

Vajpayee awaits Musharraf's next move in war of nerves

'Delhi must find new tactic to fight proxy war'

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was glued to the telephone in his holiday home Monday as he awaited the next move by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in the war of nerves between the hostile neighbours.

Vajpayee was in constant contact with key cabinet ministers and security officials while driving a forceful blitz on the international community aimed at forcing Pakistan to crack down on Islamic militancy, officials said.

The prime minister and his key aides were waiting to hear an address by Musharraf to the nation expected Monday evening before deciding on their next course of action, they said.

On Sunday, Vajpayee appeared to offer some breathing space to Pakistan, saying New Delhi would hold off military action pending the results of the diplomatic offensive.

"We are waiting as to how much the efforts of the international community will succeed," Vajpayee said near the Manali hill station in the foothills of the Himalayas where he is supposed to be vacationing.

"We have bought some time," said a Western diplomat in response to the statement, which came ahead of the arrival in Islamabad later Monday of Russian envoy Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Safonov.

Despite the softer tone, Vajpayee also fired off some salvos at Pakistan, even as Islamabad Sunday ignored international concerns and test-fired a second ballistic missile. Pakistan has said its tests will last until Tuesday.

The Indian premier blasted Pakistan once again for not cracking down on Islamic militants using Kashmir to launch cross-border raids into India and issued a rallying call to the nation to unite to fight terrorism.

Meanwhile, Indian Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, number two in the cabinet after the prime minister, said Monday it was time for India to come up with a different way to fight the "proxy war" with Pakistan.

He said India had given enough time to Pakistan to act on its demand to hand over 20 militants and criminals New Delhi has identified as having taken refuge on its neighbour's soil.

India is being subjected to an undeclared war by Pakistan, he said.

"The war has been declared by Pakistan and terrorists. Now the question is whether we should fight it the way we have been fighting or adopt a different way," he said, at a public function.

"The time has come to adopt another way to fight the war," he said.

India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring militants to fight a "proxy war" for Islamabad against Indian rule in Kashmir, but Pakistan denies the charge.

