

Double standard over terrorism

India slams US, Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India on Friday openly criticised the United States for ignoring its concerns on terrorism a week after offering Washington "unstinted support" in its campaign to fight the menace.

In an interview to the Times of India, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said: "No statements have emanated from Washington to suggest that the US, though appreciative of India's offer to support its war against terrorism, was in a mood to focus on India's bitter experience of terrorist activities on its soil."

An armed Muslim insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir has claimed more than 35,000 lives since 1989.

India accuses Pakistan of training, arming and funding Islamic militant groups operating in Kashmir. Islamabad refutes the charge, saying it offers only moral and diplomatic support to the rebels.

Commenting on Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's charge that India was seeking to exploit the situation to damage Islamabad's interests, Vajpayee said "the allegations were along expected lines."

"What concerns him (Musharraf) is not terrorism. It is Kashmir. "How can he be concerned about terrorism? He has promoted it."

The premier's strongly worded comments did not evoke any surprise from analysts in New Delhi.

"This reaction is not unnatural," said former foreign secretary J.N. Dixit.

"India extended its full support to the US very promptly after the September 11 terrorist strikes. Up to now there has been no direct expres-

sion of US appreciation of New Delhi's position.

"Hence Vajpayee is a little disappointed," Dixit said.

But this does not mean the premier was unaware of Washington's dilemma, he said.

"The US needs Pakistan's cooperation more than India's and expectations that the US would straight away join New Delhi's struggle are unrealistic," Dixit said.

Another former foreign secretary, S.K. Singh, described Vajpayee's statements on Pakistan as "accurate and precise."

"Musharraf's attitude towards India is always conditioned by Kashmir. So what the prime minister said is very correct," Singh said.

"Vajpayee was serving notice to Islamabad that if they go abusive, the India-Pakistan dialogue will be impeded."

In his interview, Vajpayee also alleged the United States had not declared Pakistan a terrorist state, a longstanding demand by New Delhi, because "it has not seen terrorism in this part of the world in the correct perspective."

"It is for America to decide whether terrorism is a global phenomenon or whether it is restricted to just one individual," Vajpayee said, referring to the US campaign to catch Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, prime suspect in the attacks that killed more than 6,300 in the United States.

"America alone can determine whether it will address the symptom of terrorism or the system of terrorism," Vajpayee was quoted as saying.

"America will have to look at the sanctuaries provided to terrorists, at the training camps, at the arms and the money flowing into the hands of the terrorists if it wants to get rid of terrorism, root and branch."

Strike cripples Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A strike called by Islamic radicals in protest against Pakistani support for Washington's war on terrorism crippled Indian-ruled Kashmir Friday, despite pleas by the main separatist groups to stand by Islamabad.

The one-day strike called by five radical Muslim separatist groups shut down shops, banks, schools and colleges in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar and other towns, residents said.

Light traffic was seen on the roads of Srinagar, where security was beefed up ahead of the strike.

Kashmiri youths shouting pro-militant slogans poured onto the streets in the congested Srinagar quarter of Maisuma, pelting stones at the few vehicles on the road.

The youths were later dispersed by baton-wielding police.

On Thursday, Kashmir's main separatist political alliance, the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), had urged Kashmiris to reject the strike call by the militants.



PHOTO: AFP

Policemen shoot tear gas as well as bullets at demonstrators in massive protests in the city of Karachi on Friday. Pakistan's major radical Islamic parties observed countrywide strikes and staged protests against probable US attacks on Afghanistan.

Baton-charge on radicals as Pak protests turn violent

AFP, Karachi

Police mounted baton charges and fired tear gas at stone-throwing Islamic militants Friday as protests over Pakistan's support for possible US strikes on Afghanistan turned violent for the first time.

Police fired shots in the air and used tear gas to repel around 150 militants who were pelting them with stones in the new town area of Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city.

A protest in the Nazimabad area in the centre of the city was brought under control after police baton-charged around 200 activists, some armed with sticks.

