

'Pakistan-Saudi Arabia ink secret nuke accord'

IAN S, Islamabad

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have concluded a secret agreement on nuclear cooperation, UPI reported, quoting an unimpeachable source.

"It will be vehemently denied by both countries," added this ranking Pakistani source, described as "a knowledgeable insider" by Arnaud de Borchgrave, the editor-in-chief of UPI.

"But future events will confirm that Pakistan has agreed to provide Saudi Arabia with the wherewithal for a nuclear deterrent."

In a lightning, hastily arranged, 26-hour "state visit" in Islamabad, Crown Prince Abdullah Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, flew across the Arabian Sea with an entourage of 200, including Foreign Minister Prince Saud and several cabinet ministers.

The pro-American Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan, who is next in line to succeed to the throne after Abdullah, was not part of the delegation.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf met Abdullah at the airport and saw him off Sunday night with a 21-gun salute.

Sadiq, Pakistan's deputy chief of mission, said Monday the report about Pakistan and Saudi Arabia reaching agreement on nuclear cooperation was "totally wrong."

"This is against our policy," Sadiq told UPI.

"Pakistan would never proliferate its nuclear technology. It's a very clear policy. This was not even discussed in the talks we held with the Saudis. It was not even on the agenda. It is out of the question."

The Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington did not immediately comment on the report.

A joint Pakistani-Saudi communiqué posted on the embassy's Web site concerning Abdullah's visit to Islamabad mentioned only an agreement for "the maximum utilization of the existing economic potential of the two countries." There was no mention of military cooperation, nuclear or conventional.

The CIA believes that Pakistan already exported nuclear know-how to North Korea in exchange for missile technology.

Last year, a Pakistani C-130 was spotted by satellite loading North Korean missiles at Pyongyang airport. Pakistan said this was a straight purchase for cash and

denied a nuclear quid pro quo.

"Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia," the Pakistani source explained, "see a world that is moving from non-proliferation to proliferation of nuclear weapons."

Pakistan, under the late dictator Zia ul-Haq, decided to pursue the nuclear option following India's first nuclear test in 1974. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is now estimated at between 35 and 60 weapons.

The Saudis have concluded that nothing will deter Iran from continuing its quest for nuclear weapons. Pakistan, on the other hand, is openly concerned about the recent armaments agreement between India, its nuclear rival, and Israel, a long-time nuclear power whose inventory is estimated at between 200 and 400 weapons.

Iran and India, located on either side of Pakistan, have also signed a strategic agreement whose aim is regarded with suspicion in Islamabad.

Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafullah Jamali is scheduled to fly to Tehran later this week to sound out Iranian leaders on the reasons for the defence deal with New Delhi.

Bush rebukes Mahathir over speech

BBC ONLINE

US President George W Bush has personally remonstrated with the Malaysian leader, Mahathir Mohamad, over his recent remarks about Jews.

A White House spokesman said Mr Bush pulled Dr Mahathir aside at the Apec summit in Bangkok and told him his remarks were "wrong and divisive" and that they stood squarely against everything the president believed in.

The Malaysian leader told an Islamic summit last week that Jews ruled the world by proxy, and he called on Muslims to use their brains rather than force to overcome Jewish influence.

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon denounced Dr Mahathir's remarks as "slandering" and criticised the reaction of Muslim leaders to Dr Mahathir's comments, the AFP news agency reports.

"It will take more time for the Arab world, and particularly Palestinian society, to understand that violence and extremism will only lead them to incalculable disaster."

