

India, Pakistan to review peace process

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan will review their ongoing peace process during high-level talks in Islamabad later this month, an official statement said Monday, as the countries prepare for a meeting of their prime ministers.

Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran would visit the Pakistani capital from August 31 to September 2 to meet his counterpart Riaz Mohammed Khan for a "wrap up meeting of the second round of the composite dialogue", a foreign ministry statement said.

"The foreign secretaries would now assess the progress made during the second round of dialogue, take stock of the relationship, and outline the course to move forward the dialogue process," the statement said.

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan resumed peace talks - called "composite dialogue" - in January 2004 to resolve a host of bilateral disputes, including the row over Kashmir, which is divided

between the two but is claimed in full by both.

The second round of this peace dialogue will end on August 29-30 with talks between the home secretaries of both sides, the statement said.

The foreign ministers are scheduled to meet in Islamabad on October 4, the release added.

This is expected to be followed by a summit between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz on the sidelines of a regional conference in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka in November.

After coming to the brink of their fourth war in 2002, India and Pakistan have steadily improved ties - reopening air, train and bus routes and reestablishing cricketing ties.

However, analysts say little headway has been made on the territorial dispute in Kashmir, over which the rivals have fought two of their three wars.

In Netzarim, the approximately 600 residents of the farming com-

Gaza cleared of settlers

Two West Bank settlements to be evacuated today

AP, Netzarim

Troops went house to house to clear out Gaza's last Jewish settlement yesterday, wrapping up Israel's historic pullout from the coastal strip, even as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would expand large West Bank settlements.

More than 5,000 troops, meanwhile, headed to two militant West Bank settlements slated to be evacuated today. Security forces braced for a possible confrontation, saying some 2,000 ultraorthodox youths holed up there planned to resist violently. Security officials said militants had hoarded stun grenades and tear gas canisters and planned to hurl burning tires onto rivers of cooking oil.

"We need a miracle so that we might stay here again tonight," said Jonathan Weinberg, 21, who came to Netzarim from the West Bank settlement of Hashmonaim to reinforce the settlers here.

Some residents found solace in

continuing with their everyday lives. Workers poured concrete to create a foundation for the roof of the Meshulam family's new house.

"As long as the state of Israel hasn't left here, we need to continue with the little bit of life that we have left," Netzarim's secretary, Eliehu Uzan, told Channel 1 TV. "We just have to continue."

Shlomo Keshet, a resident of Netzarim and the father of five, was packing car seats into the family van and preparing to relocate to a dormitory in a college in the West Bank settlement of Ariel. Residents, he said, agreed not to resist evacuation violently.

Netzarim, on the outskirts of Gaza City, has been the target of frequent attacks by Palestinian militants and was one of the coastal strip's most hardline and isolated settlements.



PHOTO: AFP
Members of the Palestinian police deploy close to the Jewish settlements of Sanur and Homesh which were evacuated by Israeli army yesterday. Palestinian security forces erected several checkpoints around the Jenin area of the northern West Bank in a bid to prevent Palestinian militant attacks during the Israeli pullout from the area.



PHOTO: AFP
A Pakistani girl holds a placard as she takes part in a demonstration in front of the Election Commission along with other women in Islamabad yesterday. The protesters accused the six party Islamic alliance, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), of preventing female voters from casting their votes in Nowshera in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) in the first phase of local government elections.

Poor states need 150 yrs to reach UN goals on child health: WHO

AFP, Geneva

UN targets to improve children's health in poor countries within 10 years will take at least 150 years to achieve despite a concerted international effort to tackle mortality and malnutrition, the UN health agency said yesterday.

The World Health Organisation reiterated that the health-related targets set under the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000 would not be met by the 2015 deadline under current trends.

"The evidence so far suggests that while there has been some progress, too many countries - particularly the poorest - are falling behind in health," WHO Director General Lee Jong Wook said in the progress report.

Despite goals of halving hunger or curbing child mortality, the situation has even worsened in some instances as poor countries struggle with chronic problems, according to the data in the report.

"We've got 10 years until 2015," said Andrew Cassells, director of health and development at the WHO.

"When it comes to an issue like child health, if the present rate of decline continues it's not going to take 10 years to achieve the goals, it's going to take 150 years," he told journalists.

Between 1990 and 2002 - the most recent data cited - the number of people with insufficient food went up by 34 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 15 million in south Asia, and by eight million in western Asia the report found. It fell by 47 million in east Asia.

More than half the children in south Asia are malnourished, while the average for developing nations in 2003 stood at one-third.

However, the proportion of under five year-olds who are underweight in south, southeastern and east Asia fell by nine to six percent between 1990 and 2003, while in Africa it has barely changed (32 percent).

US, Afghan forces kill 105 rebels in 3 weeks

AFP, Kabul/Kandahar

US and Afghan forces have killed at least 105 Taliban militants in the past three weeks during operations to increase security before key legislative elections, the American military said yesterday.

