

Pakistan to remove troops from PoK if India responds

PTI, London

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has said that his country would pull back its troops from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) if India does the same in Jammu and Kashmir.

Musharraf also said that he would nominate Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for his country's highest civilian honour, the Nishan-e-Pakistan, if the two neighbours moved towards solving the Kashmir dispute.

Replying to questions from listeners on BBC's radio programme Aapki Baat BBC Ke Saath broadcast on Monday, Musharraf said, "India has seven lakh soldiers in Kashmir, whereas Pakistan has only fifty thousand. If Indian government is ready to remove their forces, we will remove ours tomorrow."

When reminded by a listener about the Nishan-e-Pakistan conferred on former Prime Minister Morarji Desai and asked whether his country would like to confer the honour on any Indian today, Musharraf said "I would like to nominate Vajpayee Sahib for it if we move forward towards solving the Kashmir issue."

"If there is an achievement, which is significant for Pakistan's point of view, we would like to honour anyone," he added.

Musharraf said he was optimistic about next month's SAARC summit in Islamabad as it was taking place as scheduled despite early uncertainties.

"Prime Minister Vajpayee will participate and will meet with all the leaders. I am also hopeful that maybe talks (will) take place, and whatever talks take place, they would be effective, useful and point to a good future," Musharraf said.

said.

Asked whether he would meet Vajpayee, he replied, "Yes, if he wants to meet me, I will meet him."

"I am saying he should not get an impression, that since I have been saying this time and again, I am desperate to meet him. Let me tell you, I am living here and sitting comfortably there is no problem. I would meet him only if he wants."

Dismissing Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani's charge that cross-border terrorism had not stopped, Musharraf said "even if two birds fly (across the border), they would say infiltration is taking place."

He said India had often alleged that infiltration was taking place under the cover of firing by Pakistani forces.

"Now there is no firing on the LoC, so how is the infiltration taking place," Musharraf asked.

Last week, India and Pakistan announced a ceasefire along the LoC and International Border in Jammu and Kashmir. Yesterday, they decided to restore civilian aviation links and overflights from New Year's Day.

Musharraf said he hoped the Agra fiasco would not be repeated as Indo-Pak relations were again moving ahead. "Everyone should hope in the same direction, that the process of dialogue moves forward."

But Musharraf cautioned that there should be no room for complacency.

"Remember it is the beginning of an end. We would have to be extremely careful, and with sincerity we should move forward in this process of dialogue," Musharraf said.

"I am confident that if we have the sincerity, then we can move

forward leaving all this behind. If there has been bitterness in the past, it is better to forget it and move ahead."

Asked whether the Pakistani National Assembly or President was the final authority on Kashmir, Musharraf said "Whatever be the decision on Kashmir, it would be of the Assembly, but the President can contribute."

PM orders

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activities of different ministries at International Conference Centre (ICC) at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

It was decided in the meeting that manpower and other facilities would be enhanced at different upazilas, considering their size and particular features with special emphasis on maintaining law and order.

She directed the ministries to implement all development projects in the stipulated time. She stressed the need for quick implementation of the projects in power sector to enhance generation, transmission and distribution of electricity in the country.

The progress of the projects to increase water supply in Dhaka and Chittagong cities was also reviewed in the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hussain presented review report on the activities of different ministries.

The participants were informed that appointment letters have already been issued to employ 2,200 officers on the basis of the results of 22nd BCS examination.

The new appointees who include a large number of teachers, doctors and officers of administration cadre will join their respective work by December 17. Besides, 2,000 nurses have already been appointed to public hospitals, it was made known.

Gas-starved

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Gulshan, Banani, Badda, Ananda Nagar, Post Office Road, Satarkul, Rampura and Shahjadpur.

Besides, in Tejgaon, Mohakhali, Mogbazar, Malibagh and Khilgaon pressure of gas remained low.

The gas shortage also compounded commuters' woes, as there were very few gas-fired three wheelers and taxis plying the city streets. The three wheelers also charged exorbitant fares and refused to follow their meter readings.

"Whereas I regularly pay around Tk 30 to go to my office in Kakrail from Bangla Motor area, I had to pay Tk 45 (yesterday) because the CNG three wheelers refused to comply with their meters," said 35-year old Masum Hossain.

