

## US official says Kashmir issue can trigger Indo-Pak war

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: Kashmir issue could trigger war between India and Pakistan and the continued rivalry between the two countries could have an impact on Washington security interests, two top US officials warned yesterday, reports PTI.

The row between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir is most likely to trigger war between the two countries. The state was the site of major fighting in 1947, 1965 and 1971 and again witnessed heavy military action in 1999, CIA Director General J Tenet and Defence Intelligence Agency Director Vice Admiral Thomas R Wilson told the Senate select committee on intelligence.

With Islamabad and New Delhi's respective positions on Kashmir firmly entrenched, meaningful progress on the issue is unlikely in the near future, they said.

Tenet said the rise to power of military ruler General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan and emergence of a coalition government in India have worsened Indo-Pak suspicions and tensions. He feared a wider and more dangerous conflict on the subcontinent.

## Clinton's upcoming S Asian tour Peace, stability to suffer if Pakistan not included: Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, Feb 3: Pakistan said late Wednesday an opportunity to promote peace and stability in the region would be lost if US President Bill Clinton does not include Pakistan during his south Asian tour next month, reports AFP.

"Pakistan's exclusion from President Clinton's tour will be regrettable as it will mean the loss of an opportunity for peace and stability in the region," state television quoted a foreign office spokesman as saying.

Clinton is due to arrive in New Delhi on March 20 and will stay in India for five days, before making a one-day visit to Bangladesh.

According to the television report, the spokesman said "no decision has been taken by Clinton about his visit to Pakistan."

But he said while it was up to President Clinton to make a decision, Pakistan had made it clear the visit would provide an opportunity to promote understanding between Islamabad

and Washington.

A visit would help realize Clinton's promise to accelerate a process for a resolution of disputes including the core issue of Kashmir between India and Pakistan, he added.

The White House said "no decisions have been made about other stops."

The official Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) quoted Pakistan's US Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi as saying Washington and Islamabad were engaged in a dialogue on mutual concerns.

This included terrorism, sanctions and Pakistan's roadmap for economic revival and democratization.

"They have been making these exchanges for some time, but outside the context of the president's visit," the envoy said. "We do not perceive these concerns as conditions for the president's visit."

The US has been pressing Pakistan's military rulers, who seized power in October, to set a

timeframe for a return to democracy and to curb militant groups.

Clinton said in Washington on Tuesday that he was visiting India "because it is the biggest democracy in the world and I think we haven't been working with them enough."

"It is unfortunate that the US has been estranged, if not estranged at least had a distant relationship with India for too long," Clinton said.

The last US president to visit India was Jimmy Carter in 1978.

Clinton's visit to neighbouring Bangladesh will be the first by a US president.

On Friday, the US State Department deplored an order by Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf requiring senior judges to pledge loyalty to his regime.

Washington would also like Pakistan to adopt a "more flexible" policy on the Kashmir dispute and other issues with India.

Prominent Pakistani columnist and analyst Irfan Ahmad Haqqani said military rule and the regime's inability to schedule new elections "is not the only reason" for Clinton's reluctance to visit Pakistan.

The "real reason" is that the US wants Pakistan to secure the expulsion of suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and deliver him into their hands, he said.

But Pakistan has made it clear it can only use its moral influence with the "proud and self-respecting" Taliban, who cannot be forced to ignore their values and traditions, he said.

The US is also unhappy over the military's ouster of prime minister Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan's attitude regarding the global nuclear test ban treaty, which is wants Islamabad to sign, Haqqani said.

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## Israel recalls its envoy from Austria

JERUSALEM, Feb 3: Outraged over Joerg Haider's far right party's expected inclusion on Thursday in the Austrian government, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak says he will recall Israel's ambassador from Vienna, reports AP.

Barak said, however, that Ambassador Nathan Merom would fly home only after the new government was formally approved.

The recall, one of the strongest protests in the diplomatic arsenal, reflects the depth of Israel's horror over the prominence achieved by a political leader associated with Austria's Nazi past.

Barak announced his decision a day after a coalition agreement was reached between the Freedom Party and the conservative People's Party.

Austrian President Thomas Klestil was expected to approve the deal Thursday.

It is impossible to accept, at the beginning of the 21st century, that a government of the kind which Austria is presenting... should be accepted in the family of civilised nations," Barak told reporters on Wednesday.

