

Bush, Putin make some progress on ABM treaty

AFP, Shanghai

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he and President George W. Bush "made some progress" on the 1972 ABM treaty in Sunday talks but reiterated support for the accord Washington wants to scrap to build a missile shield Moscow opposes.

During a joint press conference after their first meeting since last month's terror strikes on the United States, Putin also expressed scepticism of Bush's view that the attacks made building such a defence all the more important.

"The events of September 11 make it clearer than ever that a Cold War ABM treaty that prevents us from defending our people is outdated and, I believe, dangerous," said Bush.

"It would be difficult for me to agree with some terrorists will be able to capture intercontinental missiles and will be able to use

them," said Putin, who renewed support for the US-led global war on terror.

"His action was measured and adequate to the threat," he said, referring to military strikes on Afghanistan's Taliban rulers for refusing to hand over suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.

"Second, and it is very important for everybody to know, if we started fighting terrorism it should be completed. Because, otherwise, terrorists might have an impression that they are not vulnerable," the Russian leader said.

Despite lingering disagreements over what has become the biggest irritant to Russo-US ties, the two leaders suggested they were closer to a deal that may be finalised during a November summit in Washington and at Bush's Texas ranch.

Vajpayee admits differences between BJP & his govt

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee admitted Sunday there were differences between his government and the bosses of his ruling BJP party.

"I do not blame any of the senior leaders of the (BJP party) organisation but there is a problem somewhere," Vajpayee told a meeting to mark the 50th anniversary of the BJP.

Vajpayee even joked that there was such a communication gap between the BJP party organisers and the government that he missed the flag-hoisting ceremony which was a part of the BJP party's golden jubilee celebrations.

On the other hand, Vajpayee pointed out he had good communication with his National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners who make up the country's multi-party coalition government.

"A stable government is needed to tackle internal and external challenges for the welfare of the people. We are marching ahead with our NDA partners," said Vajpayee.

"There are no internal differences among NDA partners and every constituent of the ruling alliance has sacrificed some of its programmes and even the BJP

has done so to have a good and stable government," said Vajpayee.

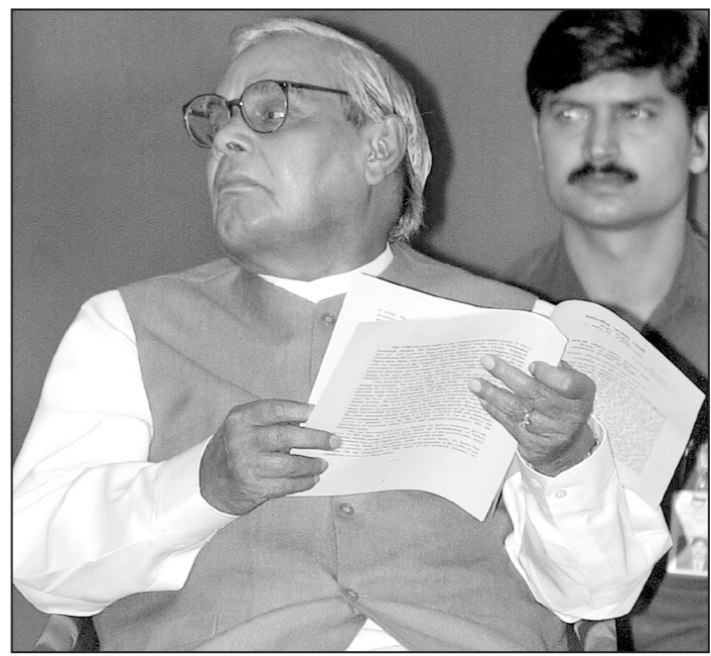
In July, Home Minister L.K. Advani chided BJP party workers and told them to behave like members of "the ruling party" rather than the opposition, after the government had been criticised by members of its own party.

The same month Vajpayee offered to resign in apparent exasperation over repeated attacks on the government from members of his own ruling alliance.

The Vajpayee government has taken a fair degree of flak from BJP activists in recent months over a spate of financial scandals and its handling of landmark summit talks with Pakistan in Agra in July, which stalled over the disputed region of Kashmir.

New market reforms which will relax controls on labour lay-offs and government downsizing have been opposed by a vocal section of the BJP, which has also criticised the trimming of interest rates on state-run saving schemes.

During Sunday's meeting Vajpayee urged the party to modernise and adopt a more "forward-looking" work culture ahead of elections early next year in two politically crucial states -- Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee looks up during a function celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in New Delhi on Sunday. Vajpayee reasserted the BJP-led ruling coalition's strength during the function.

