

ASIAN-EURASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM

May 12, 2005

Madam Hanifa Mezoui, Chief,
NGO Section

Ref: 2005 Resumed Session of the Committee on NGOs (5-20 May 2005)

Your letter of 10 May 2005

Madam,

With reference to your letter of 10 May 2005, I have the honor to submit our organization's reply to the questions posed to us. Our reply is in serial order.

1. The term "Federating State of Jammu & Kashmir" has to be understood in the context of the totality of substance of the letter in question and not in isolation. Not having to do anything with the political status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, our organization has, for all purposes and intents, focused on the human problem of a mass of people originating in a region of the Jammu and Kashmir, which India claims as a "Federating Unit". The import of our statement is that since human rights of a mass of humanity living in the Indian administered part is involved, it is logical that we address the matter to the Indian authorities reminding them of their responsibility towards these people.
2. 1947 was the year that saw the partition of India and the carving of a new state of Pakistan on the basis of "Two Nations Theory". This event caused unprecedented human tragedy on the sub-continent, the details of which are well documented in the works of historians.

As regards the region of Jammu in J&K State, the demographic complexion today, 58 years after the partition is that thousands of families of mixed religious, ethnic and linguistic identities and denominations have settled down in the region. They have been enjoying the freedom of movement, establishing their specific localities and habitats in and around the major towns of the region thus strongly contributing to the universal concept of composite civil societies

3. During the American missile attack on Osama bin Laden's terrorist training camp in Khost in Afghanistan, International media reported that though Osama escaped with his life, those who were killed included 6 – 10 Kashmiri terrorists.

Secondly, the banned Lashkar-e-Toiba organization, with its headquarter at ~~Murder~~ in Pakistan, occasionally publishes the list of its activists "martyred" while fight the Indian troops in Kashmir.

Muridke

Thirdly, Indian and Pakistani leadership has been positively addressing the problem of cross border infiltration by the terrorists.

4. The very letter in question written by our organization to the Indian Deputy Prime Minister is a clear and indisputable indication that if and when needed, our organization takes up with any government, including the Indian government, the issue of human rights when it is convinced that these need to be addressed. The tone and tenor of our letter speaks more than what we may explain.

Central Asia is a very important region for us as far as the question of human rights protection is concerned. We have at least 21 persons all of them reputed academics and scholars of Central Asian Republics as our members.

By way of sample, we enclose copies of two of our organization's monthly publications titled Asian-Eurasian Commentary that give an idea of how we are concerned about the human rights and allied issues in Central Asian region.

5. As regards the latest issue of our organization's journal, we regularly send the copies of Asian-Eurasian Commentary to all the Honorable members of the Committee as well as the NGO Secretariat. On my request, NGO Section chief has agreed to provide from her office record a copy of the March issue of our Asian-Eurasian Commentary.

With regards,



Kashinath Pandita,
General Secretary,
Asian-Eurasian Human Rights Forum

Monthly

Asian-Eurasian Commentary

Organ of the ASIAN – EURASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM, E-241, Sarita Vihar, New Delhi-110076, India
Tele: +91.11.5140 15 99 Fax: +91.11.2694 61 99 Cell (0) 9810299569, (0) 9818217755 E-mail: asiaeurasia@hotmail.com

Editor (South Asia) K.N. Pandita Co-editor (Europe) Sophie Barathieu



December 2004

Vol. V

No.12

Tsunami

Tsunami Toll Hits 150,000

By Tomi Soetjipto and Dean Yates

The United Nations has put the latest death toll in Asia's tsunami at around 150,000 and warned it could still soar as relief workers were confronted by huge devastated areas without roads, bridges and airstrips. Helicopters and elephants became the most useful tools on Monday for relief teams trying to reach remote areas to find and feed survivors and shift the rubble of razed towns. Aid workers struggled to help thousands huddled in makeshift camps on Indonesia's northern Sumatra island, where the tsunami claimed two thirds of its victims, and the U.N. said it was concentrating efforts on the area due to the threat of disease. "The current death toll ... what we operate with are the confirmed people who are identified as dead ... is around 150,000," said U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland. Earlier, figures from

governments gave a total of 144,970 dead. "There are many, many more who have disappeared or who are missing or who are for us nameless as of this stage. And it is particularly in the Sumatra coast," said Egeland, adding that the toll there could rise by tens of thousands. U.S. helicopters began shuttling injured refugees, many of them children, out of some of the worst-hit parts of Indonesia's Aceh province, where many towns and villages were wiped out in the December 26 disaster.

