

## India, Pakistan end 'cordial' talks on river treaty

AFP, New Delhi

Indian and Pakistani officials Friday indicated they may go for joint inspections of the implementation of a river water treaty on sharing the waters of the Indus river and its tributaries, a press release said.

"There was discussion on possibility of two general tours of inspection, one each in either country during 2003-04 in keeping with the provisions of the treaty," the release, issued after a three-day meeting of Indus Commissioners from both countries, said.

This was the first official interaction between India and Pakistan since Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee last month offered a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan, easing 17 months of strained relations that had brought the nuclear-capable South Asian adversaries to the brink of war.

Every year before the monsoon season, the traditionally hostile neighbours hold official talks to work out a water-sharing agreement based on the 1960 Indus Water Treaty.

The treaty was negotiated between 1951 and 1960 following rising tensions between the two after New Delhi stemmed the flow of Indus tributaries to Pakistan on April 1, 1948 for lack of an agreement.

Under the treaty, India has exclusive rights over the waters of the Sutlej, Ravi and Beas tributaries of the Indus while Pakistan has rights over the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum rivers.

Current issues of contention include two dams being built by India -- one is nearing completion while the other is in the pipeline.

Islamabad has objected to the construction of the Bagliyar dam on the Jhelum and the proposed Kirshna Ganga dam on the Chenab river, an official said.

Asked about the issue of inspection of the river projects, Pakistan Indus Commissioner Jamait Ali Shah said, "Whatever arrangements are given in the treaty, we are moving ahead. I am totally satisfied."



PHOTO: AFP  
Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) talks with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during their meeting on the Ship "Silver Whisper" in St. Petersburg, early Saturday. Putin invited some 40 world leaders on Friday to join in celebrating the tercentennial of his native city, St. Petersburg, by hosting a dinner on the ship.

## Vajpayee holds talk with Hu

PTI, St. Petersburg

In a significant engagement ahead of his proposed visit to China next month, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Saturday met Chinese President Hu Jintao here for discussions on bilateral ties in the first high-level contact between the two sides after the leadership change in Beijing.

The meeting was held at Hotel Neveskie, where the Chinese President is staying.

The two leaders discussed the upcoming visit of Vajpayee, the first by an Indian Prime Minister in a decade after PV Narasimha Rao went to Beijing in 1993.

Vajpayee was accompanied by his Principal Secretary and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal.

## Singapore is off WHO's SARS list

THE STRAITS TIMES/ ANN, Singapore

Singapore is off the list of SARS-affected countries. The decision by the World Health Organisation was announced by the Health Ministry last night.

The good news came a day ahead of the required 20-day period with no new cases of infection and demonstrated the WHO's confidence that 'Singapore has contained SARS', its spokesman said.

It should have gone on the world body's website at noon yesterday, Switzerland time.

## Doyen of Hindi film music Anil Biswas dies

AFP, New Delhi

Celebrated Hindi film musician Anil Biswas whose compositions propped up vintage Bollywood films died Saturday aged 89, a family member said.

He is credited with introducing orchestra music to cinema in India, which produces more films each year than any other country.

Biswas, who had fought for India's independence from British rule, was born in a small village in what was then the province of East Bengal, now Bangladesh.

He worked in Bengali theatre in Calcutta and learnt from noted Bengali poet Qazi Nurul Hasan before moving to Bombay in 1934 and quickly rising to fame in the Hindi film industry.

## Sonia propels her Cms into election gear

TIMES NEWS NETWORK, Srinagar

The Congress party has put in place quotas for students from Jammu and Kashmir and also for children of migrants from the state in professional courses in all the Congress-ruled states.

Punjab, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have already made generous offers for professional students and states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have lent a helping hand in reviving the state's tourism.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi made these announcements while delivering the inaugural address at the Congress Chief Ministers Conclave here on Friday. She said all sections of the Jammu and Kashmir society should be engaged in dialogue to address the legitimate grievances of all sympathetically.

The Congress has also supported the PM's Pakistan initiative stating: We have all along believed that the doors of diplomacy and the windows of dialogue with Pakistan should always be kept open and alive.

Sonia deviated from the norm of earlier such meetings and attacked the Central government on lack of employment generation: "This is one of our principal indictments of the BJP-led NDA government".

Keeping apart time after dinner on Friday to discuss the coming assembly elections, Sonia has clearly indicated that the party is in an election mode and will unleash

its attack on the Central government over rural poverty and employment.

In 1999, 2000 and in 2002 there has been an absolute decline in both public and private employment in the organized sector. The planning commission itself estimates that at current trends, unemployment rates for youth will increase to 16 per cent by the end of the Tenth Plan, she said.

In a clear message against soft Hindutva, Gandhi has congratulated Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot for arresting VHP leader Pravin Togadia. And in what could be interpreted as a warning against the Gujarat-like experiments with Hindutva by other Congress leaders, Sonia said, "Let us not look to what is electorally expedient".

