

India hopeful of resolving border row with China

AFP, New Delhi

India is optimistic about settling a decades-old border dispute with China, a top official said Sunday as the two sides held talks on the issue for a second day.

India's National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan and Dai Bingguo, China's executive vice foreign minister, met in the southern state of Kerala on the dispute, which led to a brief war in 1962.

"Both sides are optimistic about reaching a decision," Narayanan was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India, adding that discussions in New Delhi on the first day were "very good".

Dai also reported progress. "We are working together and making progress continuously," he told reporters.

The two governments in June 2003 appointed special representatives to address the border issue. The last round of talks was held in China in September.

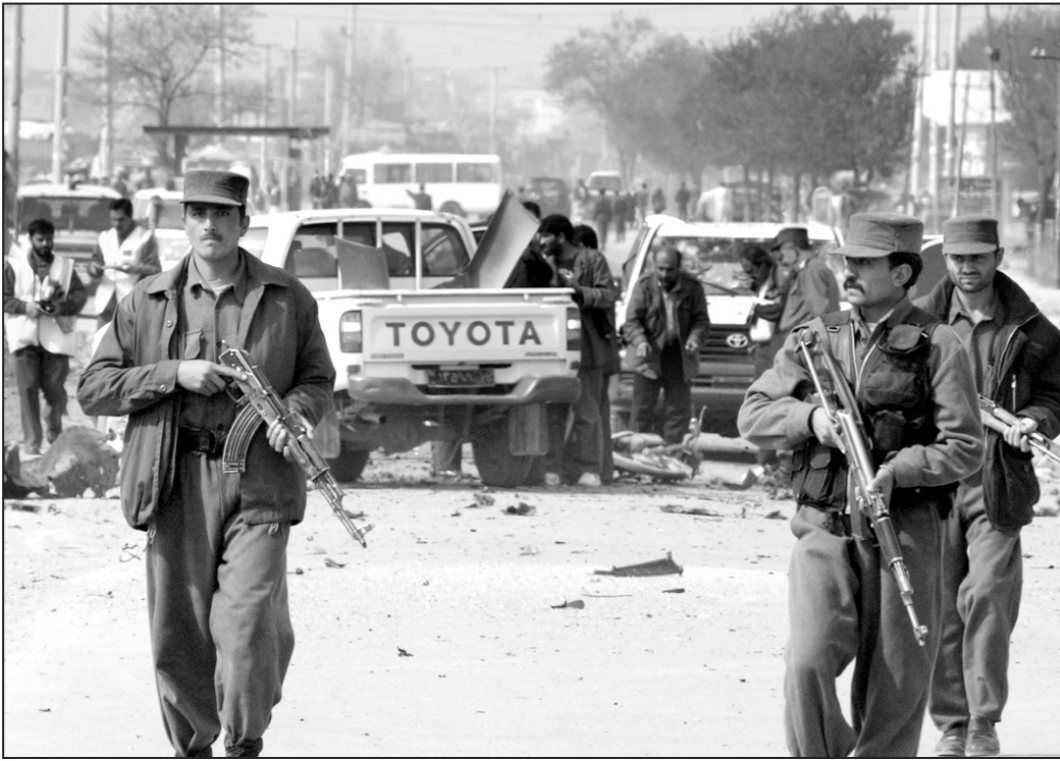


PHOTO: AFP

Afghan policemen stand guard as investigators (C) inspect the wreckage of vehicles at the site of a suicide bombing in Kabul yesterday. At least four people, including two attackers, were killed in the Afghan capital in a suicide car bombing apparently targeting the former president and current head of the country's senate, Sebgatullah Mujadidi who escaped unharmed.

4 killed in suicide attack on Afghan politician

AFP, Kandahar

Two attackers and two bystanders were killed yesterday in the Afghan capital in a suicide car bombing targeting the head of the country's senate, who escaped unharmed, the interior ministry said.

"There was a suicide attack this morning. Four people have died. The attack targeted Sebgatullah Mujadidi, who was not hurt," ministry spokesman Yousuf Stanizai said.

The dead were two attackers and two passers-by, one a young girl and the other an old man, Stanizai said.

Mujadidi, a former Afghan president, now heads the upper house of parliament. He was quoted as blaming Pakistani agents for the blast and Afghan President Hamid Karzai separately blamed unspecified foreigners.

A pick-up drove near Mujadidi's car and exploded, damaging the vehicle "but we were -- thanks be to

God -- not hurt," said his bodyguard Baz Noor who was travelling in the same car.

An AFP photographer at the scene said the vehicle belonging to the attackers was destroyed with only the frame and burst tires to be seen.

It had a licence plate from the southern province of Kandahar, which is a stronghold of Taliban insurgents, said a government official who asked not to be named.

Mujadidi's vehicle was damaged on one side with one side window shattered. Three bodies, including those of the two attackers, could be seen near the site of the explosion.

Mujadidi also runs a reconciliation program aimed at reintegrating fighters from the Taliban regime, which was toppled by US-led forces in late 2001.

It was not immediately known who was behind the attack. Afghanistan has seen more than a dozen suicide attacks, most of them

in the south, in recent months and nearly 50 people have died.

An aide to Mujadidi quoted him as telling visitors that the attack was planned by Pakistan's secret service Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

"Friends and relatives are coming to visit his excellency (Mujadidi). He is telling them that the attack was planned by foreigners and ISI of Pakistan," aide Mustafah Ghazi told AFP.

Mujadidi recently accused Pakistan of involvement in attacks in Afghanistan.

Karzai said authorities had been warned of a plot to target senior officials.

