

Sino-Japanese FMs fail to resolve row

AP, Beijing

Japan's foreign minister ended a tense visit to China yesterday without resolving the two neighbours' worst row in decades. Thousands of Japanese tourists cancelled trips to China amid indications that the spat could hurt two of the world's most important economies.

Anti-Japanese demonstrations involving tens of thousands of sometimes-violent protesters have erupted in several Chinese cities in recent weeks over a government-approved Japanese textbook that critics say whitewashes the country's wartime atrocities.

Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka, who departed China after a three-day visit, had sought an apology and compensation from China for damage during the riots. China balked and said Japan was to blame for the diplomatic spat and should be the one to apologise.

Beijing said it was considering Japan's proposal to have its prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, meet one-on-one with President Hu Jintao during a conference of Asian and African leaders in Indonesia this weekend. However, Koizumi said "if it's going to be the exchange of harsh words, it's better not to meet."

Cardinals fail to choose new pope in 3 votes

REUTERS, Vatican City

Roman Catholic Cardinals failed to choose a new pope in two more votes yesterday at their secret Vatican conclave.

Black smoke, signalling that no papal candidate had won the required two thirds of votes among the 115 cardinals, emerged from a chimney above the frescoed Sistine Chapel just before noon (0600 EDT). When a pope is chosen the smoke will be white.

There were again a few moments of confusion among thousands of faithful gathered in St Peter's Square as gray smoke initially emerged, as it did after Monday's first vote.

"It wasn't clear. It looked white, then black, but I guess any amount of black means they have not chosen. It's disappointing," said Briton Justin Fox in the square.

The smoke comes from burning ballot papers and any notes made by cardinals. Additives determine the colour although the early confusion suggested this is an inexact science in the Vatican.

The red-robed cardinals, meeting in the chapel under Michelangelo's majestic frescoed ceiling, will hold another voting session at 4 p.m. (1000 EDT).



PHOTO: AFP

Visiting Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf (L) shakes hands with an honour guard (R) as Philippine President Gloria Arroyo (C) looks on during an arrival ceremony at the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila Tuesday. Musharraf arrived in the Philippines late Monday for a three-day state visit expected to boost security cooperation between two frontline states in the US-led war on terrorism.

MUSHARRAF SAYS

Reject 'clash of civilisations'

Pakistan, India must seize 'opportunity' for peace

AFP, Manila

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf yesterday called on Islamic and Western nations to reject a "clash of civilisations" and urged Muslim countries to oppose extremism.

In a speech before both houses of the Philippine Congress, Musharraf also called for a rejection of terrorism but asked the developed world to address the political and economic divisions in poorer countries that give rise to it.

"We must reject the false notions of 'clash of civilisations', especially conflict between Islam and the West," he said, adding that "terrorism or extremism has no religion."

He reaffirmed Pakistan's role as "part of the international coalition against terrorism" but said the world must do more to address its "root causes".

Musharraf called on Islamic nations to practice "enlightened moderation" and "to reject extrem-

ism and intolerance and promote socio-economic development that is lacking in many Islamic societies".

But he also urged "Western nations to help resolve longstanding political disputes that have caused so much pain in the Islamic world". He did not specify what these disputes were.

Musharraf cited the reforms carried out under his government in Pakistan, an Islamic republic, saying democracy had progressed and economic growth and stability had been sustained under his administration.

Musharraf said he hoped Pakistan would become a "dynamic and moderate Islamic country," but conceded that "our neighbourhood has remained disturbed," due to turmoil in Afghanistan and Islamabad's dispute with India over Kashmir.

The Pakistani leader also vowed continued support for Philippine peace efforts aimed at ending a decades-old Muslim insurgency

through negotiations and called on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to lay down its arms.

The Philippine government in turn, must respect the rights, tradition and culture of its Muslim minority who are based in Mindanao, he added.

