

US tells its citizens to put off travel to India, Pakistan

AP, Washington

Americans should not travel to India or Pakistan, where tensions have risen so high over disputed Kashmir that "the risk of intensified military hostilities cannot be ruled out," the US State Department said.

The Friday warning about India, the first in the current crisis, urged Americans in India to leave.

The Pakistan warning superseded one issued March 22 in connection with the departure of some US personnel and specific threats against Americans because of the anti-terror campaign in neighboring Afghanistan.

In the travel warnings, the department said, "Tensions ... have risen to serious levels, and the risk of intensified military hostilities ... cannot be ruled out."

"The Indian government has closed virtually all air and land links with Pakistan, ending travel between the two countries," the warning on India said. Military movements continue, it said, and "artillery firing along the line of control has caused death and injury" in Kashmir.

Meanwhile, Indian and Pakistani

troops yesterday traded heavy artillery fire over northern Kashmir's Kargil sector.

The two rival armies also fired at each other's positions across their southern borders in the disputed Himalayan region for the ninth consecutive day, officials said.

Army officials in Srinagar said Pakistani troops launched "unprovoked" artillery fire on Kargil, Batalik and Drass sectors yesterday.

"The firing started late afternoon and was continuing," an army official said from Kargil, the scene of a two-month conflict between Indian troops and Pakistan-backed forces in 1999 that left 1,000 people dead on both sides.

Workers inside the building had been trapped as chemicals stored inside caught fire and the flames spread quickly, blocking the escape routes.

Witnesses said people were seen standing at windows on the upper floors of the blazing building. Some were injured as they jumped to escape the flames.

"There was black smoke everywhere as the fire spread and the smoke suffocated everyone," said worker Parminder Singh, who jumped from a window.

Police said the death toll could rise further as there could be more bodies inside.

State authorities have ordered an inquiry into the blaze. The building seemed to lack basic fire protection.

Some of those who managed to escape said the fire was caused by sparks in electricity wires.

Army officials in Srinagar said

Pakistani shelling was reported from the southern zone of Indian-administered Kashmir, in the districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Kathua and Samba throughout Friday night and early Saturday, an army spokesman said.

At least 36 people 26 Pakistanis and 10 Indians have been killed in the ongoing shelling, according to police on both sides of the divided region.

31 bodies recovered

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survivor who swam ashore, said a madrassah teacher. Amin was looking for his brother-in-law and niece. Amin said they were together on the 2nd storey of the vessel when it capsized. He could not recall anything other than swimming for dear life.

Only two of the recovered bodies have so far been identified. They are engine mechanic Nazrul Islam, 38, and Zakir Hossain, 24, of Chardoba. The launch headed into a storm 45 minutes after it left Chardoba and sank at Mathbasha between Mathbaria and Kathalia upazillas, one of the survival said.

The sareng of the launch, Emdad Hossain, said passengers could not come out of the launch as its doors and windows were closed because of the gusty wind. He said it took less than two minutes for the whole ship to sink after it tipped as the wind hit it from the western side.

"I do not know how I escaped while all my assistants died; but I can tell you it took less time than I could have ever imagined. I was holding on to a wooden furniture and praying to God in the turbulent water of the river," said Hossain denying any overloading whatsoever.

None of the missing 13 staff of MV Subha could be traced till 5:30pm. Abdulla Al Azad Chowdhury, police super of Pirojpur, said. Strong current and high waves are hampering rescue operation, said Mohammad Zahirul Islam, upazila nirbahi officer of Mathbaria.

Rescuers believe many of the passengers have been trapped dead inside the capsized launch. They were mostly carrying shrimp fry from Barguna coastal belts to shrimp farm owners in Khulna.

A three-member committee has been formed to probe the accident.

Meantime, hundreds of people have gathered on the banks of Baleshwar to know the fate of the passengers. It is very difficult to identify the bodies recovered so far, said the police super of Pirojpur.

Earlier, authorities working to trace the sunken vessel had said the seven-km wide river Baleshwar by the Sundarbans was too deep for them to look for the vessel.

At around 3:00pm yesterday at the scene of Thursday's launch disaster, this correspondent saw hundreds of villagers including relatives of victims gathered in this remote part of Mathbaria called Khatachera, some 110 kms from

Barisal divisional town, to witness a single boat carrying some local men scanning the river for more bodies.

Top police officials from Barisal and Pirojpur sat in a makeshift control room and talked over wireless. They were asking the neighbouring Barguna district administration to also launch a search as they feared the strong current might have carried the 90-feet long vessel out of the demarcation line of Pirojpur district.

Many onlookers complained about the pitifully inadequate efforts to trace the vessel. The policemen complained about the inaction of the BIWTA salvage team, which was helplessly beached a hundred yards away. Desperate officials were seen trying to persuade local fishermen to comb the riverbed with their fishing nets. But the fishermen remained unmoved despite promises of compensation by police and Pirojpur district administration for damage of their nets during the search.