There was a heavy rush of CNG-run vehicles in over three-dozen gas refilling stations in the city yesterday.

Residents had to depend on outside food supplies, as restaurants remained closed in these areas.

"But this suffering will pay dividend during the winter," says a Petrobangla official who oversees this technical task. "Normally every winter Dhaka experiences low gas pressure because a gas by-product, named condensate, accumulates in the pipeline in low temperature. High condensate in the pipelines reduces gas supplies."

He explained that a new gas pipeline between Demra and Gulshan has been installed to avert the low gas pressure problem. Gas supplies had to be suspended in selected areas to install a device at the two ends of the pipeline.

"We have also set up a 20-inch pipeline in Manohardi the day after Eid. We now have normal gas supply and pressure. We believe we will be able to supply around 1260 million cft of gas per day across the country without disruption during the winter," he pointed out.

Rabbani Jabbar, president of Bangladesh Mudran Shilpa Samity, refuting the BBPSA statement, said books would be available in the market in time, as there was no difference in the system of awarding the job this year.

Earlier, the court on February 25, 2002 served a show cause notice on his guarantors to explain why Pintu was not present in the court without submission of any documents before it.

The court also directed the guarantors twice to assure it of Pintu's appearance. But Pintu was not produced before the court. The court on September 29 this year ordered Pintu's counsel to produce him before it today.

Pintu was arrested on December 26, 2001 on charge of attempted snatching of auction documents of a bankrupt company's property on December 23 the same year. Later, he was given one month's detention under the Special Powers Act.

Advocate Jahangir Alam Khan filed the case alleging that Pintu and his accomplices tried to grab the bidding documents.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested Pintu following a case filed against him with Motijheel Police Station.

Later, the court set Pintu free on bail on January 24 last year upon a bond of Tk 10,000 with two guarantors.

When reached, Masud Ahmed Talukder, Pintu's counsel, did not comment on the non-appearance of his client before the court on so many dates.

Banshkhali carnage

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horror of the deadliest ever arson attack in Bangladesh.

On the alleged repression against supporters of the main opposition party and religious minorities, Hasina, also Awami League president, claimed, "At least 21 Hindus were incinerated in Banshkhali alone and no fewer than 24,000 leaders, activists and supporters of opposition parties were killed after the last parliamentary elections."

"Why are minority groups not given protection the constitution guarantees?" Hasina asked, accusing the BNP-led coalition government of widespread torture.

Hasina alleged the involvement of some local BNP leaders and their 'harboured' hoodlums in the Banshkhali arson attack that police described as just another robbery.

"They carried out the attack to feed their desire for vengeance," the AL chief said, adding the attackers did not even spare the four-day-old baby.

Hasina accused the BNP-Jamaat coalition of sliding the country back into total chaos and sheltering killers and other criminals over its first two years in office.

She said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, local lawmaker and State Minister Jafrul Islam

Chowdhury and his cousin, who is the union parishad chairman, cannot walk away from their responsibility for the gruesome incident.

She accused the home minister of withdrawing cases against 70,000 ruling party-favoured criminals.

"The government failed to save the lives and property of people," Hasina said in a guarded reference to launching a tough movement against the government.

Hasina asked Banshkhali residents to help track down the perpetrators of the November 18 massacre and told the rally: "Unite against repression and resist it."

AL presidium members Sajeda Chowdhury, Motia Chowdhury, Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, General Secretary Abdul Jalil, central leaders Hossain Kader and Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Chittagong city AL President MA Mannan, Chittagong Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, north district President Mosharrar Hossain and south district President Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury also addressed.

Earlier in the day, Hasina addressed two roadside rallies in West Patiya and Anwara on her way to Banshkhali.

BNP renews talks

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need be, the dialogue will carry on from dawn to dusk. Please convey this message to your party chief and provide for the dialogue," Bhuiyan told Hamid.

But Hamid blamed the ruling coalition for not allowing the opposition to speak on the floor of the House.

"We see no reason for going to the parliament, as we are not allowed to speak. The treasury bench should change its attitude towards the opposition," he said.

Asking Bhuiyan for taking initiative to resolve the stalemate, Hamid said the AL would join the last parliamentary session if the government were sincere in its attitude.

"The reason why we are not going to the House should be discussed," he added.