He ordered the return of our ambassador from Austria today for an unlimited period.

## Computer experts warn of new Web surfing risk

WASHINGTON, Feb 3: America's top computer experts have warned Internet users about a serious new security threat that allows hackers to launch malicious programs on a victim's computer or capture information a person volunteers on a Web site, such as credit card numbers, reports AP.

The threat, dubbed "cross-site scripting," involves dangerous computer code that can be hidden within innocuous-looking links to popular Internet sites. The links can be emailed to victims or published to online discussion groups and Web pages.

The vulnerability was especially unusual because it is not limited to software from any particular company. Any Web browser on any computer visiting a complex Web site is at risk.

No one apparently has been victimised yet. But the risks were described as potentially so serious and affected such a breadth of even the largest, most successful Web sites that the industry's leading security group said nothing consumers can do will completely protect them.

Only a massive effort by Web site designers can eliminate the

threat, according to the CERT Coordination Center of Carnegie Mellon University and others. Software engineers at CERT issued the warning Wednesday.

The problem, discovered weeks ago but publicly disclosed Wednesday, occurs when complex Internet sites fail to verify that hidden software code sent from a consumer's browser is safe.

Experts looking at how often such filtering occurred found that Internet sites failing to perform that important safety check were "the rule rather than the exception," said Scott Culp, the top security program manager at Microsoft.

"Any information that I type into a form, what pages I visit on that site, anything that happens in that session can be sent to a third party, and it can be done transparently," Culp warned.

The dangerous code also can alter information displayed in a consumer's Web browser, such as account balances or stock prices at financial sites. And it can capture and quietly forward to others a Web site's "cookie," a small snippet of data that could help hackers impersonate a consumer on some Internet pages.

## US Navy searches Russian ship

DUBAI, Feb 3: The US Navy boarded a Russian vessel in the Gulf of Oman on Wednesday night on suspicion that it was smuggling Iraqi oil in violation of a UN embargo, a US naval commander said today, reports AFP.

A US Navy team, acting as part of the Multi-National Maritime Interception Force (MIF), boarded the ship in international waters, commander Jeff Gradeck, spokesman for the force, told AFP.

We believe that it was carrying illegal petroleum products from Iraq, he said. The tanker Volgoneft-147 is in international waters in the Gulf of Oman.

Details of what the inspection turned up were not yet available. Gradeck added by telephone from the MIF base in Bahrain.

The Russian-flagged vessel had "failed to respond to rou-

tine queries regarding its intentions," the commander said.

In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Jim Kout had announced the boarding.

The Russian crew and captain cooperated with the operation, he said.

NBC television network reported that the US suspected that two Russian ships had been transporting Iraqi oil for several weeks, hugging the coast of Iran "to elude the US Navy."

The US State Department made a formal complaint to the Russians last week, but when the smuggling did not stop, the Pentagon ordered the Navy to board the ship, the network reported.

The MIF, made up mainly of the US Fifth Fleet and British vessels, has cruised Gulf waters to try to enforce an international embargo in effect since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat (R) speaks with the US Mideast peace envoy Dennis Ross (L) during their meeting in Gaza City yesterday. Arafat and Ross met to discuss issues related with the peace process. — AFP photo

## Delay in building N-power plant DPRK demands compensation from US

SEOUL, Feb 3: North Korea on Thursday held the United States responsible for an expected delay in building promised nuclear power plants in the communist country and demanded compensation, reports AP.

It was the first time that North Korea has officially asked for compensation for the anticipated delay in building two light-water reactors promised under a 1994 nuclear accord with the United States.

The demand came as a US-led international consortium prepared to start working talks with North Korea "within a few weeks" on revising the target date for completing the first reactor, set for 2003. The second reactor is set to be completed the next year.

Officials of the consortium, called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation, have unofficially said that "several years of delay" will be

inevitable.

"Due to the unreasonable US delaying tactics, the LWR (light-water reactor) construction is not likely to be completed even in 2010, to say nothing of 2003," North Korea Vice Premier Jo Chang Dok said in a report.

In the report by the North's foreign news outlet, KCNA, Jo said North Korea has faithfully fulfilled its end of the 1994 accord and frozen its nuclear programme, which was intended for peaceful purposes only.

The United States, however, has failed to hold up its end of the accord, causing a long delay in building the reactors and in turn an acute power shortage in North Korea, the report quoted Jo as saying.

