

India meddling into Pakistan through Afghanistan
Says Pak Foreign Office

Gunmen storm US charity in Pakistan: 6 aid workers killed

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistan has once again blamed India of meddling in its internal issues through Afghanistan.

In an interview with Geo News, Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit said Islamabad would raise the issue of India's interference with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai during his visit to the country.

Karzai is scheduled to arrive in Islamabad on a two-day visit Wednesday.

"India is exploiting Afghanistan to put into practice its nefarious designs against Pakistan. The issue will be discussed with Afghan President Hamid Karzai during his Islamabad visit," The News quoted Basit, as saying.

Basit said that though Islamabad and Kabul have some issues between them, things have improved over the period of time.

Militants armed with guns and grenades stormed the offices of a US-based Christian charity in Pakistan yesterday, killing six aid workers in an attack blamed on Islamist rebels.

The gunmen stormed the World Vision building near the town of Oghi in the Mansehra district of North West Frontier Province (NWFP), where Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants have waged a deadly campaign.

The aid group condemned the attack as "brutal and senseless", and indefinitely suspended all of World Vision's operations in Pakistan, where the charity has about 300 staff.

World Vision said six Pakistani employees, including two women, were killed and seven others wounded when up to 15 gunmen arrived in pick-up vehicles and began firing on the aid workers.

"They gathered all of us in one room. The gunmen, some of whom had their faces covered, also snatched our mobile phones," said World Vision administration officer Mohammad Sajid, who was in the office at the time.

"They dragged people one by one and shifted to an adjacent room and shot and killed them... After that one of them said: 'It is enough, we should leave now'. While leaving they lobbed grenades."

Rienk van Velzen, World Vision's regional communications director, told AFP by telephone from the Netherlands that all staff in the office were Pakistani.

"We have four male and two female staff members killed," he said.

The organisation has operated in the area since October 2005, when aid workers flooded into the northwest after a 7.6-magnitude earthquake killed more than 73,000 people and left about 3.5 million homeless.

But many charities have left the area, as Islamist violence has soared. In February 2008, four aid workers with British-based group Plan International were killed in a similar gun and grenade attack in Mansehra town.

Police officials said the militants on Wednesday opened fire and detonated hand grenades at the site near Oghi, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Islamabad before disappearing into the hills.

"Police rushed to the area after receiving information about the attack, but the attackers managed to flee," senior police officer Waqar Ahmed told AFP.

"We chased them, but the gunmen escaped into the mountains."

Ahmed blamed the attack on "the same people who are destroying our schools" -- a reference to Taliban militants opposed to co-education who have blown up hundreds of schools across the northwest in the past three years.

"Now they want to disturb relief work in quake-hit areas," Ahmed said.

A wave of suicide and bomb attacks across Pakistan has killed more than 3,000 people since 2007. Blame has fallen on Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants bitterly opposed to the country's alliance with the United States.

But Azam Tariq, a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, said he was unaware of Wednesday's attack, telling AFP by telephone: "I have no knowledge about the incident and would not like to offer any comment."

World Vision's website describes the group as "a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation" founded by a US reverend.



Pakistani security officials inspect a damaged building of a US-based Christian charity after a militant attack near the town of Oghi in the Mansehra district of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) yesterday. Militants armed with guns and grenades stormed the offices of a US-based Christian charity in Pakistan, killing six aid workers in an attack blamed on Islamist rebels.



Congress Party President and leader of India's UPA government Sonia Gandhi (L) poses with supporters at her residence in New Delhi yesterday, a day after the Women's Reservation Bill was passed in the Upper House of the parliament.

'Govt will pass women's bill before Mar 16'

Lok Sabha adjourned amid protest

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The government intends to pass the women's reservation bill in the Lok Sabha before the house adjourns March 16 for a three-week break, said Parliamentary Affairs Minister PK Bansal here Wednesday.

"The government intends to pass the bill in the Lok Sabha before March 16. That's our intention," Bansal told IANS.

The Rajya Sabha Tuesday passed the historic bill giving one-third representation to women in parliament and state legislatures.

"The government will manage to get the support of all its allies when it comes in the Lok Sabha for consideration and passing. We will manage the family," Law Minister M Veerappa Moily told reporters when asked about the Trinamool Congress abstaining from voting in the Rajya Sabha.

Parliament will adjourn March 16 for a three-week break and will meet April 12. The session concludes May 7.

Earlier the Lok Sabha was adjourned Wednesday after Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal-United's Sharad Yadav and Rashtriya Janata Dal's Lalu Prasad staged noisy protests against the women's reservation bill being passed in the Rajya Sabha after seven MPs were forcefully evicted.

