



INTERVIEW-Pakistan says its missiles better than India's.

By **Chaitanya Kalbag** and Simon Denyer

609 words

15 April 2003

22:01

Reuters News

English

(c) 2003 Reuters Limited

ISLAMABAD, April 15 (Reuters) - Pakistan's foreign minister on Tuesday warned India of massive retaliation if it tried to launch a pre-emptive strike on his country, arguing that Islamabad had a more advanced missile programme than New Delhi.

Mian Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri described as "irresponsible" comments from his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha this month that there was a stronger case for military action against Pakistan than Iraq.

"Of course one is concerned, but I am not alarmed," he told Reuters in an interview, when asked about Sinha's comments.

"They are threatening nuclear war against us. My response is this: 'Don't make that mistake'," he said. "Our (missile) programme is more advanced than India's.

"If India launches into anything stupid, they will pay a price." Both India and Pakistan detonated nuclear devices in May 1998 and have assembled arsenals of warhead-capable missiles.

Sinha said India had better grounds for staging a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan than the United States had for invading Iraq. But he later said India was not about to attack Pakistan and said his comments may have been misunderstood.

"I don't think they become a foreign minister," Kasuri said of the comments. "Foreign ministers have to keep their language in check because their primary purpose is to lower tension. To raise the tension all you require is a wag of the tongue.

"My constituency is on the Indian border and I will get many more votes if I start speaking like Mr Sinha, but I take my job very seriously and I will not ever use such language."

REJECTS PRE-EMPTIVE DOCTRINE

Kasuri said he rejected the doctrine of pre-emptive war, but added that there was an argument to use it against India itself, saying New Delhi had rejected United Nations resolutions about the disputed territory of Kashmir and violated human rights in its north-east, where separatist insurgencies rage.

"I do not believe in any such doctrine," Kasuri said, "but if, for the sake of discussion, one assumes there was such a doctrine, India would be a fit case."

Tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours have been stoked by the killing of 24 Hindus by suspected Muslim rebels in Indian Kashmir last month.

New Delhi blamed the attack on Pakistan, but Kasuri said India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party was simply playing for votes domestically, with state elections due in November and national elections next year.

"These leaders are issuing these inflammatory statements to soothe the domestic electoral agenda of the BJP," he said. "I think it is irresponsible."

India, he said, also seemed concerned that the West, in an effort to soothe Muslim anger after the Iraq war,



might push for a resolution not only of the Palestinian question but also of the Kashmir dispute.

"One strand of my thought says it is the domestic electoral agenda," he said. "Maybe there's something else underlying it, that is this fear the international community may turn its attention at long last to a resolution of the Kashmir question."

The South Asian rivals came close to war last year over Indian assertions that Pakistan was sending militants across the Line of Control into Indian-controlled Kashmir.

Kasuri said those claims were not correct, and challenged India to accept neutral observers along the ceasefire line in Kashmir, a suggestion New Delhi has repeatedly rejected.

"Why does it want to be accuser, prosecutor and judge at the same time?," he asked. "Let them accept international monitoring along the Line of Control on both sides."

Document Iba0000020030415dz4f00rxr

© 2006 Dow Jones Reuters Business Interactive LLC (trading as Factiva). All rights reserved.

