

# Pakistan, India swap nuclear site lists

Bush talks with leaders of S Asian rivals to douse tensions

AFP, Islamabad/Crawford

Pakistan and India exchanged lists yesterday of their nuclear installations under an accord aimed at protecting the sites in case of war, officials said, amid simmering tensions over the Mumbai attacks.

The South Asian rivals, whose relations have been rocky since the deadly November attacks on India's financial centre Mumbai, have exchanged the lists annually since 1992, under an agreement that came into force the previous year.

The lists have been exchanged at the foreign ministries in New Delhi and Islamabad, a spokesman for the foreign office in Islamabad, Mohammad Sadiq, told AFP.

Under the agreement, both sides are to refrain from attacking nuclear facilities in the event of a war. The neighbours have

also set up a telephone hotline to prevent accidental nuclear conflict.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two of them over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, which is divided between them but claimed in full by both.

The two countries came close to another war in 2002 after an attack on the Indian parliament that New Delhi blamed on the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba -- the same group it blames for the carnage in Mumbai.

But after deploying hundreds of thousands of troops to the border, Islamabad and New Delhi retreated following intense international mediation. In 2004, they launched a peace process, but that is now on hold following the Mumbai attacks.

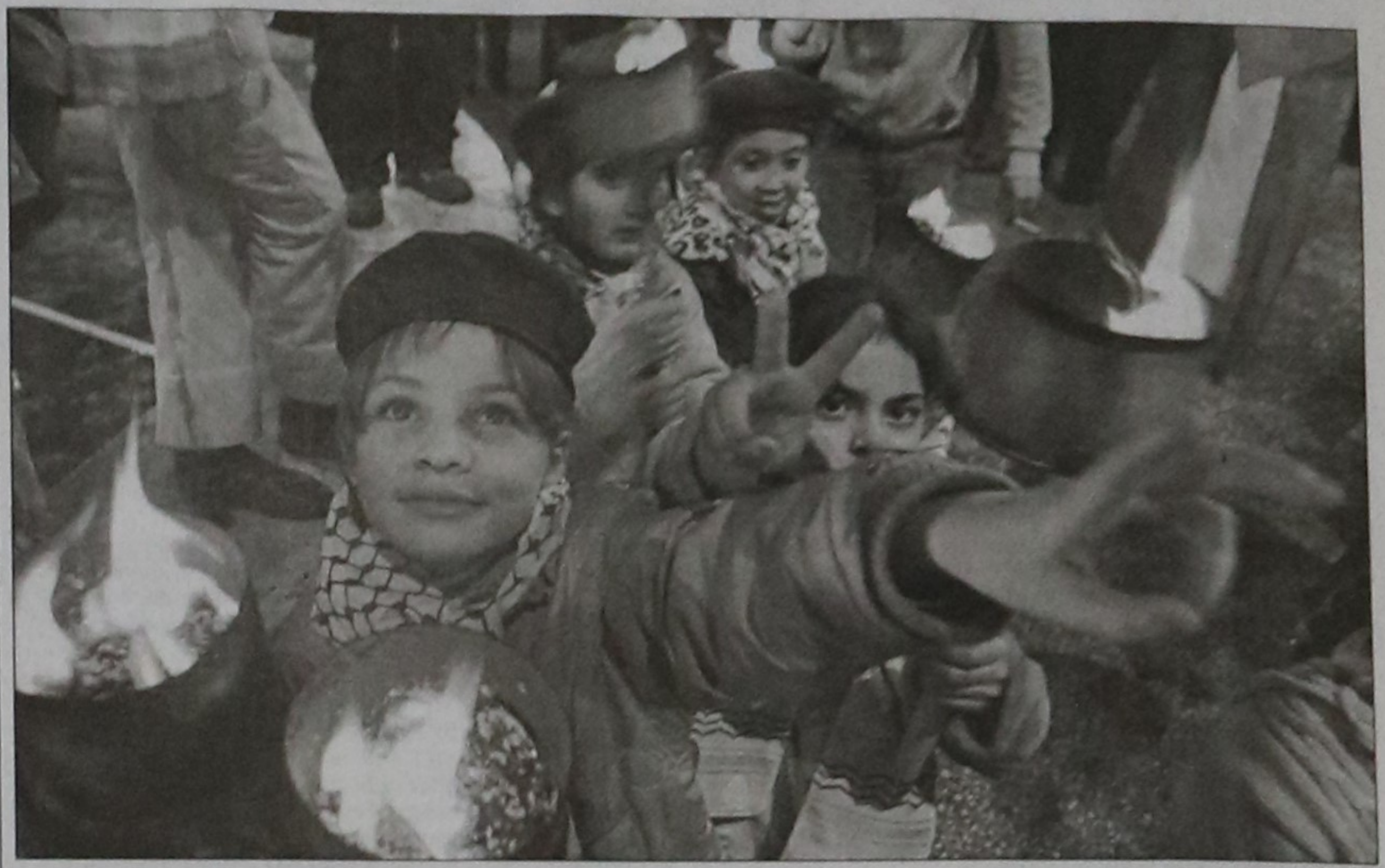
US President George W. Bush on Wednesday spoke with Indian Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. The White House said all had agreed on the need to avoid any increase in tensions.

