

'Kashmir truce possible if India pulls back'

AFP, Muzaffarabad

Rebels fighting Indian rule in Kashmir will consider a truce only if India agrees to a list of demands including self-determination for Kashmiris, a guerrilla leader said Tuesday. "Look, when they accept the disputed status of Kashmir, reduce their troops, release the detainees, halt operations, then at that time if we have to lay down weapons, there is no harm in it," Syed Salahuddin, the Pakistan-based commander of the Hizbul Mujahedin guerrillas, told AFP in an interview in Muzaffarabad, the capital of the Pakistani-controlled zone of Kashmir.

Hizbul Mujahedin, the militant wing of Pakistan's largest and most powerful Islamic party Jamaat-i-Islami, was placed on a United States watchlist of terrorist organisations this month.

It is the largest of the more than one dozen guerrilla organisations waging a gruesome insurgency against Indian rule in the New Delhi-ruled zone of Kashmir for 14 years.

N Korea declares N-accord 'dead'



PHOTO: AFP

North Korean farmers in the North are seen from the South's side of the border at Panmunjom in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on Tuesday. North Korea declared on Tuesday a decade-old agreement with South Korea to keep the Korean peninsula nuclear weapons-free a "dead document" and blamed the United States for the demise of the accord.

AFP, Pyongyang

Communist North Korea on Tuesday declared a decade-old agreement with South Korea to keep the Korean peninsula nuclear weapons-free a "dead document" and blamed the United States for the demise of the accord.

In a statement denouncing Washington on the eve of a White House summit between US President George W. Bush and South Korean counterpart Roh Moo-Hyun, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the 1992 North-South pact had been nullified.

The agreement was the last legal restraint on North Korean nuclear ambitions after the Stalinist regime pulled out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and abandoned a 1994 arms control accord with the United States.

Last month China warned North Korea that pursuit of nuclear weapons would breach the joint North-South accord, while South Korea also reminded Pyongyang it was still bound by the agreement.

"The Bush administration has systematically and completely torpedoed the process of denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula," KCNA said. "The inter-Korean declaration on denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula was

thus reduced to a dead document ..."

A top South Korean official travelling with Roh said the Seoul government had received no official word from North Korea concerning the accord.

"We need a review of this problem in talks with the United States. However I think the North Korean authorities have not officially declared it nullified yet," Roh's foreign policy advisor Ban Ki-Moon told journalists.

Roh, visiting the United States on his first foreign trip since taking office in February, meets with Bush at the White House on Wednesday.

The two leaders will discuss the seven-month-old nuclear crisis sparked by Pyongyang's reported admission in October that it was developing nuclear weapons through an enriched uranium programme.

US officials believe that North Korea has already diverted enough plutonium from a separate nuclear programme frozen under the now-defunct 1994 accord for one or two atomic bombs.

Washington is insisting that Pyongyang scrap its nuclear programmes as a first step before negotiations to resolve the crisis can progress. North Korea wants Washington to drop its "hostile" policy towards the Stalinist regime

first.

In a separate dispatch, KCNA said it was this hostile US policy that had soured North Korea's efforts to improve ties with South Korea and Japan and compelled the Stalinist state to build its own "deterrent force."

The South Korean president is an advocate of engagement with the North but has been increasingly critical of the Pyongyang regime while Japan has frozen efforts begun last year to normalize ties with North Korea.

The United States said North Korea had admitted possessing nuclear weapons during exploratory talks in Beijing last month, and was reprocessing thousands of spent fuel rods that could provide plutonium for several more within months.

KCNA said the lesson North Korea had learned from the US-led war in Iraq was to arm itself with a "deterrent force" capable of repelling any attack.

North Korea frequently accuses the United States of planning a preemptive strike. Pyongyang warned that it would meet force with force.

"The DPRK (North Korea) will increase its self-defensive capacity strong enough to destroy aggressors at a single stroke," KCNA said.

New computer virus spreading rapidly

REUTERS, Los Angeles

A new and complex computer virus called "Fizzer" spread rapidly across the Internet on Monday, infecting computers across the world via e-mail and the file-swapping service Kazaa, computer security experts said.

