

War only if there's some mad action: Musharraf

AFP, Washington

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said he did not believe tensions between his country and neighbouring India will translate into a shooting war.

"Let me assure you from a military point of view, from a diplomatic - political point of view, I don't think there can be war - unless there's some mad action, but that's always a possibility," Musharraf told Newsweek magazine in an interview for today's issue.

He said India had downgraded the alert status of its air force and had refrained from deploying some ground forces "that would give them the full potential for an offensive."

But Musharraf said the two countries should make a serious effort to resolve their dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, which has fueled regional tensions for nearly 50 years.

"Both groups have to show realism and flexibility and reach a solution," he said. "There is no doubt in my mind that we can reach a solution."

Pakistan and India have massed 800,000 troops along their common border since last month's deadly attack on the Indian parliament blamed by New Delhi on militants allegedly backed by Islamabad.

Musharraf has outlawed five militant organisations, including two accused by New Delhi of being behind the attack, but India has ruled out an immediate pullback of its forces.

Reuters adds: Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said Pakistan had not yet acted on its pledge to crack down on anti-Indian Islamic militants despite promises by President Musharraf a week ago.

Fernandes, here to meet US defence officials, told Fox News-TV in an interview that New Delhi would stick to its decision not to withdraw troops from the frontline with Pakistan until Islamabad ends what India calls cross-border terrorism.

The statement came amid reports that troops of the nuclear foes exchanged small arms fire at a few places along their border and a ceasefire line in the disputed

Kashmir region on Saturday night.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi security was at an all-time high in the runup to India's 52nd Republic Day celebrations later this week following intelligence reports that Islamic militant groups were planning attacks during the annual parade, police said yesterday.

"We have received reports of several Islamic suicide squads entering the capital to target the parade," a Delhi police official told AFP.

"So we have asked our men not to relax their guard," he added.

A report in the Asian Age newspaper yesterday said New Delhi police had received intelligence reports of a possible attempt by Muslim militants on the life of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during the January 26 parade.

But the police official dismissed the report saying: "There were always reports warning of a possible attempt on the lives of VIPs, especially when so many of them are gathered in one place.

"This is nothing unusual, but then we are not taking the situation lightly either."

PM warns of legal steps

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Khaleda Zia explained her harsh words saying that people have voted the BNP to power to serve the people and carry out development for progress of the country.

"Join parliament - people have also voted you to serve them and speak for them in parliament," she said.

Khaleda, who leads a four-party coalition, said their election commitments have started coming true.

The prime minister observed that people had given verdict on October 1 general election against Awami League for its misuse, terrorism and corruption and irregularities in their last five years in power.

"The people of Bangladesh want development, peace and work which Awami League had failed to provide," she said.

Unravelling wide-scale corruption, plunder, mismanagement and terrorism by last Awami League government, the PM told the audi-

ence that her government got a shattered economy and huge burden of debts with banks.

She alleged 'Awami Leaguers' had become owners of crores of taka depriving people of development and leaving them indebted through heavy borrowing.

Describing the terrorist activities in Feni during Awami League rule, she said nobody should cooperate with a terrorist and steps are being taken against those involved in terrorism.

Responding to demands of locals the prime minister said Fulgazi would be turned into a full-fledged thana soon and arrangement would be made to implement the incomplete works under Muhuri project.

She also said Fulgazi-Belonina road would be broadened and a computer institute set up at Feni, and 500-line digital telephone exchanges installed in Fulgazi, Chhagalnaiya and Parshuram thanas each.

Code of conduct

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"Work for preparation of the draft is now on and it will be finalised soon. Some new codes of conduct may be included into the existing set of rules, but there will be no black or repressive clauses in the draft," said a senior secretary of the government, on condition of anonymity.

He said for years a section of government officials and employees in the name of realising their demands have directly engaged in politics, and sometimes even anti-government movements supported by opposition political parties, creating serious lawlessness in offices.

Due to non-implementation of the codes of conduct, a section of officials and employees have become full-time politicians and leaders of different unions and professional bodies.

In view of the matter, the government has decided to enforce the codes of conduct to ensure proper atmosphere in government offices.

