

International

Kashmir PM says

India pushing subcontinent towards war

ISLAMABAD, Dec 9: An intransigent India is pushing the Asian subcontinent away from peace and toward a military confrontation that could escalate into a nuclear war, warned the prime minister of Pakistan-ruled Azad Kashmir, reports AP.

And Pakistan is getting fed up, says Kashmir Prime Minister Chaudhry Sultan Mahmood.

"It doesn't matter what we say, India says 'no.' We say in international mediation, India says 'no.' We say a vote by Kashmiris for self-determination, India says 'no.' India is not serious to solve the Kashmir problem," Mahmood said in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press.

The 51-year-old dispute between the two hostile neighbours took on international prominence in May when Pakistan and India exploded underground nuclear devices

and declared themselves nuclear powers.

Mahmood said a big danger for the region is an accidental outbreak of war, the result of frayed nerves and relentless cross border attacks.

Each day Mahmood says Indian troops fire at Pakistani civilians living along the disputed border that divides Kashmir between the two South Asian neighbours.

As well both Pakistan and India have charged the other with sending infiltrators across the disputed border.

Several months ago Mahmood distributed 2,500 guns to villagers living on the border. The guns, he said, were to allow residents to defend against Indian infiltrators and not to create a vigilante force.

But Mahmood warned that the relentless firing increases tensions.

"When they are trying to kill civilians and you retaliate and

even if you don't want something to happen it can accidentally be aggravated and then you use whatever means is at your disposal," said Mahmood.

And today both Pakistan and India have nuclear weapons at their disposal.

The threat of war is a real one in South Asia, where Pakistan and India already have fought three wars since independence of subcontinent in 1947. Two of the wars have been fought over Kashmir, which both countries lay claim to.

As recently as 1990 many people feared a fourth, possibly nuclear, confrontation again over Kashmir.

India blames Pakistan for fomenting violence in its side of the border, where a 10-year insurgency has left tens of thousands of people dead. Indian Kashmir is the only Muslim-dominated state in a predominantly Hindu India.

Pakistan denies giving military aid to Muslim insurgents across the border, saying its help is only political and moral.

But Mahmood says that Pakistan cannot stop some militant Muslims, who see the secessionist movement in Kashmir as a jihad or holy war.

"As far as Azad Kashmir government is concerned we are not training or sending people across the line of control," said Mahmood.

"But we can't say that no one is going, but they are not assisted by the government," he said. "May be individuals from here and there, like some Afghans are coming and saying we must help and they sneak across the border."

According to Mahmood everything changed when India and Pakistan declared themselves nuclear states. A nuclear war on the subcontinent would

endanger the lives of 1 billion people — a threat the world cannot afford to ignore, he said.

The international community and the United States in particular has a responsibility to prevent a nuclear war on the Asian subcontinent.

"As a superpower how can the United States not intervene to prevent a nuclear war that could put the lives of more than 1 billion people in danger?" he asked. "It's credibility as a superpower is at stake."

But India is steadfastly opposed to international mediation.

For Mahmood the international community's job is clear — to put pressure on India to enter into third-party mediation.

"We live in a global village and international opinions is important," he said. "With enough pressure India can't afford to say no to everything."



Former House members, from left, Elizabeth Holtzman, Father Robert Drinan and Wayne Owens are sworn in on Capitol Hill Tuesday prior to testifying before the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearing. All three served on the House Judiciary Committee in 1974 during the Nixon impeachment hearing.

— AP/UNB photo



A Palestinian police unit stage a demonstration of security-related maneuvers in honour of US President Bill Clinton's advance security team to Gaza Tuesday. US security officials met with their Palestinian counterparts Tuesday to coordinate security for President Clinton's visit to Gaza next Monday.

— AP/UNB photo

BRIEFLY

US-DPRK talks extended: The United States and North Korea have extended their discussions on a US demand for access to a North Korean site suspected of being used for development of nuclear weapons, the US State Department said Tuesday, AP says from Washington.

The two delegations met Friday and Saturday in New York and continued the discussions here on Monday and Tuesday.

Gabon's president re-elected: Gabon's veteran President Omar Bongo won a fresh seven-year-term in Sunday's presidential election, taking 66.55 per cent of the vote, according to results announced by his Interior Minister, Reuters reports from Libreville.

Bongo's closest rival, Perre Mamboundou, won 16.54 per cent of votes cast, with veteran opposition leader Father Paul Mba Abessole in third place.

Cuban communists begin confce: Young Cuban communists began a three-day conference in Havana on Tuesday designed to bolster youthful support for President Fidel Castro's four-decade-old revolutionary government, Reuters says from Havana.

Castro was present at the inauguration of the meeting of the Young Communists' Union — the youth wing of the ruling communist party — attended by more than 1,500 delegates from across the Caribbean island nation.

China-Bhutan sign agreement: Tang Jiaxuan, Chinese Foreign Minister and Lyndon Jigme Thinley, Foreign Minister of Kingdom of Bhutan, yesterday signed an agreement on maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas between the two countries on behalf of each other's government, Xinhua says from Beijing.

Prior to the signing ceremony, the two Foreign Ministers had an exchange of views on bilateral relations and issues of common concern.