Leading other protesting MPs, the Yadav trio marched towards the speaker's podium, raising slogans against the government. Speaker Meira Kumar then adjourned the house till noon.

The MPs accused the government of using marshals to forcefully evict suspended seven Rajya Sabha MPs -- SP's Kamal Akhtar, Veerpal Singh Yadav, Amir Alam Khan and Nand Kishore Yadav, JD-U's Ejaz Ali, Lok Janshakti Party's Sabir Ali and RJD's Subhash Prasad Yadav -- to pass the women's quota bill in the house Tuesday.

AFP, New Delhi

Indian newspapers yesterday hailed a vote by legislators to reserve one-third of parliamentary seats for women after a debate that saw unruly protests and the suspension of several MPs.

Sonia Gandhi, the matriarch of national politics, said she was "happy for all the women of the country" after the upper house passed the bill, which now heads to the lower house where more furious opposition is expected.

Regional socialist parties have campaigned against the law since it was first proposed 14 years ago, saying it would benefit only elite Hindus unless there were specific quotas for Muslim and low-caste women.

"Women Go From Home to House" ran the headline in The Times of India, which like other dailies described the vote as a major breakthrough for women's rights.

"It is no secret that patriarchy runs deep in Indian society and women have been historically denied social, economic and political opportunities," the Times said in its editorial.

"India takes a giant leap for womankind" the Hindu newspaper declared after the vote was passed by a large majority.

The bill has threatened to split the Congress-led coalition that won last year's elections but party president Sonia, who has invested political capital in the policy, said she was committed to seeing it pass into law.

"Politics is always full of risks," said the widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

"Whenever there is something revolutionary and new, there is opposition, there are difficulties in all parties, perhaps in my party too," she added.

The bill won the backing of 186 of the 248 members of the upper Rajya Sabha chamber, more than the two-thirds majority needed for the draft legislation, which would result in a constitutional change.

Mumbai attacks suspect a 'depraved murderer': Prosecution

AFP, Mumbai

A Pakistani man on trial in India over the 2008 attacks that killed 166 people in Mumbai was branded a "convincing, depraved murderer" by the prosecution during final arguments on Tuesday.

Lawyer Ujjwal Nikam said the case against Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab was overwhelming, as was "voluminous" evidence of Pakistani involvement.

Kasab stands accused of being one of 10 Islamist militants who launched an assault against multiple targets in India's financial capital 14 months ago.

The sole surviving gunman, he faces a string of charges, including waging war against India, murder and attempted murder. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

Bomb kills 5 as Ahmadinejad, Gates visit Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A car bomb killed five people in Afghanistan yesterday, as the Iranian president and the defence secretary of Iran's arch-foe, the United States, paid duelling visits to the war-torn country.

The attack killed Afghan security personnel at a security post in Paktika, the eastern province which has become a flashpoint for a Taliban insurgency now in its ninth year and which borders militant strongholds in Pakistan.

Militants fired eight rockets at the post after the bombing, and it was not immediately clear if the number of casualties would increase, provincial police chief Dawlat Khan Zadran told AFP.

Late Tuesday a suicide bomber targeted a Nato-Afghan border police compound in neighbouring Khost province, killing two foreign soldiers in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's arrival in Kabul was confirmed by the Afghan government as Gates visited a training centre for Afghan soldiers on the outskirts of the capital.

Gates is on the second day of a visit to review a surge of US and Nato troops set to bring the

number of foreign forces in Afghanistan to 150,000 by the summer in a last-ditch effort to end the increasingly costly conflict.

Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for the withdrawal of US-led troops from Afghanistan, on Iran's eastern border, while US officials have long accused Iran of maintaining links to Islamist insurgents in the country.

Speaking to reporters at the Camp Blackhorse training centre, Gates said the United States wanted Afghanistan to have "good relations" with all its neighbours.

Despite their rivalry, Washington and Tehran are both sworn enemies of the extremist Sunni Muslim militia, which ruled in Kabul from 1996, before being overthrown in the 2001 US-led invasion.

Washington has made a number of efforts to involve all of Afghanistan's neighbours, including Iran, in restoring stability to the country.

But they have been complicated by the lack of diplomatic relations between Tehran and Washington, and the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme.

Karzai spokesman Siamak Hirawi said the Afghan and Iranian leaders would discuss bilateral ties and expanding economic relations, such as a railway line from Tajikistan through Afghanistan to Iran.

