

## Kashmiri leaders want role in Indo-Pak peace talks

REUTERS, Muzaffarabad

Separatist leaders from Indian Kashmir visiting Pakistan's side of the disputed territory demanded yesterday to be part of a peace process to end violence in their homeland.

After receiving a heroes' welcome when they crossed the ceasefire line a day earlier, the leaders, who will meet President Pervez Musharraf next week, stood one by one before the legislative assembly of Pakistan's Kashmir to insist that New Delhi and Islamabad bring Kashmir into a three-way dialogue.

"Such a big peace process is going on but the Kashmiris are not part of it," former militant Mohammad Yasin Malik, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, told the assembly in Azad Kashmir, as Pakistan Kashmiris called.

Malik, bearded and dressed in black, warned against India,

Pakistan or any power trying to promote their own preferred Kashmiris as leaders of the people.

"Kashmiris have never accepted those who were imposed, foreign sponsored," the youthful, charismatic Malik said in Urdu, before switching to English to underline his message.

"So, I hope this favouritism will be stopped."

The speeches were broadcast live from Muzaffarabad on Pakistan state and private television channels.

The nine visitors from Indian Kashmir are expected to meet Musharraf on June 7, after he returns from a visit to the United Arab Emirates, officials said.

But before that they will go to Islamabad on Saturday for talks with Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat, Pakistan's Minister for Kashmir Affairs and the Northern Areas.

"We have a few solid proposals, we would want to share them here with the Azad Kashmir leadership

and with the leadership of Pakistan," said Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chief of the moderate faction of All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

Farooq, the spiritual leader of Kashmiri Muslims, went on to invite the Kashmiri leadership in Pakistan back to Srinagar.

Abdul Ghani Bhat, Hurriyat's spokesman, gave the most emphatic call for an end to a conflict that has cost over 45,000 lives since a Muslim separatist uprising began in 1989 in the Indian controlled Kashmir Valley.

"We want an end, end to violence, we want an end, end to insecurity, we want an end, end to indignity, we want an end, end to humiliation, we want an end, end to submission," Bhat said in a speech delivered in English.

"Let us give peace a chance," he said, echoing the John Lennon anthem.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Musharraf have called the peace process begun in early

2004 "irreversible", and a ceasefire between the nuclear rivals has largely held since November 2003.

But progress over the core dispute of Kashmir, the cause of two of the three wars India and Pakistan have fought since winning independence from Britain in 1947, remains slow.

The start of a bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar in April was the most tangible sign of progress to date.

Singh has had to overcome resistance from his own bureaucrats to allow the separatist leaders to go to Pakistan.

On the other hand, Musharraf is an assassination target for militants, some linked to al Qaeda and some of them Kashmiri, who were angered by his siding with the United States in the post-Sept 11, 2001 war on terrorism, and his search for a settlement with India.



Head of the moderate faction of the Indian Kashmir's main separatist umbrella group, All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (L), listens to the Pakistani Kashmir zone Prime Minister Sardar Sikandar Hayat during a meeting in Muzaffarabad Thursday. Muslim separatist leaders from Indian Kashmir proposed three-way talks on the decades old dispute over the Himalayan region after arriving here on an historic visit.

## US warns of attack on Jakarta hotels

REUTERS, Jakarta

The US Embassy in Jakarta warned Americans on Friday of a threat to bomb lobbies of hotels in the city, less than a week after blasts killed 22 people in an Indonesian area marked by Muslim-Christian violence.

The US embassy itself only reopened on Tuesday after closing for several days following an unspecified security threat.

An embassy statement emailed to Americans in Indonesia on Friday said the embassy had learned "there were plans by extremists to conduct bomb attacks targeting the lobbies of hotels frequented by Westerners in Jakarta."

"The attacks were to occur circa noon on an unspecified date," the statement said, adding that there was no additional information on timing or method of attack.

In recent years, Indonesia has suffered sporadic outbreaks of violence between religious groups, as well as bombing attacks blamed on Jemaah Islamiyah, a militant Islamic group linked to al-Qaeda.



