

Indo-Israel ties a threat to regional peace: Pakistan

ANI, Lahore

Growing ties between India and Israel in the defence sector would pose a serious threat to regional peace in South Asia, said Pakistan's Defence Minister.

In an apparent reference to the US sanction to India to go ahead and buy three Phalcon air-warning systems from Israel, Rao Sikandar Iqbal said such developments could disturb the balance of power in South Asia.

The Phalcon systems were originally meant to be sold to China, but objections from Washington prevented the deal

from going through. Tel Aviv then approached New Delhi and pending relevant government-to-government guarantees, the purchase is expected to be finalized.

According to sources in New Delhi, the Phalcons will augment India's existing defence requirements considerably.

Online News said Iqbal was talking to media persons at his residence in Okara City, which is located 127 km southwest of Lahore.

Commenting on senior Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman's

visit to India, he said that it was private one. Rehman's views on improving Indo-Pakistan ties and on the disputed Kashmir issue were his own and not a reflection of the federal government's stance, he added.

Pakistan, he said, would continue to extend political, moral and diplomatic support to Kashmir "freedom" movement.

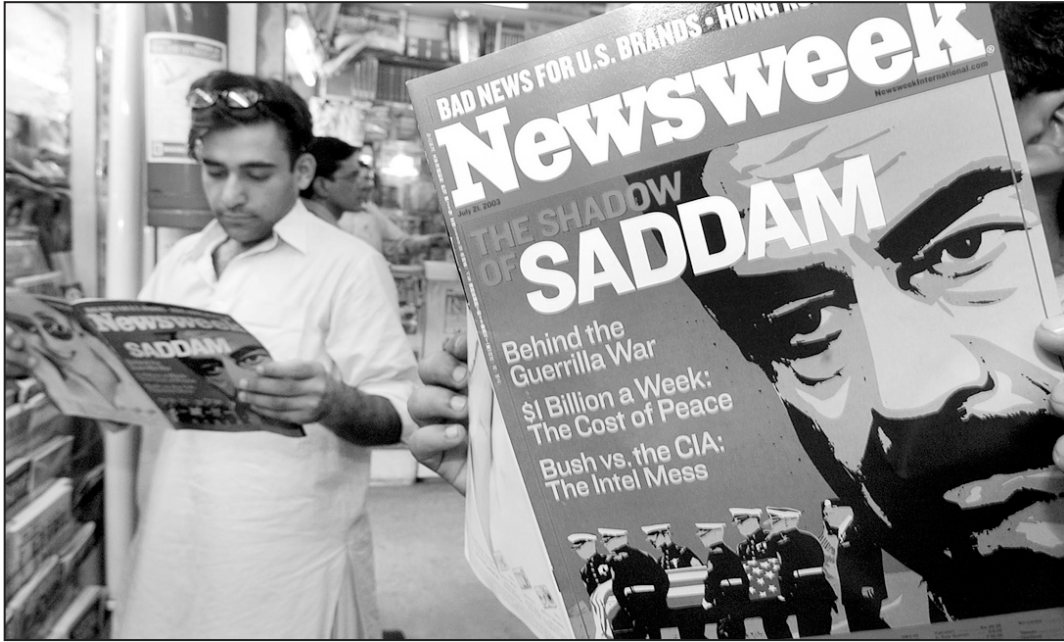
On the tension prevailing on Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan, Iqbal reiterated that no troops had crossed over to create disturbances in Afghan territory.

He was responding to Afghan

and US allegations of Islamabad extending covert support to disbanded elements of the ousted Taliban regime, helping them to regroup and to infiltrate into southern and eastern Afghanistan.

Relations between the two countries have taken a downward curve over the past month, with both sides trading charges on this issue. The Pakistan embassy in Kabul was also attacked and was shut down for some time because of this.

Iqbal insisted that misunderstandings between Pakistan and Afghanistan had been removed.



Pakistani readers look at the US based weekly magazine, Newsweek, at bookstall in Islamabad on Thursday. Pakistan has banned the latest edition of US weekly magazine Newsweek because it carries material likely to incite Muslim religious sentiments.

India, Pakistan still indecisive over resuming rail links

ANI, Karachi

India and Pakistan continue to remain indecisive about the timing for resumption of rail links between the two countries.

