

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Pak army chief dismisses world concern

AFP, Islamabad

The chief of Pakistan's powerful army yesterday dismissed "unrealistic" fears that al-Qaeda could seize the country's nuclear weapons, as the military test-fired a ballistic missile.

In a rare foray into politics, the normally reclusive General Ashfaq Kiyani rejected speculation that Pakistan's nuclear weapons could be at risk amid the turmoil sparked by the assassination of former premier Benazir Bhutto.

The United States and other Western allies have showed mounting concern about the security of Islamabad's estimated 50 warheads, with Pakistani forces battling a growing insurgency by al-Qaeda-linked militants.

Kiyani however told troops after the training launch of the medium-range Shaheen-1 (Hatf IV) that the military was "capable of safeguarding and securing nuclear assets against all categories of threat."

"Referring to international concerns regarding speculative scenarios, he dismissed such concerns as unrealistic and based on a lack of understanding of Pakistan's command and control mechanisms," an army statement said.

The statement added: "He stressed that creating irresponsible alarm by certain quarters would be counter-productive."

Former intelligence chief Kiyani has kept a low profile since taking over as chief of army staff from President Pervez Musharraf in November last year. Musharraf seized power in a coup in 1999.

Kiyani is reported to have ordered the army to stay out of politics, but in Pakistan, which has spent more than half its existence under military rule, eyes are always on the head of the 500,000-strong armed forces.

His statement closely follows the line of Musharraf's comments on Pakistan's nuclear weapons during a week-long tour of European countries.

Musharraf said Tuesday that militants could only gain access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal if al-Qaeda or the Taliban "defeated the Pakistani army entirely" or if Islamist groups won the country's general elections next month.

"There is a zero percent chance of either one of them," Musharraf said in Paris. "They (the weapons) cannot fall into any wrong hands."

Yesterday's missile test-launch came at the end of an annual training session by the army's strategic force command.

The locally developed Shaheen-1 missile, which has a range of 700 kilometres (440 miles) and is capable of carrying nuclear weapons, is routinely fired during training exercises by the troops.

Pakistan and its regional rival India make frequent missile test launches. The two countries have fought three wars since 1947 and carried out tit-for-tat nuclear test detonations in 1998.

Kiyani said that Pakistan "did not have any aggressive designs against anyone and Pakistan's nuclear capability was solely for the purpose of deterring all types of aggression."



Children are engrossed in drawing at an art competition titled 'Nature in danger' at British Council auditorium in the city yesterday. British Council organised the competition.

Birth pill has prevented 100,000 deaths from ovarian cancer: Study

AFP, Paris

The contraceptive pill has prevented some 200,000 cases of ovarian cancer and 100,000 deaths from this disease since its introduction nearly half a century ago, according to a study published in Lancet medical journal.

Over the next decade, around 30,000 extra cases of ovarian cancer are likely to be prevented each year because of the pill, it adds.

The figures are extrapolated from an overview of 45 studies in 21 countries involving 23,000 women diagnosed with ovarian cancer and 87,000 who were otherwise healthy.

Women who had been using oral contraceptives were far less likely to have this form of cancer than counterparts who had not been using the pill, the review found.

And the longer a woman had been on the pill, the more the risk diminished.

Ten years on the pill reduced the risk of ovarian cancer before the age of 75 by a third, and the risk of death by 30 percent.

The benefit was still perceptible, if somewhat reduced, more than 30 years after the woman stopped

taking the pill.

The paper, based on long-term research, sheds light on the long-term protective advantage of oral contraceptives when it comes to ovarian cancer.

Other research, though, has found a statistically significant increased risk of cancer of the breast, cervix or central nervous system among users of the pill.

Around 120 million women around the world used the pill in 2002, 80 million of them in developing countries, according to figures cited by The Lancet paper.

It is authored by the Collaborative Group on Epidemiological Studies of Ovarian Cancer, sponsored by the British Cancer Research UK.

In the 1960s, doses of estrogen in the pill were typically double those of the 1980s, when the hormone formulation was slimmed down.

Even so, there was no apparent change in the relative risk of ovarian cancer among women who used the pill in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

In an editorial, The Lancet called for the pill to be made available over the counter, rather than restricted by a doctor's prescription, given that, in its view, the benefits for cancer prevention and reproductive health so outweighed the risks.

"We believe the case is now convincing," the British journal said.

India on high alert for Republic Day bash

AFP, New Delhi

Indian security forces launched a massive security operation in New Delhi ahead of today's Republic Day celebrations, officials said, with French President Nicholas Sarkozy also in the city.

