

Islamabad calls for UN role

Pak villagers flee border areas, spend night in trenches

ISLAMABAD, May 27: Pakistan today reiterated its call for an increased United Nations role in Kashmir after the Indian air strikes there and said it would not escalate the conflict as long as its positions were not attacked.

"We have been saying that the United Nations and the secretary-general should intervene because this is a threat to peace and regional stability," Pakistan Information Minister Moshaid Hussain told Reuters.

A US State Department official today said the latest fighting in Kashmir underlines the need for resolving differences between India and Pakistan quickly and called upon both to initiate a dialogue to reduce tension within the framework of the Lahore Declaration.

The officials told PTI that Washington was in touch with both sides on the skirmishes along the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir and has conveyed its concerns to the political leadership of both countries.

We instructed our embassies in India and Pakistan to express concern about the firing that has been going for at least a week and urge both countries to work to reduce tension, the official said.

India and Pakistan to resolve their differences. We hope they will be able to do this quickly in the context of the Lahore Summit.

We understand that Prime Minister Vajpayee and Prime Minister Sharif have discussed these developments over phone. We encourage them to keep in touch."

AP adds from Athmuqam: While Indian jets pounded mountain hideouts of Kashmiri militants for a second straight day Thursday, border residents in Pakistani villages spent an-

other night in the trenches.

At night the few residents who haven't fled Athmuqam, just one km from the troubled border, sleep in trenches or to a refugee camp set up just 30 km away.

"It is a ghost town no," said Abdul Waheed, another employee of the forces department. "Ninety per cent of the houses and shops have already been deserted ... Only a handful of government employees and those residents, who have no where to go are still here."

The conditions at the refugee camp in Thunian are miserable.

There families huddle together for warmth and comfort. There is little food and in the hills the night time temperatures fall near zero.

"Our children are starving and shivering in cold, but there is not help coming in form the government," Sahab Jan Bibi, a refugee from Athmuqam.

In some tents 20 people live together. Others sleep outside.

"We have no money to buy medicine or food," she said.

Most of the refugees are fortunate with the Pakistani authorities whom they say have done little to help.

For the young in the refugee camp their nights are from their home.

Nine-year-old Mohammed Waqar recalled one attack last week.

We were in school when (an Indian shell) hit at a nearby mountain. The sound was so terrible that everyone in our class started screaming and crying and some even fainted with fear, said nine-year-old Mohammed Waqar.

Cross-border attacks along the dispute border — the flash point of two wars between India and Pakistan are routine occur-

rences, but residents and government officials alike say the fighting has escalated in the past 18 days.

Residents on Pakistan's side of the border say the government of Pakistan has done little to help. The semi-autonomous Azad Kashmir government told residents to dig trenches and last year handed out small

weapons.

Pakistan says it gives only moral, diplomatic and political support to insurgents in India's only Muslim dominated state of Kashmir. India says that Pakistan arms and finances the decade old insurgency demanding either outright independence for a united Kashmir or union with Islamic Pakistan.

— AFP photo



An Indian soldier displays ammunition used for the 155mm Bofors guns Thursday in the village of Drass in Kashmir state as India staged a second day of air strikes against Islamic guerrillas and remained locked in artillery clashes with Pakistan on the state's disputed border. The third round of aerial attacks in Kashmir's northern Kargil region targeted hideouts, food and ammunition stores of Muslim militants. Three helicopter gunships and bombers attacked the targets, more than 100 km northeast of the Kashmir summer capital of Srinagar.

— AFP photo

Militants step up fight against Indian forces in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, May 27: Four militant groups claim they have sent more fighters to battle Indian forces in northern Kashmir following air strikes by the Indian air force, a Pakistani newspaper reported today, says AFP.

A spokesman of Tehrik-e-Jihad told reporters in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir that dozens of its fighters had joined the Mujahideen already held up in Kargil and Drass sectors, The News daily reported.

The spokesman, who declined to be named, said Wednesday more reinforcements would be sent to "make our positions stable and sound."

"Our men are equipped with modern and sophisticated weapons to successfully counter the Indian offensive," he added.

Three other militant groups — Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Al-Badar Mujahideen and Harkatul Mujahideen — said they had also sent their men to join the battle, without giving numbers, the report said.

The Indian Air Force Wednesday took to the skies for the first air strikes against Muslim militants in Kargil and Drass sectors close to the divided

line of control in Kashmir.

The move provoked a strong reaction from Pakistan which placed its armed forces on high alert.

Several bombs landed on the Pakistani side, Pakistani officials said, warning the country reserved the right to retaliate if the situation worsened.

Reports from Indian-controlled Kashmir said the Indian Air Force carried out another air raid today against the

International community ought to intercede, not just by urgencies and appeals but by supporting a genuine process of tension reduction and conflict resolution," The News said in an editorial.

India holds two thirds of disputed Kashmir region and Pakistan the northern third.

Pakistan accuses India of

brutal repression to crush a Muslim separatist campaign in its zone that has claimed around 25,000 lives since 1989.

India blames its arch-rival for infiltrating guerrillas in Kashmir, a charge denied by Islamabad, which vows political and moral support for what it calls a legitimate Kashmiri struggle for self-determination.

The neighbours have fought two wars over Kashmir since

their independence in 1947 and with both having tested nuclear weapons last year the volatile region is widely considered a nuclear flashpoint.

