

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, 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 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 at 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

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 Bhojpur 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.

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov said Chechen officials had caught one of the kidnappers Monday and he told police where the hostages were being held.

BJP suffers another setback

NEW DELHI, Dec 9: India's ruling Hindu nationalists suffered a setback today when a key ally vowed to back the opposition candidate for the post of Deputy Speaker in parliament, reports AFP.

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

Sayeed is a member of the main opposition Congress Party, which last month trounced Vajpayee'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 post goes to the opposition," AIADMK Supremo Jayalalitha Jayaram said in a statement.

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 shaky 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

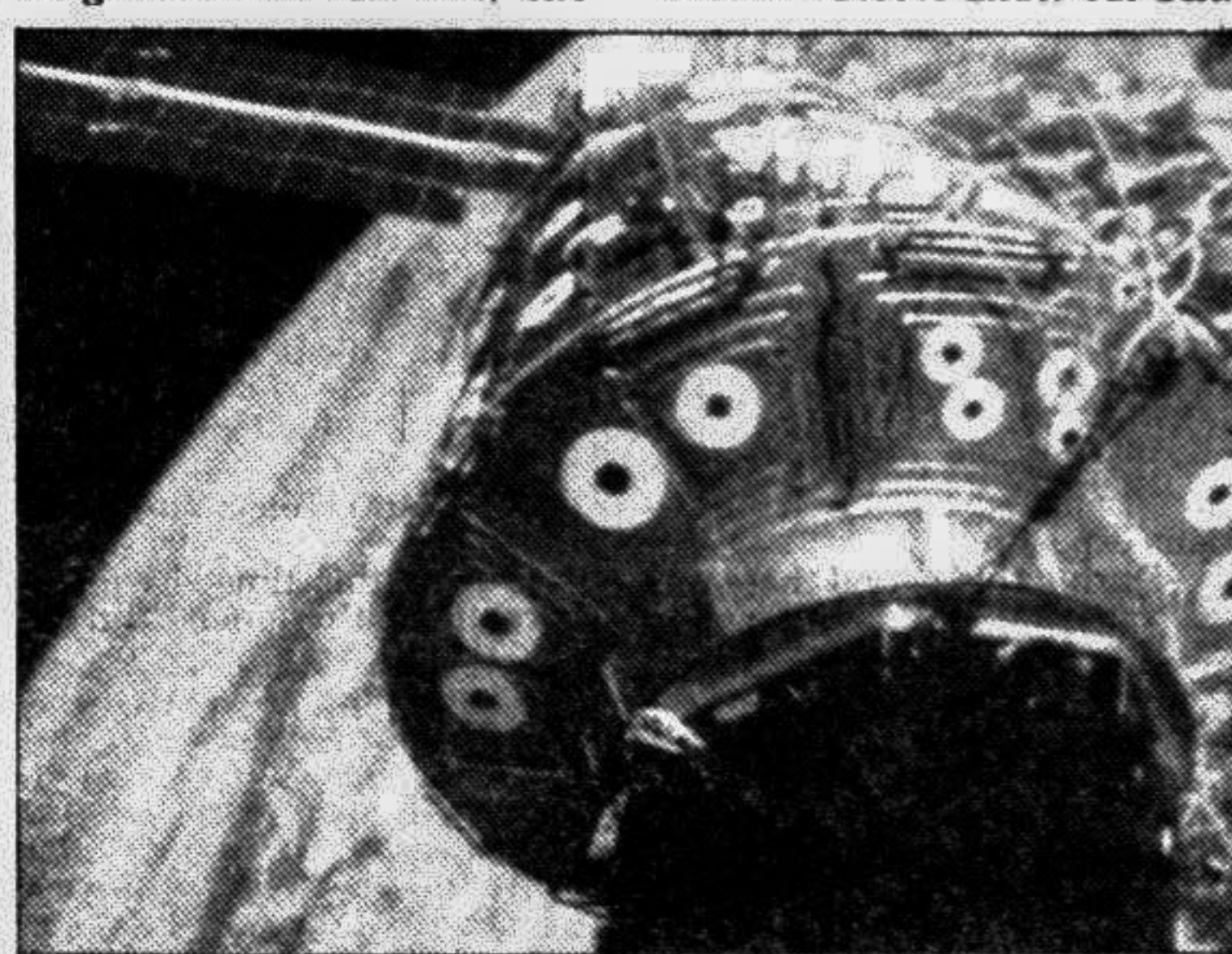
said. The astronauts kept close watch on the quivering stack during the 20-minute ride, carefully spacing out their thruster pulses to reduce the stress.

"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."



The first units of the international space station, the Russian-built Zarya at the top and American-built Unity below, can be seen as it orbits Earth docked in the payload bay of the space shuttle Endeavour Tuesday in this image from NASA television. Some of the work accomplished in last night's spacewalk can be seen in the cable connections and handles attached to the sides of Unity. — 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 council warned Taliban leaders that it would impose unspecified measures against them unless they halt their military campaign and negotiate peace with their ethnic rivals in the northern part of the country.

Alarmed by what it called the increasingly ethnic nature of the conflict, the council unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the killings this summer of eight Iranian diplomats and an Iranian journalist and the reported massacre of several thousand minority Shiites during the Taliban sweep of northern

Afghanistan. It demanded that the Taliban stop providing sanctuary and training for international terrorists.