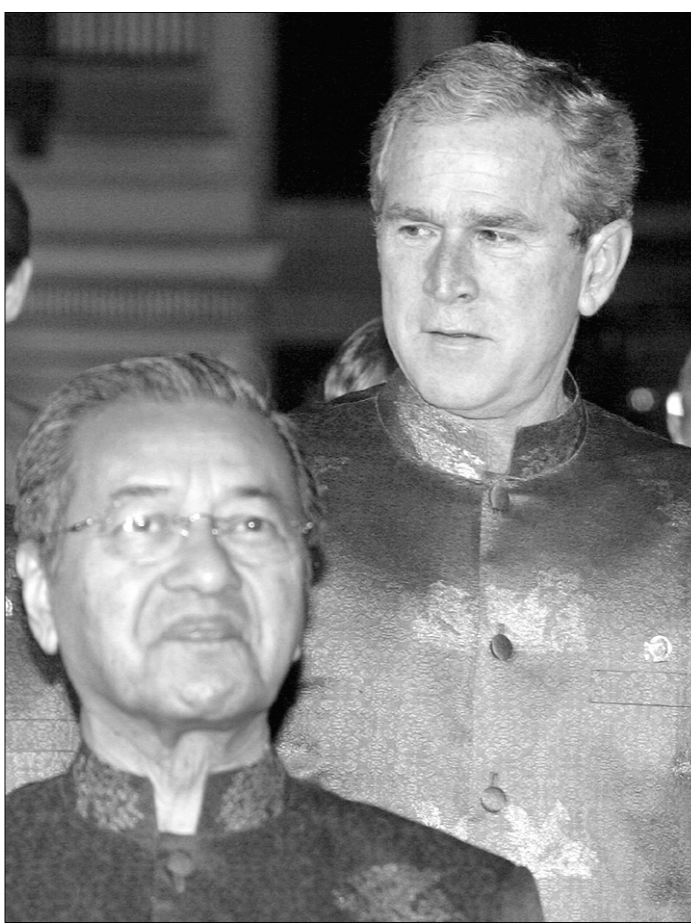


PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush is seen behind Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as leaders and representatives from the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group pose for a photo at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in Bangkok yesterday.

Mahathir tells US Discard force, use friendly approach

BERNAMA, Bangkok

The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said that the United States should change its approach of using force in dealing with conflicts around the world and instead return to its friendly ways that have won the hearts of many in the past.

In an interview with the Bangkok Post, Monday and published Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that if the US continues to use its current approach, it would not be able to resolve the conflicts it started.

"They must learn. I have great admiration for the United States. They saved us from Japanese occupation and at one time they were concerned about the welfare of everybody," he said.

Dr Mahathir, due to retire in 10 days' time, said it was sad to see American embassies all around the world to be protected, in sharp contrast to the past when they gave aid to everyone and sent its Peace Corps everywhere.

"That's a measure of bad feelings against the Americans now. That's because they changed in attitude. They have become so powerful," he said.

He said using force to submit others seemed to be their foreign policy now while sanctions are applied on countries labelled as not a democratic country.

Dr Mahathir said such policy of using force to curb terrorism had made things difficult for countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's experience in dealing with terrorism clearly showed that finding the root cause of conflicts and terrorism as well as winning over the people were the best approach.

Asked about his speech at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Putrajaya last week which prompted harsh criticism, Dr Mahathir reiterated that it was taken out of context.

"In my speech I condemned all violence, even the suicide bombings, and I told the Muslims it's about time we stopped all these things and paused to think and do something that is much more productive. That was the whole tone of my speech, but they picked up one sentence where I said that the Jews control the world," he said.

But he said the reaction of the world shows that the Jews do control the world.



PHOTO: AFP

Iranian Hassan Rohani, the secretary of the Islamic Republic's Supreme Council on National Security, shakes hands with British foreign minister Jack Straw as French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin looks at the Saad Abad palace at Tehran yesterday.

N Ireland leaders clinch power-sharing deal

Elections on Nov 26

AFP, Belfast

Northern Ireland's Roman Catholic and Protestant leaders have struck a landmark deal which may allow Britain to call elections on November 26 for the province's suspended power-sharing assembly, sources on both sides said Monday.

