

MANMOHAN WARNS

Militants may seize Pak nuclear bomb

AFP, Washington

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh warned Wednesday of "serious" consequences if Islamic militants grabbed power in Pakistan and took control of its nuclear weapons arsenal.

Singh, wrapping up a four-day visit to the United States, said the al-Qaeda terror network led by Osama bin Laden had a key base in Pakistan and that there was always the risk of Islamic militants seizing power in Pakistan.

In an interview with the CNN broadcasting network, the 72-year-old Indian leader said that he was worried about the security of

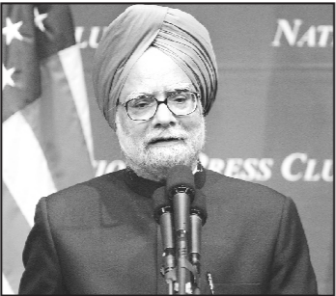
Pakistan's nuclear assets should President Pervez Musharraf be replaced.

"Well, the security of (nuclear) assets which are under control of Pakistan, I think does worry us. And I hope that credible solutions can be found today with that problem," Singh said.

Asked what specifically worried him about the nuclear weapons, he said, "Well, if they get into the hands of the Jihadi element, that could pose a serious problem."

"I hope that this does not happen. And I pray that it will not happen."

On whether he was concerned



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

that Islamic extremists in Pakistan could take charge, Singh said: "Well, there is always a danger.

"And we would like Pakistan to emerge as a moderate Islamic state, and we have a vested interest in the stability and progress in Pakistan."

Singh was also asked whether bin Laden and al-Qaeda still had a "significant base" in Pakistan. "Well, I think there's no doubt about this," he said.

Both India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998. They fought three wars since their independence in 1947 from Britain, two of them over the Himalayan state of Kashmir, which is divided between them and claimed by both in full.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers Tulsi Giri (R) gestures as he speaks with India's Minister of State for External Affairs Rao Inderjit Singh during a meeting in Kathmandu yesterday. Inderjit Singh, on a three-day visit to Nepal is scheduled to hold consultation talks with the government of King Gyanendra on reforms to the Himalayan Kingdom proposed by the United Nations.

‘Lankan truce at grave risk’

Grenade attack on another tsunami relief centre

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tiger rebels warned Wednesday that a truce brokered by Norway was at "grave risk" of collapsing even as the Colombo government said it had no intention of returning to war.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) told Norway and the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission at a meeting in the rebel-held town of Kilinochchi that saving the truce was the responsibility of the government.

"The ceasefire agreement is at grave risk and the Sri Lankan government has the responsibility to

salvage it...." the LTTE's political wing leader S. P. Thamilselvan said, renewing a call for increased security for their officials.

"We are not asking for the moon," he said. "We only request that the government sincerely implement clause 1.8 to put an end to the accelerating violence perpetrated by these groups, which alone can ensure a violence-free environment."

He was referring to calls for the government to disarm paramilitary groups whom the Tigers blame for attacks against their officials in the island's restive east.

Thamilselvan's meeting with truce monitors and a diplomat from

the Norwegian embassy comes amid growing violence in the eastern province. The government said it was keen to maintain the truce despite what it called rebel provocation.

Meanwhile, suspected Tamil Tiger rebels lobbed a grenade at another tsunami relief centre in volatile eastern Sri Lanka yesterday, wounding three policemen guarding the facility, military officials said.

The attackers threw the grenade at the welfare centre at Akkarapattu, officials said. Three police guards were admitted to hospital but there were no casualties among civilians.

Norway to cut aid to Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Norway said Wednesday it will cut its planned bilateral aid to Nepal by 10 percent next year and will not enter into any new agreements with the Himalayan kingdom because of the king's power grab more than five months ago.

"Norway considers the development after February 1 as a serious setback in regards to multiparty democracy, to constitutional monarchy, human rights and to finding a peaceful solution to the ongoing violent conflict," Norwegian ambassador Tore Toreng said in a statement.

Floods force 2m people to flee homes in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

The death toll from monsoon rains in India's northeastern state of Assam has risen to at least 15 and nearly two million more have fled their homes, officials said Wednesday.

Rescuers in rubber boats struggled to reach villagers marooned by the swollen Bhahmaputra river that is fed by snow from the Himalayas and flows through Assam before entering Bangladesh and emptying into the Bay of Bengal.

Three people drowned and 25,000 people moved to safer areas overnight as floodwaters swamped fresh parts of eastern and northern Assam, officials said.

"Two weeks of flooding have left 15 people dead and more than 1.9 million displaced so far, most of them taking shelter in makeshift relief camps," a Flood Control Department official said.

Forecasters predicted more rain across the state over the next two days.

"The Brahmaputra and its tributaries are flowing above the danger level in many parts of the state with the water current in some areas

abnormally high," a government statement said.

Flooding caused by India's monsoon, which lasts from June to September, leaves a trail of destruction in the oil- and tea-rich state and the rest of the country every year.

It washes away villages, submerges crops and drowns livestock and people.

"A total of about 400 villages have come under water with the worst-hit being Dhemaji district in eastern Assam," Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi told AFP.

Roads to remote areas in eastern Assam were cut by the floodwaters.

Medical teams carrying medicines and water purifying tablets were fanning out to hardest-hit districts to avert water-borne diseases, Assam Health Minister Bhumidhar Barman said.

Last year at least 200 people died and more than 12 million were displaced by floods that hit Assam.

Torrential rain lashed the western coastal state of Gujarat early this month, killing at least 132 people in flooding and mudslides. The waters there have now receded.

Musharraf urges UK to hunt extremists at home

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf yesterday said the July 7 London bombers could not be called human and urged Britain to do as much as his country to crack down on Islamic militants at home.

He pledged in a national address that Pakistan was waging a strong campaign against extremism and, switching from Urdu to English, said "there is a lot to be done in England", too, where he said extremists operated with impunity.

"I very strongly condemn this act of terrorism. I don't think that the perpetrators of this act can be called human beings," said Musharraf, who this week ordered the arrests of more than 200 militant suspects.

He said Britain and Pakistan "stand together in this struggle and fight against terrorism to the end until we emerge victorious against them and eliminate them."

But he also said the world should not blame Pakistan for the attacks that killed 56 people and wounded 700, pointing out that the suspected bombers had been born and bred in Britain and that one came from Jamaica.

Meanwhile, Pakistani fundamen-

Grenade attack on Pak mosque: Two killed

AFP, Islamabad

Two Islamic preachers were killed and four others wounded on Thursday in a hand grenade attack against a mosque in a Pakistani tribal district bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

Unknown attackers threw the grenade into a mosque in the Khabianga village of the Kurram agency tribal district, some 260km west of Islamabad, local administration official Basir Khan Wazir told AFP.

Two members of the Tableeghi Jamaat (Preaching Party) died on the spot, while four people were seriously hurt and taken to hospital, he said.

Authorities had detained some 15 Afghan refugee suspects in the area as part of their investigation into the attack.

Pakistan, a key ally in the US "war on terror", has deployed about 70,000 troops along its border with southeastern Afghanistan to track down foreign militants in the region.