Speaking separately with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Bush "urged both ... to cooperate with each other in the Mumbai attack investigation as well as on counterterrorism in general," said White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe.

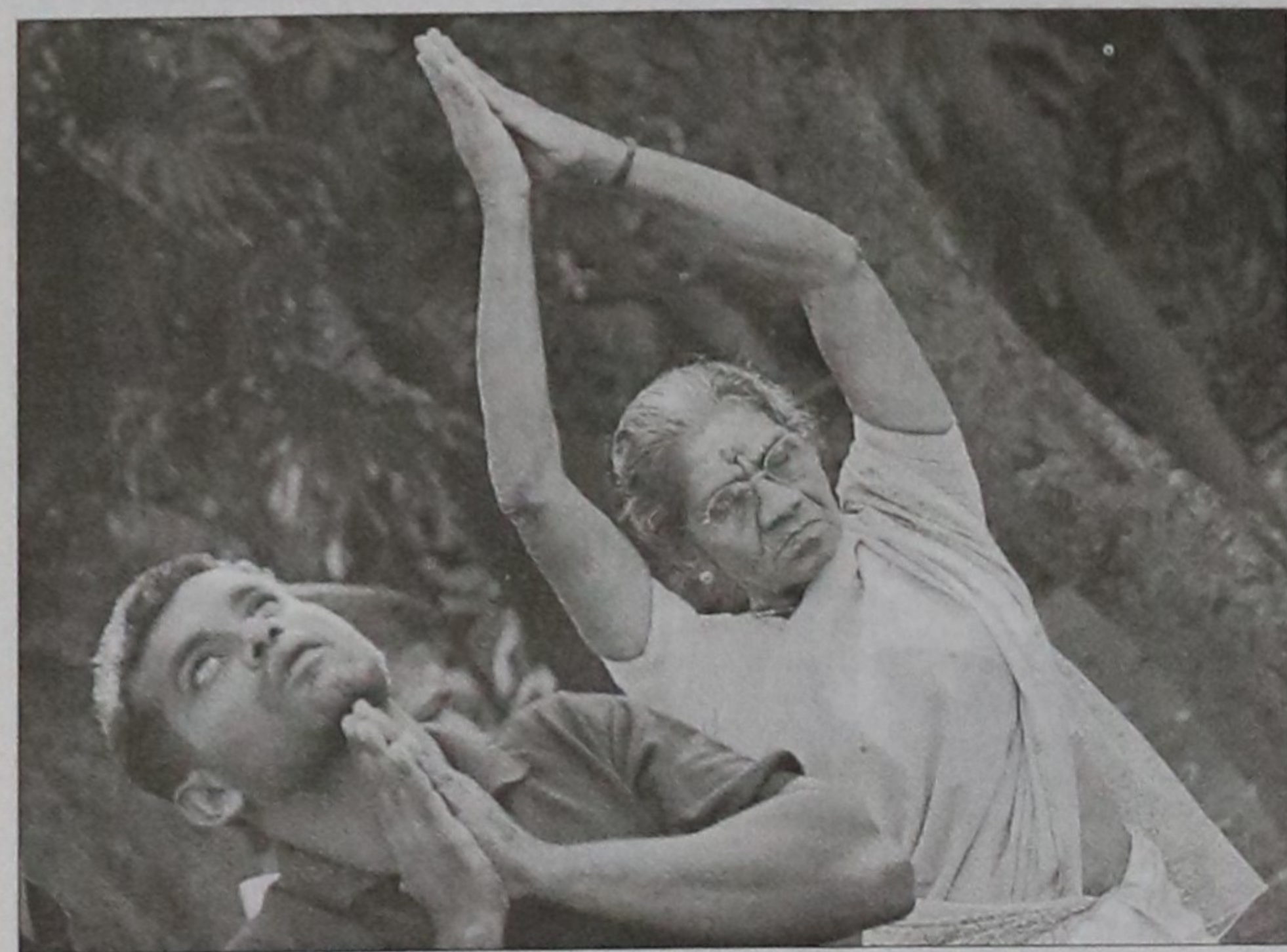
"All three leaders from the United States, India and Pakistan agreed that no one wanted to take any steps that unnecessarily raise tensions," he added.