Probe against Russian officials: A corruption investigation was launched Tuesday against the chief of Russia's missile fuel agency and some of his colleagues, military prosecutors said, AP reports from Moscow.

Criminal probes against several Defence Ministry officials were opened Tuesday, the ITAR-Tass news agency quoted the central military prosecutor's office as saying.

Workers kidnap their boss in Moscow: About 100 women workers at a Siberian auto factory took their boss hostage to demand their wages, some of which are a year and a half overdue, a news report said Tuesday, AP reports from Moscow.

The workers at the Ulan-Ude Auto Factory locked director Leonid Belykin in his office on Monday and continued to hold him Tuesday, the Interfax news agency said. It did not say what jobs the women held.

Anwar Ibrahim's trial

Lawyers continue to grill main witness

He said no, and that no one else but his parents knew about the planned visit to their home. "It's inconceivable that Anwar would want to kill me and my wife," Azizan said. "There's no way my father and mother would tell anyone."

The Malaysian Attorney General's office has said that the criminal charges against Anwar were based on a police investigation into accusations contained in the book.

The book was widely distributed at this year's annual convention of the ruling United Malays National Organisation party, where Anwar's allies campaigned for political reforms.

Throughout the cross examination Wednesday, the prosecution objected to the line of questioning.

The questioning in the past two to three days is not related to the allegations, but just to the credibility of the witness," said prosecutor Yusof Zainal Abidin.

A book, "50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become PM," hints that Anwar schemed to cause the death of Azizan's wife.

Azizan was asked if he believed the accusations.

Bus collides with fuel tanker in India: 50 dead

NEW DELHI, Dec 9: At least 50 people were killed when a speeding bus collided with a fuel tanker today in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, reports AFP.

Five others were seriously injured in the accident at Bhadrak district, Bihar. Director General of Police K Jacob was quoted as saying.

Jacob said there was a loud explosion after the collision, and most of the victims were burnt to death.

PTI earlier reported that 15 political activists were killed in the accident and identified them as members of a centrist party ruling Bihar.

Severed heads of 4 foreigners found in Chechnya

GROZNY, Dec 9: The severed heads of four kidnapped foreigners were discovered neatly lined up beside a highway in Chechnya on Tuesday after a rescue attempt apparently went wrong, reports AP.

The whereabouts of the bodies of the three Britons and a New Zealander, engineers who had been installing telephone lines across Chechnya, was unclear.

While kidnappings, usually for ransom, have become widespread in Chechnya since the end of its 1994-96 war for independence from Russia, hostages are rarely killed — particularly foreigners.

The deaths were apparently the result of a rescue attempt by Chechen authorities Monday night that went "tragically wrong," according to Ray Verth, chief executive of Granger Telecom, the British company the hostages had worked for.

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Endeavour lifts up ISS to higher orbit

SPACE CENTER, Dec 9: With the bulk of their construction work behind them Endeavour's astronauts gave the new up-and-running International Space Station (ISS) a safe but shakily lift to a higher orbit on Tuesday, reports AP.

The pilots fired the shuttle thrusters to climb to an altitude of about 400 kilometers, 9 kilometers higher than before.

NASA wants to leave the international space station in as high an orbit as possible. Spacecraft gradually sink because of the naturally occurring drag of the atmosphere, and need to be boosted periodically.

The seven-story, 35-ton station swung back and forth a half-foot or more in Endeavour's cargo bay, its solar wings flapping as the shuttle moved higher and higher.

"Wow, look at that," astronaut Nancy Currie called to her crewmates. The tips of the wings waved a full foot, she

said.

The astronauts kept close watch on the quivering stack during the 20-minute ride, carefully spacing out their thruster pulses to reduce the stress.

"Nice job," Mission Control said when it was over. Shuttle commander Robert Cabana replied that the boosting procedure "really worked slick."

It went so well, in fact, that Mission Control canceled a second boost that had been planned for Friday.

After the previous night's seven and half hour spacewalk to wire the Zarya and Unity station modules together, the astronauts took it easy Tuesday. It was their first break since rocketing into orbit last Friday.

"We've still got a lot ahead of us," Cabana told a TV interviewer. "But it really feels good to have everything we need for mission success under our belt."

— AP/UNB photo

UNSC condemns Afghanistan for sheltering terrorists

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 9: The UN Security Council denounced Afghanistan's Taliban militia Tuesday for sheltering international terrorists and violating human rights, reports AP.

The regional AIADMK party announced that it expected Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi to also help elect opposition nominee PM Sajeed to the influential portfolio.

Sajeed is a member of the main opposition Congress Party, which last month trounced Vajpeyi's nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in key state elections.

A healthy convention has evolved that the ruling group nominates the Speaker of parliament while the Deputy Speaker goes to the opposition.

AIADMK Supremo Jayalalitha Jayaram said in a statement.

The book was widely distributed at this year's annual convention of the ruling United Malays National Organisation party, where Anwar's allies campaigned for political reforms.

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— AP/UNB photo

than seven years but is yet to see an end to economic sanctions.

"This situation is no longer acceptable," Aziz was quoted as saying.

The sanctions, imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, cannot be lifted until the weapons inspectors certify that Iraq is free of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons and long-range missiles.