The secretary said the government was also going to introduce a number of mandatory provisions including submission of income tax return, submission of resource statement, prior permission to join any socio-cultural organisations and restriction on acceptance of expensive gifts from any individual or groups.

Another secretary said the committee was currently discussing about updating the codes of conduct and existing rules.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior Cabinet Minister yesterday said the

present government strongly improves participation of government officials and employees in any politics, and wants to free the offices from partisan politics and make the administration and other cadre services people-oriented through massive reforms.

He said the main objective of the planned reforms through strict implementation of codes of conduct are purely aimed at rendering service to the nation, make the administration accountable to the people as well as ensure transparency.

"We sincerely want to utilise our two-thirds majority in the last election in bringing welfare to of the people and give democracy a permanent shape through reforms in all sectors," the minister added.

Shahriar released

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Shahriar was arrested on November 22 at Zia International Airport without any charge, along with four video cassettes.

On November 23, he was placed under the Special Powers Act without specific allegations. He was given one month's detention on November 25. When the detention period was about to be over, he was given an additional three months' detention. The government filed a seditious case against him on December 8.

Shazneen case

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court granted time. Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom Group, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Latifur Rahman filed a murder case with Gulshan thana on April 24, 1998 accusing Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help at his house.

Shahidul Islam is the principal accused in the case while contractor Hasan is the alleged mastermind. Mojibur Rahman filed a rape case with Gulshan thana accusing seven people, including Shahid after six months' investigation into the Shazneen murder case.

All the accused Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu and Parvin were produced in the court during the hearing.

Special PP Mahub Ahmed, appeared for the state while Advocate Saika Ferdous, Mizanur Rahman and M A Kamrul Hasan

Khan Aslam for the accused. The murder case, pending with the First Additional Metropolitan Session Judge's Court, Dhaka was earlier stayed by an order of the Supreme Court. The order will remain valid till disposal of the rape case.

The trial of the rape case began at the Special Court on July 9, 2000.

Drain

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connected with the lake. But it was discontinued immediately after the toxic waste killed thousands of fishes in the lake few weeks ago.

The residents said the drain overflowed in daytime, but at night the level of liquid waste went down. But the stench is strong and hazardous to public health.

An official at the local office of the Dhaka City Corporation said they were aware of the problem.

He, however, failed to answer why they could not do anything to solve the problem in four days.

Embassy

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ture-building activities, including construction of houses, bridges, roads and schools," said a leading investor.

Another businessman said Bangladesh could send the bulk of manpower to support Afghanistan's reconstruction activities.

Business leaders also feel that there is a scope for selling raw jute and jute-made goods. There is also a huge market for tea as Afghans are traditional tea drinkers.

Afghan's new leader Hamid Karzai in a letter to Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had spoken of Bangladesh's support to the Afghan people.

He wrote, "We look forward to continued cooperation on a regional basis."

Dhaka is one of the 24 countries to have sent a high-level delegation to the installation ceremony of Afghan leader Hamid Karzai.

Bangladesh is likely to send troops to Afghanistan on a peace-keeping mission. Foreign Minister Morshed Khan is now participating in the 54-nation conference on Reconstruction of Afghanistan, which ends tomorrow (January 22) in Tokyo.

Economic reforms

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to forget their election pledges. Speakers at the seminar also observed that the country needs to tap new export markets within the region and beyond as the import structure of the west has undergone a change.

They said efforts should be made to increase the country's exports to markets like India and China despite different obstacles. The SAARC countries account for only four per cent of the entire trade within the region while it is 48 per cent in case of the ASEAN countries.

ICAB President MA Barea in his welcome speech said good governance is the prerequisite for having correct economic policies.

2 murdered

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dead at East Rampura, Khilgaon, at about 10:45pm Saturday.

The incident took place when Palash was returning home from his shop. A gang of hoodlums stopped him and shot him in the head and chest.

Fatally injured, Palash was rushed to the DMCH where the on-duty doctors declared him dead.

The killing is a sequel to a dispute over the ownership of the shop, sources said. Palash runs a shop owned by his uncle, Fayez Ahmad Farook, but it was registered in the name of Palash.

Ironically, his uncle filed a case with Khilgaon Police Station accusing six people of the murder. None was arrested till last night, though.

