

US seeks Pak, Afghan help to fight terrorism

Pakistani choppers pound militant hideout in border belt

REUTERS, AFP, Washington/Miranshah

Pakistan and Afghanistan must intensify cooperation along their border to prevent al-Qaeda and Taliban members from finding refuge, White House national security adviser Stephen Hadley said on Thursday.

He returned on Wednesday from his first solo overseas trip as President George W. Bush's national security adviser in which he visited Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan to discuss fighting terrorism, denying safe haven to militants, and the US goal of spreading democracy in that region.

"In the meetings in Pakistan, I started by expressing appreciation particularly to President (Pervez) Musharraf for the things he did do to fight the war on terror, to go after al-Qaeda. They are also increasing their focus on the Taliban," Hadley told a small group of reporters.

al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden,

who is believed to be hiding in the mountainous, remote border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan, has evaded capture since the September 11, 2001, attacks.

The Taliban, ousted as rulers of Afghanistan by US forces following the September 11 attacks, has been regrouping and attacking.

"There is obviously some tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan about activities on the border, and my message there was it is a common problem and it will only be solved through common action," Hadley said.

"The only way to discipline a border is working both sides of a border and that requires cooperation at all levels, and I encouraged folks to enhance and intensify that cooperation," he said.

Hadley acknowledged the sensitivities involving some of the US military operations in Afghanistan and said he

hoped some of the misunderstandings would be smoothed over as the United States worked more with Afghan forces.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai earlier questioned the need for US airstrikes, some of which have caused civilian casualties.

"They want us there to help them build the country, they are concerned that we would leave too soon," Hadley said.

"It's difficult to have foreign forces in a country, particularly a country like Afghanistan in which people are very proud and do not want outsiders," he said.

Meanwhile, Pakistani army helicopter gunships pounded a suspected militant hideout in mountains along the border with Afghanistan yesterday. One soldier and a policeman died in fresh clashes between suspected militants and Pakistani forces backed by helicopters in a tribal region on the

Afghan border, officials said yesterday.

Pakistani security forces launched an attack on the suspected hideout in the North Waziristan tribal region late on Thursday following a clash with militants.

Gunbattles erupted Thursday after tribesmen opened fire on a military convoy travelling towards Khatay Killay, an area near Miranshah, the main town in rugged North Waziristan, killing the soldier, residents and officials said.

Pakistani officials say scores of al-Qaeda-linked militants are hiding out along its border with Afghanistan. Hundreds have been killed since Pakistan launched a sweep to clear them out early last year.

In the latest fighting in North Waziristan, a Pakistani soldier was killed and three seriously wounded when militants opened fire on a military convoy late on Thursday, a security official said.

Nobel Peace Prize tipped to go to anti-nuke arms efforts

AFP, Oslo

Just days ahead of the announcement of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, observers say organisations campaigning against nuclear proliferation are the most likely to win the prestigious award.

With a record 199 individuals and organisations nominated for the prize this year, the list of possible laureates is long and varied, featuring such names as Irish U2 rock star Bono, the late pope John Paul II and former US secretary of state Colin Powell.

Many observers however feel this year's prize, which will be announced in Oslo on October 7, will go to a person or a group working to halt nuclear proliferation, and Nihon Hidankyo, a Japanese organisation of survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombs, has been tipped as one of the favourites.

"The more I think about it the better the Nihon Hidankyo sounds," said Gunnar Soerboe, director of the Christian Michelsen Institute, a human rights research group.



Indian Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) President and Leader of Opposition L. K. Advani (R) welcomes Leader of the Opposition of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina with a floral bouquet prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Hasina has called for unity among India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to check the increasing "interference of America" in the internal affairs of the developing nations.

Arabs push for denunciation of Israel as nuke threat

AFP, Vienna

Arab states were pushing for a denunciation of Israel as a nuclear threat to the Middle East, on the final day yesterday of a week-long conference of the watchdog UN atomic agency.

"This year we hope to get a little bit more," Egyptian ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldein Ramzy told AFP about an Arab drive to have the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) discuss "Israeli nuclear capabilities and threat," as proposed in a resolution by Oman.

Arab states have in past years dropped this agenda request in order to win Israeli participation in a consensus on a call for nations to work towards a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East.

But 15 Arab states plus Palestine said in a letter distributed at the 139-nation IAEA conference in Vienna that they would insist this year on the agenda item since "Israel is developing an advanced nuclear program for military purposes, which has a negative impact on peace and stability in the Middle East region and on efforts to prevent proliferation in the region."

INDIAN DELEGATION SAYS Arms ban on Nepal should continue

AFP, Kathmandu

India should continue its suspension of arms sales to Nepal to pressure King Gyanendra to reverse his February power grab, an Indian political delegation said Friday at the end of a fact-finding mission here.

All political parties represented agreed that the arms embargo should continue, Communist Part of India (Marxist) politburo member Sitaram Yechuri told reporters.

