

Bush, Koizumi go tough on N Korea

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi warned North Korea over its weapons programs as they highlighted their close relationship at a White House finale for the Japanese leader.

While both eagerly looked forward to a visit to Elvis Presley's Graceland mansion on Friday, the two concentrated on international problems, particularly North Korea, at their talks Thursday.

Koizumi is on a farewell North American tour before he stands down in September and both leaders stressed the close relationship they have built up over the past five years.

Highlighting that 60 years ago, the United States and Japan were at war, Bush told a press conference, "today we talked about North Korea, Iran and Iraq, and trade, and energy cooperation."

"It's an amazing fact that we are able to have these discussions. To me it shows the power of liberty and democracy to transform enemies to allies."

Bush said that Washington and Tokyo wanted to send "a clear message" to North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il over the Stalinist state's nuclear weapons and reported plans to launch a long range missile.

"We discussed this issue at length. We both agree that it's important for us to remain united in sending a clear message to the North Korean leader that first of all launching the missile is unacceptable."

The US president said Kim "has an obligation" to inform other countries of his plans.

Bush denounced Pyongyang's kidnapping of Japanese nationals to train its spies, a issue extremely emotional in Japan.

Koizumi said different tactics could be used to dissuade North Korea from launching the missile and that "various pressures" would be applied if the missile was fired.

Bush said the United Nations could be one avenue and hinted that work on missile defenses would also be an "interesting opportunity".

"The Japanese people cannot afford to be held hostage to rockets," the president said in a pointed comment.

Meanwhile, Koizumi called the Iranian nuclear crisis "a grave issue," despite Tokyo's traditionally close ties with Tehran.

The United States has backed a package of incentives crafted with Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia in an effort to convince Iran to limit its nuclear program.

Japan has been a major investor in Iran's energy sector, as it is heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil.

"The Iranian issue remains a grave issue for the entire world economy. And Japan wishes to cooperate with the United States and other countries concerned on this matter as well," Koizumi told the press conference.

But the two leaders did not discuss possible sanctions that could be taken against Iran, said a Japanese official who was at the summit.

Koizumi also declined to give outright support to a controversial US deal to help India develop civilian nuclear facilities, telling Bush that Japan was reviewing the issue, said the official.

Bush briefly touched on the need to pressure Myanmar to democratize itself, with Koizumi agreeing to cooperate with the United States over the issue, the official said.

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Damage of Teesta Bridge causes traffic halt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Road and railway communication with Lalmonirhat and Kurigram with other parts of the country over Teesta Bridge was suspended for 16 hours as an overloaded truck damaged railway sleepers on the bridge.

Hundreds of buses and trucks were stranded on both sides of the bridge causing untold sufferings to the passengers.

The railway authorities after a 16-hour-long effort repaired the sleepers and road and rail communication was restored at 3:00pm yesterday.

Locals and railway sources said a number of sleepers of the railway line on the northern side of the bridge were damaged on Thursday night when a truck laden with stones passed over them.

A similar incident had occurred on the bridge 14 days ago and vehicular movement was restored after 11 hours.

An official of Lalmonirhat Railway Divisional Office (West

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PHOTO: STAR

All commercial banks remained open on weekly holiday yesterday due to financial year ending but they witnessed very thin transactions. The photo was taken at the Sonali Bank head office at Motijheel in the capital yesterday.

Skop to enforce 24-hr strike on July 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop) yesterday said it would enforce a 24-hour country-wide strike at factories and all mode of transport on July 31.

They said they would enforce the strike if the set of demands the government agreed to meet in the agreement signed in January 2004 did not materialise by July 30.

The leaders of Skop, an organisation of labours and employees, at a press conference at its Tophkhana Road office in the city also threatened to block all roads in the capital and railway and river routes from dawn to dusk on July 31.

In the 2004 agreement, the government agreed to declare national wage-board and implement it, reopen closed down mills and factories, formulate democratic labour laws as per the ILO convention and halt of privatisation of industries.

The Skop leaders said the government was supposed to

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PHOTO: STAR

Indigenous people parade different streets in the capital, marking the 151st anniversary of the Santal Hool (rebellion) yesterday.



Shawkat Ali passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former lawmaker and eminent lawyer Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan passed away at a hospital at Mirzapur in Tangail on Thursday night at the age of 82.

An organiser of the liberation war and a framer of Bangladesh constitution Shawkat Ali died of cardiac failure at 10:00pm at Kumudini Hospital where he had been undergoing treatment for a long time.

He was laid to rest with state honour after Magrib prayers yesterday at their family graveyard in

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Nepal's Maoists won't go back to war

Pranchada promises but warns of street protests

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist leader vowed Friday in an interview with AFP the rebels would not go back to war but warned they could call protestors back on to the streets if talks with the government broke down.

"We have come here for a third time (to negotiate) and publicly we are saying that we will not go back to war," Pranchada told AFP in an exclusive interview in Kathmandu.

The rebels and the recently reinstated government have been observing a ceasefire for over two months, and are due to hold a second high-level round of peace talks in the next few days.