The MV Subha, built only 18 months ago at a Bagerhat dockyard called Nagerbazar Dock, went down in a manner strikingly similar to the disastrous capsizing of MV Salaluddin-2 in the river Meghna on May 3 with more than 500 passengers. According to a survivor of the disaster in Baleshwar, MV Subha left Chardoba for Khulna on Thursday an hour behind the scheduled 8:30pm with more than 150 passengers and 14 crew. About 40 minutes later, the vessel was caught up in a violent storm.

As more bodies surfaced, rescuers brought the decomposed bodies on to the flood protection embankment where hundreds of men, women and children waited. The air was heavy with the stench from decomposing corpses which lay on the roadside covered with a piece of cloth provided by local government officials. The DIG of Barisal Range, Golam Mostafa said the unclaimed bodies would soon be buried in the locality.

Local people and survivors said they could not find a single lifebuoy on board the MV Subha or while they were floating in the water. All the survivors, including two women, had to swim ashore. No help from area residents could be available as the area is thinly populated and also due to violent storm.

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President hosts

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Rakhain Buddhist Association and other Buddhist associations attended the reception.

President Chowdhury and Mrs Chowdhury welcomed the guests, inquired about their welfare and wished them a happy life.

Friday cut-out

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will allow him to take that final training ground step.

"David has to be practicing fully two or three days before the Sweden game. Otherwise he can't play," Eriksson told the Daily Mirror.

"It's been a long time since he last played and we're thinking of Friday as the deadline."

"If he can't train fully by then it would be very difficult to play against Sweden. We can't know his condition at all as a football player. If you haven't seen him practice, not even once, it's very difficult."

"If I put my hand on my heart, I think he will play. But if I put my hand on my head, I don't know."

Eriksson's World Cup plans have been dogged by problems since the close of the English season, with injuries to his midfield stacking up rapidly.

Danny Murphy was the latest to fall victim Friday, the Liverpool player ruled out with a broken foot to be replaced by West Ham's Trevor Sinclair.

Manchester United's Nicky Butt and Newcastle's Kieron Dyer are already battling back from injury and Eriksson will be praying for no more casualties in Sunday's wrap-up friendly game against Cameroon.

Eriksson added: "If we think Dyer's going to struggle to play against Sweden and Argentina it's very doubtful that he'd take part in the World Cup. Then I'd bring somebody in."

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Air crash

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Passenger list also included two Singaporeans and five people from Hong Kong.

There was a large oil slick about 20 nautical miles (36 kilometers) northeast of Penghu, about 300 kilometers southwest of Taipei, the transport minister said.

Kay Yong, managing director of Taiwan's Aviation Safety Council, told reporters that the pilots sent no distress signals before the control tower reported the plane disappeared off radar screens.

The plane was flying at 10,600 meters when it went missing, he said.

The search and rescue effort was based at Penghu's main north port, where eight ambulances were lined up waiting for victims. About 20 soldiers wearing surgical masks gathered with nurses at the port.

Penghu police officer Hsu Kuolong said that early reports from rescuers said "several" bodies have been found, but he did not know how many.

"We're waiting for the bodies to come back," Hsu said.

China Airlines set up a crash center for victims' families at a hotel near Taipei's airport. About 50 people gathered there, sobbing, hugging each other and checking the airline's passenger list for names of friends and family.

China Airlines said that the Boeing 747-200, built in 1979, was the last plane of its kind in the airline's fleet.

Due to a series of crashes in the 1990s, China Airlines used to be considered one of the world's most dangerous air carriers. But in recent years, the airline has reshuffled its board and has put a greater emphasis on safety, DCC sources said.

In St Petersburg, Putin's home town, the two leaders rounded off their summit with mostly sightseeing, spending an hour and a half in the afternoon answering questions from students.

Both see the pact as a crucial step in normalizing once bitter

Indian shoe factory fire claims 44

AFP, Agra

The death toll in a huge fire at a shoe factory in India's Taj Mahal town of Agra has risen to 44, police said yesterday.

"Till now 44 dead bodies have been recovered," Agra city police chief VK Dohre told the wire service.

Forty-two bodies had already been recovered from the site of Friday's blaze in the Jeoni Mandi market area of Agra, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Workers inside the building had been trapped as chemicals stored inside caught fire and the flames spread quickly, blocking the escape routes.

Witnesses said people were seen standing at windows on the upper floors of the blazing building. Some were injured as they jumped to escape the flames.

There was black smoke everywhere as the fire spread and the smoke suffocated everyone," said worker Parminder Singh, who jumped from a window.

Police said the death toll could rise further as there could be more bodies inside.

State authorities have ordered an inquiry into the blaze. The building seemed to lack basic fire protection.

Some of those who managed to escape said the fire was caused by sparks in electricity wires.