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga (L) shakes hands with chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Sonia Gandhi prior to their meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Kumaratunga is on a three-day working visit to India during which she met Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and will meet other ministers.

## India offers Lanka help to redesign air-defence

Donors postpone talks with Tigers

AFP, New Delhi

India has offered to assist its southern neighbour Sri Lanka redesign its air-defence network after allegations that Tamil Tiger rebels have acquired at least two aircraft, a report said yesterday.

New Delhi told visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga it is willing to consider all proposals from Colombo, including training Sri Lankan personnel or guidance and advice in designing air defences, the Indian Express daily reported.

Colombo will send a team of senior defence officials to India to discuss the technical details, it said.

The offer was made during talks in New Delhi late Thursday between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Kumaratunga, who is on a three-day visit to India.

Kumaratunga's government

charges that the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have built an airstrip in the north and possess at least two light aircraft.

European truce monitors say they have seen the airstrip from the air but have been denied access by the rebels to investigate allegations they have aircraft.

"Those two aircraft, if they have any, represent a very serious threat," Monitoring Mission chief Hagrup Haukland said last week, adding that the issue could re-ignite the war between the Tigers and government troops.

India, which once armed and trained the Tigers, warned last month that they were acquiring aircraft.

"We are concerned about the LTTE having built an airstrip and having two aeroplanes, and there's news about more coming," India's Foreign Minister Natwar Singh said.

The Indian Express, quoting unnamed sources, said India would also help provide Sri Lanka, which has focused more on maritime than air security, with radars to improve its air-space coverage.

The island's existing radar network is used for civil aviation purposes leaving a gap for small aircraft to operate at low altitudes, it added.

Meanwhile, international donors said Thursday they had postponed a meeting with Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels amid moves by Colombo to enter into a controversial aid-sharing deal with the guerrillas.

Representatives of the World Bank and other lending institutions cancelled a planned visit Friday to the rebel-held town of Kilinochchi, where they had been expected to discuss disbursement of tsunami relief.

## Hundreds feared dead as China floods raze villages

REUTERS, Beijing

Floods caused by torrential rain have turned vast tracts of farmland in south China into muddy lakes, razed mountain villages and destroyed more than 36,000 homes, possibly killing hundreds of people.

"It looks like people's houses were just swept away by a broom," Zhou Deqing, manager of a mine in the town of Taizhimiao in Hunan province, told Reuters by telephone on Friday.

Three days of rain in the provinces of Hunan, Sichuan and Guizhou caused floods and mudslides, which had already killed at least 68 and left 62 missing, Xinhua news agency said.

A resident of Hunan province had said on Wednesday that the toll of dead and missing exceeded 200 -- and there has been much more rain since.

"Houses along the river banks

have been totally destroyed. Even the foundations of some homes have been washed away and trees near the river have been uprooted," said Zhou.

In worst-hit Xinshao county, mountain torrents had killed 32 people and left 45 missing, state television said on Friday, showing pictures of flattened wooden buildings and distraught villagers sorting through the debris.

The flooding is also believed to have wiped out mountain villages yet to be reached by rescuers, China Central Television said.

"We are still searching for people missing, and many troops from the armed police are involved," an official from Taizhimiao told Reuters by telephone. "We will do as much as we can as long as there is hope."

China suffers widespread flooding and drought each year, causing huge loss of life. Earthquakes are common and typhoons roar ashore from the South China Sea in the summer.

## China opposes UNSC enlargement

Japan still hopeful

AFP, United Nations

China would block any move to give Japan, India, Brazil and Germany permanent seats in an enlarged UN Security Council, China's UN ambassador Wang Guangya said Thursday.

"This is a dangerous move and certainly China will oppose it," Wang told reporters at the UN headquarters in New York.

"It will split the house and destroy the unity and also derail the whole process of discussion on big UN reforms," Wang said.

China has opposed Japan being granted permanent status on the Security Council, demanding it first correct its attitude to its wartime history. Tensions between the two countries have risen in recent months.