KSA detains Bin Laden supporters

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia has confirmed detaining supporters of suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden, but played down the idea the crackdown may put the oil-rich kingdom at risk amid US-led strikes against Afghanistan.

"A small number of Saudis have been detained for interrogation about their presumed backing for Osama bin Laden, but these individuals do not pose a threat to the kingdom's security," Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz told reporters in Riyadh on Saturday.

"These individuals are not linked to the attacks in the United States, nor are they linked to (bin Laden's) al-Qaeda organisation," Prince Nayef said.

But the minister, an influential member of the royal family in the OPEC kingpin, quashed Western media reports about instability in Riyadh.

OIC for UNSC session to end Israeli aggression

AFP, Doha

Qatar, as chair of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), called Sunday for an urgent UN Security Council session to end "Israeli aggression" against the Palestinians, the QNA news agency said.

Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin-Jassem bin-Jabr al-Thani summoned the ambassadors of the Security Council's five permanent members in Doha to convey the request, a foreign ministry source told the official Qatar News Agency.

The minister said the Security Council should "shoulder its responsibilities by stopping these grave Israeli ... practices and providing international protection for the Palestinian people."

The world body should also "create suitable conditions for resumption of the Middle East peace process ... on the basis of (UN) resolutions and the land-for-peace principle," the envoys were told.

Israel was trying to exploit "events on the international scene" in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks in the United States to

"create new conditions in the region that would threaten (regional) security and stability and destroy remaining hopes of achieving just and comprehensive peace," the foreign ministry source said.

The official denounced Israel's "savage attacks against the Palestinian people and its reoccupation of some areas (controlled by) the Palestinian Authority in a flagrant violation of the commitments it signed, the principles of international law and (UN) resolutions."

Qatar and the 57-member OIC "stand by the Palestinian people in their just struggle to recover their legitimate rights in keeping with (UN) resolutions, chiefly the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on their national soil with (East) Jerusalem as its capital," the official said.

Twenty-two Palestinians have died since Israel launched a man-hunt Thursday for Palestinian militants following the assassination of its tourism minister.

The Palestinian Authority demanded Sunday strong international intervention to halt Israel's siege of Palestinian cities throughout the West Bank.



People march during a demonstration called by ARROW (active resistance to the roots of war) to protest against the war in Afghanistan on Sunday in London.

Pakistan closes border amid Afghan refugee wave

AFP, Chaman

Pakistan closed its main border crossing to Afghanistan on Sunday, a day after letting in a record 5,000 refugees to escape US air strikes, an AFP correspondent and witnesses said.

Officially the Pakistan-Afghan border is closed but thousands of refugees had been able to flee the mounting conflict into Pakistan in the past week.

On Sunday the border was sealed tight to Afghan refugees, according to an AFP correspondent allowed to go to Chaman and some of the rare Pakistani nationals allowed to cross.

One man who came back into Pakistan estimated there were about 5,000 people waiting to leave Afghanistan, which has faced daily US air strikes since October 7.

The threat of starvation and growing anarchy inside Afghanistan has also accelerated the move to the border, especially from cities such as Kandahar, the Taliban stronghold.

Last week, the number of people crossing at Chaman, 100 kilometres

(60 miles) northwest of Quetta, has risen from 1,000 a day to 5,000 on Saturday, according to the United Nations.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has estimated that at least 10,000 refugees were massed on the other side of the border.

Before the influx started at Chaman early last week, many Afghans were bypassing the post and crossing nearby mountain ranges during the night.

The UN agency is pressing the Pakistani authorities to allow them to establish temporary reception camps for the desperate Afghans.

Ten trucks including tents, blankets and other supplies for the proposed interim camps were dispatched on Sunday. The World Food Programme also said it was sending extra food.

"They are not allowing refugees in and they do not want refugees. That is the reality," said UN spokeswoman Fatoumata Kaba. "But we will continue to press the government."

US bombing, years of drought

and a looming tough winter is expected to propel 300,000 Afghans towards the Pakistan border in the next few weeks, half of them through Chaman.

The UN has warned that figure could reach 1.5 million if US reprisals for the September 11 destruction in New York and Washington continue. Pakistan is already home to three million long-term Afghan refugees.

"We are concerned that thousands of people are approaching the border," UNHCR spokesman Peter Kessler said. "We haven't seen a refugee flood yet but all the ingredients are there."

And Kessler said there were most likely millions of Afghans in remote areas of Afghanistan who were too poor, sick and hungry to travel to Pakistan or another neighbouring country.

Those who have already made it to the 200-metre (660-feet) no man's land on the Durand Line that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan at Chaman have become prey to human smugglers and corrupt guards.