

Kashmir talks resume after 2 ½ years today

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India return to the negotiating table after more than two-and-a-half years today in a bid to solve the thorny Kashmir dispute which has plagued relations since independence from Britain.

A three-member delegation of Indian external affairs ministry arrived in Pakistan yesterday to work out a framework for engagement between the south Asian nuclear rivals.

The delegation headed by Joint Secretary of Indian ministry of external affairs Arun Singh was met by an Indian embassy official at Pakistani side of Wagah land border crossing.

The Pakistani team is led by Director General South Asia Jalil Abbas Jilani.

The nuclear-capable countries have not discussed Kashmir since July 2001, since when they have

veered dangerously close to their third war over the disputed region.

Senior foreign ministry officials will hold three days of talks here to work out a framework for engagement under a breakthrough agreement reached last month.

"In this first round the challenge would be to come out with an agenda, a structure and timeframe for various tiers of the dialogue process," Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan told the news agency.

"We hope that the round will be productive and successful. We will participate in the talks earnestly and sincerely and our expectation is that the other side is coming to Islamabad with the same degree of earnestness."

After preparatory joint secretary-level talks today and tomorrow, the top Indian foreign ministry official, Foreign Secretary Shashank, and his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokar will get together on

Wednesday.

The January 6 accord between Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was the culmination of a series of confidence-building measures since last April, including restoring travel links and full diplomatic ties.

The two countries had been on the brink of war in 2002 following an assault on the New Delhi parliament complex which India blamed on Pakistan-backed militants.

The new detente has raised hopes in both Hindu-dominated India and Muslim Pakistan, but untangling the Gordian knot of Kashmir is widely seen as a problem as complex as the Middle East imbroglio.

The row over the Himalayan territory, split between India and Pakistan and claimed by both, has caused two of the neighbours' three wars since 1947.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman, right, offers traditional cakes to Queen Sofia of Spain, centre, while Grameen Bank Managing Director Muhammad Yunus, left, looks on during a visit to a microcredit project site in Comilla yesterday.

BBC 'to be broken up'

AFP, London

Britain's government is considering a plan to break up the BBC and remove its independent status in the wake of a bitter row with the state-funded broadcaster over the Iraq war, a report said on Saturday.

Government papers detailing possible changes to the BBC's structure proposed breaking it into separate regional entities for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, The Sunday Times said.

The documents, which the newspaper said had been drawn up by "senior civil servants", also suggested that the job of ensuring the BBC's impartiality could be taken away from the corporation's board of governors.

The BBC, which is independently run despite being financed by public money through a compulsory television licence, is currently facing perhaps the worst breakdown in relations with the government in its 82-year history.

The dispute came after a BBC radio report alleged in May last year that Prime Minister Tony Blair's government deliberately exagger

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Most Congress leaders deem Sonia a liability

AFP, New Delhi

Most leaders of India's main opposition Congress believe the party is at a disadvantage ahead of polls because chief Sonia Gandhi was born in Italy

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Food deptt's experiment poisons 50 in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

More than 50 children and old people fell sick yesterday from poisonous fumes of a fire set by the local food department officials to burn over 5,000 pounds of methyl powder.

Official sources said the date-expired methyl powder was put on fire on Barisal CSD Food Godown premises at 2:00pm. The highly poisonous powder is used as pesticide for preserving foodgrains in the stores.

The fumes made the residents especially the children and the old of

the adjacent areas -- including BIP and Wapda colonies, Charer Bari and Balurmath slum -- sick, suffering from suffocation and acute nausea.

Panic seized the area and the severely ill ones were rushed to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) and other clinical facilities for treatment.

Until filing this report yesterday evening, more than 50 children and elderly people were treated at the SBMCH, the emergency medical officer on duty said.

KM Shahidullah, local ward commissioner of Barisal City Corporation, said previously

expired methyl powder used to be dumped under deep ground, after mixing it with bleaching powder.

Tabibul Huda, regional food controller and head of the methyl burning committee, admitted the fact, saying it was the first attempt to destroy the powder by burning.

He claimed the step was taken as per instructions of the food department high-ups.

Fire service was called that extinguished the fire at 7:00pm and police were deployed to control the aggrieved and angry locals.

Khulna chamber catches the hartal fever

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) yesterday called a half-day hartal on March 1 in the city to press home their 10-point demand.

The demands include construction of the Padma Bridge at Mawa, development of the Mongla Port, gas supply through pipeline, construction of an airport, setting up a water and

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Twin China fires kill 90, injure 71

AP, Beijing

A fire swept through a shopping center in northeastern China yesterday, killing 51 people and injuring dozens more, an official and state media reported. Hours later, a fire in a temple in the country's southeast killed 39 people.