"I urge the Muslims of the Philippines, my brothers in faith, to shun the path of confrontation, suppress extremism and contribute to the socio-economic progress of their country," Musharraf said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and India must seize the "historic opportunity" for peace in the wake of the recent meeting of the two countries' leaders, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said here yesterday.

Addressing the Philippine Congress following his trip to New Delhi last week, Musharraf said that he was "encouraged by my interaction" with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other Indian leaders.

Indo-Pak pacts tangible breakthroughs: US

OIC hail peace progress

PTI, AFP, Washington/ Jeddah

The US on Monday welcomed the joint statement by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf as "tangible breakthroughs" that will allow better people-to-people contacts between both countries.

The agreements outlined in the joint statement issued by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Musharraf after their meeting in New Delhi are "tangible breakthroughs that will allow for more extensive people to people contacts and will contribute to improved prosperity," a senior State Department official said.

"We welcome the commitments made over the weekend by India and Pakistan as outlined in their joint statement, including enhanced interaction and family reunification across the Line of Control, expanding the frequency and type of transport such as bus transport and truck transport they talked about, and also their initiatives for promoting cross-border trade," the official added.

Meanwhile, the 57-member Organisation of the Islamic

Conference Monday hailed what it described as the "positive results" of peace talks between India and Pakistan in New Delhi.

Secretary General Akmal al-Din Oghali said Islamic states "welcome the announcement by the two sides that the peace process is now irreversible," said a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The OIC expressed its "full support for efforts for peace and normalisation between the two countries" and the "settlement of all outstanding differences, including that of Kashmir".

Monday's joint statement from the long-time foes came at the end of a visit by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to India that had originally started as an invitation to watch cricket but quickly built into a broader review of the 14-month peace process.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan welcomed Monday's joint statement from India and Pakistan that the peace process between the two nuclear-armed rivals was now irreversible.

"The secretary general warmly

supports the efforts by India and Pakistan to advance the ongoing dialogue," Annan's spokesman said in a statement.

"He welcomes the joint statement issued by the leaders of the two countries this weekend which outlined additional confidence building measures aimed at achieving durable peace in the region," the spokesman said.

"In particular, he is encouraged by their declaration that the dialogue had become 'irreversible.'"

"The two leaders had substantive talks on all issues. They determined that the peace process was now irreversible," they said.

Musharraf's visit started as an invitation to watch Pakistan play India at cricket but quickly built into a broader review of the 14-month peace process.

The two countries each hold part of Kashmir but both claim the territory in full. They have fought two of their three wars since independence from Britain in 1947 over the Himalayan region.

Kashmiri militant rejects Pakistan's unity call

AFP, Srinagar

A hardline Indian Kashmir separatist leader has rejected Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's call for secessionist forces to unite and speak with one voice, a report said yesterday.

"Pakistan desires separatist unity," said Syed Ali Geelani, head of the revolt-hit region's hardline faction of the main separatist alliance Hurriyat.

"But I can't break my principles to forge unity for the sake of unity," he told the local Current News Service.

Geelani said Musharraf told him during a three-day visit to New Delhi that ended Monday to join forces with moderate separatists to present a united secessionist front.

Hardliners broke away from Hurriyat in 2003 after moderates, led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, said they were open to talks with New Delhi.

Both factions claim to be the real Hurriyat.

Musharraf said in a broadcast by Pakistan TV late Monday that Indian Kashmir separatist leaders should use "their brains" and join talks with India as it would be a step toward trilateral talks, the Press Trust of India reported.

The interview with Current News Service contained no separatist reaction to the Press Trust of India report.

Iraqi suicide bombing, attacks kill 11

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad

Guerrilla attacks on Iraqi forces in Baghdad and in a town west of the capital killed at least eleven people and wounded 25 yesterday, police and hospital officials said.

Insurgents opened fire on members of Iraq's National Guard in Khaldiya, west of Baghdad, killing five people.

In Baghdad, a suicide car bomb exploded outside an Iraqi army recruitment center in northern Baghdad on Tuesday, killing at least six Iraqis and wounding 44. On the other side of the capital, the National Assembly briefly adjourned after a legislator claimed he had been roughed up at a US checkpoint.