Around 65 insurgents died during battles last week at Deh Cholan in the southern province of Zabol where four US soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb on Sunday, spokeswoman Lieutenant Cindy Moore told reporters.

Separately, more than 40 rebels were killed over the past three weeks during operations to clear "enemy" forces from the eastern province of Kunar, Moore added.

In June Taliban rebels shot down a US military helicopter in Kunar, killing all 16 on board. The helicopter was trying to rescue a team of four elite US Navy SEALs, three of whom were shot dead by militants.

"The focus of these battles is to find, disrupt and defeat the enemies of Afghanistan," Moore said.

Pak forces find guns, wigs stashed at fake madrasa, arrest 10

AFP, REUTERS, Peshawar

Security forces arrested 10 suspected militants from Pakistan's turbulent tribal regions and recovered weapons, wigs and women's outfits from a fake madrasa, the military said yesterday.

The raid on a deserted compound which was designed to look like one of Pakistan's thousands of religious schools happened late Sunday near Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan region, it said.

"The compound was being used as terrorist den and security forces carried out a search following a tip-off by locals that suspected militants visited the compound," the military said in a statement.

During the search the troops recovered grenades, fuses, guns, binoculars, daggers and commando uniforms, as well as female costumes and wigs, it said.

"The madrasa had been established in an unpopulated location and is an attempt on part of terrorists to use the cover of religious places

for sabotage activities," the military said.

In a "related development", security forces arrested seven suspected terrorists from Mera Din town in Shawal Valley in the tribal belt while three others were held from various places in the area near the Afghan border.

The detainees were all aged between 18 and 25 but their identities could not be established immediately, the military said. They were handed over to security agencies for interrogation, the statement added.

Pakistan's controversial madrasas have come under international scrutiny after it emerged that at least one of the suicide bombers involved in the July 7 attacks on London's transit network may have visited some.

It said the raids took place in the past 24 hours.

The identity of those arrested could not immediately be established, the statement said, adding that they had been handed over to intelligence agencies for interrogation.

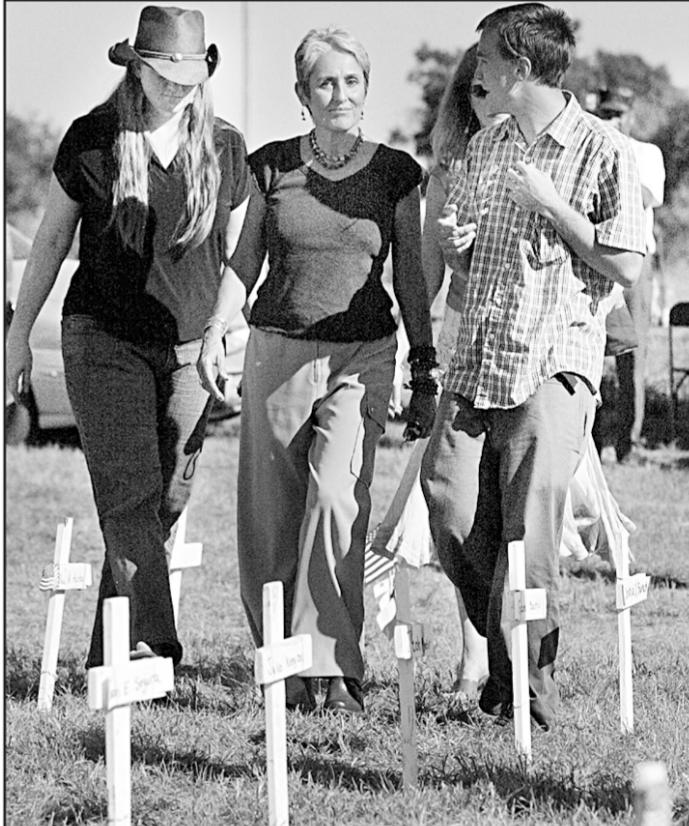


PHOTO: AFP
Folk Rock singer Joan Baez (C) arrives at the newest Camp Casey to speak with anti-war protesters on Sunday near US President George W. Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas. Bush's neighbour, Fred Mattlage, has given the demonstrators permission to use his field as their new base of operations.

Indonesia pulls 1,300 troops out of Aceh

AFP, Jakarta

Some 1,300 Indonesian soldiers yesterday pulled out of Aceh province, the first major step by Indonesia to begin implementing a historic peace deal struck last week with separatist rebels.

Two battalions from the army's Kostrad strategic reserve, about 1,300 men, left on board a navy ship from Krueung Geukueh port in North Aceh early Monday, military spokesman Ahmad Yani Basuki said.

"The pull out is part of our commitment to the peace agreement," Basuki said, declining to give details on how many troops were left in the resource-rich province at the northern tip of Sumatra island.

Indonesia and rebels from the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed a historic peace pact in Helsinki last Monday, agreeing to end hostilities after a 29-year conflict, which has left around 15,000 dead, mostly civilians.

Under the accord, GAM dropped its long-held demand for independence for a form of local self-government and agreed to disarm and demobilise its 3,000 fighters.