Many airports are now bursting with emergency supplies. But a logistical nightmare looms in distributing them through areas where roads and bridges have been washed away. "The emergency teams are arriving to be blocked by a wall of devastation. Everything is destroyed," Aly-Khan Rajani, CARE Canada's programme

manager for Southeast Asia, said in Jakarta. Tsunami-hit nations, however, have worked with aid agencies, private relief groups and donor governments to ease some transport bottlenecks to get supplies to the estimated 5 million people requiring some form of help.

In Sri Lanka, the second worst-hit nation with more than 30,000 dead and 850,000 homeless, there was little sign of an organised government relief effort, but food distribution looked to be smoother. The U.N International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates about 50,000 children died across South Asia — a third of the toll. Tens of thousands more have been pined. More than \$2 billion (1.05 billion pounds) has been pledged by governments and the World Bank, while private donations have been unprecedented. (A BBC report)

UN

UN the Best Place to Tackle Global Ills

Says Secretary General

Addressing the Council on Foreign Relations on 16 December at Washington DC Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "The only universal instrument that can bring States together in such a global effort is the United Nations. I am the first to acknowledge that the UN is not perfect. At times, it shows its age. But

our world will not easily find a better instrument for forging a sustained global response to today's threats. Whether the threat is terrorism or AIDS, a threat to one is a threat to all. Our defences are only as strong as their weakest link. We will be safest if we work together."

The report by the 16-member High-

level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, "A more secure world: our shared responsibility," contained 101 recommendations for dealing with the six areas identified as being the greatest threats to worldwide security in the 21st century.

(Courtesy UNIC New Delhi, vol. 59/51)

Human Rights

AFGHANISTAN: Refugees and Asylum Seekers Subjected to Human Rights Abuses

Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries and further afield continue to suffer human rights violations, rights advocates warned the Afghan government. Its concerns follow recent reports that Greek police officers allegedly tortured a group of some 40 Afghan asylum-seekers, including at least 17 Afghans aged 15 to 17. The torture reportedly included severe beatings and death threats, taking place over several days in mid-December, according to Amnesty International (AI).

"The human rights violations of Afghan refugees outside the country continue to be a matter of concern. We have called on the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to look after this issue through their channels," Nader Nadery, a member of the Afghan Independent

Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), told IRIN in the capital, Kabul.

The commission emphasized that the forced repatriation of Afghan refugees from various countries and a cessation of their refugee status was contrary to international refugee protection standards. According to Nadery, under international standards for returnees' protection, Afghanistan was still not a secure place for return. "The major concern is not only their safety in terms of security but also their food and shelter security," adding that the post-conflict Afghan government was not able to provide enough jobs and health care, while housing continued to pose a major problem for returnees.

The rights advocate said incidents reported included the harassment of

refugees by police and other authorities, mainly in Iran and Pakistan, the issue of the reunification of refugees with their families in Australia, the status of Afghan asylum seekers on the Pacific island of Nauru, as well as the alleged beating and torture of Afghan refugees by Greece police.

Meanwhile, the Afghan Commission for Human Rights (ACHR) told IRIN that hundreds of Afghan refugees in some Central Asian countries, as well as Russia, were tortured by police, with some falling victim to mafia gangs. "Unfortunately we continue to see Afghans severely harassed by police and mafia bands in Central Asia as they take this route to go to Europe," All Gull, ACHR's chairman told IRIN.

(Source: *Integrated Regional Information Networks*)

Subcontinent

Pakistan says Iran-India Pipeline would be Safe

Pakistan has reiterated that it would be able to ensure safe supply of natural gas to rival India should New Delhi join a proposed project to bring gas from Iran via Pakistan.

