

Pakistan's stiff warning to India

Islamabad calls for restraint

ISLAMABAD, May 26: Pakistan issued a stiff warning to India on Wednesday following air strikes by Indian jet fighters against infiltrators on its Kashmir territory, reports AP.

"We will take the necessary steps to defend ourselves," Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said shortly after receiving word that India launched air strikes Wednesday in the mountains that run like a seam along its border with Pakistan.

"We are retaliating when our positions are attacked and we will retaliate," he warned. However he didn't elaborate. India accuses Pakistan of sending the infiltrators across the border.

Aziz dismissed the allegations. "The area is an unmanned area... no one knows where they come from and who they are," he said.

He also said Pakistan was currently exercising restraint despite two weeks of cross border attacks from Indian soldiers amassed on the border.

Kashmir has been the flash point of two previous wars between India and Pakistan and Aziz warned "we will take the necessary action when our positions are attacked."

Pakistani authorities have ordered residents along its side of the Kashmir border to dig trenches.

In Muzaffarabad, the capital of Azad Kashmir, there were reports in recent days of thousands of people fleeing the border area because of relentless shelling from Indian troops amassed on the border.

Pakistan says several civilians have been killed by Indian artillery attacks.

"We are assessing the situation," Aziz said "and we will reply later in the day."

According to newspaper reports Wednesday the Pakistan Air Force and army have been put on "high alert" along the Kashmir border with India.

Quoting an unnamed source, the independent English-language daily newspaper The News said a meeting Tuesday chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and senior military and government officials looked at the latest developments on the Indian side of the Kashmir border.

"We have taken up the whole scenario, its implications and how Pakistan should launch diplomatic offensive against India, along with operational preparedness to meet any challenge if

Indian forces launch a misadventure," The News quoted the participant as saying.

Aziz said Pakistan is trying to engage India in talks. He said that Pakistan wants to hold high-level talks with India in Pakistan in the next three weeks. However there has been no immediate response from India.

"This escalation on the Line of Control (disputed border) is against the Lahore declaration," said Aziz referring to an agreement signed in February between Pakistani and Indian prime ministers.

Reuters says, Pakistan called for restraint on Wednesday after India launched air strikes in disputed Kashmir, but vowed to defend itself if its positions were attacked.

"There has to be restraint from both sides," Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, told reporters after India announced it had strafed positions held by infiltrators on Indian-controlled Kashmir, escalating tensions between the world's newest nuclear powers.

One Pakistan military official said there had been no reports of any bombs on the Pakistan side of the line of control.

"We don't know why they escalated the situation," Aziz told reporters. "If attack our positions, we will defend ourselves."

India and Pakistan routinely exchange fire across the 720-km (450-mile) ceasefire line dividing Kashmir.

The increased tension comes just two days before Pakistan marks the first anniversary of its successful nuclear tests and two weeks after the first anniversary of India's nuclear tests.

"It is an unwarranted escalation of the situation because we have been trying to defuse the situation," Aziz said.

Aziz said the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Islamabad was called to the Foreign Office on Monday and warned about escalating tension in Kashmir.

"We have already urged them to exercise restraint," Aziz said.

US expresses concern

Meanwhile, the US envoy to New Delhi expressed concern over India's air strikes on "infiltrators" in Kashmir at a meeting with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes today, a US embassy spokeswoman said.

"We used the opportunity to express our concern about what is happening in Kargil and our hope that the situation can be contained and brought to an end," the spokesman said.



India's deputy chief of military operations, Mohan Bhandari (L), and Air Force assault unit chief Subhash Bhojwani brief reporters Wednesday in New Delhi after India for the first time conducted air strikes on some 400 Muslim militants in Kashmir. New Delhi claims the rebels, comprising Pakistani troops, have been pushed into the Himalayan zone to escalate violence. — AFP PHOTO

UN calls for truce

Concerned about reports of heavy gunfire between Indian and Pakistani troops in Kashmir, Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged both sides to call a ceasefire, a UN spokesman said Tuesday.

"These events again highlight the need for a political solution to the dispute over Kashmir," said spokesman Manoel de Almeida Silva.

"The secretary-general calls on the parties to exercise restraint and cease the fighting which has reportedly caused a number of casualties on the civilian population and displaced others from their villages in the area," the spokesman said.