Jo claimed in the report that if his country had built a Soviet-designed graphite-moderated reactor as scheduled, its power problem would not be as serious as it is now.

"The US should own respon-

sibility for having caused such acute shortage of electricity in (North Korea)," the report quoted Jo as saying.

The shortage caused North Korea "enormous economic losses," said US should "make compensation for them in any form," Jo reportedly said.

The premier said in the report that his government is under pressure from its military and people to revive frozen nuclear power plants to help ease the lack of power.

The 1994 nuclear accord was negotiated after the North's Communist government had threatened to break away from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The accord calls for the United States to build two safer, 1,000-megawatt nuclear power plants to replace the North's Soviet-designed graphite-moderated reactors, which experts say produce greater amounts of weapons-grade plutonium.

## UN troops free 37 captive children in Sierra Leone

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 3: UN military officers freed 37 abducted children who served as fighters or labourers for rebels in Sierra Leone during the West African nation's eight-year old civil war, the United Nations reported on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

The children, including one girl, were between 6 and 12 years of age. Some of the younger children appeared to be malnourished, UN spokesman Fred Eckhard said.

They had been held in Ocorra Hills in the northern part of the country, a rebel stronghold area, about 45 miles (70 km) from Freetown, the capital.

The children, whose release was negotiated by UN military observers, were taken on Tues-

day to Freetown and handed over to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. Earlier this month, on January 22, the peacekeepers retrieved 29 children from the same location, Eckhard said.

UNICEF estimates that about 5,000 children, some of them as young as 5, have taken part in the war with 4,000 still missing, most of them kidnapped by the rebels. The insurgents are known for their extraordinary brutality, including mass killings, gang rapes and amputation of arms, legs and ears.

Since a peace agreement last July, the rebels have turned over some 800 children to UNICEF, the agency said.

## Trial of Nawaz Sharif Pilot testifies to have narrowly averted disaster

KARACHI, Feb 3: Barred from landing in Pakistan, and rapidly running out of fuel, a Pakistani pilot testified Thursday that he narrowly averted disaster last October when his routine flight became the focal point of the country's political feud, reports AP.

The pilot, Syed Sarwat Hussein, detailed his nerve-racking flight at the trial of ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who has been charged with hijacking, attempted murder, kidnapping and terrorism. All the charges stem from the Oct. 12 flight, and Sharif could face the death penalty or life in prison if convicted.

Hussein was the captain of the Pakistan International Airlines plane that was carrying almost 200 people, including army chief Gen. Pervez Musharraf, on a journey from Colombo, Sri Lanka, to Karachi, Pakistan.

Unknown to Hussein, the prime minister had fired the army chief around the time the plane was taking off from Sri Lanka. The flight was then barred from landing in Karachi, forcing the pilot into a desperate search for a safe place to touch down as his fuel supply rapidly dwindled.

"I felt helpless," Hussein told the court. "It was a very tense situation to say the least."

The flight from Sri Lanka

was proceeding without incident until Hussein made his first radio contact with the air traffic control tower in Karachi, and was immediately asked about the plane's remaining fuel supply.

"It was quite an unusual question," Hussein said. Even more unsettling, he was asked if he could find another airport to land the Airbus A-300.

The plane had enough fuel to reach the airport in Nawabshah, also in southern Pakistan. But as the aircraft descended from about 30,000 feet to around 10,000 feet, the pilot was told that the Nawabshah airport was also off limits for Hussein's plane.

"That created a very alarming situation because Nawabshah was available for other flights, but not to us," Hussein said. "I reached the conclusion that it was because of the presence of the chief of army staff on board."

The situation then became even more disturbing when the air traffic control tower informed Hussein that he was not permitted to land at any airport in Pakistan, and should head to another country "at his own risk."

"I advised the Karachi air traffic control that I had more than 190 souls on board and a limited amount of fuel, and if we were not allowed to land at the Karachi or Nawabshah air-

port, that would be the end of the story," Hussein said.

The pilot headed toward Nawabshah unaware that military officers in Karachi had learned of the drama and had taken over air traffic control tower from the civilians.

While flying toward Nawabshah, Hussein suddenly received new instructions from the Karachi tower — reverse course and return to Karachi.

"This instruction created a state of confusion," Hussein added.