The catastrophes added to a recent string of deadly accidents that have struck China despite promises by the government of President Hu Jintao to improve its public safety record.

The shopping center fire broke out at about 11:20am in the second floor of the five-story building in Jilin, a city about 560 miles northeast of Beijing, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. It said 71 people were injured.

The cause was under investigation.

"It was an especially large fire," said Fang Wanyou, a government spokesman in Jilin, located in a province of the same name.

Many of the dead were sales clerks, and firefighters were among the injured, Fang said. He said it wasn't clear why the fire spread so fast.

Because it was a Sunday, the store was likely crowded with shoppers. Shopping has become a major pastime in China, which is newly flush with consumer goods as economic growth soars.

The temple fire broke at about 2:15 p.m. in Wufeng, a village in Zhejiang province, Xinhua said. It said firefighters put out the blaze

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India 'acts' on Dhaka's camp claim

PTI, New Delhi

Displaying its seriousness to act on Dhaka's perception that 39 anti-Bangladesh camps existed in India, the Indian government has launched an exercise to verify the claims.

The Government has entrusted the intelligence agencies and other services the task of getting the claims verified through their sources and on-the-spot visits, official sources told PTI.

A note was circulated to these agencies recently in this regard asking them to report whether any such camps existed anywhere in the states identified so that appropriate action could be taken, they said.

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Kazi Zafar's return fuels speculations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former prime minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed returned home yesterday after a four-year broken stay in Australia, fuelling speculations among politicians.

Before leaving Bangladesh in 1999, Zafar was active with HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) but is now out of any political party ranks.

A Dhaka court sentenced Zafar to 15 years in jail in his absence on corruption charges in November 1999. He was arrested on return home in 2001 but released on a High Court bail.

"I am not out of danger so far as

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh U-19 opener Nafis Iqbal pulls on way to his entertaining 67 against New Zealand at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Restart disputed land registration

JS body asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday asked the government to restart registration and documentation of disputed land swapped by people of India and East Pakistan at the dawn of subcontinent's partition in 1947.

The recommendation of the standing committee came after the submission of a sub-committee report yesterday on the land that official figures put at 35,515 acres and unofficial figures at 1,00,000 acres.

Emerging from the standing committee meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, committee chairman Mahbubur Rahman said the body asked the government to run the registration process, stalled since 2000, from today to September 2005.

It will be the 12th extension of the deadline since the emergence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh through the bloody war of independ-

ence in 1971. The lands run 3,951 cases.

The violence-packed partition of the subcontinent and riots in 1964 forced a large number of Hindus and Muslims to swap their lands and settle either in India or in Pakistan.

Many of the displaced people who crossed into East Pakistan largely from the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, could not register the swapped lands in their names because of lack of documents, lax investigation and legal tangles.

According to the standing committee recommendations, deputy commissioners across Bangladesh will receive applicants from claimants for dispute settlement until September 30.

Based on the applications, the district administrators will issue certificates to land owners after resolving the disputes through field-level investigations by September 2005.

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PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Fishermen in Lalmonirhat pull their net in the muddy waters of a narrow channel that remains of the Teesta in their vain attempt to fish. Unilateral construction of a dam in the upstream of the common river has virtually dried up the river and threatened desertification in the northern region.

AL, CPB to gear up oust-govt agitation

Strategies for unified programmes to be worked out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) and Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday agreed to intensify their movements to unseat the ruling coalition.

The two opposition parties also agreed to work out a set of strategies for a unified oust-government movement.

Following an hour-long meeting between the parties at CPB office in the city, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said, "We've agreed to the point that this government needs to be ousted."

CPB President Monjurul Ahsan Khan said the AL and the CPB as

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Ershad vows to go alone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President of one faction of Jatiya Party (JP) HM Ershad yesterday said his party would go forward maintaining the party's independent identity.

"We'll not extend our hands to anybody for political struggle," said Ershad while addressing at a view-exchanging meeting of the JP on its central office premises in the city.

The former president said the development in every sector of the country has come to a pause due to failure of the two major political parties.

"People are living in fear, as power politics has turned to a devastating form in the country," the JP president said.

CJ asked to replace 3 judges, 5 magistrates

Dhaka lawyers accuse them of corruption

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Over 100 lawyers of Dhaka Bar Association have urged the chief justice (CJ) to replace three judges and five magistrates including the Dhaka metropolitan sessions judge and chief metropolitan magistrate.

In a memorandum to Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain on February 9, the lawyers accused them of bribery, corruption and

irregularities and also of misconduct.

The lawyers said the allegations against these judges and magistrates in question are well known to all. Besides, the lawyers alleged, one of them took bribe to grant bail to the prime accused but refused the same to the co-accused in a case.

Such actions of the judges and magistrates are unacceptable, as their actions are causing erosion of

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