



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) sits next to his Nepalese counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba prior to signing an agreement in New Delhi yesterday. Deuba is in India for a five-day official visit aimed at seeking more help from neighbouring India to crush a Maoist revolt wracking his homeland.

India, Nepal hold talks over tackling Maoist revolt

REUTERS, New Delhi

Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba held talks with his Indian counterpart yesterday to try to secure more help to crush an increasingly deadly Maoist revolt in the poor Himalayan nation.

Deuba briefed Manmohan Singh on the threat posed by the guerrillas, fighting since 1996 to overthrow Nepal's constitutional monarchy, a Nepalese official said.

But both sides, who share a complex relationship, refused to reveal details in what is seen as an indication of the sensitivity of the issue.

Deuba's five-day visit, which began on Wednesday, is expected to focus on winning more military help from giant southern neighbor India, which has the world's fourth-

largest armed force, to deal with an insurgency that is running out of control.

However, analysts said New Delhi could do little beyond supplying more arms and equipment to the landlocked nation that straddles the Himalayas between India and China.

"It is a battle that Nepal will eventually have to fight on its own," said Ajai Sahni of New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management.

"India can only provide more material inputs, more training, strategic inputs and some help to plan and coordinate their action (against the Maoists)," Sahni told Reuters.

He said direct military intervention by India would not be tenable. "It would be politically unacceptable to Nepal. For India, it will be a quagmire to get into."

The Maoist revolt has killed more than 10,000 people and wrecked the economy of one of the world's poorest countries.

New Delhi is a key ally in Kathmandu's efforts to end the insurgency and is keen to see it quelled quickly for fear it could spill over into India.

India has so far provided the Royal Nepal Army -- which needs everything from boots to helicopters -- with arms, ammunition, anti-mine trucks, helicopters and training of troops.

India is also Nepal's largest foreign investor and accounts for almost half of its total trade.

On Thursday, Indian Oil Corp. and Nepal Oil Corp. signed a pact under which the Indian oil giant will build a pipeline into Nepal to ensure smooth supply of petroleum products.

The pipeline would prevent Nepal from being choked by the Maoists, who cut off the capital Kathmandu last month in an unprecedented show of their might through a road blockade.

Analysts say the guerrillas, who draw inspiration from the ideas of late Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong, dominate more than two-thirds of Nepal.

Government administration virtually does not exist beyond the headquarters of a majority of its 75 districts, they say.

"India can help in tackling poverty and implementing a social and economic development package," said Yadav Kant Silwal, a former Nepali foreign secretary.

China rounds up 30,000 protesters

AFP, Beijing

More than 30,000 petitioners -- many of whom were brutally beaten and herded into a gymnasium -- have been detained in Beijing before a major meeting of China's communist party, a human rights group and witnesses said yesterday.

Some 36,000 people have been rounded up during the past week in an apparent move to ensure public order before the fourth plenary session of the party's elite 198-member Central Committee, New York-based Human Rights in China (HRIC) said.

Citing unnamed sources, it said police had been seen storming into petitioner settlements and breaking down makeshift structures, confiscating and destroying personal belongings.

"Many of them were brutally beaten or otherwise abused," the right groups said.

Saddam never developed drone to drop WMD

UN inspector challenges US claim on cornerstone of war

AFP, United Nations

The debate over the war in Iraq took a new twist when the top UN weapons inspector challenged one of the cornerstone US arguments for launching the war to bring down Saddam Hussein.

His new report said UN inspectors found no evidence that Saddam's regime, despite US claims, had developed so-called drone planes without pilots that could drop chemical and biological weapons on far-away targets.

The report also concluded that Iraqi authorities, installed by the United States after Saddam's ouster last year, quickly began shipping scrap metal out of Iraq that included

dozens of engines from banned missile systems.

The UN Security Council, sharply divided over the war, debated the findings behind closed doors on Wednesday. It issued no public statement after the meeting.

The report from UNMOVIC, the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission established in 1999, said Baghdad admitted to trying to develop biological weapons-capable drones before giving up ahead of the 1991 Gulf War.

Saddam's regime also developed other drone aircraft but there was no "technical" evidence that it built them for delivery of chemical or biological weapons, said the report by acting UNMOVIC chief Dimitri Perricos.

1 million commit suicide worldwide each year: WHO

PTI, New York

About one million people commit suicide worldwide each year, a figure which is more than number of all homicides and deaths in war combined, the UN reported and called for concerted global action to curb "a huge but largely preventable public health problem."

"Suicide is a tragic global public health problem," World Health Organisation (WHO) Assistant-Director General for Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health Catherine Le Galhs-Camus said ahead of World Suicide Prevention Day being marked tomorrow.

"There is an urgent need for coordinated and intensified global action to prevent this needless toll."

The agency has produced a series of guidelines for different audiences that, it said, has a critical role in suicide prevention.

India, Pakistan to open up tourism

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Despite disagreement over Kashmir issue, India and Pakistan on Wednesday agreed to open up cross-border tourism for the first time while pledging to continue a "serious and sustained" dialogue in the coming months.

A joint statement issued at the end of a visit by Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri charted a roadmap for talks on a number of issues including nuclear and conventional weapons, modalities for disengagement in the world's highest battlefield, coast guard communication and reviving a rail link.