"Yes, we have a deal" on restoring Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions, a source close to the leadership of Northern Ireland's largest Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, told AFP at the end of talks Monday.

"There is agreement on how this is going to work its way out," said a source close to Sinn Fein -- the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the most powerful Catholic paramilitary organisation.

Any deal on elections, which have been pushed back twice this year, is believed to include a third act of disarmament, known as decommissioning, by the IRA.

The head of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, General John de Chastelain, is believed to have renewed contact with Sinn Fein and is expected to produce a report on Tuesday confirming a move from the IRA on weapons.

In a carefully choreographed set of proceedings, British Prime Minister Tony Blair is expected to announce early Tuesday that Northern Ireland elections will be held on November 26 before leaving for the province to join his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern.

Then Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams is expected to announce in

his own terms that the IRA's armed struggle has come to an end, before de Chastelain publishes his weapons report.

An IRA statement is then expected to confirm Adams's earlier statement before an announcement by Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble.

Finally, Blair and Ahern are expected to seal the agreement with a joint statement at a press conference at Hillsborough Castle, the official residence of Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Paul Murphy.

A British government source would not confirm late Monday that a deal had been struck, simply stating that it was "a critical time for the (peace) process".

NY renames 52 streets on Sept 11 victims

AFP, New York

New York will rename 52 streets for victims of the September 11 attacks, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced Monday.

"Even though over two years have passed since that tragic event, this action, although a modest gesture, will let it be known that the city will never forget those who perished that day," Bloomberg said.

The renamed streets are in all five of the city's boroughs, bearing the names of both firefighters and civilians, such as Captain Walter G. Hynes in Queens, Firefighter Peter Louis Freund Avenue in Staten Island, and Andrew and Vincent Abate Way in Brooklyn.

Bandits massacre 100 villagers in Sudan

AP, Khartoum

At least 100 villagers were killed and scores were injured by bandits in remote western Sudan last week, Sudanese newspapers reported.

However, aid agencies working in Sudan said on Tuesday they had no immediate information on the reports that appeared in two independent Sudanese newspapers a day before.

Interior Ministry officials also had no comment.

Al-Ayam daily said Arab tribesmen and nomadic cattle breeders attacked 15 villages in west Darfur, 1,020 km west of Khartoum, on

Thursday and Friday, killing at least 100 and forcing thousands of people to flee their homes.

Parliament member Khalid Bilal was quoted by Alwan daily as saying a group of parliamentarians would go to west Darfur to console the people.

Darfur, on the border with Chad and Central Africa, is home to some 80 tribes and ethnic groups divided between nomads of Arab origin and farmers of African origin.

Nearly a fifth of Sudan's 30 million people live in the region, one of the country's least developed, where cycles of drought and desert creep have shrunk its vast grazing areas and spurred friction among

nomads and farmers.

The situation worsened earlier this year when a Darfur group demanding self determination for the region attacked Sudanese government troops. Last month, the government and the Darfur Liberation Army agreed to a 45-day cease-fire.

Humanitarian agencies have expressed concern in the past about fighting and banditry in Darfur that has displaced large numbers of civilians.

Earlier this month, according to a newspaper report, 15 people were killed and scores were injured in tribal clashes in Darfur.

Kashmir hostages rescued

PTI, Shopian

Launching an operation this morning, security forces rescued eight civilians, held hostage by terrorists in a house here since Monday, by lobbying tear gas shells into the house.

Soon after the shells were fired around 8.30 am into the house at Thraren village, the hostages, including a Muslim cleric, came out safely, police said.

All the eight had been sent in by the security forces on Monday to negotiate surrender of the holed-up terrorists.

After repeated appeals this morning to the terrorists to free the hostages and surrender went unheeded, the forces lobbed the shells inside the besieged house, they said.

ME peace more distant than ever: Assad

AFP, Damascus

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has warned that Middle East peace is more distant than ever denouncing Israel's "racist" policy against Palestinians and Arabs.