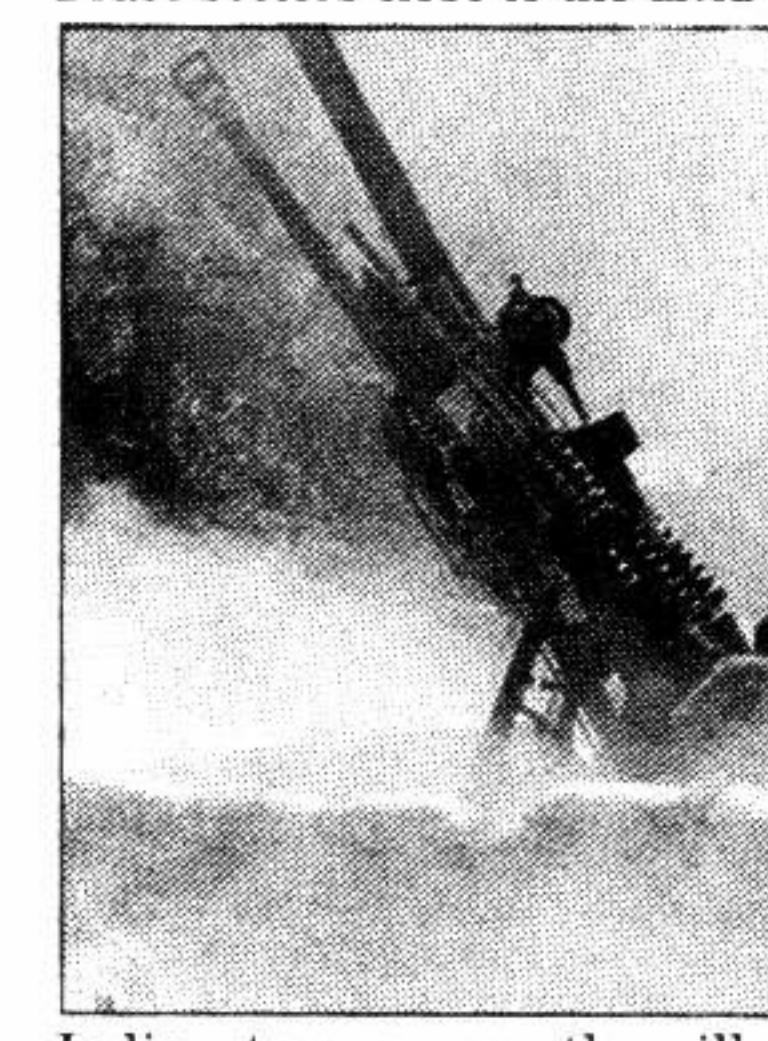
Pakistani newspapers today described the new flareup in Kashmir as a wake-up call to the international community to work for a solution to the problem of Kashmir, claimed by both Pakistan and India.

The international community ought to intercede, not just by urgencies and appeals but by supporting a genuine process of tension reduction and conflict resolution," The News said in an editorial.

For those who "pretend" that normalisation can be achieved by wishing Kashmir away, Wednesday's escalation should serve as a "wake-up call," it said.

The Nation blamed India for the crisis saying it was "reneging on its promise" to allow the people of Kashmir to decide their future in accordance with UN resolutions.

Pakistan has been pushing for a plebiscite in Kashmir, but India has categorically ruled out such a move.



Indian troops near the village of Drass, in the disputed Indian province of Kashmir, shell Muslim separatist guerrilla positions with 155mm guns. — AFP photo

Milosevic indicted for war crimes



Slobodan Milosevic

BELGRADE, May 27: Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic faced charges of war crimes Thursday as NATO bombing raids against Yugoslavia reached a new peak with alliance warplanes mounting nearly 400 attack missions against targets in Kosovo and throughout Serbia, reports AFP.

In the 24 hours up until the early hours of Thursday, NATO planes flew a total of 741 sorties, the highest total since the air campaign began on March 24, an alliance spokesman said.

It was the first time that the international community has laid charges against a head of state in office for atrocities committed during an armed conflict.

Chief prosecutor Louise Arbour of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) made the announcement at a news conference.

She announced the indictment of four other Yugoslavs, along with Milosevic including Serbian President Milan Mi-

lutinovic, the chief of staff of the Yugoslav armed forces, the Serbian interior minister and a Yugoslav deputy prime minister.

Close to 970,000 ethnic Albanians have been driven from their homes in Kosovo since fighting between Yugoslav forces and ethnic Albanian separatists intensified in February last year.

Refugees who have poured into Albania and Macedonia in droves since the NATO bombing campaign began on March 24 have given accounts of summary executions, rape and intimidation as part of a Serb terror campaign.

In Brussels NATO said there were 308 strike sorties, also a record, while 74 more sorties were intended to neutralise Serb air defence systems.

The high percentage of strike to overall sorties reflects growing confidence within the alliance that the Serbs' ability to resist attacks and pose a threat to attack aircraft is diminishing.

Even now, NATO's requirement that pilots only fire when they are confident of hitting a military target means many strike sorties have to be aborted

without bombs being dropped.

Better weather has also provided a considerable boost to NATO.

"We are in the most favourable weather period since the start of the campaign," spokesman Jamie Shea said, adding that meteorologists were expecting the clear blue skies to continue for the next two weeks.

Shea said the increased number of attacks also reflected the increased ease with which NATO could mount round-the-clock raids now that Hungary and Turkey were both being used as bases and Bulgaria and Romania have granted access to their airspace.

He denied however that the alliance was in danger of running out of military targets.

"Milosevic has a lot of military capability, there are still a lot of things we can go after."

In Kosovo, NATO said it had attacked 10 artillery positions, eight armoured personnel carriers, at least five tanks, four anti-aircraft artillery emplacements, several mortar positions.

At the start of the campaign, more than two out of three planes which left NATO bases were involved in support operations for those planes instructed to attack specific targets.

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attacked 10 artillery positions, eight armoured personnel carriers, at least five tanks, four anti-aircraft artillery emplacements, several mortar positions.

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