Pakistan has been keen on the proposed \$4 billion pipeline for years but India has been lukewarm given its troubled relations with Islamabad and concerns about security in Pakistan.

India began showing interest as its relationship with Pakistan warmed in recent months and on Speaking to Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi in Islamabad Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshheed Mehmood Kasuri called for early implementation of the scheme.

"Pakistan needs the gas pipeline with Iran anyway due to its very high growth rate and in view of an even higher growth expected in future," an official statement quoted him as saying. "Pakistan would welcome India joining the project while assuring it of security of supplies through Pakistani territory."

Kharrazi visit to Islamabad coincided with a meeting of foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan on the slow-moving peace process for the two nuclear neighbours, but the Pakistani side said there had been no detailed discussion of the project. While energy-hungry India has shown interest, it has said the pipeline would be built only if overall economic ties with Pakistan improved, but this has been prevented by continuing political tensions over the disputed Kashmir region. Pakistan says the project can go ahead with or without India. (Source: AlertNet provided by Reuters)

ADB approves loan for Kashmir development

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a US \$57 million loan for a multi-sector rehabilitation and improvement project, aimed at improving the physical and social infrastructure in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. "Our interventions are basically in five areas

including roads, education, health, power supply and water and sanitation," Shaukat Shafi, a project implementation officer at ADB's country branch, told IRIN in Islamabad.

The five-year project is the ADB's first intervention to support the local government of Pakistani-administered Kashmir in tackling urgent needs in the basic social service delivery sector. "Apart from these, we are also doing some institutional training and capacity building of different departments," Shafi added.

The ADB loan covers 75 percent of the total cost of \$76 million, while Islamabad will contribute \$19 million towards the project. The Muzaffarabad-based Planning and Development Department (PDD) is the coordinating agency for the entire project. "Investment under the project, together with the needed strengthening of related public agencies, are expected to provide the basis for sustainable economic growth, improve the well

being of about 3.4 million people, and help reduce poverty in the state," said an ADB press statement, quoting Shakeel Khan, an Urban Development Specialist at the Manila-based multilateral funding agency.

With respect to health services, none of the eight district hospitals have proper emergency departments. Every year about 4,000 people die and a greater number suffer from some kind of disability because of poor facilities. At the same time, important departments such as a pediatrics, gynecology and surgical theatres lack basic essential equipment. The ADB-funded project will support the provision of diagnostic facilities and needed medical equipment. In addition to rehabilitating various wards and constructing hostels for nurses and doctors. According to the PDD, about 80 percent of schools have no safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, while the water supply networks and

water treatment plant in all the districts' towns are in a poor condition. This causes cases of typhoid, hepatitis, cholera, and other gastrointestinal water-related diseases.

In education services, the project will rehabilitate and reconstruct the buildings of nearly 150 primary, middle and high schools of Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Local authorities require a large number of bridges to link rural communities in the hilly terrain to nearby urban centres, according to PDD. The ADB project will also help in building suspension bridges and foot bridges to increase access to livelihood opportunities and social services. Additionally, the project, due for completion in 2010, will support improvements in the power distribution network, replace transformers and procure maintenance tools. Besides, the local government has developed its own 10-year Perspective Development Plan (PDP) 2001-2011 to

improve the low levels of communication and social services.

The ADB has also approved a loan of \$250 million for a similar physical and infrastructure development project in Indian-administered Kashmir, with an additional \$108 million coming from the government of India and Kashmir's state government. The ADB project will restore existing infrastructure facilities and services in two key areas of urban and transport sectors in the state. The urban sector component will cover water supply and drainage systems while the transport sector component will finance the rehabilitation of roads and bridges throughout the state. The ADB, in its first major intervention by a multilateral aid agency in recent times, has approved two similar projects for both the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir, ensuring to some extent that the security situation will improve in the area. (*Integrated Regional Information Networks news*) ■

Pakistan's undeclared war

By Zaffar Abbas

For Pakistan's powerful military and the rugged Pashtun tribesmen, the South Waziristan region, near the border with Afghanistan, is a virtual war zone.