The blast occurred in the Azamiyah section of the capital about 18 yards from the front gate of the center and the fatalities included at least two soldiers, police Col. Hussein Mutlaq said.

All the victims of the car bomb appeared to be Iraqis, Mutlaq said, as insurgents continued to target Iraqi soldiers and others they accuse of collaborating with US forces.

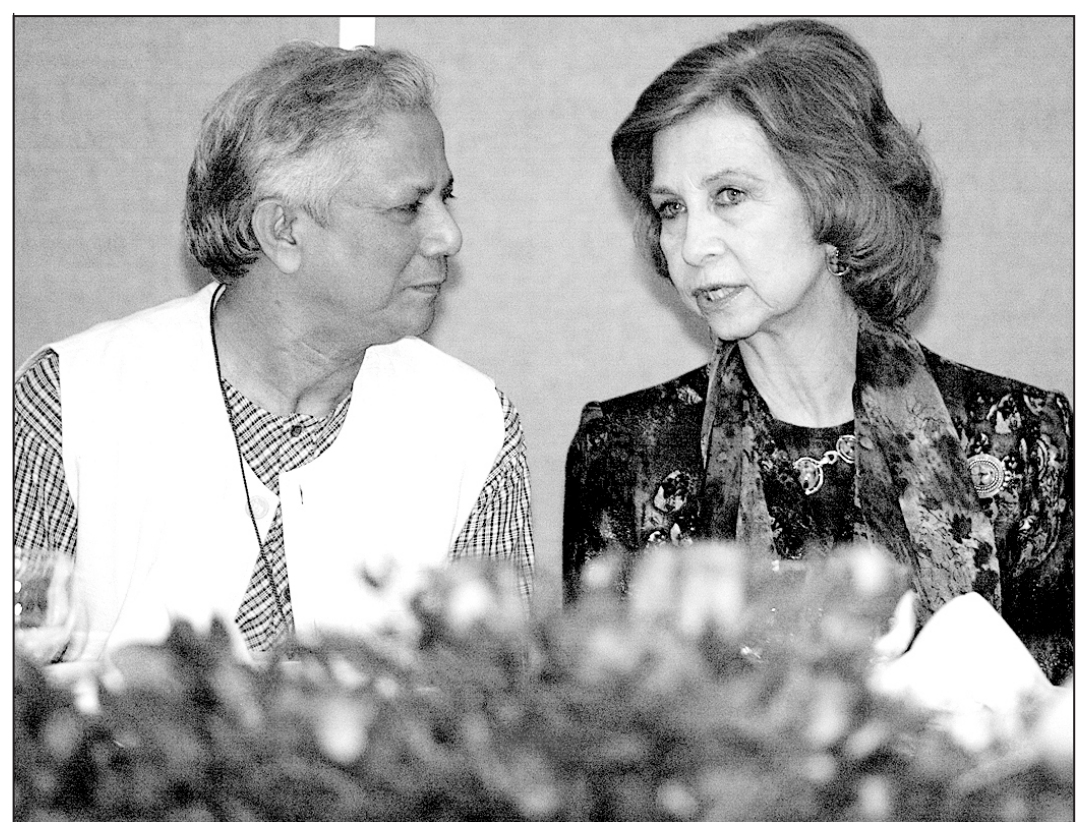


PHOTO: AFP

Queen Sofia of Spain and founder of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh Dr Muhammad Yunus confer during a banquet in the framework of the Micro-credit Summit Monday in Santiago, Chile.

Asia-Africa summit puts relevance of Nam to test

AFP, Jakarta

Fifty years ago, 29 African and Asian heads of state met in Indonesia to proudly declare a solidarity they saw as a counterbalance to the divided world of the Cold War, free from the imperialism and dominance of the West.

But as leaders from both continents prepare to meet half a century on from the first Asia-Africa conference, which gave birth to the Non-Aligned Movement, (Nam) they face a struggle to revive lofty ideals that many participants have cast aside as they strive for a footing in a vastly different world.