Kasuri and his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh said the two countries would add a tourism category to their visa regime which has till now been confined to those with relatives on either side of the border or with official work or

to special groups wanting to visit religion shrines.

The statement promised to promote group tourism and visits to religious shrines. Tourism industry sources said the move is expected to come as a big boost to the sector in both the countries.

The statement, released after two days of talks between Kasuri and Singh, also agreed to have further meetings on the proposal for a bus service across the frontiers in Kashmir and reopening of a railway line across India's Rajasthan state and Pakistan's Sindh province.

The proposal for a bus service between Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and Muzaffarabad, is stuck on the question of whether passports or "local permits" be used as travel documents by people wanting to move across the Line of Control dividing the two countries in Kashmir.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese school students walk past Kathmandu's main mosque as they participate in a peace and goodwill march in Kathmandu yesterday. Over 1,500 people from different walks of life took part in a goodwill march urging for peace in the Himalayan kingdom. The peace march was organised after irate mobs had attacked a number of airlines offices, mosques and manpower offices on September 1 protesting against grisly killing of 12 Nepalese hostages by militants in Iraq.

14 die in major violence after Indo-Pak talks

AFP, Jammu

Fourteen people have died in a fresh upsurge of violence in Indian Kashmir, just days after India and Pakistan wound up talks on the future of the divided region, police said yesterday.

Indian officials blame the violence on militants who oppose talks between the rivals, who each hold part of the state but claim it in full.

Two policemen were killed and six injured when suspected Islamic rebels blew up their convoy in southern Kashmir Thursday, police said.

Explosions destroyed two trucks of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) as they rolled into Buldoda village, 185km northeast of the winter capital Jammu, a police spokesman said.

"Two CRPF trucks were travelling from Doda to Jammu when militants used powerful improvised explosive devices to target them. Two CRPF personnel died

on the spot and six others were critically injured," he said.

Kashmir's dominant rebel group Hizbul Mujahedin claimed responsibility for the attack in a telephone call to the Current News Service.

Two Muslim civilians were killed and two injured during an exchange of fire between the rebels and Indian troops near Shopian town, 50km southwest of Srinagar Thursday, the police spokesman said.

"The shooting erupted during a cordon and search operation by the Indian soldiers," he said. The killings sparked anti-government protests. Police said they used batons to disperse the villagers, injuring three people.

Indian troops in two separate clashes gunned down five Islamic militants in the southern district of Rajouri overnight and Thursday, the police spokesman said, adding an Indian border guard member also died during one of the clashes.

Police said troops also shot dead a rebel in northern Kupwara district overnight.

In Febri Dhok village in Rajouri district, suspected rebels beheaded a Muslim man overnight, police said. They said two more people were killed by suspected rebels in southern Pulwama and central Budgam districts.

The violence comes just days after Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri agreed during talks in New Delhi to a timetable of meetings between officials to discuss points of contention.

But they failed to make any headway on Kashmir, cause of two of their three wars and which is in the grip of a 15-year-old insurgency against Indian rule. More than 40,000 people have been killed, according to official count. Separatists put the toll between 80,000 and 100,000.

Lanka seeks more UN peacekeeping slots

AFP, Panagoda

Sri Lanka's military Wednesday said it was seeking more UN peacekeeping jobs as the island's first batch of 750 troops prepared to leave for Haiti.

Army chief Lieutenant General Shantha Kottegoda said a peace deal with Tamil Tiger guerrillas could free more troops from the security forces to take up the lucrative peacekeeping slots.

Addressing the 750 infantrymen headed for Haiti next week, Kottegoda said he expected to send more soldiers abroad on similar missions.

"Once we have permanent peace, we will be in a position to send more of our soldiers abroad on these missions," Kottegoda said at the military's main base 25km east of Colombo.

He said the prospect of being chosen for the plum posts with a basic salary of 1,028 dollars a month plus other allowances was encouraging new recruits and boosting the morale of enlisted men.

The average monthly salary of a Sri Lankan soldier is about 100 dollars.



PHOTO: AFP

Newly-wed Bruneian Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkihah (C) with his bride, Princess Sarah (R) leaves the royal dais after the wedding ceremony in Istana Nurul Iman in Bandar Seri Begawan yesterday. The heir to oil-rich Brunei's throne married a half-Swiss commoner yesterday in a glittering ceremony attended by government leaders and blue-blooded guests from around the world.

Brunei's future king marries in glittering ceremony

AFP, Bandar Seri Begawan

The heir to the throne of oil-rich Brunei married a teenaged commoner yesterday before a glittering array of foreign dignitaries in Asia's grandest wedding in more than a decade.

After a 21-gun salute, Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkihah, 30, formalised his marriage to half-Swiss student Sarah Salleh, 17, in a cavernous hall of his father Sultan Hassanal Bolkihah's 1,700-room Istana palace.

Presidents and prime ministers from Brunei's neighbors joined Arab and European royals for Asia's most lavish wedding since the 1993 marriage of Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito to commoner Masako Owada.

Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah, a billiards and snooker enthusiast sent to Britain to learn statecraft, is one of 10 children and first in line to succeed his father, the absolute ruler of the Southeast Asian kingdom.

The mustachioed prince wore a golden crown and had a ceremonial dagger tucked into his waist. His brand-new wife sported a diamond-studded tiara over a blue veil and clutched a bouquet laced with precious stones.