

Pakistan denies aiding Taliban, other militants

AFP, United Nations

Pakistan's UN ambassador fired back Wednesday at allegations his country was aiding Taliban and other elements trying to undermine neighbouring Afghanistan and its presidential election.

Taking aim at remarks by the UN envoy to Afghanistan, Ambassador Munir Akram denied the charges and said they called into question the objectivity of the world body.

"The threats to Afghanistan security lie inside Afghanistan," Akram said in an unusually testy speech at a meeting of the UN Security Council called to discuss the situation in the country ahead of the October 9 poll.

"There are nevertheless quarters who are seeking to shift the blame on Pakistan," he said.

"There seems to be a compulsion on the part of certain power centres and some individuals to find scapegoats for failing to address the real security threats in Afghanistan. Even some (UN) officials seem to be playing into their hands or playing their game," he said.

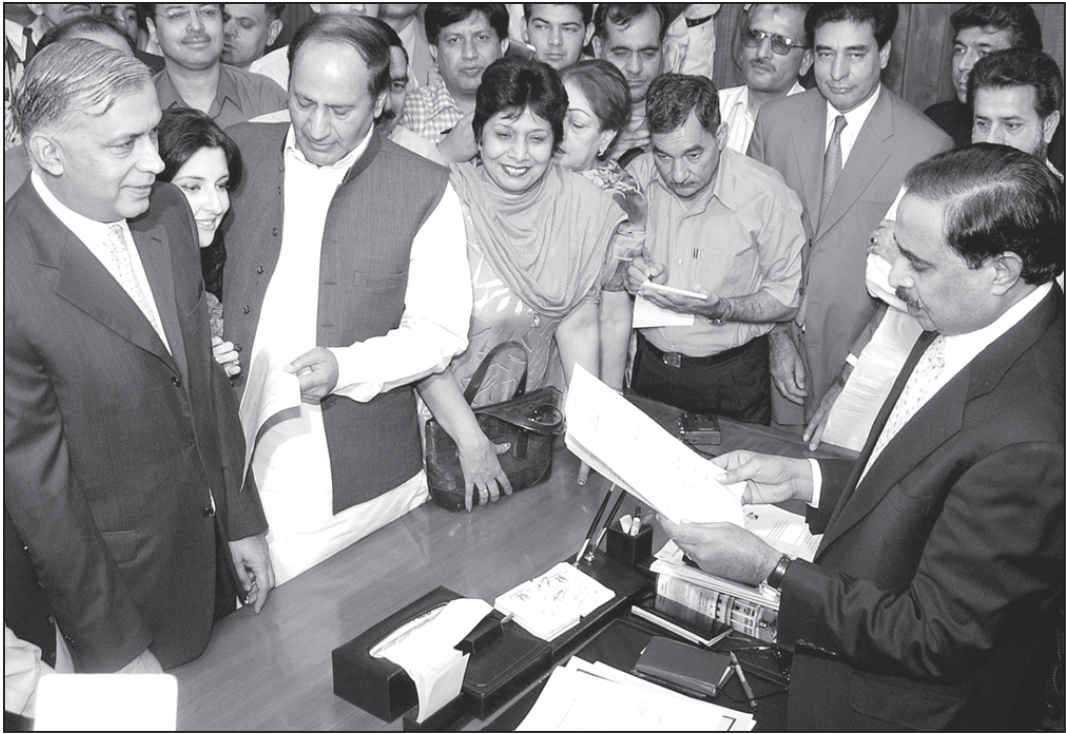


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani in-coming prime minister Shaukat Aziz (L) submits his nomination papers for the post of prime minister to an unidentified official (R) at the Parliament House in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan's opposition parties put forward their jailed leader Javed Hashmi as candidate in a rubber-stamp parliamentary vote for prime minister against the ruling party candidate and former finance minister Shaukat Aziz.

Pak opposition fields candidate for PM's post

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's opposition parties yesterday put forward their jailed leader as candidate in a rubber-stamp parliamentary vote for prime minister against the ruling party candidate, ex-finance minister Shaukat Aziz.

"I asked my colleagues to field Javed Hashmi as he has been jailed unlawfully," Amin Fahim, president of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, told reporters.

Bhutto's party is a partner with Hashmi's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in the opposition Alliance for Restoration of Democracy.

Hashmi was jailed in April for 23 years for treason after being found guilty of distributing a letter which he said was from army officers criticising President Pervez Musharraf, who is also army chief.