The vast mountainous region remains out of bound for non-locals. Journalists have been barred from the area, and the main town of Wana looks like a military garrison. Almost daily skirmishes, landmine explosions, and use of heavy artillery and occasional aerial bombing, makes it a deadly conflict zone. The latest military offensive in which air force bombers and gunship helicopters pounded an alleged training camp of suspected al-Qaeda militants, has resulted in heavy casualties. And it has taken the conflict to an area that until now had remained relatively peaceful. This was the third time in recent weeks that the military bombed suspected militant hideouts. It has given a new and a more serious dimension to the security operation within the country. Until now, aerial bombing has never been used to crush an armed insurgency in the country. The military may not have suffered any serious casualties in the latest offensive, largely because it used air power and long-range rockets. But since the present conflict began in March, scores of soldiers have been killed, including officers. Dozens of foreign and

local militants have also been killed. But it is becoming increasingly clear that the victims of this undeclared war are the local tribesmen and their families, who have been caught in the crossfire. In some ways it suggests that the military's assessments about the fighting strength of the militants, and the risk to civilians, were wrong. So what will be the outcome of this bloody conflict, which does not seem to have an immediate end? No-one seems to have an answer. The military offensive had been part of the overall war against al-Qaeda. The US-led forces have largely been operating across the border in Afghanistan, and Islamabad admits, have also been assisting the Pakistani troops in surveillance and communication. The co-ordinated effort is largely aimed at capturing top al-Qaeda leaders Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahri. The men, and many of their close associates, are widely believed to be hiding in and perhaps operating out of the area. Since the start of operation, the military authorities have firmly established that a large number of Uzbek, Chechen and Arab militants were in the area. Battle-hardened tribesmen have taken the military action as an attack on their sovereignty, and have been putting up stiff resistance. Most parts of the semi-autonomous tribal region have

traditionally resisted the presence of foreign forces, including Pakistani troops. It was in July 2002 that Pakistani troops, for the first time in 55 years, entered the Tirah Valley in Khyber tribal agency. Soon they were in Shawal valley of North Waziristan, and later in South Waziristan. This was made possible after long negotiations with various tribes, who reluctantly agreed to allow the military's presence on the assurance that it would bring in funds and development work. But once the military action started in South Waziristan a number of Waziri sub-tribes took it as an attempt to subjugate them. Attempts to persuade them into handing over the foreign militants failed, and with an apparently mishandling by the authorities, the security campaign against suspected al-Qaeda militants turned into an undeclared war between the Pakistani military and the rebel tribesmen. Some analysts say it is a no-win situation for the Pakistani troops. They cannot abandon the operation half-way, but are now having to use bombers and gunship helicopters against what was earlier described as a "handful of foreign militants and some local miscreants".

BBC correspondent in Islamabad ■

Central Asia

Central Asian Boys Sucked into Militancy

Pakistani military officials say militants were recruiting more and more teenagers from Central Asia to carry out attacks, and say they have intercepted messages specifically asking their contacts to send them children. "They are the future terrorists," said Lieutenant-General Safdar Hussain, who leads the army's hunt for militants in northwestern Pakistan. "They are the best people to be used for terrorism. They can plant improvised explosive devices without anyone suspecting them because they are very young."

Army operations in South Waziristan have flushed out large numbers of militants from the former Soviet-controlled states of Central Asia. Members of al-Qaeda linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), for example, landed up in the semi-

autonomous Pashtun tribal lands after first taking refuge in Afghanistan, having been forced out of Tajikistan in 2000. The leader of the Uzbek group, Juma Namangani, was killed by a U.S.-led air strike in 2001, when Washington decided to retaliate against al Qaeda's attacks on U.S. cities on Sept. 11 by bombing bin Laden's militant network in Afghanistan. Military officials say Namangani's charismatic successor, Tahir Yuldashev, was now reorganizing these central Asian militants and recruiting young men for attacks on the security forces in the tribal region.

"Qari Tahir Yuldashev, who has his own political motives, is using these boys for terrorism," Hussain said. Commonly known as Qari because of his clear recitals of passages from the Koran in a beautiful voice, Yuldashev

has been on the run since Pakistani security forces launched an offensive on his stronghold South Waziristan last March.