Army officials in Srinagar said



Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan meets Senator John McCain in Washington on Friday.

Israel sets new permit system for travel between WB towns

AP, Bethlehem

Israel is enforcing new restrictions in the West Bank requiring Palestinians to obtain permits to move from town to town, and is putting up fences and digging trenches to block those trying to sneak past soldiers.

Palestinians fear Israel is making permanent what was to have been a temporary emergency measure -- military blockades of West Bank towns aimed at preventing Palestinian terror attacks.

Hundreds of Israelis have been killed in bombings and shootings since Israeli-Palestinian fighting erupted 20 months ago.

Israel denies Palestinian claims that it is carving up the West Bank into disconnected cantons in order to impose arrangements that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon envisions for a final peace deal. Israel says it has begun issuing permits for travel in the West Bank as a humanitarian gesture, to ease the hardships caused by the prolonged blockades, and that restrictions will be lifted as soon as terror stops.

Since the fighting began in September 2000, Palestinians have been largely confined to their communities, with a network of military checkpoints and ramparts enforcing the blockades that have paralyzed daily life.

In many areas, Palestinians sneak around the barriers, driving through fields, climbing over mounds of earth and walking single-file along narrow dirt paths.

Those caught by Israeli troops usually have their car keys or ID cards taken. In some instances, those trying to sneak around checkpoints have been killed by army fire.

In recent weeks, following a new rash of suicide bombings, the military has accelerated the construction of barriers on the outskirts of Palestinian towns.

On the outskirts of Beit Jalla, a 3-meter-high barbed-wire fence stretches for several kilometers, separating the Palestinian town from Gilo, a Jewish neighborhood built on war-won land annexed to Jerusalem. A broad trench, about 2 meters deep, runs along the fence. Army jeeps patrol from time to time.

The house of the 14-member Darwesh family has ended up on the wrong side of the fence; the Darwishes are now cut off from Beit Jalla, but are not allowed to go in the other direction, toward Jerusalem, because they are West Bank residents.

Similar fence-and-trench systems have been spotted in other West Bank areas, including Beit Sahur near Bethlehem and on the outskirts of Ramallah.

Yarden Vatikai, an adviser to Israeli Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, said the barriers are meant to prevent infiltrations of Palestinian militants. In addition, Israel is planning walls and fences that would run for 80 kilometers along the so-called "Green Line," the invisible boundary with West Bank.

Judge appointment

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trial.

A committee of the senior lawyers has been formed yesterday to resolve the crisis. In the past, when such a crisis arose senior lawyers had undertaken similar moves.

The BNP-aligned leading advocates made a list of 17 lawyers who could be made judges, senior Supreme Court lawyers said. The list containing the names of some BNP hardliners was submitted to the law ministry. But some BNP-aligned lawyers expressed reservations about the list, the sources added.

The politicisation of the appointment of the Supreme Court judges is nothing new. Justice Latifur Rahman, the judge who resigned following the publication of his telephone conversation with deposed president HM Ershad about the Janata Tower case, was an Awami League activist.

Before being appointed by the AL government in 1998, Latifur had contested the national election twice.

In 1994, the government appointed a judge who was a leader of the BNP's Bagerhat district chapter, which was criticised by the Supreme Court lawyers.

On February 3 1994, the then President Abdur Rahman Biswas had appointed nine judges to the High Court without consulting the chief justice. This prompted lawyers to protest and they brought allegations of graft against two of them.

Senior lawyers then met the president, the speaker and the chief justice over the issue. When the meetings did not yield any result, they met the then Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, which led to the cancellation of appointment of the two.

Chaos arose from the appointment of two judges to the Appellate Division in January 2001, in which two other judges were superseded. The lawyers supporting the BNP went on the rampage in the

Supreme Court, vandalising its property and confining the chief justice to his room for three hours.

Again, the senior lawyers met the chief justice, the president and the prime minister and recommended appointment to the Appellate Division of two judges who were superseded. But the AL government ignored the suggestion.

However, the suggestion has been implemented early this year by the BNP government that extended the five-member Appellate Division to a seven-member one.

As per Article 95(1) of the constitution, the president will appoint the chief justice and other judges.

But Article 48(3) says the president can appoint only the prime minister and the chief justice on his own, and all other acts must be done in consultation with the prime minister. This ultimately puts the control of appointment of judges in the hands of the prime minister, thus leaving room for politicisation.

On May 20, the High Court division bench in its verdict on the cassette scam case made some observations about the appointment of judges. It was said that the selection of judges from lawyers by the chief justice has some limitations. To overcome the limitations, the process must go through a panel of Supreme Court judges.

In the greater interest of the nation, the executive wing must keep the issue of appointment of judges above politics. The Supreme Court recommendations on appointment must be made effective and meaningful, the verdict suggested.

In the selection of judges, the background of nominees must be checked and cross