Musharraf chose Aziz to replace Zafarullah Jamali, who resigned suddenly in June after months of rumours that the president was unhappy with his performance.

Tigers testing tolerance threshold, warns Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday warned Tamil Tiger rebels that they were testing the limits of the government's tolerance with their stepped-up attacks against political rivals.

Government spokesman Man-gala Samaraweera said the Tiger killings undermined the Norwegian-backed process aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed, but added that the government was keen to avoid a return to war.

"We don't want war," Samaraweera told reporters. "For the sake of peace, we are willing to be very, very patient."

"The recent incidents are not only a strain on the ceasefire but they test the threshold of tolerance of the government and the international community."

Samaraweera, who is also the minister for ports, said the Tigers must match their words with deeds and return to the

negotiating table to resolve allegations that the military was backing a rival Tiger faction.

He denied that security forces were supporting the breakaway faction of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The government had earlier said it could not rule out individual members of the security forces acting on their own, but there was no "officially sanctioned involvement" in supporting the rebel renegades.

Tigers were also accused of setting up new bunkers near government military installations in the island's northeast and engaging in gun-running despite an Oslo-brokered truce that has been in place since February 2002.

The Tigers on Wednesday rejected government claims that they were engaged in gun-running and insisted that they will not enter talks with the local military to review the implementation of the truce.

The LTTE told the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission that they had only carried out a naval exercise and were not gun-running.

The Tigers' political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan told mission chief Trond Furuhoedve that they would not enter truce review meetings in protest at alleged army support for renegades.

"The LTTE would not resume meeting with the Sri Lankan armed forces in the east until the killings of their cadres in the region are stopped," Thamilselvan was quoted as saying on the pro-rebel Tamilnet website.

Talks between the government and the LTTE have been on hold since April last year.

Four previous attempts at a political solution to the island's ethnic conflict ended in more bloodshed. More than 60,000 people have been killed since 1972.

Rebels bomb buses in Assam: 5 killed

AFP, Guwahati

Five people were killed and 42 wounded yesterday when militants blew up a passenger bus and another bus carrying soldiers and their families in northeastern India, officials said.

Two people were killed and 33 wounded, some critically, when explosives concealed in a sack blew apart a crowded bus in the town of Gossaigaon, 270km west of Assam state's main city of Guwahati, they said.

"Passengers spotted an unidentified sack inside the bus and as they were trying to disembark, the explosion took place, blowing apart the vehicle," Kokrajhar district magistrate Asish Bhutani told AFP.

Police said the casualties would have been higher but the bomb exploded after several passengers got off for breakfast at a roadside restaurant.

Police suspect the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which is fighting for an independent homeland in Assam, was behind the attack.

An hour later a bus belonging to the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF) hit a landmine in the town of Paikani, 140km west of Guwahati.

Two soldiers and a six-year-old girl, the daughter of a trooper going on holiday, were killed, said police Inspector General Khagen Sharma.

The bus was carrying soldiers and their families from a border post to Guwahati. Nine people were wounded.

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi called for peace talks with ULFA and accused both Bangladesh and Myanmar of harbouring cadres of the banned separatist group.

"We want the ULFA to come for talks. The people of Assam want the ULFA to stop these barbaric attacks on civilians and come for negotiations," Gogoi said, adding, however, the rebels did not appear to be ready to talk.

"The ULFA it seems does not want to come for talks and the violent attacks are a pointer ... The ULFA has declared a war on the people of Assam and we cannot tolerate such cowardly attacks," he said.

"We want the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to crack down on ULFA camps located in their countries ... We have definite reports of the ULFA having bases inside these two neighbouring countries."

Bangladesh has denied the presence of Indian rebel groups in its territory. Myanmar has assured New Delhi that it will expel any Indian insurgents it finds.

Blast kills 1 in S Thailand on eve of PM's trip

AFP, Hat Yai

A bomb ripped through a food market in Thailand's troubled Muslim south yesterday killing one person and injuring at least 24 others, including police and soldiers, on the eve of a visit by the prime minister, police and military said.

The blast happened at 7:30 am (0300 GMT) in Narathiwat province's Sukhirin district bordering Malaysia, police said.

"The dead victim was Atachai Boon-in, age 45, the younger brother of a shop owner," Lieutenant Colonel Amnuay Pongsawat, deputy Sukhirin police commander, told AFP.

Among the injured were six policemen, including two in critical condition, and four Thai navy soldiers, two of whom are also critical.

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is Friday set to begin a visit to the troubled region, where an Islamist separatist insurgency has raged since January, leaving more than 280 people dead and hundreds more wounded.

