

Talks on cooperation with US at early stage: Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

US talks with Pakistan on cooperation for a possible attack on Afghanistan are still at a preliminary stage, a government spokesman said Tuesday.

In Islamabad's first official comment on the status of a team of US defence officials who arrived unannounced here at the weekend, the spokesman said their discussions were only of an "exploratory" nature and designed to prepare the ground for a second US delegation which would arrive at a later date.

"This is not the main delegation," the spokesman told AFP. "They are just holding a preparatory meeting with their counterparts of an exploratory nature."

"They will discuss the situation on the ground and exchange information. The main delegation

is expected later, but we do not have any dates."

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has promised "unstinted cooperation" with US efforts to hit back at Osama bin Laden, the Afghan-based militant whom the United States suspects of orchestrating the devastating September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

But how far Islamabad goes in facilitating a US operation against bin Laden's bases or Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia is a highly sensitive issue.

Pakistan has signalled that it is willing to allow the US to use its airspace and provide logistical support for any military action.

It has also pledged to share its intelligence on bin Laden and the Taliban with the United States but insists the US has not asked to use Pakistani territory as a launchpad for a ground operation in

Afghanistan.

Radical Islamic groups have vowed to mount a violent campaign against any US military presence in Pakistan. A Qatari television station on Monday broadcast what it said was an appeal from bin Laden for Pakistanis to rise up and "repel the US crusader forces."

Four people, described as martyrs by bin Laden, died in violence linked to protests in Karachi on Friday but otherwise there has been little sign of mass unrest on the streets.

Opinion polls and the reaction of the mainstream political parties suggest most Pakistanis support General Musharraf's decision to back the United States in the crisis.

Washington has already rewarded Pakistan for its stance by lifting sanctions imposed over its nuclear programme and rescheduling 375 million dollars of the country's huge foreign debt.



Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar (2nd L) speaks to European Union (EU) foreign policy chief, Javier Solana (3rd R), during talks at the foreign ministry in Islamabad on Tuesday. The EU delegation held talks with Pakistani officials in an effort to bolster Pakistan's participation in an international coalition against terrorism.

Bihar flood toll rises to 146
PTI, Patna

With 21 more deaths, the toll in the current spell of floods in Bihar on Monday went up to 146 while the overall flood situation improved considerably with all major rivers receding.

State Relief and Rehabilitation Department sources said two more deaths were reported from flood-hit Saran, Samastipur, Gopalganj and Siwan districts during the past 48 hours, taking the toll to 146 so far.

Water level of different rivers was likely to decrease further in the next 24 hours, Central Water Commission sources said.

Nearly seven million people have been affected in more than 4200 villages in 21 districts in Bihar. Floods have so far damaged standing crops, public property and houses worth over Rs. 500 crore.

More than 4000 boats have been engaged to distribute relief and evacuate the marooned people to safer places.

China takes steps to secure its border with Pakistan
AFP, Beijing

China said Tuesday it was taking military measures to secure its westernmost border regions with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Asked to confirm China was sending more troops to the region, in the Muslim-majority province of Xinjiang, foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao confirmed "security measures" were being taken.

"In order to safeguard the peace and stability of China's border areas we are fully entitled to implement security measures along our border," he told a press briefing, without elaborating.

According to reports from the far western city of Kashgar, convoys of Chinese troops have been seen heading down the Karakoram highway towards the mountainous areas around the Pakistani and Afghan borders.

Zhu reiterated Beijing's determination to refuse any entry into China of Osama bin Laden, the suspected mastermind of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

US in diplomatic blitz to shape up anti-terror coalition

AFP, Washington

US Secretary George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell have in the past two weeks logged more than 135 telephone calls to world leaders and met more than a dozen in person in their push for a US-led anti-terrorism coalition, officials said Monday.

Bush has placed some 34 telephone calls to foreign heads of state and government and met with four of them here since September 12, the day after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the White House said.