Speaking before a dinner meeting with visiting Spanish King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia on Monday, Assad stressed that his country sought a "just and global peace" in the region based on UN resolutions stipulating Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

"Peace is further away than ever," he said.

"Rather than advancing along the path of peace, the Israeli government has intensified its policy of repression against the Palestinian people by bombarding houses and assassinating the citizens," he said.

Assad denounced Israel's construction of a security wall around the West Bank which he said "annexes Palestinian territories".

he also expressed the hope for "stability and unity" in neighbouring Iraq.

"The Iraqis must choose their own government and the UN should play an essential role to help them overcome the destruction caused by the war", waged there by US-led forces, he added.

Since the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, Washington has been pressuring Syria to avoid getting involved in the situation in Iraq.

US-Syrian relations are at a low. Last week the US House of Representatives voted for economic and diplomatic sanctions against Damascus, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism.

Assad also said he hoped that Syria could seal an association accord with the European Union "in the near future".

King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia began their first state visit to Syria on Sunday.

US fails to probe civilian deaths in Iraq: HRW

AFP, New York

A Human Rights Watch report released yesterday accused the US military of failing to investigate Iraqi civilian deaths arising from excessive use of force by US troops in Baghdad.

The 56-page report, "Hearts and Minds: Post-War Civilian Casualties in Baghdad by US Forces," confirmed 20 civilian deaths in Baghdad between May 1 and September 30.

The New York-based rights watchdog said it had collected credible reports of 94 civilian deaths in the Iraqi capital, involving "questionable legal circumstances" that warrant investigation.

The US military has not released any figures on the number of civilians killed by occupational forces since an end to major combat operations was declared by President George W. Bush on May 1.

"It's a tragedy that US soldiers have killed so many civilians in Baghdad," said Joe Stork, acting executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch.

"But it's really incredible that the US military does not even count these deaths. Any time US forces kill an Iraqi civilian in questionable

circumstances, they should investigate the incident," Stork said.

Last month, the human rights group Amnesty International condemned what it claimed was a virtual licence for occupying troops to kill in Iraq, with no proper probes into civilians killed by US soldiers.

The issue has also been the source of some friction between members of the interim Iraqi Governing Council and the US occupation authorities.

According to Human Rights Watch, the US military says it has concluded five investigations above the division level, ordered by the deputy commanding general, into alleged unlawful deaths.

Of these, soldiers were found to have operated "within the rules of engagement" in four cases. In the fifth case, two soldiers face disciplinary action for provoking a violent clash by trying to tear down a Shiite banner.

After conducting its own investigation into two of the five cases, Human Rights Watch said it had found evidence to suggest that soldiers had used excessive force, including shooting a person who had his hands in the air.

Freed ex-Taliban FM offers to help Karzai

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban's former foreign minister Wakeel Ahmed Mutawakel has written to President Hamid Karzai offering to help his government, a spokesman for Karzai told AFP yesterday.

Mutawakel's letter was sent earlier this month from his home city Kandahar, the Taliban's former stronghold in southern Afghanistan, Karzai's spokesman Jawed Ludin said.

"Mutawakel, who I believe is still in custody, has written to the President and has offered that he can help in any way that is possible," Ludin said.

"The letter was sent from Kandahar."

Mutawakel was released from US military headquarters at Bagram air base and flown to Kandahar earlier this month, his uncle and an Afghan official told AFP.

His uncle Abdul Ghafoor Khadam said he was being held by US forces at Kandahar's airbase.

Several former Taliban officials, including "high-ranking" members of the ousted regime, have made individual approaches to Karzai offering to side with his government, Ludin said. None were criminals or terrorists, he said.



PHOTO: AFP

The sister of killed Palestinian Iyad Fayezi al-Hilu, 28, a member of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of the radical group Hamas, cries as she watches the body of her brother being taken from his home to a cemetery on Monday in Gaza City.