Bhuiyan and Hamid exchanged the views during a discussion meeting, marking the death anniversary of Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milton on Dhaka Medical College premises.

Presided over by Bangladesh Medical Association President and Vice-Chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Prof MA Hadi, the meeting was addressed, among others, by

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, State Minister for Labour and Manpower Amanullah Aman and Jatiya Party leader Shaful Alam Proddhan.

"In democracy, no elected person has the privilege of doing whatever he or she wishes to. It brings autocracy in the country if the ruling party forgets the people till the next poll," Hamid said at the meet.

Bhuiyan shot down the conception of formation of "national or consensus" government, saying, "BNP does not believe in those. Election is the only way to come to power and persons having no ability to be elected are talking about formation of a national government."

Inu, however, reiterated his party's proposal of forming national government and said, "A national government is urgently needed instead of a one-party government in the present perspective of crime, globalisation and rise of fundamentalism."

Menon observed that the harvest of democracy has been confined within corruption, communalism and criminalisation.

Secondary students

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The High Court has issued a rule on the NCTB chairman and other officials to explain why they would not be directed to stop issuing any order for print and marketing of books for VI to X classes for exceeding the estimated value of books.

The rule nisi came after the BBPSA vice-president, Shah Alam, filed a writ petition with the court.

Publishers and sellers sought intervention of the prime minister to ensure even-handed work distribution and demanded cancellation of the order that allowed the remaining 327 publishing houses only 8 percent of the job.

"It is a flagrant violation of government rules," Alam said.

Rabbani Jabbar, president of Bangladesh Mudran Shilpa Samity, refuting the BBPSA statement, said books would be available in the market in time, as there was no difference in the system of awarding the job this year.

Earlier, the BBPSA submitted a memorandum to the prime minister, education minister and NCTB chairman, seeking intervention.

The BBPSA is scheduled to stage a token hunger strike in front of the NCTB building today in protest against the NCTB decision.

The association members will hold a rally at Bangla Bazar on December 11 and hand over a memorandum to the president, seeking intervention.

Kuril arms haul

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him about the source and destination of the sophisticated weapons.

"We are verifying the names that Manik gave us," said a top DB official seeking anonymity, adding that preliminary investigation has not revealed anything out of the ordinary with the persons named. Manik is now on a 14-day remand in two separate cases.

The DB official said the matter is being handled with utmost caution given the sensitive nature of the case and that police are making steady progress in unearthing the identity of the suspected gunrunners and the purpose of bringing such sophisticated firearms into the capital.

Police said they will follow up all possible leads once they are able to interrogate Abdul Aziz, one of the suspected gunrunners now undergoing treatment at Combined Military Hospital after being critically injured in Sunday's gunfight with police.

Meanwhile, the manhunt for Lincoln, a known drug-peddler of

the Uttara-Airport area, continued yesterday for his suspected connection with the Kuril arms cache, police said.

Manik told police that Lincoln took the keys to his shop on Saturday afternoon saying he wouldn't go home that night because he had a quarrel with his parents.

Manik also said Lincoln was inside the shop at 8:00pm on Sunday.

Police raided several places in Uttara's Ashkonia area but couldn't find Lincoln. Deputy Commissioner (North Zone) Golam Rasul said he was certain of Lincoln's involvement with the arms found in Kuril Badda.

Four AK-47 assault rifles, two revolvers, 20 hand grenades, four time bombs, a large number of AK-47 ammunition and other explosives were seized among other things from the signboard shop during Sunday's raid on the signboard shop.

Dr Kamal

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stressed unity of civil society members against the 'misrule of the present government' and to press the mainstream opposition political parties to launch a united anti-government movement.

They expressed dismay at religious militancy in the country and accused the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government of patronising the militants instead of resisting them.

They said repression on the minority has been institutionalised after the elections of 2001.

President of a faction of Jatiya Samjatantrik Dal (JSD) Hasanul Haq Inu said "We are creating a situation for foreign aggression in the country," and blamed the state and the politicians for such a situation.

Inu urged for greater unity of the social and political forces that opposed the alliance government.

General Secretary of the Gono Forum Saifuddin Ahmed Manik called for a sustained movement against all types of misdeeds of the government.

Dr Ajay Roy criticised the media for labelling the initiatives of the civil society members as the Third Force and said civil society members could play their part alongside the political parties in their anti-government agitation.

Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori urged all to face the present situation of the country politically.

Presided over by Justice KM Sobhan the programme was addressed, among others, by Sultana Kamal of the ASK, Prof Ajay Roy of the Sammilito Samajik Andolon, Communist Party of Bangladesh leader Jiad Al Malum, Shirin Akhtar of Karmojibi Nari, writer Hayat Mamud and cultural activist Sara Zaker.

Koizumi tells

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within the country over the government's decision to send its troops to Baghdad, with some reports speculating that Japan could delay sending its forces.

Koizumi, however, refrained from making a commitment on when he would make a decision and said: "It is not a question of delaying or not delaying. I will make an assessment and make my judgement."

The fight against terrorism in both Iraq and Afghanistan has become a very serious issue and nations should be prepared for a "long drawn out fight," he told the Asian editors and representatives.

Of concern to him also was the maritime security threat in the Asean region and Japan hoped to cooperate with countries in Southeast Asia to counter piracy and foil attacks.

Koizumi, however, emphasised that Japan would not take security measures that would "alarm" its neighbours in Asia.

He made these remarks while responding to another question on changes in Japan's security role in the region, with the US now talking about re-alignment of troops.

"The constitution stipulates that Japan shall not use force and not engage in combat and we will uphold that constitution."

"It is important to make sure that what we do will not cause a sense of alarm in the region," he said.

The ANN is a grouping of prominent Asian newspapers to promote the exchange of Asian news and views in the region.

Kuril gunrunners

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other explosives as they escaped.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Ashraf Huda however termed yesterday's raid more successful than the Badda raid in that five of the 150 criminals listed with Mohammadpur Police Station were arrested.

"It was like any regular raid for criminal hunt, but was more effective due to the curfew which was necessary given the gravity of the situation surrounding the arms haul in Badda," Huda said.

"The curfew during the raid proved effective and we have decided to conduct more such raids from time to time," he added.

The decision to slap curfew during the Mohammadpur raid on suspected criminal hideouts was taken at a DMP meeting chaired by Huda at 9:00pm Monday.

"We heard an announcement at around 11:45 Monday night that those venturing outside after midnight would be arrested," said Abdur Rehman, a resident of Geneva Camp.

Led by Assistant Deputy Commissioner (West Zone) Morshed Alam, the joint team raided some houses blacklisted by Mohammadpur Police. The Detective Branch and Special Branch of police assisted the raid.

Apart from the five arrested listed criminals Suman, Naju, Ismail, Mazharul and Nata Bhulu, six of the arrested had warrants issued for their arrest and 13 others accused in different cases.

"Another 32 were rounded up for violating the curfew," the DMP commissioner said, adding they would be released after questioning.

Total 450 police and 160 BDR personnel took part in the raids that ended at 5:00am yesterday.

Poison from lethal fish could be a painkiller

TORONTO, Reuters

A tiny Canadian company wants to use poison from a fish -- a substance more toxic than cyanide -- to help cancer patients suppress pain or to wean heroin addicts off their habit.

International Wex Technologies, a Vancouver-based company listed on the small-cap Canadian Venture Exchange, says early trials show positive results from tetrodotoxin, although bigger and more extensive tests will be needed before the product reaches the marketing stage.

It says the new drug could be on the market within three years, if all the tests workout.

The new drug is derived from a blowfish poison -- a substance so dangerous that a mere trace can paralyze a person within minutes.

The blowfish is known to gourmets as the source of the sometimes deadly Japanese fugu delicacy, a dish that can be prepared only by trained and licensed chefs, because the slip of a knife can poison the food, causing the diner to drop to the ground convulsing and gasping for air.

It has been described as the

culinary version of Russian roulette.

But the drug derived from the poison, tetrodotoxin, has already passed two phases of clinical tests, and doctors conducting early surveys say it eased pain in terminally ill cancer patients, where no other pain medication had worked.

"It quickly became apparent that some patients were having a dramatic response. You would not have expected these results in existing treatments," said Dr Edward Sellers, a professor of pharmacology at the University of Toronto who helped Wex conduct its Phase II trials, a study of 22 patients.

Sellers said one patient in his mid-50s was in such agony that he couldn't even wear his clothes without sharp surges of pain.