"The bomb was tied to a motorcycle which was parked inside the Mamong market. We initially suspect it was the work of the insurgents who are conducting a campaign of unrest," Sukhirin police commander Colonel Suwit Choensiri said.

Manmohan loses patience with opposition

AFP, New Delhi

India's mild-mannered prime minister finally lost his patience with the Hindu nationalist-led opposition which brought parliament to a halt during his first 90 days in office, reports said yesterday.

Newspapers quoted former defence minister George Fernandes as saying Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "threw" down on a table budget proposals which opposition leaders presented to him in his office on Wednesday.

The premier refused to listen to them, Fernandes said.

The Congress prime minister asked why the opposition leaders were visiting him to give their views on the budget after they had refused to take part in a parliamentary debate on the subject, the newspapers said.

"You make noise in the House and now are asking me to accept it? If you have to say anything, speak on that in the House," the Pioneer daily said Singh told former deputy premier Lal Krishna Advani and Fernandes.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said Singh, 71, had

been "contemptuous, impolite and discourteous." The office of the technocrat-turned-premier denied this.

"Manmohan Singh cannot be discourteous to a fly. To say he was rude or that he flung down the note is difficult to accept," a spokesman for the prime minister told reporters.

He said the premier later Wednesday called BJP leaders to say he had meant no disrespect, only that he wanted the opposition to take part in parliamentary debates.

Fernandes said, "The prime minister threw the note on the table ... His behaviour indicated he wanted us to leave the room."

"In my 50 years in public office I have dealt with many PMs but no one has behaved like this. We were out of his room in two-and-a-half minutes," the Hindustan Times quoted Fernandes as saying.

Earlier this week, the Oxford-educated Singh lamented the BJP-led turmoil in parliament over the inclusion of three politicians facing criminal cases in his Congress party-led government.



PHOTO: AFP

Nuns of Missionaries of Charity pray before a picture of Mother Teresa on the 94th birth anniversary of Mother Teresa, while standing beside her mausoleum at the Mother House in Kolkata yesterday. Some 200 nuns of the house together with a number of volunteers took part in the morning service to mark the day. Mother Teresa was born August 26, 1910, in what is now Skopje, Macedonia.

Prisoners 'to get Afghan trials'

BBC ONLINE, Kabul

The American military in Afghanistan has said prisoners it is holding there will eventually be handed over for trial in Afghan courts.

A US military spokesman said most of the detainees posed no major threat, but that the Afghan judicial system was unable yet to deal with them.

It is unclear if the move forms part of a long-delayed review by the US of its Afghan detention centres.

The report was prompted by revelations of abuse in Iraq.

The US military said earlier this year it was holding more than 300 people in about 20 locations across Afghanistan, most at its Bagram and Kandahar bases.

None has been charged with any crime.

At a news conference on Wednesday, US spokesman Major Scott Nelson said most did not pose a threat to international security.

Anyone considered to be in this category had been moved to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

However, remaining detainees had to stay in US custody, he said, because they were still a threat to Afghanistan.

He said the country's judicial system was still not up to the task of trying and punishing them.

2 Maoists shot dead during strike in S Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese troops yesterday shot dead two Maoist rebels when the guerrillas fighting to overthrow the monarchy blocked vehicles in the south of the country, an official said.

The incident occurred a day after the rebels lifted a week-long blockade of Kathmandu that aimed to stop traffic from entering or leaving the ancient capital.

The two men were killed as they were trying to force traffic to stop in a one-day strike in the southern districts of Sarlahi, Siraha and Dhanusa, an army official said.

The rebels called the strike to protest the alleged killing by troops of five Maoists in the area earlier this month, according to a statement by a senior rebel commander Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal.

Police said normal activities in the three districts had ground to a halt, with schools and shops keeping their doors shuttered.

The rebels, who control much of the countryside, have warned they would resume their blockade of Kathmandu in a month unless the government meets their demands, including an end to the Maoists' classification as a terrorist group.



PHOTO: AFP

In this picture taken on August 22, Nepalese women sit with their fruit and vegetable produce at a small market place in Gorkha, 150km west of Kathmandu, where the Maoist rebels say they are setting up a more just system for Nepal's impoverished agrarian majority. The rebels, who are inspired by Chinese revolutionary Mao Zedong and Peru's ruthless Shining Path, claim to have set up parallel governments in the countryside that serve Nepal's impoverished rural majority.

