

Pakistan, Iran reject reports of nuke deal

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and Iran yesterday issued a joint denial of a media report that Iran admitted of receiving Islamabad's help in developing a nuclear programme.

"Both sides dismiss as totally baseless a Western media report alleging that Iran had admitted to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Pakistan had given Iran assistance for its nuclear programme," Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The statement was issued after Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Gholam Ali Khoshru held talks in Islamabad late on Thursday with Pakistan's acting foreign secretary Tariq Osman Hyder.

It cited a report carried in The Times of London on Thursday saying Iran admitted receiving nuclear help from Pakistan, and an earlier report in the same daily saying Pakistan had given nuclear assistance to Iraq.



PHOTO: AFP

Vice-President of India Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (3-L) poses for photographs with health ministers of Pakistan Mohammad Nasir Khan (L), Sushma Swaraj, India (2-L), Kamal Thapa, Nepal (3-R), Lyonpo Jigme Singay, Bhutan (2-R) and I. Wijewantha, Sri Lankan (R) at the first Saarc Health Ministers' conference in New Delhi yesterday. The delegates to the conference are scheduled to discuss matters concerning women's health and disease surveillance of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB).

Full UN return to Iraq still uncertain

UN report warns of failure to clamp down on al-Qaeda funding

REUTERS, Nicosia

A top UN official involved in deciding when staff should fully return to Iraq said yesterday it was hard to envision such a move until security improved.

"It is hard to envision we would be able to carry out the full range of activities we would like to do ... until security improves," Kevin Kennedy, chief of the Humanitarian Emergency Branch of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told Reuters.

Kennedy and other top UN officials were meeting in Cyprus to make a recommendation to Secretary General Kofi Annan on the return of staff to Iraq. Most staff were pulled out after an Aug. 19 attack on the organisation's headquarters in Baghdad killed 22 staff and

visitors, including the head of the operation, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Kennedy said the discussions would end at the weekend when a recommendation would be made to Annan.

"The security situation is not uniform throughout the country and there are parts where we can work -- more safe and secure than other parts," Kennedy said.

"It is not a uniform picture and we'll adjust operations region by region."

Annan has put two security officials on leave after an independent panel issued a scathing report on safety precautions before the August bombing of the UN offices in Baghdad.

After the August attack, Annan drastically reduced staff in Iraq and earlier this month withdrew the last 20 from Baghdad

after a week of violence including the bombing of the Baghdad headquarters of the International Committee for the Red Cross.

About 40 or so foreign staff remain in northern Iraq where it is safer. Some 4,000 Iraqi staff are still on the UN payroll throughout Iraq.

Asked if it was unlikely there would be a full return of staff, Kennedy replied: "I wouldn't say it's unlikely and there are a variety of ways to go back -- longer term, shorter term or visits. We hope to be back as soon as we possibly can."

AFP adds: A UN report warns that international efforts to seal off financial resources to al-Qaeda are being seriously hampered by inadequate cooperation, legislative loopholes and a lack of political determination, London's

Financial Times newspaper said yesterday.

"Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and those associated with the network are still able to obtain, solicit, collect, transfer and distribute considerable sums," the report says, according to The Financial Times.

"Without a more comprehensive resolution -- which obliges states to take the mandated measures -- the role played by the United Nations risks becoming marginalised," the report says, according to the same source.

The report highlights the activities of Youssef Nada and Idris Nasredin, directors of al-Taqwa, a financial group Washington believes was the most important fundraising operation for al-Qaeda.

US envoy warns Pakistan over re-emergence of banned militants

AFP, Karachi

The United States has warned key war-on-terror ally Pakistan that banned Islamic extremist groups which are re-emerging under new names are posing a threat inside and outside Pakistan.

"We continue to work with the government of Pakistan to monitor the effectiveness of actions taken to curb such extremist groups as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad and others," US ambassador Nancy Powell told the Karachi Council on Foreign Relations in southern Pakistan late Thursday.

"These groups pose a serious threat to Pakistan, to the region and to the

Police break up anti-govt protest in Kashmir: 6 killed

AFP, Srinagar

Six people, including a woman, were killed in Indian Kashmir, where police Friday broke up a separatist rally against alleged abuses by Indian troops, police and witnesses said.