Haji Selim

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Haji Selim, the former MP, on January 12. Four others Solaiman, Monir Hossain, Abdul Barea and Antu are absconding, they added.

Newspaper reports however have contradicted the victim's political identity saying that Shamsul Haque Shanti, 32, son of Lal Mian of village Kamrangir Char in Lalbagh area, was an Awami League worker.

Shanti, who was also a trader in plastic materials at Imanganj, was killed by hoodlums near the local cremation ground at Nawabganj in Lalbagh on the night of June 9, 1996, the reports said.

The victim was returning to his Kamrangir Char residence after attending an election meeting. The gang took him inside the National Steel Sheet Factory and hacked him to death, added the reports.

City corps polls

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to 90 from 100, to 30 from 35 in Rajshahi and to 31 from 37 in Khulna.

Meanwhile, the EC also has requested the law ministry and the attorney general's office to produce the government notification before the High Court for early disposal of the cases.

The aspirants of the major political parties have already started lobbying at the party hierarchies to ensure their candidatures in the coming city polls.



Palestinian protesters hold up portraits of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon during a demonstration held in Gaza City yesterday in support of Arafat. Scattered violence swept across the Palestinian territories overnight after a day of clashes in the West Bank town of Ramallah, where Arafat's headquarters are surrounded by Israeli tanks.

Arafat should stay locked than being expelled, says Sharon

AFP, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon believes it is better for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to remain confined in the West Bank town of Ramallah than to be expelled from the territories, an Israeli daily reported yesterday.

Maariv quoted Sharon as saying "it is preferable that Arafat stays locked in Ramallah instead of being expelled from the (Palestinian) territories as he could cause more harm outside."

"He opens the windows of his Ramallah offices, he sees our tanks and knows he has nowhere to go. He is dying to travel and fly off, it's making him sick since he knows he is locked up in our jail," Sharon said, quoted by the daily.

The prime minister was speaking after the last cabinet meeting which took place on Wednesday night, the daily said.

Surrounded by Israeli tanks and deprived of his helicopters which were blown up by Israel, Arafat has been confined to his Ramallah headquarters since December 3 following a series of deadly attacks on Israel.

Israeli tanks moved even closer to the headquarters which also serve as his official residence in the town on Friday after a bloody attack by a Palestinian gunman killed six Israelis celebrating at a family party

in Hadera, northern Israel.

The gunman, who was also shot dead, belonged to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, a radical offshoot of Arafat's own Fatah faction.

Several ministers from Sharon's right-wing Likud party stepped up calls for Arafat's expulsion from the Palestinian territories after the shooting incident.

Sharon is exploiting Palestinian attacks to destroy the Palestinian people, Arafat said in an interview.

"We have to take into consideration that the Israelis are looking to create friction between Palestinians," Arafat told Newsweek magazine.

"We are doing everything we can at the political and security level to exterminate this phenomenon of suicide operations. It's obvious that Sharon finds in such operations a golden opportunity to damage the reputation of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority, and to ... destroy the peace process."

Meanwhile Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Saturday warned that expelling Arafat out of the Palestinian territories or attempting to kill him will lead to "a terrible danger."

Mubarak issued the warning in an interview with Xinhua and other Chinese media organisations in Cairo, saying that such a matter is "very dangerous."

"The Israelis can not choose a

Palestinian leader to negotiate with," he said, adding that the Palestinians will not support anyone chosen by Israel, but a leader chosen by themselves.

"If the Israelis believe that they could solve problems with the Palestinians without Arafat, I would say it is impossible, and it can not be done," he said.

WB happy

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were also present in the meeting. Referring to different measures for improvement of law and order, removal of corruption and restoration of discipline in the financial sector, the donor agency VP said that the Bank was keenly observing the developments.

She praised government programmes in the education sector, particularly the steps for ensuring women's education.

The World Bank senior executive also showed interest in the steps for ensuring good governance and reducing losses in the state-owned enterprises through reforms.

During the discussion, the prime minister mentioned her government's emphasis on education, particularly education of girls.

Referring to the health-sector initiatives, Khaleda Zia observed that steps regarding family planning would help bring an end to early marriage.