Businesses in Asia were the first to report the attack, followed by reports of tens of thousands of infections in Europe, and experts were expecting more cases in North America.

"It first appeared last Thursday and started out rather slowly," said Vincent Gullotto, who heads up an anti-virus response Team at Network Associates in Beaverton, Oregon.

Fizzer was a complex virus that combined previously known tactics from other malicious viruses, Gullotto said.

There was no threat that Fizzer would cause widespread damage similar to the disruption caused by the "SQL Slammer" in January, which bogged down computer networks across the globe, Gullotto said.

Instead, Fizzer appears as an e-mail with an attention-grabbing subject line that is activated once a user opens an attached file.

Pak terrorism must end first for talks: Vajpayee

AFP, Shimla

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee reiterated Tuesday that Pakistan must stop supporting Kashmir rebels before New Delhi begins talks with Islamabad.

A call from the Pakistani leadership for starting an "unconditional" dialogue does not have meaning as "it is essential that cross-border terrorism must end," the Press Trust of India news agency quoted the premier as saying.

"Without that, how can a climate for talks be created?" he told reporters as he began a summer vacation in the Himalayan resort of Manali north of here.

But he stopped short of setting a condition for talks.

"We are not putting any conditions, but a climate to hold the parleys should be created," Vajpayee was quoted saying.

Vajpayee's remarks come a day after Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha said the easing of tensions between India and Pakistan will end in a summit, but only after a step-by-step process dealing with issues of concern.

Sinha, speaking to NDTV television, said an end to violence in Kashmir was "a practical necessity" but also did not call it a precondition.

Vajpayee stunned political observers on April 18 when in a rare address in Kashmir he offered

friendship to Pakistan.

Vajpayee's initiative was reciprocated by his Pakistani counterpart Zafarullah Jamali, who telephoned the Indian leader and has proposed the two countries restore diplomatic, transport and sporting relations.

Bilateral dialogue has been stalled since July 2001, when Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf held a summit in the Taj Mahal town of Agra that deadlocked largely over Kashmir.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been at crisis level since a December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based Islamic militants.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training rebels in Kashmir. Pakistan denies the charge but offers open moral and diplomatic support to the "struggle for self-determination" in India's sole Muslim-majority state.

Meanwhile, Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said Tuesday that India and Pakistan had already begun confidence-building measures to ease tensions between the nuclear rivals.

"The roadmap is being drawn now," Fernandes told reporters here. "At the moment confidence-building measures are going on and it will take time. One should not rush into it now."

"Nobody can fix a time in matters of this nature," he said without

giving further detail.

"One has to live with hope (otherwise) there is no focus in living," he said when asked whether the talks would yield tangible results.

He said the infiltration of Islamic rebels from Pakistani to Indian Kashmir, a key sticking point in the two countries' relations, was down but could rise again.

"Infiltration has its ups and down. At the moment it is a little down. That does not mean tomorrow it will not go up," he said.

Addressing employees of state-run electronics maker Bharat Electronics, Fernandes said no nation could forever live in a state of conflict.

"At one point conflicts have to be resolved. All wars are finally settled at the table. They may end insofar as the use of weapons are concerned but it is ultimately settled at the table.

"To settle one does not have to wait until the last round has been fired," he said.

Fernandes said the surprise peace move with Pakistan announced by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on April 18 in restive Kashmir was appreciated around the world.

"There might be some people who are not happy about it. Some colleagues wonder in fact (if) this was the right thing to do," he said.

AFP, Mumbai

Pakistani legislators on a peace mission in India suggested Tuesday the two countries start joint patrols of the disputed Kashmir border to resolve the key sticking issue between the arch-enemy neighbours.

The leader of the delegation, which is visiting amid sudden hopes for peace between India and Pakistan, also recommended that a neutral body monitor the Kashmir frontier.

"There has to be face-to-face talk on the Kashmir issue and from our side Pakistan has to be honest and not beat around the bush," said Sardar Saleem Jan Mazari, a Pakistani MP who is leading the 12-strong team that has already visited New Delhi.

