

India, China discuss pact to save tigers from extinction

AFP, New Delhi

India, home to a dwindling tiger population, and China, which has a black market for tiger parts used in traditional medicine, are discussing an accord to save the endangered big cat, a senior official said yesterday.

A Chinese delegation was in New Delhi last week to finalise details of the accord, said the environment ministry official, who wished to remain unnamed.

"We are still in the stage of dialogue, nothing has been finalised as yet," the official told AFP.

He did not give any details about the proposed pact, which he said had been under discussion for some time.

But a report in the Indian Express on Friday said key elements of the pact included better vigilance along the borders to clamp down on the illegal trafficking of tiger parts and the training of Chinese personnel at the premier Dehradun Wildlife Institute of India.

Military warns Delhi against glacier deal

'Kashmir insurgency deaths drop sharply'

AFP, Srinagar

India's million-plus military yesterday cautioned the government against extending concessions to Pakistan on a strategic glacier in disputed Kashmir.

"I am sure that security concerns will be kept in mind when any such decisions are arrived at by the government," Indian army chief General JJ Singh told reporters in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar.

The warning came in the run-up to the resumption of bilateral talks, which were put on ice after New Delhi blamed Islamabad for a spate of bombings on trains in July that killed 186 people and left 800 others injured in Mumbai.

"The government has been

conveyed our views and we hope that the dialogue which is going to take place between the foreign secretaries (of India and Pakistan) will tell us what lies in the future," he said.

India and Pakistan opened talks in February 2004 on eight nagging issues including Siachen, where the two fought a bloody battle in 1987, three years after India occupied strategic peaks.

Military experts estimate that a 7,000-strong Indian military and 4,000 Pakistani troops are stationed on the 6,300 metre (20,700 feet) icy wasteland in divided Kashmir, where the bitter cold and high altitude claim more lives than actual combat.

South Asian neighbours India and Pakistan, who carried out tit-for-

tat nuclear weapons tests in May 1998, have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since their 1947 independence from the British.

Meanwhile, India said insurgency-related killings in Indian Kashmir have fallen by nearly 30 percent from a year ago thanks to its "iron first, velvet glove" counter-guerrilla strategy.

"The level of violence has been brought down as compared to previous year," army chief General J.J. Singh told reporters Friday in Srinagar.

The city is the capital of Indian Kashmir where a deadly separatist Islamic revolt has raged against New Delhi's rule since 1989.

Nepali Maoist chief to visit India

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The secretive chief of Nepal's Maoist insurgents will this month make his first high profile foreign visit since coming out of hiding in June when he travels to India to speak at a leadership conference, rebels said on Thursday.

Maoist chief Prachanda, whose assumed name means Awesome or Terrible, had been invited to speak at the conference, organised by an Indian newspaper, alongside prominent leaders, businessmen and entertainers from India and abroad, they said.

The conference is scheduled to be held in New Delhi on Nov. 17 and 18.

Among those scheduled to speak there are Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, British cabinet minister Jack Straw, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Indian film maker Karan Johar.