Mieko Nishimizu lauded government's recent ban on polythene bags, mass use of which wrecked Dhaka's sewers, posed public health hazards and also caused soil pollution.

Textbooks

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complaint, seeking necessary permission from the government.

The accused are Dr. Shafiqur Rahman, chairman of NCTB, Prof. Kabir Uddin Ahmed Majumdar, member (textbook), Prof. Hassan Ali, member (finance), Prof. SM Haider, member (curriculum), Prof. AFM Alamgir Khan, member (primary education), Prof. Nazimuddin, secretary of NCTB, Nurul Islam, librarian, Mohammad Hossain, controller of distribution, Mohammad Amanullah, senior store keeper, Abdur Rashid Miah, deputy production manager and Abdul Haque Chowdhury, controller of paper.

NCTB officials could not be reached despite repetitive efforts last night.

Revised population policy

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rise from 60 years now to about 67 in 2020.

The policy document says, necessary steps should be taken to ensure that trained and skilled health workers attend upto 50 per cent of births by the year 2005 and upto 100 per cent by 2010.

To encourage adolescent married girls not to have children before the age of 20, it suggests providing them with 'school allowance', family planning counseling and opportunities for vocational education and self-employment.

It suggests providing extensive credit facilities and vocational training to unmarried young women and men, and measures for food security for destitute women.

If poor girls marry at the age of 20, they should be given one-time financial grants to cover their marriage expenses.

The draft policy suggests providing family planning and reproductive healthcare services at district, upazila and union levels through integrated health and family planning centres. Doctors would be appointed in union health centres in phases.

To stabilise the population, the government should take steps for education and minimum housing facilities for all and removing eco-

nomnic disparity between different groups in the society, it says.

Experts who reviewed the draft policy told this correspondent that the country will not achieve the targets set at the Beijing International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD +5) if the current trends continue.

The policy document does not seem to have adequately taken into account three major concerns, a UNFPA statement observed.

These are: (1) Urban population will increase by 30 per cent by 2005 (growing at 1.3 million per year), (2) 42 per cent of the population is currently under the age of 15 and will attain marriage age within the next 3-5 years and (3) the growth of poverty and urban slum populations.

The UNFPA pointed out that reproductive healthcare and family planning services can no longer be primary instruments for reducing high growth and fertility rates. The policy does not go far in addressing other related issues.

The developed partners in a written statement said, it is not clear why the ministry of health and family welfare decided to formulate a separate Population Policy. It would have been more appropriate to combine both health and popula-

tion policies into one integrated policy.

It would have been especially important if the government prepared a National Platform for Action based on the Beijing Declaration which stipulates formulation of a comprehensive health policy by integrating population policy, the statement said.

The donors noted that many population policies tend to target women and not men and this draft policy is no exception.

Their statement noted that the policy needs also to address men as potential users of contraceptives as they have more responsibility in the family.

It said the draft policy seems to be predominantly service oriented and not education or behaviour change oriented and implies that it will be implemented by the health ministry with little or no role for other ministries.

Two expatriate population consultants during their recent visit to the country reviewed the policy document. They said the disabled have not been mentioned in the draft policy although disability is a big problem in Bangladesh.

They also said the draft policy did not mention involvement of males, which is equally important.

Int'l confce opens in Tokyo today \$15b will be needed to rebuild Afghanistan

REUTERS, Tokyo

Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai arrived in Japan for an international conference where he must outline a vision of how to rebuild his country, devastated by decades of strife and disaster.

Officials from more than 60 governments and international organisations will meet in Tokyo today and tomorrow to pledge funds for a reconstruction process that aid experts estimate will take \$15 billion over a decade, much of it in the initial stage.

Participants agree that a significant show of financial support for Afghanistan will be key to ensuring the country does not again breed radical movements and such as the Taliban and Saudi-born millionaire Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network.

Karzai, on his first international tour since he took office in December, needs assurances that the world won't turn its back on Afghanistan now that the war against the Taliban has been won.

The United Nations, World Bank and Asian Development Bank have estimated reconstruction will require \$15 billion over a decade with \$5 billion needed in the critical first 30 months and \$10 billion in the first five years.