Soldiers overnight shot dead four rebels in gunbattles triggered by search operations in the southern Poonch district and northern districts of Baramulla and Kupwara, police said.

Suspected rebels overnight shot dead a police informant in the central Budgam district, police said. A woman was also strangled to death but the circumstances surrounding her death were not immediately clear.

Iran warns IAEA, US

REUTERS, Vienna

Tehran warned on Thursday of "unpredictable consequences" if the UN watchdog finds it in breach of a global pact against atomic weapons, as Washington accused the United Nations of playing down "evidence" Iran wants a bomb.

On November 20, the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Board of Governors meets to discuss an IAEA report on Iran's nuclear program, detailing decades of failures by Iran to

China, India hold war games

REUTERS, Beijing

China and India, building on a new strategic alliance, staged their first joint naval exercise yesterday, just weeks after the Chinese navy held a similar drill with India's bitter rival, Pakistan.

Nuclear-armed India and China agreed to hold the one-day exercise -- and seek a speedy end to a decades-old border dispute -- during a visit by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in June, the first by an Indian prime minister in a decade.

Ties between the world's two most populous nations, frosty since they fought a brief border war in 1962, have

been warming in recent years.

Zhang Minqiu, a professor of international relations at Peking University, said the exercise was a significant step in a long and deliberate process by China to balance its relations with India and traditional ally Pakistan.

"I think Pakistan should welcome this policy, India should welcome it. If China supports only one side, it makes relations between them more tense," she said.

Friday's naval exercise also marked "big progress for Sino-Indian ties" given the fact India first proposed similar exercises in the early 1990s, but China declined to engage, she added.

"It's an expression of the healthy relations between them."

The exercise, involving three Indian ships, was aimed at ensuring the safety of maritime trade and improving coordination in search-and-rescue at sea, the Indian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

"India and China are the two most populous countries in the world," the Indian embassy said in a separate statement. "...Our capabilities are well known and provide the opportunity to share experiences and cooperation. Such cooperation will have a positive impact not only on the livelihood of our people, but also in the world at large."

N Korea willing to give up nukes, arms sale

AFP, Washington

North Korea is willing to give up its nuclear weapons programme and stop testing and exporting missiles, subject to certain guarantees, The Washington Times reported Friday, quoting diplomats from the Stalinist state.

Pyongyang expected written security guarantees and compensation for economic losses incurred by closing two nuclear power plants, the two diplomats told the daily in Geneva during an interview.

Identified as Kim Yong-ho and Kim Song-sol, the envoys said the United

States would also have to pledge not to hinder North Korea's economic development, especially its dealings with Japan and South Korea.

They said there was no confirmation on a date for the next six-way talks involving both Koreas, Japan, Russia, China and the United States, but stressed that their government had "agreed in principle to the next round of talks."

Since the nuclear crisis erupted a year ago, North Korea has demanded a non-aggression pact with Washington. US President George W. Bush has refused, but last month proposed a

written guarantee instead of a formal treaty.

North Korea, the diplomats said, was willing to accept written security guarantees signed by the United States and the other four parties at the talks, provided "Mr. Bush's proposal ... is based on the principle of simultaneous action" to overcome the lack of mutual trust between the two countries.

Pressed on the meaning of simultaneous action, Kim Yong-ho said "first guarantee the security, and second do not hinder the economic development of my country."

China providing nuke, missile assistance to Pakistan: CIA

PTI, Washington

China continues to provide nuclear-weapon and ballistic missiles assistance to Pakistan despite assurances to the US that it would not do so, the Central Intelligence Agency has said.

"We cannot rule out, however, some continued contacts subsequent to the pledge between Chinese entities and entities associated with Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme," it said in its latest six-monthly report to Congress.

The latest report on Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction covers the period January 1 through June 30, 2003.

Unlike previous reports, there are

no separate chapters relating to India and Pakistan but their activities find mention in the context of actions by China, Russia, North Korea and the EU.

The report elaborates on the assistance Pakistan and other countries are receiving for developing its weapons of mass destruction and advanced conventional armmunitions.

