entirety. Their armies regularly exchange small arms and artillery fire along the Line

of Control, the de facto border that divides the lush Himalayan territory.

Jamali said friendly relations between Pakistan and India depended on a resolution to the Kashmir question and on ensuring Kashmiris the right of self-determination.

"We will have to find a solution to the problem of Jammu and Kashmir," he said referring to the name of India's only Muslim-majority state. "It is a fundamental link to peace in South Asia."

On Tuesday, in another move to improve ties, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf suggested a cease-fire along the Line of Control.

However, India poured cold water on the suggestion, saying such proposals had not been effective in the past because Pakistan continued to sponsor "terrorism" directed against India.

Pakistan says it does not directly help militants crossing from its side of Kashmir to the Indian-administered side, but offers them political and diplomatic support.

most of them civilians, have been killed in a 14-year insurgency against Indian rule.

PTI adds: India yesterday said that it was not surprised at comments made by Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali in a speech to mark his country's Independence Day.

During his speech Jamali referred to the oft-repeated statement that Kashmiri people should be granted their right of self-determination.

"We are not surprised at what has been said. We would have been surprised if nothing was said," External Affairs Ministry spokesman told reporters in New Delhi.

He was asked about Jamali's speech at a flag hoisting ceremony in Islamabad. Declaring that Pakistan was all for friendly and cordial ties with India, Jamali, however, said the objective could not be realised till Kashmiris were granted their right of self-determination.

Tens of thousands of people,

Blast in bus kills 6 as India sounds I-Day security alert

AFP, New Delhi

A powerful bomb killed six passengers on a bus in northeastern India yesterday as fears of more attacks put the country on high security alert on the eve of annual Independence Day celebrations.

The blast in Manipur state, which also left 15 injured, was the latest in a string of rebel attacks in the region where 11 separatist groups have called a boycott of Friday's national event.

A boycott was also called in Indian-administered Kashmir, where the day marking India's independence from Britain in 1947 has always been observed by militants and those who want the region to secede as a "black day."

"We appeal to the people of

Kashmir to observe an exemplary one-day strike on August 15 to impress upon the world that Kashmiris will continue their struggle until they achieve freedom," the region's main separatist alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, said Thursday.

The alliance is headquartered in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, which becomes a hub for demonstrations every August 15 with anti-Indian protesters displaying black flags or clashing with the police.

Worries of attacks by Islamic guerrillas around Independence Day led federal security forces to boost defence measures, especially in troubled Kashmir.

"We have deployed adequate troops to prevent militant attacks," a spokesman for the Border Security Force (BSF) paramilitary unit said,

adding checkpoints and 24-hour patrols had already started in the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley. In Kashmir's Hindu-dominated winter capital of Jammu, authorities deployed 10,000 additional paramilitary troops and units from Indian army's combat formations ahead of Friday's event.

Police Inspector General P.L. Gupta said layers of security had barricaded two sports stadiums in Srinagar and Jammu to prevent guerrilla attacks, which increase in the run-up to and during annual celebrations.

"Tight security measures have been taken because of the series of mine and bomb explosions in different parts of the state in which five civilians have died and over 60 injured in the last 24 hours," Gupta said Thursday.

Kashmir most dangerous part in world: Armitage

PTI, Sydney

Taking India by surprise, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage has said that Jammu and Kashmir, apart from Israel and Palestine, was the "most dangerous place in the world".

"There are a lot of other dangerous parts in the world. India and Pakistan over Kashmir comes to mind," Armitage said in response to a specific question after his lecture at the Asia Society Australasia Centre in Sydney on Wednesday, attended among others by Indian High Commissioner to Australia RS Rathore.

Armitage was asked to comment on the progress in the roadmap to peace in West Asia and Israel and Palestine being the most dangerous places in the world.

Tensions in Baghdad after US troops-Shiites clash

AFP, Baghdad

Tensions simmered yesterday in Baghdad after a deadly confrontation between Shiite Muslims and US troops, as the United Nations was set to acknowledge Iraq's interim government and a message attributed to Saddam Hussein called for a holy war.

"The Americans, they are playing with fire. Do they want the sleeping lion to wake? Yesterday, he (the lion) raised his head," an unemployed youth, Abbas Jamal, said in the capital's poor and predominantly Shiite neighbourhood of Sadr City.

An Iraqi was killed and four people wounded when US troops fired into a crowd of thousands of demonstrators here Wednesday,

after an American helicopter apparently tried to remove a black religious flag from a communications tower.

It was the first armed clash between US forces and Shiites in Baghdad since the war to oust Saddam.