Zardari signs anti-women harassment bill

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has signed the Protection Against Harassment of Women Bill, 2010, which prohibits harassment of women at the workplace.

Addressing a gathering of some distinguished women guests at the Presidency after signing the historic bill, Zardari said people wanting to harm the ideology of Muhammad Ali Jinnah would not be spared, and that the government is committed to providing a bright future for the coming generations.

Kidnapped toddler safe, alive, say Pak police

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan police officials have claimed that British toddler Sahil Saeed, who was kidnapped from Punjab's Jhelum last week, is safe and alive and that investigation agencies were close to recovering him.

"The child is safe. We made some progress and hopefully, we'll sort out this case soon," Khalid Mehmood, who is leading the investigations in Jhelum, told a foreign news agency.

Five-year old Sahil was abducted from his grandmother's house in Jhelum on last Thursday as he was about to leave along with his father to catch a flight back to London.

Earlier, Interior Minister Rehman Malik had said that there was growing evidence of the involvement of some family members in the abduction.

Talking to reporters in Islamabad, Malik said investigations suggest the hand of some one very close to the family being involved in Sahil's abduction.

Putin eyes arms, nuclear deals with old ally India

AFP, Moscow

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin heads to India today for a visit aimed at tightening the close arms and energy partnerships that Moscow and New Delhi have enjoyed since the Soviet era.

The highlight of the two-day visit is expected to be the signing of several military agreements, including a deal on a Soviet-era aircraft carrier whose troubled history has raised fears over the future strength of relations.

"The signing of a number of concrete documents, including in the military sphere, is expected," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told AFP. He declined to provide further details ahead of Friday's signing.

A spokesman for Russia's state arms exporter, Rosoboronexport, Vyacheslav Davidenko, confirmed to AFP that several arms deals were expected, including on the Admiral Gorshkov, a Soviet-era aircraft carrier sold to India and being refurbished by a Russian firm.

Pakistan court stalls on US terror suspects

Say lawyers

AFP, Sargodha

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan again failed Wednesday to frame charges against five young Americans accused of plotting attacks with al-Qaeda-linked groups, lawyers said.

The US citizens facing trial in the eastern city of Sargodha were arrested in December 2009. Judge Anwar Nazeer has rejected a plea by defence lawyers for them to be released on bail because of lack of evidence.

The judge has adjourned the hearing until March 17, public prosecutor, Naveed Akram Cheema said.

"Charges could not be framed against the accused today, because some documents were needed which were not annexed with the charge sheet filed by the police earlier," he said.

The court at its previous hearing had delayed the indictment to March 10.

"We requested the court that we want to attach these documents and the court has fixed March 17 for the next hearing," Cheema said.

The judge decided Wednesday to transfer the hearing from an anti-terrorism court to Sargodha district jail for security fears, lawyers told reporters.

The proceedings were held amid tight security and reporters were not allowed inside the prison where the accused have been languishing.

The men, aged between 18 and 25, face life imprisonment if found guilty.

A Pakistani court has also barred their deportation to the United States, where they all lived before travelling to Pakistan last year.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (R) speaks with visiting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad moments before a joint press conference at the presidential palace in Kabul yesterday.

INVITATION FOR TENDERS

Cowater International Inc.

Strengthening Comptrollership and Oversight of Public Expenditure (SCOPE) Project

CONTRACT NO: CIDA Project No. 7049333

Supply, Installation and Configuration of Office Automation User Equipments for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Bangladesh

Under an agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has provided funds for the **Strengthening of Comptrollership and Oversight of Public Expenditure [SCOPE] Project**. The SCOPE project intends to apply part of the allocation of this credit to payments under the contract for: **Supply, Installation and Configuration of Office Automation User Equipments for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Bangladesh.**

Cowater International Inc., the Canadian implementing agency of the SCOPE project now invites sealed tenders from eligible bidders for the goods/services mentioned in the above mentioned tender package. The Tender package describes four sub-systems. Bidders are required to submit bids for all sub-systems together as one proposal.

A complete set of bidding documents in the English language will be available upon payment of a non-refundable fee of Taka Three Thousand, for which a receipt will be issued. Bidding documents are available at the address below, during working hours

SCOPE Project
c/o CIDA Program Support Unit
House No.19, Road No. 3
Block K (Off Park Road)
Baridhara, Dhaka-1212
Bangladesh
Tel: 8824740-44

BID DOCUMENT WILL BE SOLD UNTIL 4:00 p.m. WEDNESDAY 24TH of MARCH 2010