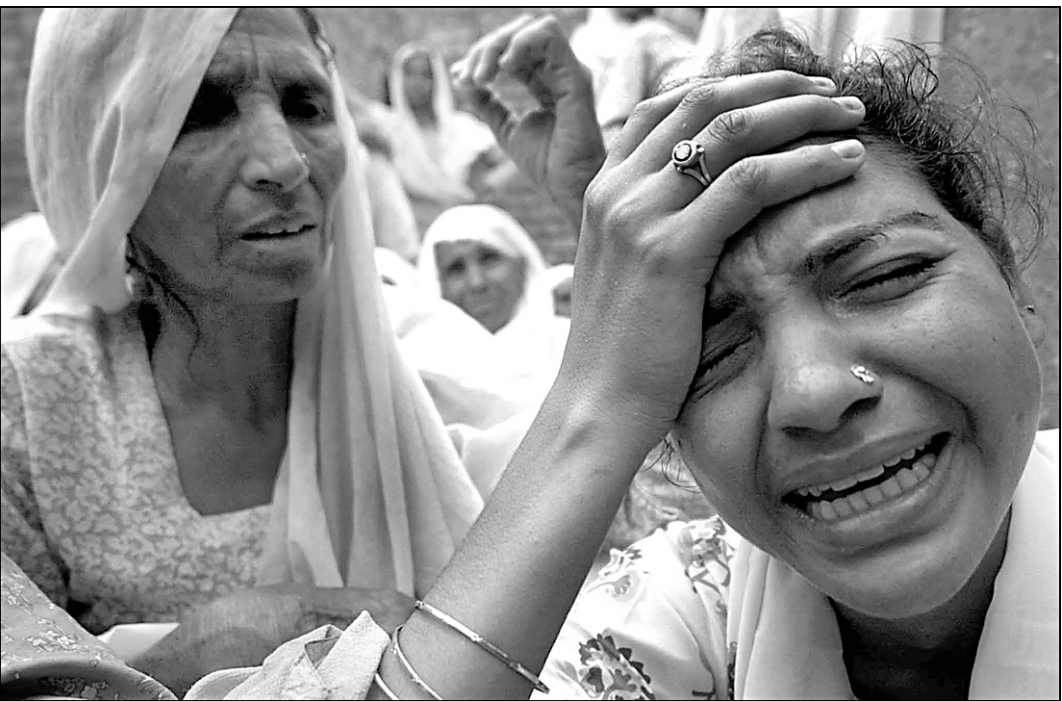


PHOTO: AFP

Relatives of Bachan Lal, who was killed by Pakistani shelling overnight, grieve at their home in R.S. Pura sector north of Jammu on Sunday. Five civilians were killed and eight others injured overnight in Pakistani artillery fire in Indian-controlled Kashmir.

North Korean soldiers intrude into S Korea

AFP, Seoul

Three armed North Korean soldiers briefly crossed into South Korea which has heightened security to guard the football World Cup against terrorist attacks, military authorities said Monday.

The intrusion took place Sunday afternoon near the truce village of Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone, which has divided the Korean peninsula since the 1950-53 Korea War, defense ministry officials said.

This was the first intrusion by North Korean soldiers this year in the four kilometre (2.5 mile) wide DMZ, one of the world's most heavily fortified zones.

North Korean troops have sporadically intruded across the frontier in recent years.

"The North Korean soldiers retreated into their territory after intruding 75 meters (yards) into our side of the DMZ for five minutes," a ministry official said.

46 killed in bus accident in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 46 passengers were killed Monday when a bus carrying local tourists overturned in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, the Press Trust of India reported.

The news agency quoted Kanti Ganguly, a senior local administrative official, as saying that the bus burst a tyre, skidded into a ditch and overturned near the marshlands of the Sunderbans animal sanctuary near the state capital Calcutta.

"Rescue operations are going on in full swing to extricate the bodies from the bus," said Ganguly, who could not confirm the number of people on board the private tour bus.

60 killed as wedding bus drives into power cable

AFP, New Delhi

At least 60 people were killed when a bus carrying a wedding party drove into a power cable and burst into flames in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, officials said Sunday.

The victims were returning from a wedding in the state's Bahraich district when their bus struck the cable, a police spokesman said earlier from the state capital of Lucknow.

"The bus's roof was piled high with bicycles which snared... an overhead high-tension cable and then the bus caught (fire), killing 50 people on the spot," he told AFP.

NLD marks it's foiled polls victory

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday attended the largest political gathering of her National League for Democracy (NLD) since her release from 19 months house arrest.

More than 1,000 NLD members, supporters and senior foreign diplomats gathered at the party's ramshackle Yangon headquarters to commemorate the anniversary of the 1990 election which was won by the NLD in a landslide but rejected by the ruling military junta.

To chants of "long live Aung San Suu Kyi," the pro-democracy Nobel peace laureate, who was only freed from house arrest on May 6, appeared in light blue traditional dress and praised unity within the NLD but stressed earning the trust of Myanmar citizens was paramount.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi and Chief Minister of Delhi Sheila Dikshit paying homage at the Samadhi of Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru at Shanti Van in New Delhi on Monday on the 38th death anniversary of the first Prime Minister of India.

Nepal's ruling party faces split after PM's expulsion

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's ruling party appeared split into rival camps on Monday after caretaker Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was expelled for his decision to dissolve parliament and call elections two years early.

Deuba was banned from the Nepali Congress (NC) party for three years on Sunday, after he asked King Gyanendra last week to dissolve the 205-member lower house of parliament and call elections for November 13.

The surprise move infuriated senior NC leaders who said they had not been consulted.

Deuba is likely to stay on as caretaker prime minister until the elections in November, but he will not be able to stand as a candidate of the NC, and observers reckoned the party would now split.