The pilot was then told to change radio frequencies, and was put in contact with army Gen. Ilkhar Ahmed, who confirmed the plane was now cleared to land in Karachi.

Hussein turned the plane around and touched down safely in Karachi at 7:47 pm, with only a few minutes worth of fuel remaining. The plane was immediately encircled by soldiers. Sharif, who was in the capital Islamabad, was overthrown and taken into custody by the army, and Musharraf took charge of the military government.

The army says Sharif gave the initial order barring the plane from landing, and thereby risked the lives of all on board. Sharif has denied the charges against him and has demanded the restoration of his civilian government, which was elected in 1997.

## 'Water' gets fresh approval from Indian govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The government Wednesday gave filmmaker Deepa Mehta fresh approval to shoot her movie about an Indian widow trying to rejoin society, after a few "requisite alterations" were made in the script, new agencies reported, says AP.

"Water" the third in a controversial trilogy by Mehta, was disrupted last week when a mob of Hindu nationalists ransacked the set of the movie, accusing the filmmaker of distorting traditions in her depiction of Indian widows in the 1930s.

After the attack, the state government withdrew permission to shoot the film in Varanasi and urged the federal government to review the script. The city, with its many temples, is considered one of India's oldest and holiest.

Mehta rushed to New Delhi to seek the help of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government while vociferous opposition to the film, from people affiliated to his party, continued in Varanasi. The city, 670 kilometers east of New Delhi, is located in Uttar Pradesh state which is ruled by Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party.

The approval came after a meeting with Information and Broadcasting Minister Arun Jaitley, the Press Trust of India reported.

Mehta is free to resume shooting, Jaitley said after the meeting.

## Politicians asked to declare number of wives

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 3: To avoid dirty politics and squash gossip, male politicians in one Malaysian district have been asked to publicly state how many wives they have, a news report said Thursday, reports AP.

Muslim men in this Southeast Asian nation are all wed up to four wives. Although extramarital affairs are considered adulterous, many of Malaysia's resort islands and weekend spots are known as destinations for illicit affairs.

On the resort island of Langkawi, off the country's northwest coast, talk has turned to some politicians spotted with unfamiliar women, said Aziz Desa, the president of the Vision of Langkawi Youth Brigade, a non-governmental group.

Aziz was quoted in the New Straits Times newspaper as saying politicians should come clean and declare their wives to silence suspicions and avoid being the target of gossip and lies.

Although multiple wives are traditionally accepted in Malaysia and the private lives of public figures are not mentioned by local media, the subject is a favourite topic of gossip at coffee shops and cocktail parties.

## Plane collision kills 8 at Tehran airport

TEHRAN, Feb 3: Eight crew members of an Iranian military plane died in a fire after their aircraft collided during takeoff with an empty passenger plane at Tehran airport on Wednesday, an official said, reports Reuters.

In a civil aviation deal, Behzad Mazaheri, told state television that the air force Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules transport plane collided with an Iran Air Airbus when the military plane was preparing to take off on a training flight.

All eight crew members of the Hercules died in the collision in which both planes caught fire on the tarmac, and a worker to wing the Airbus to a hanger for repairs was injured, he said.

Iran's official news agency IRNA had earlier quoted Mazaheri as saying 10 people had died.

"The C-130 plane was taking off but it was diverted from its path because of a technical fault and it collided with the Airbus," Mazaheri said.

The television showed the charred, mangled wreckage of the planes lying on a runway covered with flame retardant foam.

It quoted Iran Air Managing Director Ahmad Reza Kazemi as saying the state airline was looking into ways of covering its flights with its remaining aircraft, which he said included four Airbus planes.

Insurance sources in London said the Airbus 300 involved in the collision was insured for a

hull value of 15 million dollar.

Mazaheri said the blaze had been put out and the airport's runways were clear for domestic and international flights.

Tehran's Mehrabad airport, which is adjacent to a major air force base, is used by both military and civilian aircraft.

## 3 TV employees shot dead in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Feb 3: Separatist militants in India's northern Kashmir state fired at a car carrying employees of the state-run television channel Wednesday, killing three people and injuring two others, police said, reports AP.

A cameraman and his assistant were being escorted home by security guards after work when the militants shot at them just outside Srinagar, the Kashmiri capital.

The driver of the car, the assistant and a security guard died immediately. The cameraman and another guard were seriously injured, police said.