Pakistan on Tuesday asked India to resume dialogue and urged New Delhi to de-activate its forward air bases and redeploy troops to peacetime locations, but India denied it had moved troops into offensive positions on the border.



Palestinian girls show 'victory' sign and hold flames during a candle light vigil in the West Bank city of Nablus on Wednesday to express their solidarity with the people of Gaza as Israel's massive bombing campaign continued for sixth day.

PHOTO: AFP



Sri Lankan Tamil devotees pray at a Hindu temple in Colombo yesterday. Government forces announced the capture of a strategic town from Tamil Tiger rebels in the north of the island after intense fighting that killed at least 50 rebels.

PHOTO: AFP

## Lanka troops seize key rebel town

54 Tigers killed in fighting

AFP, AP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops yesterday captured a key town from Tamil Tiger rebels in the island's north after intense clashes that left at least 54 guerrillas dead, the defence ministry said.

The fall of Paranthan, near the Tigers' political capital Kilinochchi, effectively cut off the rebels' main supply line to several other strongholds, the ministry said in a statement.

At least 54 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels have been killed and twice as many wounded in heavy fighting since Tuesday, it

added.

The ministry did not say if security forces suffered any casualties.

"Unable to withstand the fury of the combined army and air force onslaught, LTTE terrorists withdrew from the town in total disarray," the ministry said.

Paranthan is about six kilometres (four miles) from Kilinochchi, which is the military's main objective.

Military officials said government forces were heading toward Kilinochchi following the success at Paranthan, which had been under rebel control for 10 years.

"LTTE resistances and counter-attacks were outflanked by the intense military armour attacks and concentrated artillery and mortar fire," the defence ministry said.

"The fighting was fierce and prolonged for hours until terrorists were completely beaten by the determined soldiers."

Earlier at least 12 Tamil Tiger rebels were killed by government forces about to capture a key rebel-held town in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said Wednesday.

## Pak General Kiyani turns dove, tones down war cry

AP, PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan's army chief is stressing the need to "avoid conflict" amid tensions with India following last month's terror attacks on Mumbai.

Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani's comments Monday were perhaps the strongest signal yet that Pakistan does not want to see a fourth war with India over the attacks.

They are believed to be his first in relation to the tensions.

An army statement said Kayani made the statement in talks with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei.