"We will not allow the Indian government to supply arms to Nepal until democracy is fully restored," said Yechuri, who is leading the seven-member team.

He denied allegations by the Nepalese authorities that the delegation was meddling in the affairs of another country.

"It is a baseless accusation that we have come here to interfere in Nepal's internal affairs," he said.



Nepalese political leaders and activists shout slogans during an anti-king street protest in Kathmandu yesterday. Activists from an alliance of the country's seven main opposition political parties are continuing their protest against King Gyanendra's seizure of power and their demands for a democratic republic in Nepal.

Fatah sees off Hamas challenge in local polls

AFP, Ramallah

The ruling Palestinian movement Fatah held off yesterday a challenge from the radical Islamists of Hamas in a fresh round of elections in the West Bank where more deadly violence flared.

Hamas, looking to break into the political mainstream while still pursuing its armed campaign against Israel, failed to make significant inroads during the municipal elections, which were held in 104 municipalities on Thursday.

Preliminary results, announced Friday by elections chief Jamal Shobaki, showed Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas's Fatah faction had won 51 of the councils while Hamas had gained control in only 13 on an 81-percent turnout.

The results will be a disappointment for Hamas, robbing it of some of the momentum that it had built up during its strong showing in previous

rounds of local elections.

Hamas is planning to field candidates in January's legislative elections for the first time despite threats from Israel to hamper the polls in the occupied West Bank if the movement, which does not recognise the Jewish state's right to exist, participates.

Commentators however played down the wider implications of the results of the latest elections, which were largely held in villages, saying local issues and tribal affiliations were the main factor in determining how people voted.

"The tribal factor played a primary role. The main factor was the municipal services being promised by different candidates and the political dimension did not really feature in the minds of the electorate," political analyst Zakaria al-Qaq told AFP.

"The results cannot serve as an indicator for the outcome of the legislative elections."

19 die in Kashmir violence

Bus accident leaves 44 dead

AFP, AP, Srinagar/Jammu

Nineteen people were killed in the latest violence in Indian Kashmir, four of them soldiers gunned down in a firefight with suspected rebels on the de facto border between India and Pakistan, officials said yesterday.

Two suspected rebels also died in the early morning gunbattle, in northern Machil sector, army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Vijay Batra told AFP.

He said the gunbattle erupted when a group of suspected militants sneaked across the Line of Control (LoC) at Machil from Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

"Three other soldiers were injured during the fighting," Batra said.

"The operation in the area is continuing," he said, adding that army reinforcements had been rushed to the area.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and pushing militants into Kashmir. Pakistan insists it only provides moral and diplomatic support to militants it regards as freedom fighters engaged in a struggle for self-determination.

The Indian army says more than 100 rebel infiltrators have been killed along the LoC since January this year.

Meanwhile, Indian troops shot dead nine rebels in four separate encounters in the southern districts of Doda, Poonch, Udhampur and Anantnag late Thursday and early Friday, a police spokesman said.

Separately another rebel was killed in northern Kupwara district, of which Machil is an important sector.

In other clashes, an Indian soldier was killed in an ambush by militants in Doda district and a Muslim girl and a man were gunned down by suspected rebels in Pulwama and Anantnag districts, police said.

The Himalayan region is in the grip of a 16-year-old insurgency that has so far left more than 44,000 people dead by official count. Separatists put the death toll at twice as high.

Meanwhile, a bus accident in India's portion of Kashmir has left 44 people dead and 42 others injured, police said Friday.

The heavily overcrowded bus veered out of control on Thursday and plunged down a mountain road near the town of Tattapani, a town 100 miles north of Jammu, winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, Inspector General of Police S.P. Vaid.

Police, soldiers and villagers searched the thickly wooded hill terrain through the night, pulling out more bodies to reach a total of 44, said Vaid. Another 42 passengers were injured, some seriously, he said.

10 students die as cops open fire in Meghalaya

AFP, Guwahati

Ten students were killed and 90 people injured yesterday when police opened fire during two separate clashes with thousands of protesters in India's northeastern state of Meghalaya, an official said.

The incidents occurred in the towns of Tura and Williamnagar when thousands of students staged violent protests against plans to move a school education board to the state capital Shillong from Tura, the official said.

The issue has been simmering for a month or so, with almost daily protests.

"Five students each died in Tura and Williamnagar when police opened fire on mobs who were making

coordinated attacks on the offices of the district magistrates in the two headquarters," Meghalaya Education Minister Mukul Sangma said.

"The injured included 54 policemen and three senior magistrates. The condition of many of the injured are critical," he added.

Police opened fire on a crowd of about 1,000 students in Tura after they began throwing stones at them and refused to disperse despite a baton charge and water canons before opening fire.

Police imposed an indefinite curfew on the two towns following the violence.

The two towns are dominated by the Garo tribe which opposes moving the education board as it regards it as a matter of prestige that it stays in Tura.



Kashmiri Muslim women walk in front of a house devastated during a gunbattle between militants and Indian troops in the village of Kani Pora on the outskirts of Srinagar Thursday.