Flash floods wash away 29 in Uttaranchal

PTI, BBC ONLINE, Khatima

Twenty-nine labourers were washed away early yesterday in flash floods in Kailashu river at Akrouli village in Udhampur Nagar district.

"Twenty-nine people were washed away in the floods in Akrouli," Udhampur Nagar district magistrate Sunderlal Munyal said.

At least thirty labourers, sleeping in an open area in Akrouli, sought refuge in a tractor trolley to save themselves from the rushing waters, official reports said.

However, the strong current washed away the trolley, taking with it 29 labourers, they said adding that only one person managed to swim to safety.

The floods on Kailash river in Uttaranchal state have also trapped nearly 150 people, they say.

Many of those feared dead were labourers who were engaged in mining work in the area on Thursday morning.

Floods and landslides are common in South Asia during the monsoon season when annual rains combine with melting snow from the Himalayas.

A senior official of Uttaranchal state, Sunder Lal, told the BBC that the water level in Kailash river was continuing to rise because of heavy rainfall in the area.

The officials have requested the Indian Air Force to deploy their helicopters to rescue the stranded villagers, he said.

Hundreds of people have died and an estimated 10 million people have been hit by severe monsoon flooding in large parts of north-east India, Nepal and Bangladesh last month.

Five thousand people in India were evacuated from the northern Himachal Pradesh state earlier this month as fears grow that a lake in Tibet may overflow and flood the state.

Many of the flood victims say the disasters - which happen most years during the monsoon season - could be avoided if South Asian governments co-operated in managing water resources.

Taliban threaten Rumsfeld, vow 'flood of jihad'

AFP, Dubai

Afghanistan's Taliban fighters threatened yesterday to kill US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and vowed "a flood of jihad" against the Americans, in a statement posted on their website.

"We tell Rumsfeld: you may have escaped unharmed from our swords, but you will not escape again," said "the information office of the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan" in the statement accompanied by footage of Taliban "victories" in Afghanistan.

The statement also promised "a flood of jihad (holy war) ... against the Americans and their allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Two rockets landed in the north of Kabul and in a neighboring village just hours after a brief visit by Rumsfeld during which he met Afghan President Hamid Karzai on August 11. No one was injured in the attack and one of the rockets failed to explode.

The statement, posted on (<http://www.uploadyourimage.com/1/bannerFarog.gif>), was accompanied by three video films purporting to show "the Pakistani forces' losses" from Taliban attacks.

"We give the Islamic nation the glad tidings: jihad in Afghanistan is constantly escalating ... America claims that the mujahadeen (Islamic fighters) are divided ... (But) thanks be to God, the mujahadeen are standing fast and fighting under the banner of (Taliban spiritual leader) Mullah Mohammad Omar," the statement said.

The Taliban, a fundamentalist militia, were ousted from power in US-led military operations in late 2001 in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the United States which Washington blamed on the al-Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden, who was sheltered by Mullah Omar.

Gujarat govt faces fire as riot probe drags on

AFP, Ahmedabad

Police and officials in Gujarat are slowly starting to reveal how Hindu nationalists ruling the western Indian state either turned a blind eye or deliberately inflamed deadly Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002.

An inquiry panel into the riots, in which some 2,000 people -- mainly Muslims -- were killed, has been hearing testimony for the past few weeks from policemen and bureaucrats who were tasked with containing the bloodletting.

Many told the two judges on the panel that they had forgotten details of the tumultuous events following the torching of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims and activists on February 27, 2002.

The attack by what was allegedly a

Muslim mob at Gujarat's Godhra railway station killed 59 people and sparked savage reprisals in which angry Hindus chased down and lynched Muslims across the state.

Grilled by prosecutor Mukul Sinha on the reprisal killings, officer after officer pleaded memory losses and lapses.

But after days and days of non-committal nods and grunts, Sinha began to strike paydirt -- a police inspector told how the police control room had issued a blanket order against using radios to relay information on the rioting.

"There were instructions not to send messages to the city police control room over the wireless sets as frequencies would be jammed," Police Inspector K. K. Mysorewala said when pushed by the

prosecutor as to why news of widespread rioting had not reached senior officials for hours.

More than 100 Muslims were killed in the area under Mysorewala's jurisdiction on February 28 alone, including 83 who were butchered and their bodies flung onto a bonfire.

State and city police heads had earlier told the prosecutor they did not come to know of the grisly killings until late on the night of the 28th.

A senior bureaucrat then told judges G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah that Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi had taken a decision on the day of the Godhra carnage that all the charred bodies of the Hindus should be taken to Ahmedabad.