Chinese entity assistance has helped Pakistan move toward domestic serial production of solid-propellant SRBMs (short range ballistic missiles) and supported Pakistan's development of solid-propellant MRBMs (medium range ballistic missiles), the report said.



PHOTO: AFP

Italian soldiers stand guard as a Carabinieri policeman prepares to dive in the Euphrates river to search for possible human remains of missing comrades or civilians from a deadly suicide bombing in the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah, about 400km south of Baghdad yesterday.

Jury gets case of Washington sniper suspect

REUTERS, Virginia Beach

The murder trial of accused US sniper John Muhammad went to the jury on Thursday, after prosecutors portrayed him as a controlling man who turned his teen-age companion Lee Malvo into "an instrument of death and destruction."

In closing arguments, prosecutors said the 42-year-old Gulf War veteran trained Malvo, 18, as a sniper and planned a series of shootings, including 10 killings, that terrorized the Washington area in October 2002.

As a huge photograph of Malvo was projected on a screen in the courtroom, prosecutor Paul Ebert pointed at Muhammad, "Let's look at the type (of) individual he is: controlling. You've seen it, you watch his demeanor in this courtroom ... He was the one that Lee Boyd Malvo obeyed ...

"God knows, but for that man (Muhammad), (Malvo) would still be somewhere else. God knows (Malvo) would never have had the weapon in his possession."

The 12 jurors got the case minutes before court adjourned for the day, and were to continue deliberations on Friday.

Meanwhile, in opening statements in Malvo's trial in nearby Chesapeake, Virginia, prosecutors told jurors the teen-ager was a "smart, clever killer" while defense attorneys described him as a shy, skinny kid looking for a father figure who was in thrall to Muhammad and obedient to him.

"He changed him, he indoctrinated him," defense attorney Craig Cooley said of Muhammad's control over Malvo. "He made him a child soldier."



PHOTO: AFP

New Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit (C) waves to the crowd before filing her nomination documents in New Delhi yesterday. Dikshit opted to contest elections from the home district of an expelled party colleague sentenced to death for burning his dismembered wife in an oven. The 65-year-old Congress Party leader filed her nomination in the working-class Gole Market constituency to contest the December 1 elections to the city legislature.

Diabetes among poor could double by 2030

AFP, Geneva

Diabetes in poor countries could more than double by 2030 to 284 million cases, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned yesterday on World Diabetes Day, as it pledged to boost efforts to fight the disease.

At least one in 20 deaths worldwide is attributable to diabetes, which translates into a financial burden of between 2.5 and 15 percent of annual health care budgets, according to WHO, which has received a new injection of funds from the World Diabetes Foundation to help its latest drive.

"Diabetes is part of the growing epidemic of noncommunicable diseases that are beginning to impose a double burden of disease on the world's poorest countries," said Catherine Le Gales-Camus, WHO assistant director-general.

"Even as these countries are struggling to address the problems of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, they must also prepare to deal with the onslaught of diseases that come with changes in lifestyle and ageing of their populations."

Despite the grim figures, Le Gales-Camus said much of the projected rise in diabetes was preventable if attention was given to diet and physical activity.

WHO said it would work with the International Diabetes Federation, to reduce the illness, which affects

about 171 million people worldwide, by teaching communities to lead a healthier lifestyle. They will also offer advice to those who already have diabetes on how to cope.

"Prevention and management go hand in hand," said Rafael Bengoa, WHO director in management of NCDs.

"We need to provide comprehensive packages (of care) that meet the needs of all members of the community, and that address the disease at all stages."

People with diabetes, characterised as having has too much glucose in the blood due to a failure to produce enough insulin, were once old and from richer countries, but most sufferers in Africa are aged between 45 and 64, WHO noted.

"We are less active than our parents and grandparents, and we eat food with higher concentrations of sugars and fats, often with the result that we are putting on weight, and increasing the risk of diabetes," said Le Gales-Camus.

"It is easy to see why diseases such as diabetes are on the increase."

Amanda Marlin, a WHO official, said although the World Diabetes Foundation had pledged to help fund the anti-diabetes campaign an exact figure was unavailable as negotiations were set to continue until the end of January.