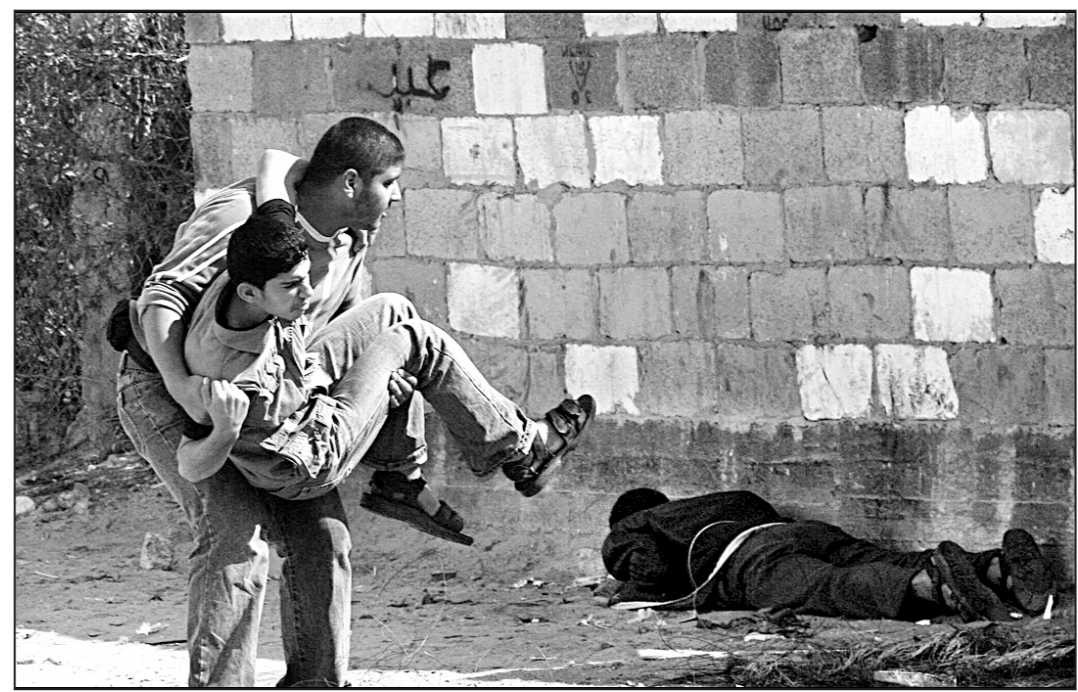


PHOTO: AFP
A Palestinian carries a youth wounded during a demonstration as another one takes cover on the ground after women tried to enter the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanun during an Israeli army incursion yesterday. Five Hamas militants and four demonstrators were killed Friday as Israel pressed on with a deadly offensive in northern Gaza that has seen 25 Palestinians killed in 72 hours.

UNSC mission to go to Afghanistan next week

Six killed in Taliban ambush

AFP, United Nations/ Herat

The Security Council will send a high-level team on a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan next week to review the threat posed by Taliban and al-Qaeda extremists, its current president said Thursday.

Peru's UN Ambassador Jorge Voto-Bernales, the council president for November, said a nine-member team from the 15-member council would leave for Islamabad November 10 on its way to Afghanistan where it was due to arrive on November 12.

The mission is due back at UN headquarters on November 17 and the Security Council is to hear a briefing on the trip on November 22, Voto-Bernales told reporters.

In late September, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said his Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf had promised to crack down on Islamist militants and religious schools breeding extremism.

Karzai then blamed other countries' religious schools, or madrasas, for promoting the extremism fuelling Afghanistan's Taliban-led insurgency.

He was clearly referring to neighbouring Pakistan, home to madrasas from which the Taliban emerged in the early 1990s.

The Taliban is waging a virulent insurgency in Afghanistan. The

rebels, who are allied with al-Qaeda, have attacked troops in large numbers and intensified a campaign of suicide and roadside bombings.

More than 2,500 people, most of them militants, have been killed in unrest so far this year, nearly double last year's toll. Scores of civilians have also been caught up in the violence.

US-led forces launched the war against the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies shortly after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States.

Meanwhile, Taliban insurgents ambushed a police convoy in western Afghanistan killing a district police chief and five others, and wounding three other policemen, police said yesterday.

Mohammad Sediq, police chief of Adraskan district of Herat province was visiting police posts in the area Thursday when his convoy came under attack, Herat province's police chief, Nisar Ahmad Paikar, told AFP.

Paikar blamed the attack on remnants of Taliban who have waged an insurgency since 2001 when they were forced out of power by US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

US posted Iraqi nuclear bomb documents on Internet

AFP, Washington

The US government posted on the Internet Iraqi documents that explain how to build a nuclear bomb, the New York Times reported yesterday on its website.

The Times said that officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency had complained to US officials last week about the postings of "roughly a dozen" documents from Iraq's pre-1991 nuclear research that contained diagrams, equations and other details for making a nuclear bomb.

The Times cited experts who said the documents "constitute a basic guide to building an atom bomb."

One of the documents, running to 51 pages, covered the technical advances of Iraq's early nuclear program, including 18 pages on the development of its bomb design.

The US government posted the bomb-related documents on a website set up last March to make available to the public a huge archive of Iraqi government papers, hoping that the public would help sift through the archive for useful information government translators did not have time to search for.

UN Darfur force would create second Iraq

Warns Sudan as militias kill 63

REUTERS, Beijing/ Tine

Sudan will not accept UN peacekeeping forces into its troubled Darfur region as it would risk turning the country into a second Iraq, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir said yesterday.

Visiting the Chinese capital for a summit that brings together 48 African leaders, Bashir also thanked China for its support in the face of western pressure over a humanitarian crisis that he United States has labelled genocide.

Sudan has flatly rejected a 22,500-strong UN peacekeeping force for Darfur, aimed at bolstering about 7,000 under-funded, African troops on the ground, saying it amounted to colonialism.

"As regards the UN peacekeeping force, we decided that with such an army moving in to our country, the impact is going to be the same as what's been happening in Iraq," Bashir told a news conference.

The comparison was not immediately clear as there are no UN peacekeepers in Iraq and the March 2003 US-led invasion did not have the explicit approval of the UN Security Council.

Bashir said only 10,000 people had died in Darfur compared with around 655,000 in Iraq following the March 2003 US-led invasion -- a

figure from a study by US and Iraqi public health teams.

Most international estimates put the death toll from Sudan's vicious civil conflict, which has pitted mostly non-Arab rebels against the Arab-dominated government and Janjaweed militia, at tens of thousands, and say it has displaced over 2 million.

All sides have been accused of grave human rights violations. Despite mounting international concern over Darfur, China, which has imported over 14 million barrels of oil from Sudan this year alone and has lucrative business interests there, has been a strong and vocal supporter of Khartoum.