But with shots of Tectin, Wex's patented name for tetrodotoxin, his pain subsided for more than a week.

Researchers injected patients with several micrograms of Tectin -- a quantity so small it can't be seen with the naked eye -- twice a day for four days, and found that nearly 70 percent experienced a reduction in pain.

CHT at standstill

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quoted sources as saying.

The PCJSS enforced the dawn-to-dusk road barricade in all the three hill districts yesterday to press for its demands for full implementation of the accord.

Protesting the attack and killing of the UPDF men, the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) and Hills Women Federation brought out a procession in the port city yesterday.

The procession ended up in a rally in front of Chittagong Press Club where the UPDF leaders at a rally blamed the PCJSS for the attack. They demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

The Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Students' Council also blamed the PCJSS for the killing. They took out a procession from Dhaka University Teacher and Student Centre (TSC) in the protest at the attacks.

Our correspondents from three hill districts reported that apart from gun attack, the road blockade was enforced in the three hill districts without any major incidents, with vehicles staying off the roads.

Communications with the rest of the country was disrupted due to the road blockade and commuters suffered greatly.

Our Bandaran Correspondent reported that the PCJSS and its front organisations yesterday observed 'Protest day' in there yesterday.

The four-party alliance government-backed organisations of Banglae settlers hoisted black flags in the Bandaran town.

Bangalee Chhatra Parishad, the PCJSS, PCP, and Parbatya Gano Parishad held separate rallies in front of the local press club, at Silpakola Academy and at Reserve Bazar.

Meanwhile, main opposition Awami League's Rangamati district unit organised a discussion marking the sixth anniversary of the peace accord signing. The discussion was presided over by district AL President and former MP Dipankar Talukder. The discussants demanded full implementation of the accord to establish peace in the CHT.

HIV victims

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paign would be launched. The deputy speaker said that he would use his office to reinstate the sacked BIWTA employee as soon as possible.

The HIV carriers got a psychological boost as the lawmakers, journalists, and representatives from the UNDP, Unicef and other donor agencies had lunch with them.

"Today's meeting and lunch with the elite have given us the belief that we have not been alienated from the society," one patient told reporters after the meeting at the deputy speaker's office.

"We may have disagreement on many a political issue, but we are united on HIV/Aids issues," Ghulam Mohammad Quader, Jatiya Party lawmaker and also vice-chairman of the BPMG, said.

"It is significant that the HIV/Aids patients discussed their problems with the policymakers for the first time. We should utilise their experiences to combat the deadly virus," Faruque Khan, Awami League lawmaker and vice-chairman of the BPMG, said.

"The HIV/Aids patients should be given the chance to discuss their problems to help prevent further spread of the disease," Zahir Uddin Swapan, BNP lawmaker and vice chairman of the BPMG, said.

Shantu asks govt

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ministry as per the accord," said Shantu Larma.

As the government did not remove Wadud Bhuiyan from the CHT development board by November 30, the deadline the PCJSS set, it will enforce a hartal on December 8, Shantu Larma said.

The PCJSS will contact CHT people, professionals and members of the civil society to garner support for implementation of the accord.

They will also form a support group and a forum drawing members of the civil society to work for the implementation of the peace accord. Shantu also extended support to the 11-party alliance's hartal on December 13.

Shantu said the presence of so many army camps in the region is a clear violation of the accord. With the direct aid of the army officials, he complained, attacks were launched in Baghaihat bazaar and Babuchhara in 1999, Dighinala Bawal Khali in 2001, Rangar in 2001 and in Mahalchhari in 2003. "So it is very important that they (army men) are removed from the region."

He said after the signing of the CHT peace accord in 1997 that ended decades of insurgency, the country had three governments including a caretaker administration, but none of them was pro-

public. They could not resolve the problems of the CHT people, nor of the country.

The PCJSS chief blamed the governments for encouraging Bangladeshis from all over the country to settle in the CHT. Now the government itself has created unrest in the CHT, he added.

He, however, admitted that some clauses of the accord were implemented, but some key clauses were not.

Rupayan Dewan, vice-president of the PCJSS, Dhaka University teacher Dr Mesbah Kamal, Sanjib Drong, secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Sumanlangkar Mathahero, president of the Parbatya Bouddha Samity, and representatives of the non-settling Bang