The Pakistani establishment now believes that the "time of war" with India is over and the recent telephonic

contacts at the highest military level have led to reduction in tensions generated in the wake of troop build up following the Mumbai terror attacks.

"The time of war has gone and even India cannot dare mount surgical strikes primarily because of the uncertain response," an unnamed top official told The News daily after the Directors General of Military Operations of the two countries spoke on their hotline over the weekend.

The contacts between the DGMOs had not been suspended after last month's terrorist attacks in Mumbai and that the two officials remained in touch, officials said.

## 5 killed in US missile strike in Pakistan

Militant rockets kill 4 others

AFP, Peshawar/Khar

A suspected US missile strike yesterday killed at least five Taliban militants in a tribal area in northwest Pakistan known as an extremist stronghold, local officials said.

The strike was the latest targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan -- most said to have been launched by CIA drones -- that have raised tensions between Washington and Islamabad.

A local security official told AFP that an unmanned CIA aircraft had fired three missiles in the Karikot area of

South Waziristan -- the same spot where eight suspected militants were killed in a US drone strike 10 days ago.

One of the missiles struck a vehicle, killing five people inside, another security official said, adding those killed were known Taliban militants.

The other two missiles hit a hilltop house that was a known militant hideout in the area, but it was empty at the time of the strike, the officials said.

One militant was also wounded, they added.

"We rushed out of our homes," said resident Zar Wali, adding that locals had been panicked by the power-

ful explosions.

Smoke billowed from the house for hours after the strike, he said.

Meanwhile, four civilians were killed in northwest Pakistan on Thursday when Taliban militants fired rockets at local government offices in a restive tribal region on the Afghan border, an official said.

At least four rockets landed near a court and government complex in Khar, the main town in Bajaur district, local administration chief Israr Khan told AFP.

"The attack left four civilians dead and 16 wounded," Khan said.

## Pakistan to reopen Nato supply route

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan will reopen a key route for Nato supply trucks headed for Afghanistan in the next two days, an official said Thursday as troops pursued militants in the lawless northwest tribal zone.

Security forces backed by helicopter gunships, tanks and heavy artillery launched the operation on Tuesday to flush militants out of the area near Jamrud, the gateway to the famed Khyber Pass linking Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The military offensive forced the closure of the highway from the city of Peshawar to the Afghan border town of Torkham after a series of attacks on truck depots in and around Peshawar that saw hundreds of Nato vehicles

torched.

"The road will be open in a day or two for all types of traffic, including Nato vehicles," the administrator of the Khyber tribal area, Tariq Hayat, told reporters in Peshawar.

"We have achieved 80 percent of our objective," he added, saying a total of 159 people had been arrested or turned themselves in since Tuesday, including 116 Afghans who were illegal migrants or involved with suspected extremists.