He was said to have been wounded, but managed to escape and has not been sighted since.

Blamed for a series of bomb attacks in the Uzbek capital Tashkent in 1999, Yuldashev was sentenced to death in absentia.

Khalid said he had never met Yuldashev but has seen his in pictures.

And with his own militant career curtailed, Khalid is at a loss over what he wants from life. Asked if he would like to see his widowed mother again, Khalid can only nod miserably, unable to raise his eyes from the ground.

(Source: AlertNet Reuters)

OSCE Raps Uzbek Parliamentary Poll as Undemocratic

By Dmitry Solovyov

Uzbekistan's parliamentary election fell significantly short of international standards because it involved only parties loyal to President Islam Karimov said Europe's main human rights body.

Karimov, 66, who has ruled the Muslim nation of 26 million since Soviet times, hailed the vote as a step towards democracy, pointing to five loyal parties on the ballot as a sign of a viable multi-party system. But four opposition parties were barred from running in the race after the Justice Ministry refused to register them. "Although minor improvements since the 1999 elections were identified, the mission concludes that the elections did fall significantly short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections," an observer mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said.

"The similarity of the political platforms of the registered political parties appeared to deprive voters of a genuine choice," the OSCE said. "Regrettably, the implementation of the election legislation by the authorities failed to ensure a pluralistic, competitive and transparent election," the OSCE statement quoted Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj, head of the OSCE mission, as saying.

The European Union Presidency echoed the OSCE comment. "The Presidency...notes with concern that only government-approved parties were registered," it said in a statement.

Uzbek officials had earlier said the election was "open and honest, held in conformity with the law". Observers from the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States lauded the "transparency and democratic manner"

of the vote.

The Central Election Commission called runoffs for around half of the seats, where no candidate had won an outright majority. The runoffs between the two leading candidates will be held within two weeks. "We view this poll as a crime against the Uzbek people," said Otanazar Aripov of the banned Erk (Freedom) Democratic Party. "Those five loyal parties serve only one person in this country, the president, and were all created on his orders. In the future parliament, they will continue serving Karimov," Vasilya Inoyatova, a leader of the opposition Birlik (Unity) Popular Movement, told Reuters. Kopaj said the OSCE had evidence of cases of "proxy voting", believed to be common in the countryside, when a person brings the passports of his family members and votes on their behalf.

Monthly

Asian-Eurasian Commentary

Organ of the ASIAN - EURASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM, E-240, Sarita Vihar, New Delhi-110044
Tele: +91.11.2694 21 78 Fax: +91.11.2694 61 99 Cell (0) 9810299569 E-mail: asiaeurasia@hotmail.com

Editor (South Asia) K.N. Pandita Co-editor (Europe) Sophie Barathieu



December 2003

Vol. IV

No.12

Human Rights

Afghanistan: Violation of Children's Rights

In Afghanistan local administrative bodies and international assistance organizations took action to ensure children's welfare to the extent possible; however, the situation of children was very poor. Approximately 45 percent of the population was made up of children age 14 or under. The infant mortality rate was 250 out of 1,000 births; Medecins Sans Frontieres reported in 2000 that 250,000 children per year die of malnutrition. One-quarter of children die before the age of 5. These figures most likely have increased due to another year of drought, intensified fighting, and massive displacement. A Management Sciences for Health study also found that only about one-fourth of all health facilities offer basic services for children, including immunization, antenatal care, postpartum care, and treatment of childhood diseases. An UNICEF study also reported that the majority of children were highly traumatized and expected to die before reaching adulthood. According to the study, some 90 percent have nightmares and suffer from acute anxiety, while 70 percent have seen acts of violence,

including the killing of parents or relatives.

While girls throughout the country were able to attend school, the U.N. reported that in some areas a climate of insecurity persisted. In the spring, anonymous leaflets distributed at schools in the Kandahar area urged citizens not to cooperate with foreigners. On September 25, a girls' school near the northern town of Sar-i Pul was set on fire. In mid-September a small device reportedly detonated under a chair in a changing room in a coeducational primary school in Kandahar, causing minor injuries to a teacher. On October 25, in Wardak Province, unknown assailants fired rockets at the De Afghanan School. The school was badly damaged; however, no one was injured in the attack. A leaflet was left near the school denouncing the influence of foreigners on women and girls.