Some 46 heads of state are due to gather this weekend in Jakarta and Bandung, the Java island city where Indonesia's founding president Sukarno convened the first Asia-Africa summit.

Ahead of the meeting, joint hosts Indonesia and South Africa have pushed the message that the sum-

mit will see a revival of the "Bandung spirit" as the two continents rebuild old bridges with new trade and friendship pacts.

It will be a tall order to recapture the non-aligned zeitgeist of 1955, when it seemed feasible to create an ideological blend of Asian and African nationalism acceptable to theocrats of the Middle East, capitalists from Japan and communists of China.

This is even more unlikely when considering side-issues that will dominate the 2005 meeting, such as a spat between Tokyo and Beijing, ostensibly over Japan's World War II aggression, but indicative of tensions over the race for a permanent UN Security Council seat.

Myriad other regional power struggles have been further complicated by a US-led war on terrorism that has targeted and involved several participants.

"The 50th anniversary of the Asia-Africa conference calls for

deep introspection. We still need to weigh whether our destinies are really being decided at home or in Geneva or Washington," said Delhi-based political analyst Praful Bidawi.

Some observers are scornful of a gathering they see as little more than an exercise in well-meaning handshakes and empty promises that will fail to address real issues such as the spread of HIV-Aids in both continents.

"This is a meeting looking for a mission," said John Stremiau, director of the Johannesburg-based Centre for Africa's International Relations. "There are no strategic issues."

But others see strong forces at play beneath the hot air, with the summit likely to be showcase if not for inter-continental harmony, then for emerging economic powerhouses wanting to throw their weight and make new strategic pals.

Canada eases rules of immigration for families, students

AFP, Ottawa

Canada announced Monday it was relaxing immigration rules to attract talented students, to help families unite and to cut waiting time for approved immigrants.

"Canada's immigration system is a model for the world and today's measures allow us to maintain and enhance our position. We will do this by reducing application processing times for permanent residents who want to become Canadian citizens," said Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Joe Volpe in a statement.

Beginning in 2007-2008, the wait for permanent residency will be cut to one year from two years, without reducing rigorous security

screening requirements, Volpe said.

To help bring together immigrant citizens and their parents and grandparents living abroad, the government is exempting all applicants over 55 from language and knowledge-of-Canada tests. Currently, the exemption is only for those over 60.

To compete for talented foreign students, Canada will permit foreign students to work off-campus while studying and also for one year after obtaining their diplomas.

With more than 220,000 new permanent residents each year, immigration is an important motor of demographic growth in the country, which has a population of 32 million.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian fishermen sit in a lockup at a police station in Karachi Tuesday. Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency (MSA) arrested 36 Indian fishermen and seized their eight boats on Monday for illegal fishing in its territorial waters in the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan, Afghanistan & US agree to boost anti-terror battle

AFP, Islamabad

The United States, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed Monday to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation along the Pakistani-Afghan border, the military here said.

Defence officials from the three countries "agreed to further improve coordination and information sharing to enhance the effectiveness of counter terrorist operations," it said in a statement following talks in Islamabad.

They also "welcomed" the establishment of a counter-narcotics working group to "facilitate discussions" between the three countries, the military said.

Afghanistan produces almost 90 percent of the world's opium and Pakistan is often used as a transit country to smuggle drugs to the West.

Pakistan's director-general for

military operations Major General Mohammad Yousaf, the commander of US troops in Afghanistan Lieutenant General David W. Barno, and Afghan national army chief of operations Lieutenant General Sher Mohammad Karimi led their delegations at the Tripartite Commission meeting.

The commission, formed some three years ago to settle border issues, will meet again in June 2005 in Kabul, the statement said.

The porous and ill-defined 2,400km Pakistan-Afghanistan border has been the source of enormous friction between the two countries.

Afghan officials say key commanders of the ousted Taliban militia have been allowed to freely cross the border while conducting guerrilla operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan denies the charges.