

**WRAPUP-Indian helicopter downed in Kashmir crisis.**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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NEW DELHI, May 28 (Reuters) - India suffered a second setback on Friday in its air campaign to root out infiltrators from its part of Kashmir when guerrillas brought down an attack helicopter with a Stinger missile, killing all four crewmen.

The use of the Stinger by the separatists, who have dug themselves in on high ground, introduced a new and lethal element into the conflict in the subcontinent.

An alliance of guerrilla groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir later claimed it had shot down two Indian helicopters. An Indian defence official said only one had been lost.

But the nuclear-capable neighbours also appeared to pause in their worst direct confrontation in nearly three decades.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told a public meeting in Karachi he had spoken to his Indian counterpart, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and told him the Kashmir issue could not be resolved without talks.

"I talked to Vajpayee today and asked where is this leading to," Sharif said. "I told him and he agreed that there is no solution to Kashmir except table talks."

But Sharif also warned that any Indian aircraft violating Pakistan's airspace would be shot down.

An Indian official confirmed that Vajpayee spoke to Sharif for 20 minutes by telephone and said the stand-off was in the danger of escalating.

"Vajpayee told Sharif he was disappointed at what was going on in Kargil (in India's Kashmir) and warned him the situation could escalate," the official said.

Pakistani officials at the United Nations said Sharif had also asked U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to send a special envoy and enlarge the U.N. observer mission in Kashmir.

But India was cool to the idea of overt U.N. intervention or mediation during discussions with Alvaro de Soto, a U.N. assistant secretary-general for political affairs who spoke to envoys from both countries on Thursday, U.N. sources said.

Annan has spoken to leaders of both countries by telephone and called on them to stop fighting, a U.N. spokesman said.

India on Thursday lost two jet fighters, one of whose pilots was killed. It has demanded that Pakistan immediately return the survivor. Islamabad has said it will treat him as a prisoner of war but will hand over the body of the other pilot.

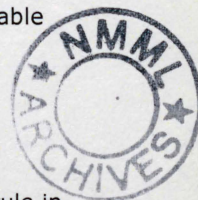
"The Pakistanis are provoking us to escalate the conflict," India's Air Vice Marshal S.K. Malik told a briefing, saying the helicopter had been brought down on the Indian side of the ceasefire line dividing Kashmir.

"We will be reviewing some of our options of evicting infiltrators from our territory."

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the United States supplied Afghan guerrillas with the portable Stingers.

India says Afghan mercenaries are among the hundreds of guerrillas it has tried to flush out of dug-in positions on remote mountains in Kashmir with three days of air assaults.

Islamic guerrillas have made no secret of their infiltration of Jammu and Kashmir state to fight Indian rule in the two-thirds of Kashmir controlled by New Delhi. Pakistan controls the rest.





Major General J.J. Singh, additional director general of operations, said 24 Indian personnel had died in three weeks of hostilities, while 131 had been wounded and 12 were missing.

Singh estimated that more than 200 of the militants had been killed and said logistical support routes from Pakistan for 300-400 others had been choked off by the Indian army. Malik said Indian aircraft had flown 40-50 sorties since Wednesday.

India and Pakistan have gone to war twice over Kashmir since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

Since 1990, they have been locked in a diplomatic tussle over a Moslem revolt in Kashmir.

A sharp reminder of that rebellion, which has cost over 25,000 lives, came on Friday when a crude bomb blew up an army vehicle on a key road connecting the Kashmir Valley with the rest of India.

A defence official said two children of an army colonel and two soldiers died in the blast and six soldiers were wounded.

In Srinagar, the summer capital of India's only Moslem-majority state, the main group banding together separatist organisations led a protest strike against the air strikes, which closed shops, businesses, schools and colleges.

Overnight there were heavy artillery exchanges across the Line of Control between the two countries.

Islamabad, which on Friday marked the first anniversary of nuclear tests staged in reply to underground blasts by New Delhi, is seeking U.N. intervention in Kashmir.

India says it is committed to February's Lahore Declaration, in which the two sides pledged to solve the dispute peacefully.

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