"What do they have against our flag? This is an insult against Shiite Muslims," said an elderly man, who did not give his name, dressed in a traditional Muslim robe and headress.

But there was little support in Sadr City for a call attributed to Saddam calling on Iraq's top Shiite religious authority, the Hawza, to "proclaim jihad so that all the Iraqi people are united against the occupation."

"It's not Saddam who can call for jihad," said Abbas Jamal. "We don't

follow orders from the US or from Saddam. Only from the Hawza."

The Hawza, based in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf south of Baghdad, is Iraq's top Shiite religious authority.

Saddam's purported message, aired late Wednesday by Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television, also praised Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, regarded as the most influential of the four top Hawza clerics.

He is viewed by US officials as a crucial force for moderation in post-war Iraq. But the ayatollah has voiced unease at the occupation and opposed plans for a US-backed interim Governing Council to draw up a new constitution for the country.

Lanka jails 254 Pakistanis for human trafficking

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan court has sentenced 254 Pakistani men to a year in jail and fined them 50,000 rupees (515 dollars) each for trying to leave the island illegally and travel to Europe, police said Thursday.

A magistrate in the southern town of Tangalle, 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of here handed down the sentences Wednesday to the Pakistanis who were arrested on July 1 as they boarded a cargo ship, police said.

They said Magistrate Sunil Abeysinghe ordered the men should serve an additional two months in jail if they failed to pay the fine.

The seven-member crew of Russian and Georgian nationals from the cargo ship, M.V. Invincible, were remanded in custody till August 28 pending further investigations.



North Koreans (L) wave flowers at a group of 330 South Korean delegates arriving at the airport in Pyongyang yesterday to participate in this year's anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. Liberation Day is a major holiday in both Koreas, with the two sides usually marking the day with pro-unification proposals and celebrations.

Tanker may spill tons of oil off Pakistan

AP, Karachi

A Greek-registered oil tanker that ran aground off Karachi's coast has developed cracks in its hull and is threatening to spill tons of oil in rich fishing waters, port officials said.

A low tide Wednesday morning put extra stress on the MT Tasman Spirit - which is already leaking oil - and caused the ship to buckle, said Ahmed Hayat, chairman of the Karachi Port Trust, which manages the Pakistani city's port.

"The ship has cracked and can break apart within 12 hours," Hayat said Wednesday.

The tanker ran aground July 27 in monsoon rains and high tides, and crews have been racing to siphon off oil to make the vessel lighter so it can be pulled to deeper waters.

The ship was carrying 62,000 tons of crude oil for state-run Pakistan Refinery Ltd., and about 20,000 tons have already been siphoned off into a second tanker, officials said. The ship was chartered by Pakistan National Shipping Corp.

Truce at risk as Israel kills militant commander

REUTERS, Hebron

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian militant commander on Thursday, triggering vows of revenge in increasing signs that a six-week-old truce critical to a new peace plan could collapse.

Fresh violence since an army raid last week that killed two Hamas militants and prompted two avenging Palestinian suicide bombings on Tuesday has overshadowed diplomacy to prevent the US-orchestrated "road map" plan from unraveling.

Witnesses in Hebron, a West Bank stronghold of Muslim militants, said Israeli troops surrounded a building in search of Mohammad Seder, local head of Islamic Jihad's armed wing, touching off a gunfight followed by explosions in the premises.

A senior Islamic Jihad official said a body found at the house was that of Seder. A Reuters reporter at the scene said the body was

removed with a machine gun still in his hands.

Israeli military sources said as the operation began that Seder was wanted on suspicion of organising a car-bomb attack and that they were trying to arrest him.

"The Jerusalem Brigades reserve the right to respond to the Zionist... assassination of Mujahid leader Mohammad Seder despite the truce declared by the factions," the Neda al-Quds Web site, closely affiliated with Islamic Jihad, said.

"The response will be quick, like an earthquake and in the depth of the Zionist entity," it added, referring to Israel.

"We assure our people that resistance has a long arm and these crimes will not pass without punishment," Bassam Assadi, a senior West Bank Islamic Jihad official, said on Qatar-based al-Jazeera satellite television.

Two suicide bombers from Nablus killed two Israelis on Tuesday in what their militant fac-

ties called acts of revenge for an army raid that killed two wanted Hamas men in the West Bank city last week.

In response, the Israeli army demolished the family home of one suicide bomber on Wednesday and the other early on Thursday, both in Nablus's Askar refugee quarter.

But it eschewed major military action common in the aftermath of past suicide bombings in a 34-month-old Palestinian uprising, heeding US pressure to avoid wrecking a peace plan already mired in disputes over who should take what step first.