One minister, on condition of anonymity, said Deuba was considering forming his own party called the Socialist Democratic Party.

But before this, he said Deuba wants to call a general convention of the NC to prove he still has the support of a majority of the 113 Nepali Congress MPs.

"I still command the majority of the parliamentary party and will prove that the general committee of the party still supports me," Deuba told reporters after his expulsion.

Deuba's decision to dissolve parliament came as he faced losing a vote over an extension of a state of emergency, which he says is needed to tackle a Maoist insurgency.

His arch-rival and former premier, Girija Prasad Koirala, as well as opposition parties, argued that an extension to the emergency was undemocratic and also unnecessary because existing anti-terrorism laws could be used against the rebels.

Arafat 'has let Palestinian people down': Bush

White House splits over working with Arafat

AFP, St. Petersburg

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has let his people down but subsequent Palestinian policies could be "more accountable", US President George W. Bush said Sunday as he wound up a four-day visit to Russia.

"He has let the Palestinian people down," Bush told reporters in Saint Petersburg, responding to questions on an article in the New York Times which reported on Sunday that the Bush administration was divided over whether it

should attempt to force Arafat to resign.

"He has not delivered. He had a chance to secure peace as a result of the hard work of president (Bill) Clinton and he has not," Bush said, referring to the 2000 Camp David peace talks that Clinton mediated.

Bush said however that he was beginning to hear, within the Palestinian administration, "discussions of how to make the Palestinian Authorities more accountable".

Moreover, a debate between top White House officials over whether

to press for the removal of Yasser Arafat as the leader of the Palestinian Authority has stymied US Middle East policy, the New York Times wrote Sunday.

The debate in the George W. Bush administration has reportedly divided along familiar lines, with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney pressing for a policy that would undermine Arafat's control over the Palestinian Authority and pave the way for a change in leadership.

Hottest kid around

AFP, Shillong

Toddler Bantainam Sunn in India's northeastern state of Meghalaya could be the hottest kid around: every day he munches handfuls of fiery chillis that even most adults could not stand.

The bubbly tribal Khasi child, aged two years and 10 months, does not relish any food without a generous helping of the chillis that grow in the region and are said to be hottest in the world.

Now community elders in Meghalaya's capital Shillong want the Guinness Book of World Records to assess if the chilli child is one of a kind.

"We shall write to the Guinness Book of Records to send their representatives to verify Bantainam's chilli-eating prowess," community leader John F. Kharshing said.

The child's mother, Jessica, told AFP: "He loves eating chillis and at times gets angry when we don't give him any. We often find him rummaging in shopping bags in the kitchen to look for chillis."

Train crash site cleared as Mozambique starts 3-day of mourning

AFP, Maputo

Rescue workers have recovered all the dead and injured from the site of the Mozambique train crash that killed at least 195 and left 166 wounded, the transport minister said Sunday.

"The site has now completely cleared leaving the line in business again," said Tomas Salomao, who led the rescue operation following the accident Saturday at Pessene, in Moamba district, 40 kilometres (25 miles) west of the capital Maputo.

Salomao, speaking on state radio, said that a final casualty toll would be released later Sunday.

The government declared three days of mourning beginning Sunday, with flags flying at half-mast.

The cause of the accident is not yet known but preliminary findings by government investigators indicated human error.

Hospitals are still scrambling to find doctors and blood supplies with many of the wounded are in critical condition.

Saddam cries victory over US

AFP, Baghdad

US policy on Iraq has failed and Baghdad has succeeded in rebuilding its infrastructure damaged in the 1991 Gulf War, President Saddam Hussein said in remarks published Sunday.

The United States "is starting to recognise its defeat because it wants, in fact, to finish off not only the economy but also the spirit of endurance of the Iraqis" by maintaining the embargo slapped on Baghdad for invading Kuwait in 1990, Saddam told the official press.