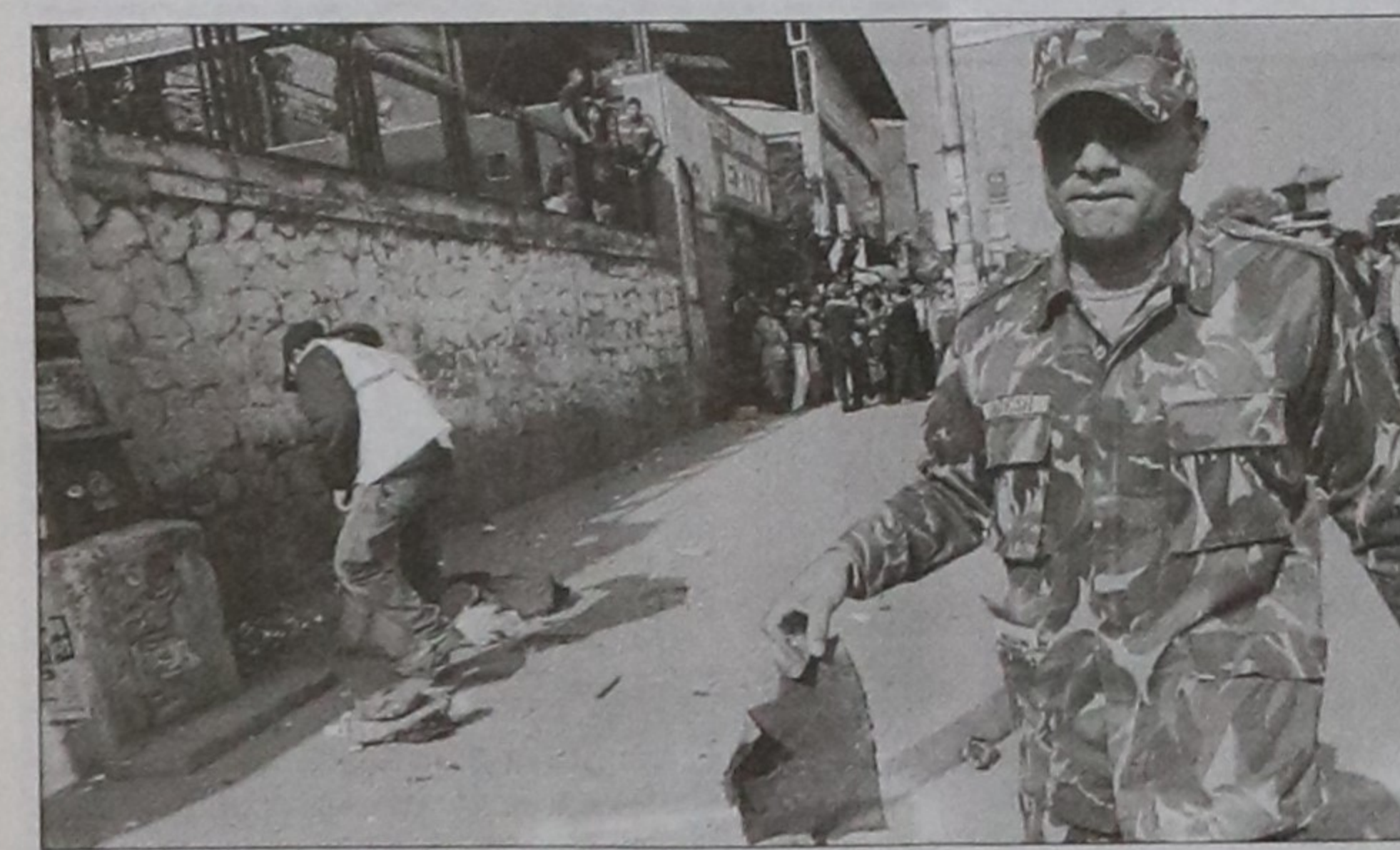
More than 30 suspected militant hideouts had been destroyed, he said.

"The detained Afghans will be interrogated and those proven innocent will be deported, while those found guilty will be punished," he said.



Thai firefighters work at the site of a fire that ripped through a nightclub in Bangkok yesterday. Police forensic investigators sifted through the charred remains of the upscale Bangkok nightclub, seeking clues to the blaze that killed 61 revellers ringing in the New Year.

PHOTO: AFP



Nepalese police officers investigate the site of a bomb blast in Kathmandu yesterday. A street vendor was injured in the blast in a shopping area of the Nepalese capital.

PHOTO: AFP

## 20 Afghan police killed in Taliban ambush

AP, Kandahar

Taliban militants ambushed a group of Afghan police while they were eating lunch in a remote and dangerous part of southern Afghanistan, killing 20 officers and one of the policeman's mother, an Afghan official said yesterday.

A Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, said two Taliban were killed and four wounded during the ambush. Ahmadi claimed 32 police were killed, but that number had not been confirmed by Afghan officials.

The attack came Wednesday in the small village of Shaghzay in the district of Kajaki in Helmand province, said Daud Ahmadi, spokesman for Helmand's governor. He said 20 police bodyguards for the district chief of nearby Musa Qala were killed. Musa Qala for many

months of 2007 had been held by Taliban fighters.