Militants in other parts of the city blocked roads with burning tyres and a liquor shop in eastern Karachi -- a symbol of Western influence -- was set ablaze. At least 100 people

were arrested across the city.

A coalition of Pakistan's Islamist parties called earlier this week for a wave of nationwide strikes and protests starting after prayers on Friday, the Muslim holy day.

Tens of thousands of police had been deployed in cities across the country and an army spokesman said troops were also on standby.

"The army is already on alert. It can be called out in any part of the country in case of violence," he told AFP.

Large demonstrations were also scheduled Friday in Islamabad, Lahore and Rawalpindi, and the two big cities closest to Afghanistan -- Quetta and Peshawar.

Police in Quetta, southwestern Pakistan, issued an order that foreigners in the city, mostly international journalists, should stay in their

hotels. Every police officer in the city was on duty in anticipation of protests, the interior ministry said.

In Peshawar, in the northwest, journalists were instructed to stay away from market areas and restricted from visiting the Afghan frontier, which lies only around 100 km west of the city.

A total of 10,000 police had been deployed in Lahore, 5,000 in Rawalpindi and 3,000 in the capital, Islamabad.

There have been demonstrations every day since Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf announced last week that he would support possible military action against Afghanistan over the terror attacks on the United States.

Suu Kyi marks one year under house arrest

AFP, Yangon

Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi will by Saturday have spent one year confined to her lakeside home on the orders of Myanmar's junta, which has given no sign of when she could be released.

Despite the restrictions, the Nobel peace laureate has had a productive 12 months, embarking on landmark talks with the military and receiving a stream of high-profile international visitors.

The political atmosphere in Yangon has thawed since the talks began, leading to the release of nearly 200 opposition figures including senior members of her National League for Democracy (NLD).

The opposition leader has also



been allowed to receive top officials from her party, as well as envoys from the United Nations, the European Union, the US State

Department and the International Labour Organisation.

"Despite her incarceration she is well informed about what is going on inside the party and elsewhere," a close family friend told AFP.

As a devout Buddhist, Aung San Suu Kyi has used the periods of house arrest during her long struggle against the generals in Yangon as an opportunity to hone her renowned mental and spiritual toughness.

The family friend said the 56-year-old maintained a simple, somewhat austere lifestyle, and found the isolation agreed with her.

"She exercises and meditates regularly and is in good health," he said.

US, allies, Iran meet to review Afghan situation

AFP, Geneva

Envoys from the United States, Germany, Iran and Italy, began a meeting here on Friday with the UN's chief envoy for Afghanistan to review the situation in Afghanistan, a UN spokeswoman said.

"There is an extraordinary meeting of the 'Geneva Initiative' on Afghanistan, they are private consultations headed by Francesc Vendrell," spokeswoman Marie Heuze said.

"We have no more information to give you, we have no more comment to make at this stage, it's a private meeting," she added.

The meeting was expected to continue on Saturday.

The "Geneva Initiative" was launched by Vendrell, a UN assistant secretary-general, and the four

countries at a meeting on September 9, two days before the attacks in the United States.

"These were regular consultations among some states and non-belligerent Afghans who are outside Afghanistan," a UN source told AFP.

However, no Afghans were said to be taking part in the latest meeting, which was being held in a guarded room at the UN's European headquarters in Geneva.

"The situation in Afghanistan has been completely turned upside down since the initiative was launched, obviously," the source added, but declined to comment any further on the content or aim of the meeting.

Sources said the envoys from the United States, Germany, Iran and Italy were specialists on the region who had flown into Geneva.