Security officials stop women trying to reach Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif (L) during his address at a Women's Convention, in Islamabad Wednesday. The convention of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML) women wing was organised in connection with the country's nuclear test anniversary celebrations. —AFP PHOTO

Milosevic villa hit again

BRUSSELS, May 26: NATO said Wednesday it had struck a villa belonging to President Slobodan Milosevic for the second night running in the heavy night of bombing yet against Yugoslavia, reports AP.

Boosted by improved weather conditions and the increasing weakness of Serb anti-air defences as a result of earlier strikes, alliance warplanes were able to fly 650 sorties.

Of these, 358 were strike sorties, the highest total recorded since the air campaign began on March 24.

NATO said it had struck Milosevic's Dobanovci presidential villa on the outskirts of Belgrade because it contained a military command and control bunker, again denying that it was attempting to assassinate the Yugoslav leader.

The new peak in the bombing came as the allies accelerated preparations for the deployment of ground forces in Kosovo once Belgrade has agreed to comply with the alliance's demands to pull its forces out of the province and accept the deployment of an international security force.

Alliance ambassadors on Wednesday approved a "concept of operations" for the planned

Kosovo Force (K-FOR) which envisages that some 45,000 men will be needed to secure the province — 17,000 more than were judged necessary before the air campaign began and hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians were forced to flee their homes by Serb forces.

NATO already has an advance force of some 16,000 men stationed in Macedonia in preparation to go into Kosovo as soon as a peace deal emerges. Some 11,000 NATO troops are also stationed in Albania, although they have not yet been formally designated as available for KFOR.

Alliance spokesman Jamie Shea said he expected a "significant percentage" of KFOR to be predeployed in the region over the coming weeks, subject to agreement with the host countries.

The remaining forces would be put on standby in their own countries.

"The idea is that we should be ready to enter Kosovo as soon as possible to prevent a vacuum emerging," Shea said.

The make-up of KFOR will become clearer earlier next week when alliance generals hold a conference at NATO's military headquarters at Mons.

The process will then be broadened to include NATO partner countries including Russia.

NATO continues to insist that any security force must be based around an Alliance "core," something which Belgrade has so far categorically ruled out.

Differences over the composition of the force are seen as one of the biggest obstacles to an accord between NATO and Russia on the terms of UN Security Council resolution designed to end the conflict.

As well as targeting Milosevic's villa, NATO said it had carried out extensive strikes against Serb forces in Kosovo with attacks on 15 artillery positions, six mortar emplacements, five tanks and other military targets.

Elsewhere in Serbia, the alliance continued its controversial tactic of targeting Serb television installations. Relay stations and transmitters at Belgrade, Stip, Palist, Pirot and Sremska Karlovca were attacked.

The alliance also attacked army barracks at Sabac, Pec, Novi Pazar and Pirot, as well as ammunition dumps and petroleum storage sites.

Architect of Pak atom bomb Qadir Khan says Pakistan has enough N-weapons

ISLAMABAD, May 26: Pakistan has enough nuclear weapons to "destroy the enemy in case of aggression," the architect of the country's atomic bomb, Abdul Qadir Khan, said Tuesday, reports AP.

"Pakistan's defence is invincible... I don't see any need to further waste our hard earned income to develop more strategic arms," the independent news agency News Network International (NNI) quoted Khan as saying.

"We already have developed very effective arms, which could destroy the enemy in case of aggression," he was quoted as saying.

He didn't say how many nuclear weapons Pakistan had in its arsenal, which also includes medium-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear and conventional warheads to targets deep inside neighbouring India, its traditional enemy.

Khan's address to Pakistani journalists was part of a week-

long celebration here to mark the one-year anniversary of Pakistan's underground nuclear explosions conducted on May 28, 1998.

Pakistan detonated several nuclear devices in response to similar nuclear tests carried out by India. After the tests the two countries declared themselves nuclear powers.

The explosions generated global fears of a nuclear arms race in South Asia, one of the poorest regions in the world.

South Asia is also one of the world's most volatile regions, the site of three wars between India and Pakistan in the five decades since the two nations became independent. A bloody insurgency in the disputed state of Kashmir — the flash point of two wars — still rages on the border.

The deep mistrust that exist between the two neighbours and the lack of proper nuclear safeguards has also raised fears of an accidental nuclear confrontation.

But Pakistan this week has displayed no such fears as it moves toward the one-year anniversary of its nuclear tests.

Giant banners have been strung throughout the capital, Islamabad, praising the nuclear explosions.