The mother of one of the police pleaded with the militants to spare her son's life, and she was also killed, Ahmadi said.

The region between Musa Qala and Kajaki is filled with Taliban militants, and the Afghan government has little control outside of main district centres. Taliban fighters operate their own parallel government in the region, sometimes called a shadow government.

The Taliban's shadow police chief for Helmand province, Mullah Mohammad Qasim, claimed in a call to The Associated Press that one of the policemen in the group of bodyguards was a Taliban sympathiser and had helped set up the ambush. There was no way to confirm the claim.

## FBI team visits Faridkot to probe about Kasab

PTI, Islamabad

An FBI team, late on Wednesday night, visited Faridkot in Pakistan's Punjab province to investigate about Ajmal Amir Iman Kasab, the lone terrorist captured during the Mumbai attacks. Kasab hails from the Faridkot area.

The five-member team of the FBI was headed by its South Asian Director William Robert, GeoTV reported.

According to sources, the purpose of the FBI team's visit was to investigate about Kasab, it said.

The channel also claimed, without quoting anyone, that

according to the FBI team, it found no evidence.

Kasab's father recently admitted in an interview to the Dawn newspaper that the gunman whose picture was beamed around the world by the media was his son.

Residents of Kasab's village of Faridkot too have told the Pakistani media that he belonged to the area. They said he had told his mother during his last visit home that he was going away for jihad.

Pakistan on Wednesday claimed that India has cooked up a story about Kasab being a Pakistani.

## Indian armed forces get own pay panel

PTI, New Delhi

In a major New Year bonanza for the armed forces, the Prime Minister's Office has informed the Defence Ministry that the armed forces personnel would henceforth have a separate pay commission, which is de-linked from the civilian pay panel.

Defence Ministry the PMO also granted the demand for placing 12,000 odd Lieutenant Colonels under equivalence in Navy and Air Force in the pay band four of the sixth central pay commission.

However, the PMO, which considered the recommendations of the ministerial committee headed by External Affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee,

said that the pay band four status with a grade pay of Rs 8000 would be accorded to Lieutenant Colonels who were performing a combat role or were ready for combat.

Those Lieutenant Colonels on deputation to other services would receive the pay band four status only when they return to their parent service.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Gaza blitz helps Iran, hurts Obama

AFP, Washington

Israel's war against Hamas has so far bolstered the anti-US Iran front and placed even more daunting challenges before incoming US president Barack Obama, analysts said.

It was only a little over a year ago that President George W. Bush raised hopes of rolling back Iran's newfound clout in the region when he helped revive the Palestinian-Israeli peace process in Annapolis, Maryland.

But five days of Israeli air strikes have

instead raised the political fortunes of the pro-Iranian Hamas and lowered those of the Palestinian Authority, Hamas's US-backed rival and Israel's negotiating partner, they say.

And they point to other regional casualties.

Egypt and Jordan, key US allies and the sole Arab partners in peace with Israel, are on the back foot against charges from Arab states, radical groups and public opinion of either doing nothing to stop Israel or actually tacitly accepting the assault.

"The camp centred around Iran and Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas has more leverage as of now because of what is happening in the Arab street," said Amr Hamzawy, an analyst with the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace.

But Hamzawy, speaking to reporters in a conference call, added that Egypt and Turkey, a US-allied Sunni Muslim state, could still change the dynamic if they can broker a "durable" ceasefire, the formula embraced by Washington.

Hamas has not actually rejected

one, he pointed out.

He also said the region is again sharply divided along the lines of pro-Iran and pro-US camps as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia accuse fellow Sunni Hamas of serving the interests of non-Arab Shia Muslim Iran.

Nathan Brown, speaking at the conference call with his Carnegie colleagues, said Israel may find it easier to declare victory than it did during the war with Lebanon's Hezbollah in 2006 because it has set lower goals.