Brazil, Germany, India and Japan have formed a group, called G4, to lobby for permanent seats on the Security Council.

It has circulated a draft resolution, which could be voted on at the UN General Assembly in September, proposing a 25-member Security Council, 10 more than now, with six new permanent members.

Wang said China leaned toward a rival plan, proposed by Italy, Mexico and Pakistan, to enlarge the Security Council to 25 members, but without additional veto-wielding permanent members.

"We see many good points in their formula because this will expand the Security Council and this will give certain members who they believe are important a longer term," he said.

In the Italy-Mexico-Pakistan

plan, some non-permanent members could be re-elected at the end of their two-year stints on the Security Council, unlike the current practice.

The G4 nations plan to put their motion to the General Assembly if they are certain they will get the support of two thirds of the 191 UN members so that it will be passed.

Meanwhile, Japan said yesterday it still hoped to persuade China to accept a historic expansion of the UN Security Council after Beijing made clear it opposed a four-nation bid for permanent seats that includes Tokyo.

China says Japan -- which is seeking seats with Brazil, Germany and India -- must show more remorse for its aggression in the first half of the 20th century before it deserves a prestigious UN seat.

## Rumsfeld eyes stronger ties with India

China's course uncertain

AFP, Singapore

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said yesterday he expects US military ties with India to strengthen over the coming years and predicted that China's influence will decline unless it moves to a freer political system.

"It's pretty clear where India's going, and one would anticipate the relationship with India will continue to strengthen as we go through the period ahead," Rumsfeld said before he arrived here Friday afternoon.

"With respect to China, it's not completely clear which way they're going because of the tension... between the nature of their political system and the nature of their economic system," he told reporters.

Rumsfeld compared and contrasted the prospects of the two Asian giants as he flew here from Washington to attend an annual

international security conference that draws defence ministers from around the region.

In remarks to reporters travelling with him, he would not be drawn on the standoff with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program and alluded only glancingly to a Chinese military buildup that has caused concern in Washington.

But he was expected to air US concerns on both North Korea and China's military spending in a keynote speech Saturday to the conference organised by the International Institute of Strategic Studies as well as in one-on-one meetings with other defence ministers.

His comments to reporters made clear that the Pentagon is looking to India as an anchor in its security relationships in the region. Rumsfeld recalled that he made the first overtures to India within weeks of becoming defence secretary in 2001.

## Syria tested three Scud missiles

AFP, Washington

Syria test fired three Scud missiles a week ago, one of which broke up over two Turkish villages causing no injuries, in an act of defiance to the United States and the United Nations, The New York Times said yesterday quoting Israeli military officials.

The officials, who asked not to be identified, said there was nothing unusual about the missile tests -- Syria's first since 2001 -- other than the embarrassment it caused to Turkey, but that they decided to make them public because they were puzzled by US silence about them.

In Tel Aviv, the Israeli officials told the daily that the missile tests -- one older Scud B, with a range of 300km and two Scud D's with a range of 700km -- were part of a Syrian missile development project using North Korean technology.

The missiles, they said, are designed to deliver air-burst chemical weapons.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

### Pak name dropped from US watchlist

AFP, Islamabad

The United States has removed Pakistan from its watchlist on human trafficking, but Islamabad needs to do more to stamp out the practice, the US embassy said yesterday.

US Ambassador Ryan Crocker had delivered a copy of the State Department's fifth annual Trafficking in Persons report, due to be released later Friday, to Pakistani Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao on Thursday, it said in a statement.

"The report indicates that Pakistan has improved its anti-trafficking performance over the reporting period," the statement said.

Pakistan is regarded as a major hub for human trafficking and was placed on the watch list last year, but President Pervez Musharraf's government has launched a drive to tackle people smugglers.

Crocker commended Pakistan's efforts during his meeting with Sherpao but encouraged continued

progress. "We look forward to further cooperation on trafficking-in-persons issues," he was quoted as telling the minister.

Pakistan had increased trafficking-related prosecutions and convictions and strengthened implementation of key 2002 legislation to prevent human smuggling, the US embassy statement said.