"As part of counter-terror efforts, Israeli forces in the Askar refugee camp overnight demolished the home of Islam Yusuf Kafishi, who carried out Tuesday's suicide bombing at the entrance to Ariel," an army statement said.

Landowners open fire on low caste peasants in UP: 70 injured

AFP, Lucknow

At least 70 Dalits, or lowest caste Hindus, were injured in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh when upper-caste landowners fired on them to settle a dispute, state officials said Thursday.

Some two dozen Thakurs or upper caste landowners in Tajepur village, in the Mau district of Uttar Pradesh, tried to settle the long-running row with peasants from the Dalit community by firing on them late Wednesday, said state home secretary Raja Ram.

"At least 70 people were injured when the Thakurs and their henchmen opened fire on the large group of assembled Dalits. Seven of them are seriously hurt and we have rushed them to the Benaras Hindu University hospital in Varanasi town," Ram told AFP.

New Saddam message urges Shiites to wage Jihad

AFP, Doha

A handwritten message purported to be from Saddam Hussein and read out by Al-Jazeera TV called for Iraq's majority Shiites to wage "Jihad", or holy war, against the US and British occupiers.

The message on the Qatar-based satellite news channel called for the Hawza, Iraq's top Shiite Muslim religious authority, to "proclaim jihad so that all the Iraqi people are united against the occupation."

It also praised a top Shiite leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. Sistani is viewed by US officials as a crucial force for moderation in post-war Iraq. But he has voiced unease at the occupation and opposed plans for a US-backed interim Governing Council to draw up a new constitution for Iraq.

"Sayyed Sistani has our respect," the message read, using the title for a descendant of the prophet Mohammad.

"The position of Sayyed al-Sistani and the Hawza in Najaf (south of Baghdad) is important for the jihad of the Iraqis," said the message purported to

come from the Iraqi president toppled in April.

The undated letter, signed in Saddam's name, answers questions from an unnamed journalist on the Governing Council and Sistani, who met the council's current president Ibrahim al-Jaafari on August 6.

"I learnt that Sayyed Sistani told Ibrahim that any constitution drafted under the shadow of the US occupation is null and void because Iraq needs a constitution based on Islamic sharia (laws)," said the message.

"We welcome this statement because, implicitly, it does not recognise the occupation and considers that all decisions taken under the occupation are null and void, including talk of a new constitution," it said.

Saddam's fate has been a mystery since a US-led coalition ended his 24-year grip on power.

At the start of the month, Al-Jazeera aired another message purported to be from the former strongman to the Iraqi people. It was the sixth audiotape attributed to him broadcast by Arab satellite channels in less than a month.

AP adds: US troops fired into a crowd, killing one protester, after thousands of Shiite Muslims gathered

around a telecommunications tower where they said American forces in a helicopter tried to tear down an Islamic banner.

The Americans said they opened fire after a rocket-propelled grenade was launched at them.

US military spokesman Sgt. Danny Martin said the banner was apparently blown down by rotor wash from a Black Hawk helicopter. He said that four other people were wounded by American troops after a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at them during the protest in Sadr City, a Shiite Muslim slum in Baghdad.

Also Wednesday, guerrillas killed two American soldiers and two Iraqi civilians were killed after attacking US soldiers in separate incidents north of Baghdad.

Amateur video footage obtained by Associated Press Television News showed a Black Hawk helicopter hovering a few feet from the top of the tower. Later, US Humvees drove by and the crowd threw stones at them. Heavy gunfire could be heard and demonstrators were seen diving to the ground.

New dinosaur species found in India

AP, Mumbai

US and Indian scientists said Wednesday they have discovered a new carnivorous dinosaur species in India after finding bones in the western part of the country.

The new dinosaur species was named Rajasaurus narmadensis, or "Regal reptile from the Narmada," after the Narmada River region where the bones were found.

The dinosaurs were between 25-30 feet long, had a horn above their skulls, were relatively heavy and walked on two legs, scientists said. They preyed on long-necked herbivorous dinosaurs on the Indian subcontinent during the Cretaceous Period at the end of the dinosaur age, 65 million years ago.

"It's fabulous to be able to see this dinosaur which lived as the age of dinosaurs came to a close," said Paul Sereno, a paleontologist at the University of Chicago. "It was a significant predator that was related to species on continental Africa, Madagascar and South America."



South Korean firefighters search the wreckage of a South Korean military UH-1H helicopter which crashed into a rice field in Yeongcheon yesterday, some 340 km south of Seoul. Seven South Korean soldiers died in the crash as the helicopter crashed into the rice field when it had been heading back to base from a training session.