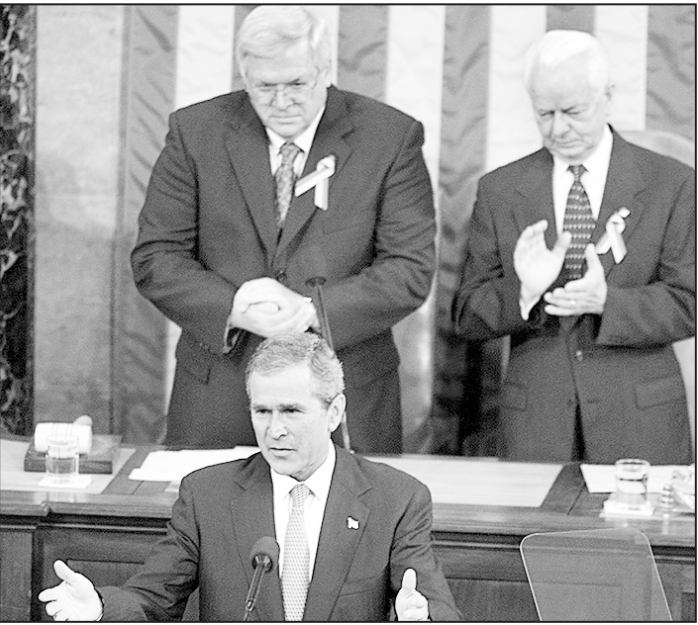


PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush acknowledges the US Congress late Thursday. Bush addressed a Congressional joint session on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Bush vowed to use "every resource" to combat global terrorism and called on the US military to "be ready," during a televised speech to the US Congress.

Congress hails Bush speech as 'defining moment'

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers hailed George W. Bush's address to the nation as the "defining moment" of his presidency, and said the country as well as the Congress fully backed his war on global terrorism in response to last week's devastating kamikaze attacks on US soil.

"The president did a magnificent job tonight," said Republican Senator Chuck Hagel, who like all of his colleagues in the Senate rose to a standing ovation many times during Bush's 30-minute address.

"This was the speech of his presidency."

"My guess is that the American public will score him a solid 100 percent," Republican Senator Larry Craig concurred. "It is a very defining moment for our country."

Bush vowed late Thursday to tap

"every necessary weapon of war" in the US arsenal for a coming global campaign against terrorism and warned the world: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

His speech came 10 days after spectacular suicide airborne attacks left more than 6,800 missing and presumed dead in New York, at the Pentagon outside Washington and in rural Pennsylvania.

Senate Majority Leader Democrat Tom Daschle was less effusive, but made it clear that members of the congress were solidly behind the president.

"We want President Bush to know, we want the world to know that he can depend on us," he said in a televised statement shortly after Bush ended his address.

Senate Republican Minority Leader Trent Lott said no one in the

world should doubt the US resolve to root out terrorism.

"No one who heard the president this evening can doubt our resolve, and no one in the ranks of terror should doubt our ability to follow through," said Lott.

New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who received a rousing standing ovation when Bush honored him for his leadership in getting his devastated city back on its feet, said later that he felt it was "one of the greatest and most important speeches given to a joint session of Congress."

House Majority Leader Republican Dick Army also praised Bush, emphasizing that the country and the US Congress fully supported his war on terrorism.

US terror crisis may change mood of US-China ties

AFP, Washington

Washington will Friday seek to sign China up to its war on terrorism, as signs grow that even turbulent Sino-US ties may not escape the wave of change unleashed by terror attacks on US soil.

As Secretary of State Colin Powell prepares to meet Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, there are indications that the shock of the airborne assaults on New York and the Pentagon last week drew some of the poison from US-China ties.

China condemned the attacks, which killed thousands of people, making clear it opposed terrorism, even signalling limited acceptance of any US retaliation against Afghanistan, which shelters Washington's top suspect, Osama bin Laden.

While Beijing and Washington are as far apart as ever on human rights, Taiwan and missile cooperation, the crisis may open a small window for cooperation in a relationship plagued by tension since President George W. Bush took power eight months ago.

At the very least, the crisis has changed the complexion of Bush's visit to China next month, where much of

the focus will now be on mutual anti-terror efforts rather than disagreements.