There were credible reports that both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance used child soldiers. Northern Alliance officials publicly stated that their soldiers must be at least 18 years of age, but press sources reported that

preteen soldiers were used in Northern Alliance forces.

Persons with Disabilities

The Government took no measures to protect the rights of persons with mental and physical disabilities or to mandate accessibility for them. In December hundreds of persons with disabilities protested against the State, claiming that the State was not doing enough to care for them. In addition, they demanded the resignation of the Minister of the Disabled, Abdullah Wardak, and accused him of not disbursing foreign aid meant for them. There reportedly has been increased public acceptance of persons with disabilities because of their increasing prevalence due to landmines or other war-related injuries. An estimated 800,000 persons suffered from disabilities requiring at least some form of assistance. Although community-based health and rehabilitation committees provided services to approximately 100,000 persons, their activities were restricted to 60 out of 330 districts, and they were able to assist only a small number of those in need. (USDept of State, Country Reports on HR Practices March 31, 2003. ■

Turkey: the role of international community

United Nations

Several years after his first request for a visit, U.N. Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons Dr. Francis Deng,

was finally permitted to visit Turkey in May. In a brief public statement in June, Dr. Deng called on the government to formulate a clear,

transparent policy on return and encouraged the government to involve intergovernmental organizations and civil society in the process.

The special rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary, and summary executions, Asma Jahangir, published a report on her February 2001 visit to Turkey, noting that there were violations of the right to life even while she was in the country. The rapporteur made inquiries into the "disappearance" of Serdar Tanzi and Kubekir Deniz, officials from the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) after they had presented themselves at the Silopi district gendarmerie in

Şirnak in January 2001, and she reported that she "did not get a sense that the civil authorities had sufficient power to investigate the District Gendarme Commander."

With respect to "honor" killings, the special rapporteur criticized the provisions of the penal code reducing the sentence of the perpetrators of such crimes to a token punishment if the court considers that there was "grave provocation." She noted that the longstanding conflict in the

southeast had overshadowed and marginalized the issue of women's right to life in that region.

The rapporteur concluded that state agents had been able to commit extrajudicial executions, confident that their crimes would not be investigated. She recommended that the government set up a high-level commission with strong powers to undertake fact-finding in cases where people have allegedly been killed by the security forces. ■

terrorism

Kashmir, Afghan network targets Musharraf: Pakistan

Two suicide car bombers tried to ram explosives-laden vehicles into Musharraf's limousine on Thursday, 5 December in the Garrison city of Rawalpindi, 20 km from the capital Islamabad.

Information Minister Sheikh Hasnain Ahmed said investigators were close to arresting those behind the attack.

"It's a huge network of terrorists having tentacles from Kashmir to Afghanistan. They also have international ties," he told Reuters.

A senior Government official said, in a condition of anonymity, that one of the suicide bombers was from Pakistani-occupied Kashmir (PoK), while the other was an Afghan who carried a fake Pakistani identity card. The fake identity card showed his address to be in a town of North West Frontier Province, bordering Afghanistan, he said.

The fake identity card showed his address to be in a town of North West Frontier Province, bordering Afghanistan, he said.

Fifteen people were killed and 45 wounded in the attack, the second against Musharraf in less than a fortnight. A powerful bomb exploded moments after his motorcade crossed a bridge on the same Rawalpindi road on December 14.

Musharraf, a staunch ally of the United States in the war on terror, blamed Islamic extremists for the attacks and vowed not to falter in the fight against terrorism.

Ahmed said several people had been arrested in the crackdown aimed at the masterminds of the attack.

"We have entered the network," he said, without elaborating. Witnesses in Rawalakot in Pakistan's part of Kashmir said authorities arrested at least three suspects from a nearby village in a raid before dawn on Friday.

