

Telephone alert grounds Mumbai-Dubai flight

AFP, Mumbai

A passenger flight from Mumbai to Dubai was halted minutes before take-off yesterday when airline staff received a telephone call claiming there were "terrorists" on board, authorities said.

The plane was grounded after the anonymous caller alleged that two passengers were members of the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a Mumbai International Airport spokesman said.

The Emirates aircraft, which had 356 people on board, was taken to an isolated bay where passengers disembarked and security personnel detained two people for questioning.

"The flight was on the taxiway when the call came through which said that there were LeT suspects on board," the spokesman told AFP.

India tests nuke-capable Agni-III missile

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Bhadrak

India Sunday successfully tested its indigenous nuclear-capable Agni-III missile with a range of over 3,000-km, consolidating the country's position among a select group of nations that have intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM)-capability, defence sources said.

The missile, which is capable of carrying warheads weighing up to 1.5 tonnes, was tested from the Inner Wheeler Island at Dhamra, a launch site in Bhadrak district, about 200 km from Orissa capital Bhubaneswar, at 10.46 am.

This is the fourth test of the country's most powerful missile, which has the capability to hit deep inside China, bringing cities like Shanghai and Beijing within its potent reach.

Court martial looms for Fonseka over 'coup'

AFP, Colombo

Defeated Sri Lankan presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka could be hauled before a court martial to answer charges of plotting a coup to topple the government, a press report said yesterday.

The government has sought legal advice on using a military court to fast-track proceedings against Fonseka, who challenged President Mahinda Rajapakse in the January 26 vote, the Sunday Times said.

"A military court will try retired general Sarath Fonseka on several charges of conspiracy," it said.

There was no immediate comment from Fonseka, who has already accused the government of planning to arrest or assassinate him after he fell out with Rajapakse and resigned in November.

Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said he was unaware of plans to bring Fonseka before a court martial, but added that a senior defence



official had publicly spoken of the possibility.

Fonseka led troops to a crushing victory over Tamil Tiger rebels in May last year, ending a decades-long separatist campaign by the guerrillas.

However, he and Rajapakse were at loggerheads over sharing credit for the

spectacular military success and then went head to head at the ballot box last month.

Fonseka, who was routed by Rajapakse, has vowed to challenge Rajapakse's election at the Supreme Court.

Earlier this month, Rajapakse sacked a dozen senior military officers whom the defence ministry said were a "direct threat to national security."

Security forces kept Fonseka under siege while election results were being announced the day after the election, and 36 retired officers working at Fonseka's offices were later arrested by police.

Fonseka said the government targeted his office to prevent his party from collecting evidence to mount the legal challenge to Rajapakse's re-election.

The government insisted the election was free and fair but the United States and the European Commission have pressed for a probe into the charges of vote fraud.



PHOTO: AFP Activists of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice) demonstrate in support of US-detained Pakistani woman Aafia Siddiqui in Lahore on Saturday. PTI chairman Imran Khan has said that the way Aafia Siddiqui case has ended is a travesty of justice.

Pak minister sees blasphemy law revision this year

AFP, Washington

Pakistan plans within this year to revise its laws against blasphemy, which have long been criticised as a way to abuse minorities, a government minister said.

Shahbaz Bhatti, minister for minority affairs, said religious reconciliation was a little-noticed priority for President Asif Ali Zardari's civilian government in Pakistan, which lies on the frontline of the US-led war against Islamic extremism.

Bhatti, a longtime Roman Catholic activist whose position was given full cabinet status for the first time, said he was speaking with political parties to present revisions to the blasphemy law by the end of 2010.

"This is a democratic government which has a commitment to repeal all the discriminatory laws affecting the rights of minorities," Bhatti told AFP in an interview in Washington.



PHOTO: AFP Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Defence Minister A.K. Antony head the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security in New Delhi yesterday. Manmohan appealed to the assembled state leaders to fill about 394 000 police vacancies, a 20 percent force deficit, during the conference looking at internal security policies.

Multiple security threats must be put down: PM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Emphasising that the road ahead to securing India was hard and there was a lot to achieve, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said multiple threats such as leftwing extremism and insurgencies in the northeast and Jammu and Kashmir required a firm hand to put down.

"Hostile groups and elements operate from across the border to perpetrate terrorist acts in our country. The state of Jammu and Kashmir bears the brunt of the acts of these groups. There is insurgency and violence in the northeast. Many states are affected by leftwing extremism, which I have in the past referred to as the greatest threat to our internal security," said Manmohan Singh, inaugurating the internal security conclave of chief ministers here.

"There are also those trying to divide our society on com-

munal and regional lines. Each one of these threats requires a strong effort, determination, hard work and continuous vigilance to tackle. These threats to our society, to our polity and our country constitute a challenge that we must and we shall meet effectively at all costs," he said.

Addressing chief ministers on internal security for the third time after the 26/11 terror strikes, Manmohan Singh lamented that policing was not being given due attention by states, and talked of how infiltration levels have increased in Jammu and Kashmir, the need to strengthen coastal security and the menace of counterfeit currency notes.

"The problems of inadequate number of policemen and deficiency in training of the police personnel have been underlined time and again. Unfortunately, there has not been adequate progress in these areas," he said.

Kashmiris pessimistic about outcome of Indo-Pak talks

AFP, Srinagar

India and Pakistan are set to relaunch peace talks but residents of Kashmir, at the heart of decades of hostility between the nuclear-armed neighbours, say they are pessimistic about the outcome.

India has proposed foreign secretary-level dialogue with Pakistan, signalling a major breakthrough in relations frozen since the 2008 attacks in Mumbai in which 166 people died.

New Delhi blamed the assault on Pakistan-based militants. India and Pakistan have held discussions in the past but without any breakthrough on Kashmir, the disputed Himalayan region, which each country holds in part but claims in full.

Kashmir has been the trigger for two of three wars between India and Pakistan. In Muslim-majority Indian Kashmir, which has been in uproar over allegations about police killings of two teenage boys and where anti-India violence has resurfaced, the mood over the talks is gloomy.

"On the one hand, India is offering talks to Pakistan, and on the other hand it is killing innocent people in Kashmir," said Javed Mir, senior leader of the pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front.

A two-decade insurgency by militants who oppose New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir has claimed more than 47,000 lives, according to an official count. Human rights groups put the toll at twice as high.