Saddam, who was speaking Saturday during a reception of navy officers and experts from the military industrialisation authority, added

that the US "wanted to destroy this spirit, but it has failed."

"All that has been destroyed has been rebuilt with our own means," he said in reference to the infrastructure damaged in bombing by the US-led international coalition during the 1991 Gulf War.

This was recognised in the "leading American and British media," Saddam claimed, referring to articles which, according to him, put the standard of living in Iraq higher than that in Egypt.

The official media also blasted the European tour of US President George W. Bush "who is seen by the people of the world as a disciple of war and a war criminal," said Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath party.

Uribe elected Colombian president on promise to get tough with rebels

AFP, Bogota

Alvaro Uribe, 49, was elected president of war-torn Colombia Sunday, sweeping to power on promises to battle drug-funded insurgencies that figure on the US list of terrorist groups.

Uribe, who ran as an independent candidate, had 53 percent of the vote, far ahead of his nearest challenger, the Liberal Party's Horacio Serpa, who polled 32 percent.

By passing the 50 percent mark, Uribe averted the need to face off against his rival in a second round.

He will be inaugurated as president on August 7.

In his victory speech he offered a flimsy olive branch to the insurgents.

"They lost many opportunities for peace. They will always have them," he said, adding that he would seek international mediation.

"The violent groups must know that we are democrats ratifying an offer: let us build democratic security so that they can consider the idea of giving up their rifles, of doing politics without weapons and without being killed."

'The Pianist' wins Golden Palm at Cannes



PHOTO: INTERNET

French film director Roman Polanski, left, kisses the hand of American actress Sharon Stone, right, as he is awarded the Palme d'Or for the film "The Pianist," during the award ceremony of the 55th Film Festival in Cannes, on the French Riviera on Sunday.

AFP, Cannes

Roman Polanski was Monday basking in the glory of having won his first Palme d'Or at Cannes, carrying off the prestigious prize for "The Pianist", a tale about a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust.

His movie was late Sunday honoured with the festival's top award, also known as the Golden Palm, at a glittering closing ceremony filled with celebrities.

For Polanski, a French-born Jew of Polish parents whose mother died in a Nazi concentration camp, it was both a cinematic and a very personal triumph.

"I am honoured and touched to receive this prestigious prize for a film that represents Poland," Polanski said.

Polanski, 68, now lives in France after a turbulent but rewarding period in the United States, where he filmed the highly acclaimed "Rosemary's Baby" and "Chinatown".

A Finnish film, "The Man Without a Past", won the runner-up Grand Prize. It also picked up the Best Actress prize for Kati Outinen, who played a compassionate Salvation Army officer in director Aki Kaurismaki's wry look at an amnesiac man rebuilding his life on society's fringe.

A Palestinian movie also dotted with intelligent humour, "Divine Intervention", was given the third-place

Jury Prize. It presents vignettes of Palestinian life under Israeli oppression around a romance.

Polanski had presented his English-language drama during the 12-day festival as "probably the most personal film I've made."

It draws on the true story of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a brilliant pianist stuck in the Warsaw ghetto, and on the childhood memories of Polanski, who went with his parents back to their native Poland two years before World War II.

Szpilman, played by US actor Adrien Brody, escapes deportation to the Nazi gas chambers by hiding in the deserted ghetto, shattered after the Polish Jews' unsuccessful uprising. He survives thanks to the help of a German officer captivated by his musical talent.

The decision by the Cannes jury -- headed by US director David Lynch and including actresses Sharon Stone and Michelle Yeoh -- surprised some critics who had given Polanski's film lukewarm reviews, accusing "The Pianist" of being too detached and stagey.

Many saw "The Man Without a Past", and "Divine Intervention", by Elia Suleiman, as more compelling fare.

Others had rooted for "Bowling for Columbine", a rollicking documentary by US satirist and social commentator Michael Moore about guns in America that won a new honour, a prize marking Cannes's 55th year.