Adorning the wide tree-lined boulevards are giant posters of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Khan, separated by the drawing of one of Pakistan's newest nuclear-capable ballistic missiles.

Songs have been written commemorating the explosions, medals have been given to scientists and a film is being made.

According to the state run news agency, Associated Press of Pakistan, the film will be entitled Ghauri, named for Pakistan's latest ballistic missile.

Torchlit parades are being held, lotteries conducted and television programmes lauding Pakistan's nuclear programme are being shown.

US says 'no' to further easing of sanctions on India, Pakistan

WASHINGTON, May 26: The Clinton administration yesterday expressed its opposition to any further relaxation of sanctions on India and Pakistan and linked gradual easing of remaining curbs to the two neighbours progress on key US non-proliferation goals, reports PTI.

Our administration is opposed to further easing of economic sanctions against India and Pakistan at this time... US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Karl F. Inderfurth told a Congressional Subcommittee.

Deposing before the Senate Subcommittee on Near East and South Asia chaired by Senator SAM Brownback, Inderfurth insisted on a gradual, step-by-step easing of sanctions linked to progress by both nations on US non-proliferation goals.

Reacting to Brownback's announcement that he would seek

an amendment to the Defence Bill for suspending sanctions against India and Pakistan for five years, Inderfurth said that the administration was opposed to any blanket suspension of sanctions.

What the administration wants is waiver authority for beyond October when the present waiver lapses, he said.

During the committee hearings, Brownback, rapped the Clinton administration for linking improved ties with New Delhi on India's adherence to CTBT while ignoring the Cox Committee's sensational disclosures on China.

He demanded that the administration give up its single track — CTBT — approach to India and accept democratic India, not communist China, as its strategic partner.

Inderfurth made it clear that though the administration

wanted good ties with India, it has quarrels with New Delhi beyond the CTBT issue and does not want to choose between India and China.

We seek good relations with both, he said.

He said our focus on our discussions with India and Pakistan is broader than CTBT. It includes fissile materials production, export controls, strategic restraint, etc.

As part of efforts to narrow down differences on these, the administration would seek to broaden the scope of talks with the new government that takes over in New Delhi after the polls, he said.

He emphasised the need to impress upon New Delhi to adhere to international agreements on disarmament and non-proliferation saying these would help India to address its concerns vis-a-vis China.

Indo-Pak strategic fact-file

NEW DELHI, May 26: Military tension between India and Pakistan mounted today after New Delhi launched air strikes on its side of the disputed Kashmir region to flush out what it said were Pakistan-backed Afghan infiltrators, reports Reuters.

Following are key facts about the two South Asian nations' military capability: (Source: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1998/99)

INDIA
Population—983.44 million
GDP—\$385 billion (1997)
Armed forces—1,175,000 plus 528,400 reserves.

Army—980,000 personnel in five regional commands 3,414 battle tanks, 1 surface-to-surface missile regiment (Prithvi), Navy—55,000 personnel in four principal commands, one aircraft carrier, six destroyers, 19 submarines, 18 frigates, Naval Air Force has 67 combat aircraft including 17 Sea Harriers and 83 armed helicopters.

Air Force—140,000 personnel, 772 combat aircraft and 32 armed helicopters.

PAKISTAN
Population—140.69 million
GDP—\$61 billion (1997)

Armed forces—Active 587,000, plus 513,000 reserves
Army—520,000 personnel, 1,120 tanks, 18 surface-to-surface Half 1 missile, Half 2 (under development).

Navy—22,000 personnel, nine submarines, eight frigates, two destroyers, Naval Air Force has seven combat aircraft and 12 armed helicopters.

Air Force—45,000 personnel, 410 combat aircraft.

Golkar nominates Habibie

E Timorese less interested in Indonesian nat'l polls

DILI, May 26: Campaigning for a crucial June 7 parliamentary election is heating up across Indonesia, but few seem to care in East Timor, reports AP.

Instead they're preoccupied with their own crucial vote—a UN-supervised referendum in August on whether to become independent from Indonesia.

The ruling Golkar Party has wrapped up its campaign in the troubled territory after a single rally in the capital, Dili. Some of the other 47 parties have decided not to campaign at all. Many residents said they won't even bother to register even though it might be their last chance to vote in an Indonesian poll.