According to Ghaus Bukhsh Khan Maher, Pakistan's Railway Minister, Islamabad and New Delhi are debating which train to send first across the border separating the two countries—a goods train or the Samjhauta Express.

"The only impediment to the restoration of rail links between the two countries is that India wants the process to start with the transportation of goods, while Pakistan favours exchanging passenger trains first," The News quoted Maher as saying.



Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri smiles before addressing her speech during the opening of the 5th Asia and Europe Foreign Ministers meeting in Denpasar on Thursday. Foreign ministers from 25 countries in Asia and Europe hold talks on the situation in Myanmar, where democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained for nearly two months, the North Korean nuclear crisis and terrorism.

'Asia, Europe should not impose will on each other'

AFP, Nusa Dua

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri on Thursday formally opened a meeting of Asian and European foreign ministers, urging the two sides to respect differences and not impose their will on each other.

Megawati made the call at the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bali, where there are divisions on how to handle the Myanmar issue.

The Europeans have imposed political and economic sanctions to pressure military-ruled Myanmar to release democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi while the Asians prefer the problem to be resolved through diplomacy.

The Asians have rejected a European proposal to have a special agenda on Myanmar at the ministerial meeting although the Nobel peace prize winner's detention is a key topic along the conference corridors.

Megawati did not refer to Myanmar in her opening remarks but warned that much time and resources would be lost unless the two continents are realistic in accepting and respecting their

differences.

She said that based on experience "it is essential to build mutual understanding, refrain from the imposition of will, and respect each other when we are determined to engage in cooperation, especially between different groupings."

"This is particularly true when cooperation involved countries which are different in culture, level of socio-economy, and in many other aspects of their lives," she said.

Megawati said Indonesia's experience, where "differences and diversity have no comparison in many places, not even Europe," had enabled the people to build tolerance and to respect differences.

"It is within the Asia-Europe partnership that I would like to underline that we need to be really sincere, honest and earnest to accept and respect differences."

"Admittedly, we have wasted (much time) without really accomplishing substantive and concrete benefit to our peoples in our joint efforts to carry out our vision into the 21st century," she said.

Opposition diatribe against Fernandes continues

PTI, New Delhi

Continuing their boycott of Defence Minister over the Tehelka expose, Congress, Left and other opposition parties on Thursday walked out of Lok Sabha as soon as George Fernandes rose to reply to a query during question hour.

Soon after Speaker Manohar Joshi asked VM Sudheeran (Cong) to put a question to Defence Minister, the member declined to do so.

As Fernandes rose to reply to a query from GJ Javiya (BJP), Congress members rose in their seats protesting against the minister answering questions.

They along with Left party and RJD members then staged a walk-out.

The Congress and other Opposition parties have been protesting against Fernandes' re-induction into the Union Cabinet saying he is still to be cleared in the Tehelka expose.

Annan calls for peaceful Kashmiri resolution

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan Wednesday urged India and Pakistan to pursue a peaceful resolution over the dispute Kashmir state after the killing of Hindu pilgrims in an attack on a temple in the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir.

Seven Hindus were killed and 42 injured in the attack Monday night on crowds gathered to receive free food near the town of Katra on their way to the shrine of Vaishnodevi in Indian-administered Kashmir.

The shrine is visited by thousands of Hindus each year.

"The Secretary General is deeply concerned by the increase in violence in Jammu and Kashmir in the past two days and expresses his condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives," Annan's spokesman said in a statement.

"The Secretary General reiterates his condemnation of all acts of terrorism," he said.

"At the same time, he urges those concerned to exercise restraint following these tragic incidents and encourages the governments of India and Pakistan to continue their recent efforts to resolve their differences peacefully through normalization of diplomatic relations, confidence-building measures and renewed dialogue," said the statement.

5 Asian nations concerned by amphetamine scourge

AFP, Bangkok

Ministers from five Asian nations said Thursday they were deeply concerned by an alarming increase in the production of illegal amphetamines and agreed to intensify cooperation to control the trade.

Ministers from China, Laos, India, Myanmar and Thailand responsible for narcotics suppression signed the Chiang Rai Declaration on drug control after meeting at the northern Thai town.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who opened the talks Thursday expressed confidence that the region's drugs crisis could be resolved.