The president's calls and meetings represent direct contact with the leaders of 31 countries from Argentina to Uzbekistan as well as the secretaries-general of the United Nations and NATO, it said.

Powell, the nation's top diplomat, made more than 100 "phone calls in the last two weeks to foreign ministers and leaders of foreign governments, all of this devoted to trying to build the coalition and get the sup-

port," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

Other calls made by Powell to Israeli and Palestinian officials were aimed at promoting high-level talks between the two sides as fighting in the Middle East continued, Boucher added.

A senior State Department official said that by midday Monday, Powell had made 103 telephone calls to his counterparts around the world, nearly all of whom urged support for the coalition formed after the attacks.

Twenty of those calls were made on September 12, the day after hijackers flew three planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon and a fourth hijacked plane crashed in Pennsylvania, the official said.

Bush made six telephone calls that day to the leaders of Britain, China, France and Russia -- the United States' fellow permanent members on the UN Security Council -- as well as close NATO allies Germany and Canada, the White House said.

US, China, Russia back UN role in fighting terror

AP, United Nations

Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call on Monday for the United Nations to play a major role in the long-term international fight against terrorism won immediate support from the United States, Russia and China. But the world body is still struggling to decide what it can and should do.

Addressing a scaled-down meeting of the General Assembly, Annan declared that only the United Nations can give "global legitimacy" to the long-term struggle against "the unspeakable horror" of terrorism. He urged all countries to work together to strengthen international peace and security "by cementing the ties among nations, and not subjecting them to new strains."

Last week, the General Assembly postponed its annual gathering of global leaders because of security concerns following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Nonetheless, the 189 nations in the world body are going ahead with

"The United Nations should play an important role in this regard," he said.

Taliban under siege as fighting rages in north

AFP, Islamabad

The Taliban's bid to cling to power in Afghanistan suffered a double setback Tuesday with opposition forces gaining ground in the north and allies Saudi Arabia publicly washing its hands of the Islamic militia.

Backing Annan, Ivanov told the General Assembly that the United Nations should lead any global action against terrorism and warned against moves that could erode international law.

"It is necessary to strengthen and enhance the role of the United Nations as an indispensable instrument for maintaining international peace and security and for mobilizing people of the world against new, unprecedented threats," he said.

China's UN Ambassador Wang Yingfan urged all countries to strengthen cooperation "and make joint efforts for the sake of their common interests to prevent and combat all forms of terrorist activities."

"The United Nations should play an important role in this regard," he said.

Bin Laden is wanted by the United States in connection with a string of terrorist atrocities culminating in the September 11 attacks

on New York and Washington. Pakistan is now the only country in the world to recognise the Taliban but even Islamabad no longer has any diplomats in Kabul. The United Arab Emirates cut its ties on Saturday.

Opposition spokesmen said clashes flared in three provinces across the Taliban-held north of the country, near the borders with Uzbekistan, where US forces are already believed to be based, and Tajikistan, which is guarded by thousands of Russian soldiers.

The fighting continued the whole night and this morning," opposition spokesman Mohammad Ashraf Nadeem told AFP from somewhere near the frontlines.

Scattered fighting was continuing in Samangan, Sar-e-Pul and Balkh provinces in the north, opposition sources said.

Nadeem claimed that a pro-Taliban commander, Abdul Samad,

defected to the opposition along with an unknown number of armed men Monday to the west of the strategic Dara-e-Souf valley in Samangan province.

Taliban officials, who Monday claimed to have mobilised 300,000 men in preparation for an all-out war, were unusually silent.

The Taliban's forces are believed to number between 40,000 and 50,000 and military experts in neighbouring Pakistan do not regard its claim of 300,000 experienced fighters as credible.

Despite the quickening tempo of the drums of war, there were signs of public panic over impending US strikes subsiding.

Tens of thousands of people have fled from Afghan towns and cities to rural areas or towards the closed borders of Pakistan and Iran in the last week.

Vajpayee urges people to be on guard as war hovers

US must address causes of terrorism: Kashmir CM

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Tuesday urged the public to be on their guard against security threats as "war clouds hovered in the region".