"We don't need to follow the Indonesian elections. Indonesia has already agreed in New York to allow us a vote in August so it is not important for us who wins in Indonesia," said one student at the University of East Timor, a hotbed of anti-Indonesian protest.

Added another student: "Only a few people campaign here, some of them only to get money from the political parties."

To many East Timorese, the campaign for the June 7 national elections is inseparable from the intimidation by pro-Indonesian militias that has accompanied the push to support autonomy and remain a part of Indonesia.

Violence has escalated between pro-and anti-independence groups this year — par-

ticularly in the last month as dozens have been killed and hundreds of others forced to flee their homes.

The United Nations has called on Indonesia to stop the violence, particularly by anti-independence militiamen who roam Dili's streets.

The world body has begun to bring in hundreds of officials to supervise the referendum, including about 280 international police officers to advise Indonesian police how to maintain law and order.

Golkar, which has curtailed its campaigning in several parts of Indonesia after being hit by vandalism, decided to rest on its past support, especially with the electorate already polarised.

AFP adds: A decision by Indonesia's ruling Golkar Party to nominate incumbent President BJ Habibie as its candidate for the next presidency is final and cannot be reviewed, the party chairman was reported today as saying.

The decision of the Golkar leaders' meeting is final. There is no reason or organisational policy to cancel the decision," Golkar chairman Akbar Tanjung was quoted as saying by the party newspaper, the Suara Karya.

Tanjung's statement followed a separate one by Golkar deputy chairman Marzuki Darusman, who said the candidacy would be open to review after the June 7 elections.

India launches sat

SRIHARIKOTA, India, May 26: A rocket with Indian, German and South Korean satellites blasted off from this southeastern town Wednesday as the government-run space agency began commercial operations, reports AP.

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle C-2 with the three satellites took off from the space center on an island in the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of Andhra Pradesh state. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee cheered as the rocket took off on a clear morning.

PSLV is India's most technologically advanced space project. It was the first launch with a foreign commercial payload.

The rocket carried a 1,050-kilogram (2,310-pound) Indian remote sensing satellite, Oceansat-1, for oceanographic research.

The other satellites were KITSAT-3, a 107-kilogram (235-pound) satellite of South Korea's Satellite Technology Research Center, and the 45-kilogram (99-pound) Tubsat of the German Aerospace Center.

Indian space officials say

they hope to offer tough competition to other international launch facilities.

"ISRO can offer to launch satellites at a much cheaper rate than other countries with launch facilities," K Kasturirangan, chairman of ISRO, told reporters Tuesday at Sriharikota, some 2,000 km southeast of New Delhi.

"In the international market it will cost about 1 million dollars to piggyback a satellite," he said, but did not give the comparative Indian figure.

The three satellites will be put into polar synchronous orbits at a height of 720 km from the Earth's surface, within 18 minutes of liftoff. Details of the orbit were not immediately available.

A satellite reaches a synchronous orbit when its orbit takes 24 hours, the duration the earth takes to rotate once on its axis.

India can launch at least two satellites each year, Kasturirangan said. Next on the calendar is a Belgian satellite, the date for whose launch has not been announced.

BRIEFLY

Rebels kill 6 in Indonesia: Separatist rebels killed six people in two related incidents in the troubled northern province of Aceh, the Indonesian military said Wednesday, AP reports from Jakarta.

The six included a physician and a nurse who were shot to death as they rode a police truck Tuesday into an ambush near Peudada village in northern Aceh, 1,700 kilometers (1,100 miles) northwest of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.

3 held in China for bomb attack: China has arrested three people suspected of involvement in a bomb attack that killed four policemen in the northern city of Yinchuan last month, the officials Wendhui Daily said yesterday, Reuters reports from Shanghai.

The four policemen were killed when their car was blown up on April 20 in an ambush by "criminal elements," officials media have reported.

Rebels kill 4 in Philippines: Two policemen and two civilians were slain in two separate attacks by Muslim rebels in the south, military spokesmen said in Zamboanga in Philippines, AFP reports from Philippines. Guerrillas of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) attacked two policemen and a civilian who were riding on two motorcycles in Sarangani province on Monday, killing the three.

Khrushchev's son now US citizen: The son of former Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and his wife will become US citizens in June, his lawyer said Tuesday, AFP reports from Los Angeles.

Sergei Khrushchev, 63, and his wife Valentina, 61, will take a required test on US history and politics on June 23 in Rhode Island, before being naturalized. Dan Danilov said in telephone interview from Seattle, Washington.