"Both sides have been seeking to grab onto something to make the relationship take off," said Mark Fung, a China specialist at the Nixon Center think-tank in Washington.

Ahead of the Tang-Powell meeting, part of a diplomatic whirlwind in Washington over the past week, China seemed keen to ensure its views on the drama were not drowned out by the US diplomatic initiative.

President Jiang Zemin conducted a flurry of telephone diplomacy, speaking to Russia's President Vladimir Putin and British Prime Minister Tony Blair among others following the attacks.

But, highly sensitive to likely breaches of national sovereignty involved in any retaliation -- the issue is germane to China's claims over Taiwan and Tibet -- Beijing is apparently keen to limit the scope of the US campaign, insisting that the United Nations Security Council must sign off on any military action.

China may also be troubled by the prospect of US troops operating close to its borders in South Asia.

Blast kills 10 in French chemical plant

AFP, Toulouse

Between 10 and 15 people were killed and nearly 200 injured, 80 of them seriously, in a huge blast that rocked a petrochemical plant in this southwestern French city Friday, authorities said.

Police said the blast took place at the AZF petrochemical plant at 10:15 am (0815 GMT), destroying two large buildings at the site and causing major damage nearby.

Witnesses said the explosion shattered windows in the area near the plant, located three km from the city center, and caused panic among residents, some of whom immediately linked the blast to last week's terrorist attacks in the United States.

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Interior Minister Daniel Vaillant immediately rushed to Toulouse

following the incident.

Police said the blast was probably an accident.

Authorities urged residents to remain indoors as a huge cloud of potentially toxic smoke was visible over areas of the city.

Police quoted plant workers as saying that the substance was ammonia, a bulk chemical widely used in fertilisers, plastics and explosives.

Inhaled fumes of ammonia can cause breathing difficulties and vomiting and, at higher concentrations, temporary blindness.

The regional prefect said no toxic chemicals had been detected in air samples tested near the plant but nonetheless urged residents to remain indoors.

"So far we have not detected any toxic fumes," Hubert Fournier said.



PHOTO: AFP

Cherie Blair, wife of British Prime Minister Tony Blair talks with former US president Bill Clinton at a memorial to fallen fire fighters lost in the World Trade Centre attack on Thursday outside the Engine company 8, Ladder 2 station in New York. Blair met relatives of the ten men lost from the station.

BSF keeps vigil on Pak border

AFP, Jodhpur

Indian guards were on alert along the border with Pakistan Friday to combat any infiltration bids by Muslim militants following the terror attacks in the United States.

B.D. Sharma, deputy inspector general of India's Border Security Force in Jodhpur in the state of Rajasthan, said they were ready to thwart any attempts by militants to cross India's 1,050-kilometre (650-mile) western border with Pakistan.

"With Pakistan closing down terrorist camps on its soil Muslim militants may try to push into India via the Rajasthan border route. Therefore, we have increased

security precautions," Sharma said.

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has agreed to back possible US action against Islamabad's neighbour and long-time ally Afghanistan over last week's attacks on New York and Washington. He has also put his army on alert ahead of a possible US airstrike on Afghanistan.

Rajasthan's home secretary R.K. Nayyar inspected several sensitive border outposts.

"Our borders are safe but the Border Security Force has to be vigilant and on high alert," he said.

Indian airforce officials said, on condition of anonymity, that fleets of

MiG 21 aircraft and Mirage jets had collected in three airforce bases across the state.

According to government sources, Indian Defence Minister Jaswant Singh is planning to visit key border outposts on Sunday to ensure the necessary safeguards are in place in the desert state.

Meanwhile, Sharma said "several thousand" Pakistani troops had been moved from the Rajasthan border towards Quetta and Peshawar to keep watch on the Afghan border and regulate the traffic of refugees from Afghanistan.

"There is a lot of troop movement on the Pakistani side," he said.