

India, Pakistan must sign CTBT: Japanese PM

NEW DELHI, Aug 22 : India and Pakistan must sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and resume talks aimed at bringing stability to South Asia, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori said in an interview published today, reports AFP.

"It is extremely important that both India and Pakistan sign the CTBT towards preventing nuclear proliferation," Mori told the Times of India in an interview conducted before he left August 19 on his ongoing South Asian tour.

"I hope to see progress during my visit," said Mori, who arrived in India Monday night following a two-day visit to Pakistan.

Japan has cited the signing of the CTBT as a prerequisite for lifting sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan following their tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May 1998.

The sanctions included freezing developmental assis-

tance and halting fresh yen loans.

Regarding any easing or lifting of sanctions, Mori said Japan would "continue to carefully watch progress made regarding nuclear non-proliferation, including the signing of the CTBT."

Mori, who will hold talks in New Delhi with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and other Indian leaders Wednesday, said it was also essential for India and Pakistan to resume talks, frozen since a two-month border conflict in Kashmir last year.

"The relationship between India and Pakistan is important to establish peace and stability in the region," Mori said.

"I strongly hope that both India and Pakistan will overcome their difficulties and resume dialogue."

Earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori unveiled a series of initiatives for promoting IT cooperation as he

kicked off a three-day India visit today in the southern city of Bangalore.

After touring the headquarters of India's flagship infotech firms, Infosys and Wipro, Mori held a lunch meeting of software executives that Japan would take concrete measures to promote IT exchanges and dialogue, especially in the private sector.

His talks with Vajpayee and other Indian leaders are likely to be dominated by questions of nuclear non-proliferation, with both sides keen to smooth over the rift caused by India's nuclear tests in May 1998.

Tokyo, which was India's largest aid donor, responded to the tests by freezing developmental assistance and halting fresh yen loans. The same sanctions were imposed on Pakistan which followed India's tests with underground blasts of its own.

Japan has cited the signing of the nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as a prerequisite for a lifting of the sanctions against both countries.

Despite their differences, both countries hope the non-proliferation issue can be placed on the backburner in order to allow economic relations to prosper.

of the nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as a prerequisite for a lifting of the sanctions against both countries.

Regarding the lifting of sanctions, Mori said in the interview conducted before he left on his South Asian tour last weekend, that Japan would "continue to carefully watch progress made regarding nuclear non-proliferation, including the signing of the CTBT."

New Delhi is unlikely to give any ground on the CTBT, which it says it will sign only after building a national consensus.

Prior to Mori's arrival, Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh made it clear that India had no intention of appealing for a lifting of the Japanese sanctions.

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HR group slams civilian killings in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Aug 22 : Human Rights Watch, the US-based rights watchdog, condemned today the series of militant attacks over the weekend on Hindu residents in Indian-administered Kashmir which left 10 people dead, reports AFP.

The recent attacks on Hindus in Kashmir are a reminder of the continued failure by all parties to protect civilian non-combatants," Sidney Jones, executive director of Human Right Watch, said in a statement released here.

"Just as we have condemned abuses against civilians at the hands of the Indian security forces, we oppose violations of international humanitarian law by militant groups," said Jones.

She said the Geneva Convention "prohibited acts of violence" against civilians who were not taking an active part in hostilities in internal armed conflicts.

Meanwhile, London-based Amnesty International Tuesday also urged the Kashmir government to order an independent and impartial enquiry into the massacre of nearly 100 civilians in Kashmir on the night of August 1.

"Under international human rights law, everyone has the right to legal redress for abuses suffered. The state government is obliged to set up an independent and impartial inquiry into the killings," the group said in a letter to Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

"The failure to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice results in a climate in which more and more human rights violations are committed," the rights group added.



An Indian paramilitary soldier guards a street in Srinagar yesterday as two Muslim women with their children walk past. Tensions remained high in the disputed territory as an Indian army brigadier and a lieutenant colonel were killed along with four others when their patrol vehicle was blown up by a landmine on Monday. - AFP photo

'Arafat still committed to peace with Israel'

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Aug 22 : Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told US peace envoy Dennis Ross late Monday that he will exert every effort to reach a peace deal with Israel so long as it does not sidestep or delay solutions to any of the key issues in their conflict, including Jerusalem, reports AFP.

"We are fully committed to carrying out, President Arafat told Ambassador Ross, every possible effort to ensure the conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement," senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters after the one-hour Arafat-Ross meeting in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

"We stressed our commitment to exerting maximum efforts to ensure a successful conclusion on all issues of the permanent status negotiations without delays or leaving out (anything) or any exceptions whatsoever," Erekat added.

Erekat said that Arafat and Ross would meet again in "the coming days," but did not provide further details.

An Israeli-Palestinian peace summit broke down last month at the US presidential retreat of Camp David after the two sides were unable to reach a deal on the status of Israeli-occupied east Jerusalem, one of the most troublesome of the so-called permanent status issues, which also include the fate of the some 3.7 million Palestinian refugees and the borders of a future Palestinian state.

Ross, who has been in the region since Thursday in a bid to test the temperature of the negotiations held in the wake of the Camp David breakdown, has already met Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

The US troubleshooter said both Israel and the Palestinians were committed to the peace process.

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