Border troops were deployed at sandbagged posts on intersections yesterday ahead of a display of military hardware for the 58th annual parade in the Raj-era heart of the capital, and air space has also been closed.

Sarkozy's guest of honour for the high-security event marking the proclamation of a republic in 1950.

"New Delhi will be a no-fly zone for the duration of the event and we have deployed anti-aircraft guns and armed helicopters to enforce the rule," a military official in charge of the security arrangements told AFP.

"A massive ground-to-air security apparatus is being put in place," said the official, who did not want to be named.

Some 17,000 paramilitary

troops including elite "Black Cat" military commandos will reinforce New Delhi's 55,000-member police force, a police spokesman said.

"A special emphasis is being laid on anti-sabotage checks, access control measures and intelligence coordination," said joint police commissioner Qamar Ahmed.

"The entire route of the parade will be covered by special security and anti-terror arrangements," he told reporters.

Various separatist organisations and extremist groups fighting New Delhi's rule in disputed Kashmir or in the seven revolt-racked northeastern states boycott Republic Day celebrations across the country.

In Kashmir, combat troops were out on the streets in strength in the two largest cities -- Srinagar and Jammu -- where parades are also planned for Saturday.

Security was also bolstered in the northeast after several ethnic guerrilla groups called for Saturday to be observed as a "Black Day."

Japan looks at tighter controls on foreigners

AFP, Tokyo

Japan is looking to tighten controls on foreign residents to crack down on undocumented aliens and ensure that all households receive public services, Justice Minister Kunio Hatoyama said yesterday.

Japan largely sees itself as ethnically homogeneous and has consistently rejected wide-scale immigration despite having one of the world's lowest birth rates.

It requires foreign residents to carry registration cards which are issued by municipal offices.

The system is often criticised as ineffective as foreigners do not need to re-register when moving and local offices often do not check with the central Immigration Bureau on applicants' legal status.

"It doesn't make sense that the foreign registration card is issued to people the Immigration Bureau considers illegal stayers," Hatoyama told reporters.

He said the ministry is looking at

"integrating administration concerning immigration control and registration of foreign residents."

Specifically, the government is considering a new identification card issued by the central government and requiring residents to register every change of address, a ministry official said.

But the official said the government will likely exempt Koreans and Chinese whose families have resided in Japan for generations and currently still have to carry foreigners' cards.

Some 700,000 Koreans live in Japan, mostly a legacy of those who immigrated or were enslaved during colonial rule, forming the largest minority group.

Human rights groups have long argued that the registration system prevents people of foreign origin from integrating in Japan.

Local authorities used to collect fingerprints of all foreign residents, even if their families lived in Japan for generations, under a system abolished in 2000.

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Member Rehab



Dhaka University Sahitya Sangskritik Sangsad organised a daylong Pitha (traditional home-made cake) Festival at TSC cafeteria in the city yesterday.

Kibria killing cases

FROM PAGE 16
charge sheet in the murder case. But the Habiganj Magistrate's Court (Cognizance-1) rejected the petition and fixed May 10 the same year for hearing.

But in the meantime, the case was transferred to Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal that too rejected the objections to the charge sheet.

The complainant then filed a petition with the High Court and obtained orders staying the proceedings on May 14, 2006. Moved by Dr Kamal Hossain, the petition challenged the tribunal's rejection of a prayer for further investigation.

The HC bench also ordered the government to explain within two weeks why the ruling of the Speedy Trial Tribunal should not be adjudged to have been done without lawful authority.

Proceedings of the case would remain stayed till the rule is disposed of.

Vice-President of Habiganj district BNP Abdul Quaiyum was made the principal accused. The

other accused are Joynal Abedin Jalal, Jamir Ali, Momin, Tajul Islam, Shahed Ali, Selim Ahmed and Enayat Ali, Muhibur Rahman and Kajal Miah.

Of them, eight including Quaiyum are behind bars.

Asma Kibria and Reza Kibria, wife and son of the slain AL leader, had rejected the charge sheet.

Asma Kibria on January 19 last year urged the chief adviser of the caretaker government to ensure proper investigation and trial of the cases.

Meanwhile, the family members of the charge-sheeted accused too have called for fresh investigations. At a press conference at Habiganj Press Club last week they alleged that their family members were falsely implicated in the murder. The investigation officer did that on orders from the then government high-ups to save the influential masterminds, they claimed.

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