Earlier Wednesday, a prominent militant escaped from police custody while he was being taken to a government hospital for a medical checkup.

Ghulam Rasool Shah, alias General Abdullah, chief of the Jamiatul Mujahideen group, escaped with another militant, who was later caught.

## Chechen rebels suffer heavy losses

URUS-MARTAN, Russia, Feb 3: Russia's military said it had made major advances in its campaign to restore control over separatist Chechnya and reported heavy losses among rebels trying to escape its drive into the capital Grozny, reports Reuters.

Defence Minister Igor Sergeev, shown on television flanked by top generals, said on Wednesday Russian troops had killed 586 rebels who had tried to flee the largely devastated city.

"The operation to destroy illegal armed groupings in Grozny went brilliantly," Sergeev said in Khankala, just outside Grozny. Russian news agencies quoted him as saying the advance was going "two or three times" more quickly than before.

Pro-Russian Chechen leader Bislan Gantimirov told reporters in Urus-Martan, south-west of the capital, that Moscow's troops were facing very little resistance after spending two days getting the rebels out of the city, once home to 400,000 inhabitants.

"I can say that very few (fighters) are left in Grozny," he told reporters, "Over the last

three days about 3,500 fighters have left. I cannot say how many are still in Grozny but those who were able to leave have left and the last group left today."

Russia's four-month-old drive into Chechnya figured prominently in Acting President Vladimir Putin's three hours of talks with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Albright praised Putin, favourite in a March presidential poll, as a "problem solving" leader, but said the two differed on Chechnya. "I do not think we are any closer to a political solution in Chechnya," Albright said. But she said Putin wanted to rebuild Chechnya's economy and offer more autonomy.

French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine was due in Moscow on Thursday, the latest Western envoy certain to criticise the campaign and its heavy civilian casualties. Russia rejects criticism, saying it is pursuing international terrorists.

Private NTV television showed Russian soldiers combing wrecked houses in Alkhan-Kala, a village to the southwest of Grozny.

## 2 indicted in US for importing sex slaves, workers from India

OAKLAND, California, Feb 3: A wealthy Indian landlord and his son have been indicted on charges they conspired to illegally bring young women from India to the San Francisco area to serve as cheap labour of sex slaves, their lawyers said Wednesday, reports AP.

Lakireddy Baji Reddy, 62, and his 30-year-old son, Vijay Lakireddy, remained free on bail Wednesday and are to appear in Oakland federal court Monday to be arraigned on the charges listed in the indictment.

"Mr Reddy will appear in court Monday and plead not guilty," his attorney, Ted Cassman, told reporters after the indictment was returned.

Reddy and his son allegedly falsified visa applications to import young men and women from the Veludam area of southern India.

Vijay Reddy operates a Berkeley company named Active Tech Solutions, and the immigrants were brought to California on the pretext that they were skilled workers

needed by the company, according to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Berkeley police maintain that Active Tech was being used as a facade and that most of the Indian immigrants were put to work in low-paying jobs at Reddy's restaurants or rental properties.

Among the eight counts listed in the indictment issued by a federal grand jury Tuesday were charges Reddy transported minors for illegal sexual activity and imported and harboured aliens for immoral purposes.

Berkeley police reported Tuesday that they found a batch of Viagra bearing Reddy's name in a Berkeley apartment he visited with two teenage Indian girls he is accused of having sex with.

The federal charges list yet-to-be identified conspirators and make the place of state criminal charges filed against Reddy and his son.

Conviction on all the charges would make Reddy eligible for a maximum sentence

of 70 years in prison and one million dollars in fines. The charges against Lakireddy carry maximum penalties of 20 years in prison and a 750,000-dollar fine.

Reddy owns a real estate business bearing his name, more than 1,000 apartment units, and two restaurants named Pasand. His assets are estimated Friday at more than 50 million dollars.

The case developed after Sitha Vemireddy, 17, died of carbon monoxide poisoning in a Berkeley apartment owned by Reddy. Sitha Vemireddy and her 15-year-old sister were found unconscious in the apartment the day before Thanksgiving. Sitha died, but her sister recovered. The poisonings were ruled an accident caused by a blocked heater vent.

Sitha's sister told investigators that she was given to Reddy at age 12 by her parents and that their sexual relationship continued after she and her sibling came to the United States in August.