Mir to stay up until 2000

CAPE CANAVERAL, May 26: Russia's Mir space station will stay up until next year and possibly longer if the programme manages to land private funding, a top space official said Tuesday, reports AP.

"We've got more than 10 tons of scientific hardware on board the Mir station," said Boris Ostrovnikov, Deputy Director General of the Russian Space Agency. "I thought Americans are very practical people. It simply does not make too much sense to get rid of such a treasure."

Despite Russia's keen desire to keep Mir flying as long as possible, Ostrovnikov said the 13-year-old outpost will not siphon money or cargo ships away from the new international Space Station.

The International Space Station is Russia's top priority no matter how long Mir remains in orbit, he stressed.

In town for Discovery's launch to the International Space Station on Thursday with 4,300 pounds of supplies, Ostrovnikov said his agency has enough money to keep Mir flying through August. But Mir's present orbit of more than 200 miles (321 kilometres) is such that it would be safe through February, even if it's unstuffed, he said.

Until now, Russian space officials had assured NASA that Mir would come down in August

India concerned about Cox report US moves to tighten security at N-labs

WASHINGTON, May 26: President Bill Clinton says he will put into place more than two dozen recommendations to safeguard America's nuclear secrets, after a congressional conclusion that Chinese espionage has led to the theft of top-secret information about every US nuclear weapon, reports AP.

A special US House committee catalogued 20 years of Chinese espionage Tuesday and the chairman, Rep. Christopher Cox, said China's spying campaign almost surely continues "to this very day."

In an appearance in Texas, Clinton said his administration was "moving aggressively to tighten security" at nuclear laboratories and would work with Congress to follow the recommendations of the committee. But he also said the administration would continue dealing with China on a range of matters because that, too, was in the national interest.

"We have a solemn obligation to protect such national security information," declared the president.

Though the most critical thefts were said to have occurred during previous administrations, the findings by the House Committee brought demands by some Republican lawmakers for the resignation of Clinton's national security adviser and attorney general. There also were renewed questions about why Clinton did not move earlier to boost security at federal weapons labs.

While defending the president's response, Rep. Norman Dicks, the panel's ranking Democrat, said that Chinese penetration of nuclear weapons laboratories was "a major counter-intelligence failure... one of the worst failures in the nation's history."

The three-volume report, covering more than 700 pages, concluded that by stealing nuclear secrets China had "leaped in a handful of years from 1950s-era strategic nuclear capabilities" to a position where its weapon designs soon will be "on par with our own."

Dicks and another Democrat on the panel, Rep. John Spratt,

characterised that conclusion as an overstatement based on "worst case" assumptions. They said China has yet to deploy any warhead from information believed to have been obtained in the 1980s, and the Chinese have only a few nuclear weapons compared with the thousands in the US arsenal.

China denied the allegations entirely, dismissing them as a "despicable attempt" to shift attention from the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia.

Cox's committee of five Republicans and four Democrats began investigating China's acquisition of US technology last July and by fall turned its focus to espionage. He said the findings in Tuesday's unclassified report were based on facts set out in a longer classified version.

US Energy Secretary Bill Richardson said "we are fixing the problem" and 30 of the 36 recommendations made by the Cox committee already have been accepted.



US supermodel Jerry Hall returns to the catwalk Tuesday to support "Children in Crisis" during a star studded celebrity fashion show, attended by the Duchess of York in London. Celebrity guests wore gowns designed by Isabell Kristensen, during the unveiling of her "Ascot Collection". —AFP PHOTO

Benazir appeals for US protection of her husband

WASHINGTON, May 26: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto appealed Tuesday for US protection of her jailed husband and asserted that Pakistan is becoming a Muslim fundamentalist dictatorship, reports AP.

Benazir Bhutto, in a letter last week, asked President Bill Clinton to send a medical team to examine her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, saying Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government is trying to kill him.

The Clinton administration expressed concern for his treatment in custody and has asked Pakistan for an explanation of the case.

Benazir denied allegations that led to her conviction on corruption charges and drove her into self-imposed exile in Britain.

"What is occurring against me in Pakistan is not a case of corruption but a unilateral assault against democracy itself," she said. This, she said, is made more dangerous by Pakistan's nuclear capability.

She expressed a willingness to return to power for a third time if her people want her. "I will do what the people of Pakistan want," she said. "If they want me to lead them, I am there."