But he stuck to Pakistan's denial of Indian charges that Islamabad sends Islamic rebels into Indian Kashmir to fight in the 14-year rebellion there.

"Our stand is clear that there is no cross-border terrorism, but how do we satisfy India? One way is to have joint patrolling of the Kashmir border or set up a neutral body whom we both trust to oversee the issue," Mazari told an industry gathering in India's financial capital Bombay.

Mazari said the dispute over Kashmir can be solved only through peaceful initiatives and not at gunpoint.

"In my view the part of Kashmir which is with us (Pakistan) cannot

be taken by force at gunpoint and the part which is with you (India) also cannot be taken by force," he said.

"Or we give freedom to Kashmiris. These are the only options available, unless a new one is worked out by the respective governments."

He said some factions in both countries opposed the peace moves and were attempting to derail the peace process.

"There are some people from both sides who do not want both the countries to come together. But we have to unite and defeat these forces," Mazari said.

The visit by the parliamentarians, organised by the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, a non-governmental voluntary association with representatives from both countries, comes amid a sudden thaw in bilateral tension.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee stunned political observers April 18 when, in a rare public address in Kashmir, he offered a hand of friendship to Pakistan.

This month the Indian and Pakistani governments have announced the resumption of diplomatic and air links, severed in December 2001 after a deadly attack on India's parliament which New Delhi blamed on gunmen backed by Islamabad.

The attack triggered the mobilisation of a million troops to the two

countries' common borders and brought them to the brink of war.

India and Pakistan are bitterly divided over the Himalayan terri-

tory of Kashmir, which they both control in part but claim in whole.

More than 38,000 people have died in the Kashmir insurgency

since 1989, according to Indian figures. Separatists and Pakistan put the toll at more than double that.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani legislators Ishaq Khakwani (L), Shakeela Rashid (C) and M.P Bhandara (R) walks out of a guesthouse on their way for a visit of Kolkata on Tuesday. Thirteen Pakistani legislators are visiting India on a "peace and goodwill mission" aimed at strengthening frayed ties between the two South Asian rivals.

Musharraf agrees he can't hold two posts

AP, Islamabad

In an attempt to break a political standoff, Pakistan's military government has agreed that President Pervez Musharraf cannot be both president and army chief of staff, a cabinet minister said on Tuesday.

Islamic hard-liners, who gained a powerful voice in parliament following last October's general elections, have stymied proceedings in the legislature, demanding Musharraf choose to be either a civilian president or army chief of staff.

"President Musharraf ... agrees that he cannot keep the two offices. But a decision on when he leaves

the army will take time," said Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed. "He cannot give a date for that."

Musharraf was made president for five years in a referendum held last year.

"The government and opposition have agreed that he cannot keep the two posts. ... He has to decide which post he leaves," said Hafiz Hussain Ahmad, a lawmaker with the six-party Islamic alliance that forms one of the largest opposition blocs in the National Assembly, or Lower House of Parliament.

A special committee of opposition and government members

met late Monday to try to break the 12-week-old political deadlock. They were to meet again Tuesday.

Musharraf, who came to power in a bloodless coup in October 1999, later appointed himself president through a referendum and also assumed sweeping powers, including the authority to dismiss the parliament and prime minister.

Opposition parties have protested against the situation. Pakistan's constitution says the president should be elected by Parliament, which has a Senate or upper house and a National Assembly or lower house.

Lanka takes up political crisis with US

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's cohabitation government Tuesday discussed the tense stand-off between the president and the premier with a top US envoy here to urge both sides to unite for the sake of peace.

Constitutional Affairs Minister G. L. Peiris said the government took up the latest political crisis with Christina Rocca, the US assistant secretary of state for South Asia.

"Informally we have discussed all aspects, including the latest situation," Peiris told reporters here as Rocca was holding talks with Sri Lankan leaders on the island's stalled peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepal's Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala (C) and Nepal's Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist General Secretary Madhav Kumar (R) take part in a demonstration in Kathmandu on Monday. Some 10,000 protesters marched in the Nepalese capital protesting a police baton-charge on a similar demonstration a day earlier that denounced King Gyanendra.