"We'd information since two months ago there were plans to attack high-ranking government personnel, particularly Hazrat Saheb (Mujadidi)," he told a press conference.

Residents flee Pak tribal town

Curfew relaxed

AFP, Miranshah

Pakistani officials yesterday relaxed a curfew in a restive tribal area bordering Afghanistan after killing 30 militants but residents of the main town Miranshah used the opportunity to flee their homes.

The curfew was relaxed from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm so that people could buy food and other items, local administrator Zaheer Islam told AFP.

Shops and markets remained open during the day but many residents were seen leaving their homes in private cars and pickups piled with household belongings, witnesses said.

The town has been badly battered in battles between police and troops and pro-Taliban militants.

A curfew was imposed in the area eight days ago when militants clashed with security forces after occupying government buildings. It was relaxed for five and six hours on Friday and Saturday.

Restive Nepal braces for Maoist blockade

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels plan to blockade Kathmandu and other major towns and cities from tomorrow, stepping up pressure on King Gyanendra who seized absolute power a year ago.

The guerrillas, intent on setting up a communist state in place of the centuries-old Hindu monarchy, vowed to close roads to the

capital indefinitely, stopping movement of people and goods to the city of more than 1.5 million.

In the past, they have blockaded Kathmandu for several days, successfully cutting it off.

But the royalist government expects no major problem.

"We are prepared for it," said junior information minister Shris Shumsher Rana. "We have adequate stocks and we will keep our

lifelines open."

Officials said Kathmandu had enough foodgrains for two months and enough petrol, kerosene and diesel for two weeks.

"They have tried this previously and failed and will fail again," Rana said. "We have not had any shortage."

But residents were not convinced.

INDIAN MAOISTS ALLEGE Delhi backs civilian paramilitaries

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Maoists who killed 28 people last month in a landmine blast said Sunday the victims were government-backed paramilitaries and not civilians.

London-based rights group Amnesty International on Friday expressed "grave concern about the recent escalation of violence" in the

eastern state of Chhatisgarh, where the massacre took place.

The rebels on February 28 blew up a truck carrying people who were taking part in an anti-Maoist campaign called "Salwa Judum" (Purification Campaign).

In an e-mailed statement they said the group had been armed by the government to attack Maoist sympathisers in rural areas.

Tigers accuse Lankan troops of fresh attack

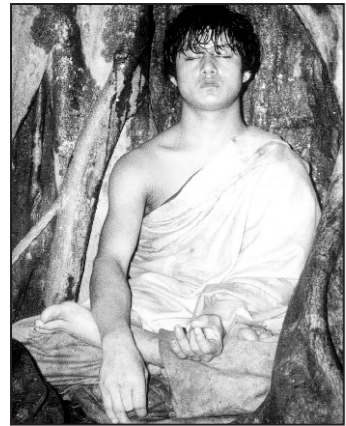
AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels have accused government forces of launching a fresh attack against them and breaking an agreement last month to halt violence.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said about 30 security personnel and paramilitary soldiers attacked their post at Kaddumrippu on Friday night.

"The LTTE counter-attacked and the Sri Lanka army and paramilitaries were forced to retreat, abandoning their weapons. Subsequently the LTTE retrieved these weapons," the Tigers said in a statement on Sunday.

There was no immediate reaction from the defence ministry which has routinely denied that it was supporting any "paramilitary" units to stage attacks against the Tigers.



Ram Bahadur Bomjan

Boy called reincarnated Buddha goes missing

AP, Katmandu

A 15-year-old boy whose followers believe he is the reincarnation of Buddha has disappeared after 10 months of meditation in the Nepalese jungle, officials said Saturday.

Followers of Ram Bahadur Banjan reported his disappearance and search parties on Sunday split up in the jungles of Bara, about 160km south of the capital, Katmandu, to investigate, said Santaraj Subedi, the chief government official in the district.

A lesson to rise above religious row

REUTERS, New Delhi

Starting bloody riots between India's majority Hindus and minority, but large, Muslim population usually doesn't take much doing.

A desecrated temple or mosque, a motorcycle rider of one group brushing past a bicycle rider of the other, or a boy of either community teasing a girl of the other, has been enough to kindle bloodshed and burn towns and cities for days.

Last week, though, saw something remarkable and followed other recent examples of uncharacteristic restraint by Hindus and Muslims.

After suspected Kashmiri militants

set off bombs in one of Hinduism's holiest pilgrimage sites in the northern city of Varanasi, killing 23 people and wounding dozens, police feared a wave of reprisal attacks.

There were none. "The Indian state has learnt the lessons - and costs - of letting religious zealots run amok," Harish Khare, an editor with The Hindu newspaper, wrote after Tuesday's blasts in Varanasi.

"India has changed dramatically ... the new India does not want to be distracted by claims made in the name of medieval passions."

Politicians and analysts say a growing awareness of political and

religious manipulation prevented any religious backlash in Varanasi. Weariness after decades of conflict and bloodshed and rising prosperity from the country's booming economy also cooled tempers.

The two sides showed similar restraint last July when suspected Islamist guerrillas raided a holy site claimed by Hindus and Muslims, and again in October when they triggered serial blasts in New Delhi, killing 66 people as they shopped ahead of the biggest Hindu and Muslim festivals of the year.

Hindus account for about 80 percent of India's 1.1 billion people and Muslims about 13 percent, giving the

country the largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan.

Although they have coexisted largely peacefully since Muslim invaders brought Islam to the subcontinent more than 1,000 years ago, tensions flared during the past few centuries, particularly under British colonial rule.

More than one million people have been killed in clashes since the early 18th century, rights groups say. The worst in recent years were riots in 2002 in Gujarat state.