Meanwhile, attacks in West Darfur have killed at least 63 people, half of them children, as rebels on Friday accused Khartoum of remobilising Arab militia after suffering two military defeats on the Sudan-Chad border.

"The government have begun mobilising the Janjaweed widely, especially in West Darfur, because they want to clear the area and move north along the border and defeat us," said Bahr Idriss Abu Garda, a leader of the National Redemption Front (NRF).

Tigers preparing for major offensive

Lankan troops pound 2 LTTE targets in Batticaloa

AFP, REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka war planes pounded suspected Tamil Tiger targets for a third straight day yesterday after the defence ministry charged that the guerrillas were preparing for a major offensive.

Sri Lanka's Air Force launched air raids for the third consecutive day on Tamil Tiger targets in the island's northwest and east on Friday, days after the breakdown of talks to halt renewed civil war.

"The air force bombed two Tiger

targets this morning. One is a Tiger training and transit camp in (the eastern district of) Batticaloa and the other one is a Sea Tiger base in Mannar," said a spokesman for the Media Centre for National Security.

The Tigers were not immediately available for comment, and there were no immediate details of casualties.

"Intelligence sources confirmed the Tigers have suffered seriously due to these attacks and these bases were used to launch attacks on the security force's detachments at

Mannar and Batticaloa," the ministry said.

It said in a statement that sporadic attacks took place against security forces across the embattled regions. Police said a civilian was also gunned down by suspected militants in the northern district of Vavuniya.

The ministry accused the LTTE of gearing up for a major offensive following the failure of the latest peace talks in Geneva last weekend and ahead of their leader's birthday later this month.

'US steps up planning for attacks on North Korean nukes'

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon has stepped up contingency planning for attacks on North Korea's nuclear programme in the wake of Pyongyang's October 9 nuclear test, The Washington Times reported yesterday.

Citing defence officials who asked not to be identified, the newspaper said the planning included programmes for striking a plutonium-reprocessing facility at Yongbyon with commando raids or precision-guided missiles.

The planning, which has been under way several months, means only that US military forces would be ready if President George W Bush were to

order attacks, the newspapers said.

Defence officials said China's condemnation of North Korea's nuclear test and Beijing's support for United Nations sanctions were a key factor in the Bush administration's decision to speed up its planning, The Washington Times reported.

The administration regards the new level of Chinese support as a "green light" for more aggressive military planning, the report said.

A Pentagon official was quoted as saying that the Defence Department was considering "various military options" for removing North Korea's nuclear programme.

'Iraq violence levels not anticipated'

REUTERS, New Delhi

The United States and its allies had not expected the soaring level of violence and sectarian killings in Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett said on Friday.

Beckett, who began a week-long visit to India on Thursday, said the security situation in Iraq was very grave and said American and British troops were making strong efforts to control violence in Baghdad and the Basra region.

Her comments came amid growing public pressure in the United States and Britain to bring troops back from Iraq, and a strong prospect that President George W Bush's Republicans will lose control of Congress in Nov. 7 polls over his Iraq policy.

'Fish, seafood on track to disappear by 2048'

AFP, Washington

The world's fish and seafood could disappear by 2048 as overfishing and pollution destroy ocean ecosystems at an accelerating pace, US and Canadian researchers reported.

If current global trends continue, the loss of fish and seafood will threaten humans' food supplies and the environment, according to the most exhaustive study to date on the subject, published in the November 3 issue of the US journal Science.

"Our analyses suggest that business as usual would foreshadow serious threats to global food security, coastal water quality, and ecosystem stability, affecting current and future generations," the international team of ecologists and economists wrote in "Impact of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services".

The four-year analysis was the first to study all existing data on ocean species and ecosystems and synthesize them to understand the importance of biodiversity at the global scale.

"Whether we looked at tide pools or studies over the entire world's ocean, we saw the same picture emerging," lead author Boris Worm of Dalhousie University, in Canada, said in a statement.

Worm said the disappearance of species from ocean ecosystems had been accelerating.

"Now we begin to see some of the consequences. For example, if the long-term trend continues, all fish and seafood species are projected to collapse within my lifetime -- by 2048," Worm said.



PHOTO: AFP
File photo dated June 1, 2005 shows men carrying tuna fishes at the at a fishing port in the southern Philippine city of General Santos. Overfishing and pollution of the oceans could force seafood completely off human's plates by the middle of the 21st century, scientists warned in a new study published yesterday.

'Bush more dangerous to world peace than Kim'

AFP, London

US President George W Bush presents more of a threat to world peace than the leaders of North Korea and Iran, and only Osama bin Laden is more feared, according to a poll of British voters published in The Guardian yesterday.

A majority of voters in Britain, Canada and Mexico, all key American allies, also think that the United States' foreign policy has made the world less safe since 2001, the survey showed.

Three-quarters of Britons said that George W. Bush presented a great or moderate threat to peace in the world, bested only by the al-Qaeda leader at 87 percent.