"I believe that the drugs problem will be improved because all five countries have frankly discussed the issue and China and India have agreed to control precursor chemicals," he told reporters.

The declaration committed the ministers to strengthen cooperation in addressing the illicit production and distribution of banned substances and controlling imports of the chemicals used to make them.

'Govt committed to protecting Taj Mahal'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian government has asserted that it is committed to protecting the Taj Mahal, the 17th century monument of love, in Agra.

"The government will ensure protection and preservation of the monument and the areas around it," Indian Culture Minister Jagmohan said in his reply to a discussion in Lok Sabha, the lower house of Indian Parliament, last evening.

The discussion was held on the controversial Taj Heritage Corridor project which had sought to be constructed linking the Agra Fort with the Taj Mahal. The project was to have featured shopping mall, restaurant and recreation park as per a proposal reportedly cleared by the government of Uttar Pradesh state where Agra is located.

Uttar Pradesh government, headed by Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati, has ordered a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into how construction work on the Heritage Corridor had begun.

It was earlier this month that the Indian government swung into action to stop construction of the Corridor following media reports on it. During the discussion, Jagmohan came in for praise from opposition members of Lok Sabha for his timely intervention in halting the construction of the corridor.

'Army fears more suicide attacks by Kashmiris'

AFP, Srinagar

India's army commander for Kashmir, who survived a suicide attack by an Islamic rebel two days ago, has warned that militants are planning more such attacks to boost their morale.

"The fact I would like to bring across is that these (suicide) attacks will be there as we are maintaining relentless pressure on them (militants)," said Lieutenant General Hari Prasad, the chief of Indian army's northern command, which takes care of Kashmir's security.

"Probably they (suicide attacks) will increase," he told a news conference late Wednesday at the army headquarters in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-administered Kashmir.

Prasad received minor shrapnel injuries when an Islamic rebel Tuesday attacked a group of officers at Tanda garrison near the Indian Kashmir winter capital Jammu. A brigadier was killed and two

other generals injured.

Prasad said he had been supervising an operation in the Tanda garrison when the militant aimed grenades at them.

"The militant was shot and the two grenades exploded in his hands, resulting in minor injuries to me and my colleagues," he said.

The group of officers had been inspecting the carnage caused when two other militants earlier Tuesday raided the military camp and shot dead seven soldiers before they themselves were gunned down.

Prasad said the attacks were "part of the complete war" Indian troops are fighting within Kashmir.

Last month 12 soldiers died in a similar attack in Jammu.

Prasad said there was not much soldiers could do to prevent such attacks.

"When a man is prepared to give his life there is very little you can do to stop him," said Prasad. "But we will definitely try to bring our casualty level to zero."

Maoists set pre-conditions for talks with Nepal govt

PTI, Kathmandu

Two days after Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa invited the Maoists for the third round of talks, the rebels have sent a letter to the government saying they were ready to sit for dialogue provided their pre-conditions, including release of imprisoned rebels and restriction of troop movement, are fulfilled.

The government has received a letter from the Maoists in response to a letter it had sent to them last week urging a third round of talks, Information and Communication Minister and spokesman of the government's dialogue team Kamal Thapa said.

He, however, did not elaborate what pre-conditions the Maoists had included in the letter.

The government will make its stand public after thoroughly studying the content of the letter received from the Maoists, he was

quoted as saying by Radio Nepal.

However, informed sources said the major pre-conditions laid down by the Maoists, include releasing the Maoists from jail, restricting army movement outside their barracks and guaranteeing full security to the members of the talks team.

The Maoists reply came a week after Communication Minister Kamal Thapa wrote a letter to the Maoist chief negotiator Baburam Bhattarai asking him to resume dialogue.

The peace talks were stalled following conclusion of the second round of talks held between the government and the Maoists in Kathmandu on May 9.

During the second round of talks the Maoists and the government representatives differed over the issue of restricting army movement, which caused delay in the talks.



Executive Director of Transparency International, Bangladesh Barrister Manzoor Hasan was made Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) recently. Picture shows Queen Elizabeth II bestowing the OBE award on Manzoor Hasan on July 16 at a simple ceremony at the Buckingham Palace.