Hardline Islamists are furious with Musharraf for supporting Washington's crackdown in which Pakistan arrested hundreds of Al Qaeda militants and handed them over to the United States.

Musharraf's recent peace overtures with India and attempts to resolve the Kashmir issue have also fuelled militants' anger.

"The anger toward Musharraf and his policies is natural," said a former guerilla belonging to the banned Harkat-ul Mujahideen.

A dissident faction of Harkat-ul Mujahideen tried to blow up Musharraf's motorcade in the southern port city of Karachi last year, according to officials.

Analysts have questioned how the perpetrators could have got details of Musharraf's movements to allow them to carry out two attacks in so short a time in Rawalpindi, the Army headquarters.

Official sources said militants ignored Musharraf's decoy motorcade on Thursday. Analysts said this showed militants had either infiltrated Pakistan's top security agencies or gained access to sensitive information. ■ (REUTERS)

Disaster

Iran appeals world community for aid to the victims of Bam earthquake

Estimates of numbers killed in the disaster range from 10,000 to 25,000. The Iranian authorities say more than 3,000 bodies have already been buried in mass graves, and hopes are dwindling for anyone who might be still trapped.

Many thousands of people have been injured and most of Bam's buildings have been flattened, including two hospitals and the old Citadel.

One official said 150 people had been pulled out alive from the rubble on Saturday, including a baby less than a year old.

The BBC's Jim Muir says thousands of people spent a second night sleeping well away from any of the buildings still standing for fear that another shock might bring them down. They slept in tents or cars or simply huddled in blankets out in the open.

But the main priority now is to provide food, clean water and shelter for those that are left in the city. Rescuers say there is also an urgent lack of body bags to take away the corpses.

Bodies buried

The exact death toll is not clear, but some local officials say it is much lower than media reports were suggesting. The regional governor said 5,500 dead had been buried by the end of Saturday.

Nations around the world have acted swiftly, sending rescuers, doctors, tents and cash to the stricken region. The US will send emergency teams and medical supplies, and

senior officials from Washington and Tehran have been in touch over the crisis. President George W Bush said the US was ready to help, and Iran has said it will accept aid from any country except Israel. But a spokesman said there was "no political angle" to the dialogue between the two countries, which have not had diplomatic relations since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Appeal

Iranian Health Minister Ahmed Pezeshkian said more foreign volunteers were not really needed because Iran was having trouble coordinating its efforts. He said Iran had already had large numbers of local volunteers coming in from all over the country. Instead it needed medical equipment like mobile x-ray machines and ventilators.

The International Red Cross has launched an appeal for \$12m of aid for the huge numbers made homeless by the earthquake, but it says appeal target amount is likely to rise in the next few days to meet survivors' long-term needs. The European Union has pledged almost \$1m in aid to Iran.

Tents needed

The United Nations is sending experts to assess the damage and mobilize international assistance.

For those who are alive, the Red Cross says tens of thousands of tents, blankets and tarpaulin sheets are needed as well as cooking equipment, water purifying tablets and kerosene.

The only hospitals still functioning

in Bam have been overwhelmed by the numbers of injured and many people are being treated in the rubble-strewn streets or taken to other towns for treatment.

Dozens of Iranian military planes have been mobilized to evacuate the wounded from the earthquake-hit zone to hospitals in Tehran and other cities.

President Mohammad Khatami described the quake as a "national tragedy" and said it was too huge for Iran to cope with alone.

Friday 26 Dec 2003 quake had a magnitude of at least 6.3, according to Iranian sources. The US Geological Survey measured it at 6.7. Bam - about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) southeast of Tehran - was on the UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

Iran suffers frequent earthquakes, with small tremors happening almost daily. In one earthquake in 1990, around 40,000 people died.

RECENT IRAN QUAKES;

June 2002 more than 200 killed in the western Qazvin and Hamadan regions. May 1997: More than 1500 killed in Eastern Iran. February 1997 about 1000 killed in North Western Iran. June 1990: About 40,000 in Iran's worst recorded disaster, affecting Caspian Area of Gilan and Zinjan. About half a million people made homeless June 1981. More than 1,000 killed in quake that destroyed the town of Golbaf.