The two sides have twice previously been engaged in peace negotiations -- in 2001 and 2003 -- in a bid to end the Maoist insur-

gency launched in 1996 and aimed at installing a communist republic in the Himalayan state.

But on both occasions talks broke down and the country was plunged back into conflict.

"This time the situation has changed. Everybody has agreed to conduct constituent assembly elections," said Pranchada, whose real name is Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Nepal's new government and rebels reached a landmark agreement earlier this month, and the rebels are set to join an interim government after the framing of an interim constitution.

"Another point is that the Nepali masses have shown their ability to fight against feudalism," the rebel leader said.

While a return to war might be

out of the question even if peace talks break down, he said in response to a question, the Maoists could appeal for a repeat of the massive people's movement that saw Nepal crippled for 19 days in April and forced King Gyanendra to end his 14 months of direct rule.

"We may appeal to the people for a peaceful movement. Not just 19 days but if necessary 29 or 39 will be there but we will not go back to war," said Pranchada, who launched an insurgency in Nepal 10 years ago that has cost more than 12,500 lives.

The government has agreed to the key rebel demand for election to a body that will rewrite Nepal's constitution permanently, and likely remove the king from politics permanently.

Outlaw hurt in 'crossfire' dies in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) died at Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) on Thursday night, four days after he was shot while exchanging gunfire with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

In a press release, Rab said Bulbul alias Marshal, 28, military commander of the underground outfit, was shot in the head during an exchange of fire with Rab on the night of June 26.

Without detailing the gunfire incident, Rab said the outlaw was admitted to Naogaon Hospital and

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Prayer Timing		
July 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-10	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-55	7-00
Esha	8-17	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Road accident in Dinajpur kills 8

5 more die in Ctg, Faridpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 13 people died and 31 others were injured in road accidents in Dinajpur, Chittagong and Faridpur yesterday.

Of them, eight died in Dinajpur, three in Chittagong and the remaining two in Faridpur.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reported that a BRTC truck collided with a passenger bus on the Dinajpur-Thakurgaon highway under Birganj upazila of Dinajpur at noon, killing six bus passengers on the spot and injuring 22 others.

Of the injured, two died on the way to Dinajpur Medical College and Hospital while the remaining 20 are undergoing treatment at the hospital and local health complex.

Five of the dead were identified as Md Aktarul, 50, son of Azizul Kader of village Chandarbari under Boda upazila, Riti Sarma, 27, wife of Narash Sarma of village Phulpur under Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, Mousumi, 15, daughter of Mustakim

of village Haldibari in Panchagarh, Kaushik, 15, son of Mizanur Rahman of village Kazipara under Tentulia of Panchagarh, and Halim Hossain Plaban, 22, son of Ekramul Haque of Chandanpur under Kaharal upazila of Dinajpur. Identity of three others could not be known.

After the accident, road communication between Thakurgaon and Dinajpur remained snapped for three hours.

According to our Chittagong correspondent, three people died and five others were injured when a Chittagong bound BRTC bus collided head on with a truck coming from opposite direction in front of Kamaphuli Steel Limited at Kumira under Sitakunda upazila at around 4:20am yesterday.

Of the dead, two were identified as trucker Manju Mia, 35, of Daudkandi in Comilla and helper Md Belal Hossain, 30, son of Abul Hossain of Masterer Bari under the

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Recognise rights of Santals

Indigenous leaders demand

STAR REPORT

Indigenous Santal leaders yesterday upheld the ethnic minority group's demands for constitutional recognition, right to ancestral land, primary education in their own language, equal opportunity in job, and protection of their culture.

To observe the 151st anniversary of Santal Hool (rebellion) against the British rulers and local landlords in vast areas across Birbhum to Bhagalpur in the then Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Santals yesterday organised discussions, rallies and cultural functions in Dhaka, Dinajpur and Rajshahi.

Thousands of people, mostly Santals and farmers, sacrificed their lives during the Santal Hool of 1855-57, one of the major revolts by the subaltern class during the British rule.

National Committee for Observance of the 151st Anniversary of Santal Rebellion organised a discussion meeting at

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Safta comes into being today

UNB, Dhaka

The agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) becomes operational today under a pre-set tariff-cut roadmap aimed at boosting regional trade among the seven-nation grouping.

Bangladesh will have to allow for next six months imports other than items under its sensitive list from the contracting states by reducing 2.5 per cent tariff from the existing rates. The highest rate of customs duty in Bangladesh is 25 per cent.

India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will reduce their tariff for Bangladesh and other contracting states by 10 per cent from their existing rates for next six months as per the negotiation concluded at the maiden Safta Ministerial Council here on April 20, 2006.

Under the Safta roadmap, the developing members will bring down their tariffs to zero-five per cent in three years while the Saarc LDCs like Bangladesh will do it in 10 years.

"The tariff-cuts take effect as per schedule," said an official in the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

The NBR official could not inform whether other contracting states issued the order, but he said yesterday that at least no problems have been notified yet. "So, the agreement becomes operational tomorrow."

Local businesses, however, apprehended that non-tariff (NTB) and para-tariff (PTB) barriers would be an obstacle for immediate benefits.

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