"Afghanistan-based terrorism has become a plague," said US envoy Nancy Soderberg. "Terrorists trained or based in Afghanistan have been responsible for incidents in all corners of the globe. This was brought home to us tragically by the bombing of our embassies" in August in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania.

The Taliban have refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, the multimillionaire Saudi dissident who lives in Afghanistan and is accused by the United States of masterminding the embassy bombings that killed 224 people, including 12 Americans. Taliban leaders deny his involvement in terrorism.

UN intensifies drive for Iraq's illegal weapons

BAGHDAD, Dec 9: The United Nations launched an intensive search Tuesday for Iraq's illegal weapons amid Iraqi charges that its arms inspectors are again trying to harass Baghdad, reports AP.

"We are undertaking a very intensive schedule," Caroline Cross, the inspectors' spokeswoman in Baghdad, told The Associated Press. "We have several teams in town, we need to test Iraq's pledge to comply."

Baghdad did not hide its anger as the weapons inspectors sped up their probe. State-run newspapers quoted Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, currently on a visit to Moscow, as saying that there is a limit to Iraqi compliance.

They quoted him as saying that Iraq has been cooperating with the UN inspectors for more

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.

Late Monday, Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf said a team of 39 inspectors had arrived in Iraq, and branded them "commandos" trying to create problems. But Ms Cross, the inspectors' spokeswoman, denied a new team had come.

"There is no reason for the Iraqis to worry if they are going to comply," she said. There are now about 140

weapons experts in Iraq in addition to several visiting teams," she said.

The inspectors resumed their work last month after a nearly three-month hiatus during which Iraq had banned them from visiting any new suspected weapons sites. Iraq allowed them back and pledged full cooperation as the United States and Britain were preparing to launch military strikes on Nov 14.

On Tuesday, at least nine UN vans went into the field. Chief UN weapons inspector Richard Butler had earlier said that a series of surprise visits would begin Tuesday in a final test of Baghdad's pledge of cooperation.

Iraq hopes that the review will lead to lifting the sanctions.

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 Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, Foreign Minister of Kingdom of Bhutan, yesterday signed an agreement on maintenance of peace and tranquility in border area 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 Belykh 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

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 9: The defence in the corruption and sex trial of Anwar Ibrahim asked a key prosecution witness Wednesday if the sacked deputy prime minister had anything to do with the death of the witness' pregnant wife, reports AP.

Anwar's defence team is trying to prove that as part of a high-level conspiracy to destroy their client's political career, Anwar had even been accused of scheming to murder the wife of the man who says the politician sodomized him.

Sodomy is a crime in this predominantly Muslim nation. Anwar's wife, who was seven months pregnant, was killed in a car accident in January when the couple was driving to visit Anwar's parents. Anwar, who was driving, said that an oncoming car slammed into the passenger side of his car.

A book, "50 Reasons Why Anwar Cannot Become PM," hints that Anwar schemed to cause the death of Anwar's wife. Anwar was asked if he believed the accusations.

He said no, and that no one else but his parents knew about the planned visit to his home.

"It's inconceivable that Anwar would want to kill me and my wife," Anwar 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.



Manila's street children light candles Tuesday outside the ruins of the Bahay Kalinga orphanage to coincide with the mass burial of the 24 orphans who died in a fire five days ago. The dilapidated orphanage was razed by a pre-dawn fire killing at least 29 people, most of them children. — AP/UNB photo

Clinton's lawyers say Evidence not enough to support impeachment

WASHINGTON, Dec 9: In an exhaustive, 184-page document, President Bill Clinton's lawyers contrasted the Monica Lewinsky affair with the Watergate scandal and concluded that Clinton's "denial of a private indiscretion" does not warrant impeachment, reports AP.

"Whereas President (Richard) Nixon used governmental agencies including the CIA and FBI to thwart the investigation into his lies, President Clinton did nothing of the sort," Clinton's lawyers said in a submission Tuesday to the House Judiciary Committee. The Clinton legal team gave its most complete assessment of the evidence against the president to date, declaring that Clinton made no agreement with the former White House intern to lie under oath and that he did not attempt to influence the testimony of presidential

secretary Betty Currie.

Noting conflicts between the testimony of Clinton and Ms. Lewinsky, the president's lawyers said that "contradictory testimony from two witnesses does not indicate that one has committed perjury... a perjury case must not be based solely upon the testimony of a single witness."

The chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Rep. Henry Hyde, an Illinois Republican, dismissed the White House report as "more legal hairsplitting and semantic gymnastics." The report, he added, "appears to contain no new evidence or challenge the truthfulness of any testimony the committee now possess."

The report also strongly criticised prosecutor Kenneth Starr, stating that "instead of transmitting to the committee the information gathered during the investigation," Mr.

Starr chose to give it his own spin.

The decision to proceed in this way was a sharp departure from Special prosecutor Leon Jaworski's submission to Congress in the Watergate scandal, the report added.

Jaworski provided a compilation of information gathered by the grand jury, but reported no conclusions.

Starr found 11 grounds for possible impeachment and spelled them out. They ranged from allegations that Clinton lied to the grand jury and to the court in the Paula Jones case to obstruction of his secretary's testimony and abuse of power.

Finally, the White House report argued that Starr excluded evidence favourable to the president.

Starr alleged that Clinton obstructed justice by procuring a job for Lewinsky in exchange for false testimony about her relationship with the president.