Security forces had been put on high alert as tensions escalated following the terrorist attacks in the United States, Vajpayee told a public function in the northern Indian town of Mathura.

"People must remain united and ensure that peace prevails to enable security forces to effectively discharge their duties," he added.

The prime minister however sounded an optimistic note, saying that cooperation between the US and Russia on a global war against terrorism had ushered in hopes of global peace.

Vajpayee also urged all political parties to present a united front at this time.

India's National Security Advisor

"But war clouds are again hovering over us. The conflict can take place any time and in any form," he added.

Vajpayee said India had been fighting terrorism for over two decades, but the world had not realised the magnitude of the menace.

"Maybe people understand only when they themselves face it," he said.

Indian-controlled Kashmir has been racked by an Islamic insurgency which has claimed more than 35,000 lives since 1989.

India's northeastern region has also been hit by violence by separatist rebels.

Vajpayee also urged all political parties to present a united front at this time.

India's National Security Advisor

Brajesh Mishra met US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz Monday to discuss India's possible role in the US war on terrorism.

India has said it will allow the US to refuel its planes on its territory and offered logistical help should Washington choose to strike suspected terrorist bases in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

India has already reportedly handed the United States video footage and intelligence inputs on terrorist training camps alleged to be run by Saudi dissident billionaire Osama bin Laden -- Washington's prime suspect for the attacks.

Meanwhile, the chief minister of Indian-administered Kashmir said

Tuesday the United States would not eradicate global terrorism by attacking Afghanistan.

Faarooq Abdullah also said Washington had done nothing to help India prevent terrorist attacks in Kashmir.

"By striking at Osama bin Laden, if you think you will wipe out terrorism from the world, you are mistaken," Abdullah said in a speech at the state assembly.

The US blames bin Laden, who is believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, for the September 11 attacks on Washington and New York.

"Where these terrorists are trained and produced, you will have to cut those roots," Abdullah said.

"You will have to address the root causes of the terrorism and address those issues. The dangers are paramount," he added.



An F/A-18C Hornet of Strike Fighter Squadron three Seven (VFA-37), "The Raging Bulls", passes over the carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65) in preparation for landing. US and its allies are gearing up to retaliate for the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.

Nepal parties to continue talks with Maoists
AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's political parties have agreed peace talks with Maoist rebels should continue even though they have made little progress, parliamentary sources said Tuesday.

The parties convened by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba held a two-day special meeting which ended Monday night.

Deuba wants to build a consensus before holding a third round of peace talks, the date and venue of which has not been settled.

Signature shows Bin Laden a unhappy man
AFP, London

The signature on Osama bin Laden's statement urging resistance to "American crusader forces" shows a giant ego with a large libido and a thirst for vengeance, according to British hand-writing experts.

A team of graphologists, quoted Tuesday by the Daily Telegraph, said it revealed his motivation for sponsoring terrorism around the world, a rampant ego compensating for possible perceived childhood slights.

"He's obviously got a huge ego. He may suffer from an inferiority complex and is over-compensating through aggression and violence," suggested Caroline Murray, one of the graphologists.

US homes in on suspects 350 detained so far for probe

AFP, Washington

US investigators have picked up more than 350 people in their dragnet for suspects behind this month's carnage as the country's top law enforcer sought boosted powers to fight terror.

But even as the unprecedented massive investigation spread across the globe, fresh fears emerged in the United States that the terrorists could have been planning to use crop duster aircraft to attack the country with chemical or biological weapons.

Attorney General John Ashcroft told a congressional hearing Monday that the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service have detained or arrested 352 people, and are seeking to question an additional 392.

The number of detainees was far higher than originally acknowledged. None of the detainees has however been charged with a crime directly related to the September 11 attack, with most held on immigration or other charges.

Investigators are trying to piece together clues left by the terrorists to find trails leading to other potential terrorists -- and to the masterminds of the September 11 strikes.

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