As a poll plank the slogan, 'Congress ka haath, garib ke saath', has been further elaborated by Sonia seeking that her CMs implement rural poverty alleviation measures, employment generation schemes and to launch food-for-work programmes.

On this count, she wanted the CMs to emulate the Maharashtra model and enact a rural employment guarantee scheme and implement it in three to four years. She has asked the CMs to provide a timetable for eliminating the backlog of SC/ST quotas in government jobs, a welfare legislation for the unorganized sector and for the democratic and autonomous functioning of cooperatives.

## Trilateral talks on North Korea set for June

THE DAILY YOMIURI/ ANN, Tokyo

Japan, the United States and South Korea will hold a policy coordination meeting at the division chief-level on North Korea's nuclear development program in mid-June in Seoul, according to sources.

Government officials from the three nations have been coordinating to hold Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) talks at the earliest opportunity after the Japan-South Korea summit meeting scheduled for June 7.

"With a summit meeting between Japan and South Korea, the ring (of three nations) will be completed," Vice Foreign Minister Yukio Takeuchi said.

The United States held separate summit talks with South Korea and Japan earlier this month.

At a TCOG meeting, working-level officials from the three nations are expected to coordinate each

nation's position on North Korea and discuss in detail measures to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons development, the sources said.

By holding such talks, the three nations intend to demonstrate their strong commitment to trilateral relations and to containing North Korea's attempts to drive a wedge among them, according to a senior Foreign Ministry official. Japan considers that keeping South Korea on the Japan-US side is essential to keep Pyongyang in check.

Japan and the United States agreed at a summit meeting last week to take tougher measures if North Korea escalated its nuclear activities.

However, South Korea and the United States at an earlier summit meeting agreed merely to consider further steps to be taken on North Korea.

## Hawks in Bush administration turn sights on Iran

US would like different kind of regime in Tehran: Rice

REUTERS, Washington

Hawks in the Bush administration have turned their sights on Iran, repeating accusations similar to those they deployed to portray Iraq as an imminent threat and win public support for war.

But this time moderates in the administration are likely to put up tougher opposition to military action against Iran or covert support for Iranian opposition groups, officials say.

President Bush, in an interview broadcast on Russia's Rossiya television channel on Friday, said reports of US plans to attack Iran were "pure speculation."

"We've had all kinds of reports that we're going to use force against Syria and now some on the left, I guess, are saying force in Iran or force here and force there. You know, it's pure speculation," said Bush, who denied for months that the United States had any plans to attack Iraq.

ABC News said this week the Defence Department was advocating a massive covert action program to overthrow the Iranian government as the only way to stop the country's nuclear program, which Washington says is for making bombs.

A State Department official, who asked not to be named, said Defence Department hawks and allies in Washington's neoconservative think tanks had not presented any formal plans but were encouraging such speculation in leaks to the media.

AFP adds: The United States would like to see a different kind of regime in Iran, which will move away from "pursuing an aggressive agenda based on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction", Condoleezza Rice, national security adviser to US President George W. Bush, told Saturday's Financial Times.

But Rice's statement of US ambitions in an interview with the paper fell short of the desire for regime change in Tehran, the London-based business daily said.

## India goes soft on China

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

India's differences with China remain, but there is a need for a "long-term and stable relationship" based on the principles of the Panchsheel, the defence ministry said.

In its annual report released on Saturday, the ministry took a slightly softer stance against China than in the earlier years. It also made references to the Nehruvian concept of Panchsheel.

The report said that while differences remain, there appears to be a keenness to work towards a solution. True, it says that every "major Indian city is within the reach of the

Chinese missiles and this is being further augmented to include submarine launched ballistic missiles." It is also true that the "asymmetry in terms of nuclear forces is pronouncedly in favour of China and is likely to get further accentuated as China responds to counter the US missile defence programme."

Thirdly, there is China's close defence ties with Pakistan. Despite this, the ministry report spoke of Panchsheel, a term associated with Jawaharlal Nehru. It speaks of "mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns and equality". It is also "committed to the process of dialogue to resolve all outstanding

differences," the report said. Confidence-building measures have been initiated and the relationship is improving but the "pace of progress is lower than satisfactory" though high-level visits have reduced tension.

The defence minister, George Fernandes, had visited China recently and his meetings had gone off well. The ministry report also talks of China's desire for stability and balance, but points out that China continues to occupy 38,000 sq km of Indian territory and claims another 90,000 sq km. Besides, another 5,180 km was illegally ceded by Pakistan to China.



PHOTO: AFP

French President Jacques Chirac (L) and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder chat prior to the EU-Russia summit on Saturday in Saint Petersburg. The summit, attended by 14 of the 15 current EU leaders, was also marked by the presence of leaders from 10 new EU membership hopefuls from Central and Eastern Europe.



PHOTO: AFP  
Iranian refugee Abbas Amini (R) has his stitches removed by NHS nurse Helen Bando, near his home in Sneinton, Nottingham, United Kingdom on Friday. Abbas who stitched up his eyes, lips and ears in a protest at the threat of deportation, was speaking for the first time in days after threads were cut from his mouth.