It had also established an anti-trafficking unit and co-sponsored several public awareness campaigns, it added.

Pakistani authorities said earlier this year they had arrested two key suspects linked to a human smuggling mafia that has allegedly sent thousands of Pakistanis illegally to Europe in the past eight years.

Intelligence officials also investigated whether the pair had helped wanted Islamic militants to flee the country following a crackdown on extremism by Musharraf.



A Pakistani Shia Muslim woman displays a placard during an anti-government demonstration in Islamabad yesterday protesting the recent unrest in the country.

## EU constitution worries aspiring members

AP, Vienna

Stuck on the sidelines, the nations with the most to lose in the European Union's deadlock over its proposed new constitution could be the countries that don't yet belong.

As Europeans took stock Thursday of the charter's troubles, leaders and ordinary citizens in Turkey and across the former Soviet bloc worried that the crisis might conspire against their dreams of joining the EU.

Having worked tirelessly and against all odds to prepare for membership, many couldn't help but wonder whether Europe is coming apart just when they're getting their acts together.

This week's momentous repudiations by the Dutch and the French both founding members of the now 25-nation EU "shattered the very concept for a European Union," said Ivan Krastev, a political analyst in Bulgaria, which hopes to join with neighbouring Romania in 2007.

Bulgaria's independent Dnevnik newspaper echoed that bleak outlook, saying "the collapse of

enlargement verges on national tragedy."

"We witnessed Europeans rejecting something that we are struggling to achieve," said Cetin Kargin, 41, a jeweller in Turkey. The mostly Muslim nation hopes to begin membership talks in October, but many Turks now worry that EU leaders will be too distracted to bother.

Across Eastern Europe, where eight countries joined the bloc a year ago along with Cyprus and Malta, and others have been scrambling to become credible candidates, the sense of frustration was palpable.

Spurred by dreams of unprecedented prosperity, stability and freedom of movement, EU candidates like Romania have spent the last decade constructing democracies and building market economies from scratch. Having invested so much, they have the most at stake.

Many reacted cautiously to the constitution's latest setback, widely seen as a backlash against the growing power of EU headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, and of the very

expansion process that opened the club to the "new Europe."

The resistance to the treaty, whose backers believed could lead to a better-oiled economy and a higher profile for Europe internationally, "could influence the future development of the EU" by freezing enlargement, acknowledged Dmytro Svytskov, a spokesman for Ukraine's Foreign Ministry.

But the former Soviet republic "hopes that the EU's difficult internal reform will not have negative consequences for Ukraine's future membership," Svytskov said, adding that the EU's "attractiveness in the eyes of would-be members has not decreased."

In Turkey, it may work the other way.

Ordinary Turks tired of hearing that many Europeans don't want their Islamic influence in the EU, and mindful that the country's bid has fed the angst fuelling opposition to the constitution are losing interest in membership, analyst Duygu Bazoglu Sezer contends.



A relative of Kashmir municipal councillor Mohammed Ashraf wails during his funeral in Srinagar yesterday. Suspected rebels Friday gunned down the municipal councillor in the main city of revolt-hit Indian Kashmir in the latest string of political killings.

## Nepalese UN soldier killed in DR Congo

AFP, Kinshasa

A Nepalese UN peacekeeper died overnight from injuries he sustained in an attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo's troubled region of Ituri, the UN mission here announced yesterday.

The soldier was among four Nepalese peacekeepers wounded Thursday in the attack on three helicopters that came under heavy fire as they were about to take off from Lugo, in the northeastern region of Ituri, during an evacuation mission.

"He was the last one to board the helicopter and he was hit just as he was about to get on," MONUC spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Thierry Provendier told AFP.

He said the three other injured were being treated at a hospital in Bunia, the main town in Ituri, and were out of danger.

The peacekeeper's death brings to 18 the number of UN soldiers killed in the central African country since the UN mission, known as MONUC, was deployed there in 1999.

Eleven of those who died were killed in ambush attacks in the Ituri region.