The conference co-hosts Japan, the United States, the European

Union and Saudi Arabia are expected to share most of the bill in equal measure.

"I think we'll do pretty well on the first year number and against the two-and-a-half year and five year numbers, there will be some impressive commitments too," UN senior official Mark Malloch Brown told a briefing yesterday.

"I'm very much of the view that if in the first few years it's successful, the numbers will get a momentum of their own."

Experts say ensuring speedy aid for Karzai's month-old administration is critical for its survival, but note that the government itself is starting from scratch.

When the United Nations sent \$6 million to Kabul this weekend just to keep the government running, the cash had to be flown in from Europe to empty Afghan central bank vaults. "Six million dollars requires a very large suitcase," Brown said.

The list of challenges includes resettling refugees, reopening schools and removing landmines, rebuilding roads and bridges and reviving the nation's farming sector.

Establishing peace in a land still plagued by feuding warlords and roving gangs of thieves is a top priority.

"Unless the security issue is grappled with, there isn't going to be a viable programme," the UN's Brown has said.

The Daily Star dialogue

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Hossain Imam and Senior Assistant Editor Afsan Chowdhury. The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam moderated the dialogue.

Farashuddin noted that before the last general election, Bangladesh Bank identified 118 loan defaulters but "big fishes got out of the net while some 25 or 26 small ones got the penalty."

In this regard he suggested a more aggressive role of the media to help debar big loan defaulters from taking part in election race. He noted that the Supreme Judicial Council, a very powerful body, did not sit for many years though it had the potential to stir the society.

Ibrahim Khaled said mere holding of regular polls would not do. "We've to adapt ourselves to democratic culture." He stressed independence of the judiciary saying, "Judiciary should be administered by the judiciary with full authority to recruit judges independently."

Termining the opposition's parliament boycott a sad chapter in Bangladesh's democracy, Hafiz Siddiqui said mere holding of free and fair elections is not sufficient for adherence to democracy. "Parties should change the attitude if I win the polls is fair, if I loose the polls is rigged."

He expressed a firm view that once elected, a government should be allowed to run the administration for its full term.

Debapriya suggested that five critical areas should be touched upon first, which had been by and large agreed in principle by both the ruling party and the opposition. These include more women's representation in legislation through direct franchise, formation of an independent anti-corruption body and a human rights commission, separation of the judiciary from the executive and transparency in government purchase.

Speaking on political culture, he drew the example of India where the Opposition is kept informed about decisions taken in cabinet meeting for the sake of greater national interest. "I think, on the question of Bangladesh's participating in peacekeeping in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister should discuss the Opposition Leader."

Debapriya noted that while per capita income has gone up, the two poles of affluence and poverty have distanced further.

He said, a fractured, excruciating and short-term expedient politics would not attract foreign direct investment. He urged for closer link between politicians and civil society leaders, instead of

bashing of politicians all the time.

Atiar Rahman laid strong emphasis on setting up local government bodies. He said that these bodies should be set up immediately and they should be given sufficient administrative and financial autonomy to function autonomously. He said democracy at the grassroots level would not be meaningful unless powerful local bodies are formed.

Hossain Zillur Rahman also drew everyone's attention to bureaucratic sluggishness and inefficiency of the whole state machinery in serving the people. He said that thousands of people were deprived of justice because of the slowness of the judicial system. He also noted that the civil society would have to be more politically assertive in matters of governance.

Salehuddin observed that Bangladeshis are very intelligent and hardworking but "our leaders failed to harness this potential over the years."

Prof Imtiaz focused on the political culture in the country and said political parties are "plagued with four negative criteria; leader-centric, mastan-centric, street-centric and government-centric". He suggested separate parliaments for all six divisions in the country.

Tasnim Siddiqui called for annulment of all black laws including Special Powers Act and Section 54. She also wanted to see that roles of NSI, DGFI, DB and SB and other government agencies are analysed. She further demanded that defense policy, budget and government purchase should be brought into public domain for transparency's sake.

Monowarul Islam called for reforms in the electoral system so that voters are freed from the influence of black money and muscle power and can exercise their franchise in a better atmosphere.