*Eurasia Insight***Russia, US Redistribute Pawns on Caucasus Chessboard***Jean-Christophe Peuch*

Abandoned by his U.S. allies, under pressure from Russia, and facing public humiliation at home after opposition supporters stormed parliament during his inaugural speech, Shevardnadze finally announced his resignation on 23 November, after a three-week standoff.

Replacing the 75-year-old leader is a trio of young politicians who have called for early presidential elections on 4 January and new legislative polls, tentatively scheduled for 25 January.

The troika includes outgoing parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze, who is temporarily standing in as president, as well as Tbilisi City Council Chairman Mikhail Saakashvili and former parliament speaker Zurab Zhvania, a one-time Shevardnadze ally.

It appears likely that the charismatic Saakashvili, who spearheaded November's street protests and is the only political heavyweight among six presidential candidates, will be Georgia's next leader.

It won't be an easy transition. Shevardnadze's successors have promised to rebuild Georgia's disastrous economy and put an end to rampant corruption, establish rule of law, and restore the country's territorial integrity.

Even more importantly, they have vowed to open a "new page" in relations with Moscow after more than a decade of mistrust marked by Russian meddling in Georgia's separatist conflicts and its continued

military presence on Georgian territory.

This means a change in posture regarding Russia's own separatist conflicts as well. In a 1 December commentary in Britain's "Financial Times," Saakashvili wrote that he sees cooperation with Moscow "in ending conflict and eliminating terrorism in Chechnya" as crucial to "building peace and prosperity in the North Caucasus. Moscow had often accused Shevardnadze's Georgia of harboring Chechen militants. Russian President Vladimir Putin has welcomed the apparent change of heart, and has vowed in turn to help restore trust between the two countries. "We hope that the future, legitimately elected leadership of the country will do everything it can to restore the traditions of friendship between our two countries," Putin said. "And for us, for Russia, there is no other goal in our relations with Georgia."

Aslan Abashidze, the maverick president of the autonomous republic of Adjara, who says he does not recognize the legitimacy of Georgia's interim leadership, was also present at the Moscow discussions. And on 8 December, Russia eased visa regulations for Adjara residents in a move Georgia's leaders see as an attempt to undermine their fledgling rule.

By contrast, the United States has put its unconditional support behind Shevardnadze's successors, pledging election funds and vowing to resume financial aid to the impoverished

country. At a recent summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Washington also chastised Russia for maintaining two military bases in Georgia in violation of international defense agreements. The spats have raised concerns about stability in the South Caucasus. But analysts believe neither Moscow nor Washington—who both supported Tbilisi's regime change—is willing to return to the bitter fight for control over the region that marked bilateral ties in the 1990s.

Charles Urjewicz teaches Russian and Caucasus history at the Paris-based National Institute of Eastern Languages and Civilizations (INALCO). He believes that, rather than seeking confrontation, Russia and the United States will be looking for ways to prop up the working arrangement they have reached over the recent political transitions in Georgia and neighboring Azerbaijan. U.S. policymakers are also anxious to avoid new troubles in a region that borders Chechnya, which they claim serves as a training ground for Al-Qaeda militants.

"I would not go so far as to say that Russia and the U.S. are contemplating a real partnership, because I don't really believe it would happen. But I believe the two countries may well make the best of the [new] situation in Georgia. They are glaring at one another, but at the same time, neither side has an interest in jostling the other one—at least for the time being," Urjewicz told RFE/RL.

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STATEMENT ON DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE IN IRAN

The Secretary-General was distressed to learn of the devastating casualties and damage caused by the earthquake in south-eastern Iran. He conveys his deepest condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the victims of the disaster. The Government of Iran has indicated that it would welcome assistance from the international community. The United Nations is mobilizing international assistance to support the Government to cope with the tragedy. The United Nations Country Team in Tehran has sent two teams to the affected area. In addition, a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has been dispatched to help coordinate relief efforts. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has made an initial emergency grant of \$90,000.

The Secretary-General calls on the international community to provide immediate support to the relief efforts for victims of the earthquake.