

# Abe goes to China Sunday, South Korea the next day

AFP, Tokyo



Shinzo Abe

Japan's new prime minister Shinzo Abe achieved a diplomatic breakthrough yesterday as China and South Korea agreed to resume summits, but a crisis over North Korea's nuclear programme was set to overshadow his trip.

Abe will go to Beijing on Sunday and to Seoul the following day in his first foreign trip as prime minister. In contrast his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi visited the United States, Japan's closest ally, first.

Beijing had refused to invite a Japanese prime minister for five years, in part due to an emotionally-charged dispute over Koizumi's visits to a Tokyo war shrine seen as symbolizing Japan's past militarism.

Both Beijing and Tokyo suggested that they had reached a deal on the controversial issue.

Abe, who took office on September 26, is scheduled to meet with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing and then hold a summit with South Korean President

But Abe has long been known as a hardliner on the communist state, whereas Beijing and Seoul prefer a more flexible approach.

Officials sounded conciliatory as they announced Abe's tour but kept mum on details.

China said the visit was made possible after "overcoming the political obstacle to bilateral relations."

It did not elaborate, but China in the past used "political obstacle" to refer to Koizumi's visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine.

Koizumi as prime minister went six times to the shrine honoring war dead and war criminals alike, infuriating China and the two Koreas which remain bitter over past Japanese aggression.

Abe is known for his nationalist views and has visited the shrine in the past. He has refused to say if he will visit as prime minister, while hinting he will go in secret.

Japanese officials refused to say if Abe's reticent stance on the shrine led to the diplomatic breakthrough.

Koizumi went to the shrine with television cameras rolling, most recently on August 15, the emotive anniversary of Japan's World War II surrender, which Koreans celebrate as "Liberation Day."

Asked if Abe would discuss the Yasukuni shrine dispute with his counterparts, government spokesman Yasuhiisa Shiozaki: "It's common sense that this will probably be a major topic."

"But Japan and China agreed in promoting a healthy bilateral relationship, overcoming political difficulties," said Shiozaki, the chief cabinet secretary, without elaborating.

However, the bridge-building visit could show up disagreements on North Korea.

Abe built his career as a hawk on the communist state. He told parliament he would seek cooperation with China and South Korea, which have taken a more conciliatory stance towards Pyongyang.

## Two killed in militant attack in Srinagar

AFP, Srinagar

Two police commandos were killed and seven people hurt when Islamic rebels opened fire from a hotel window in Indian Kashmir's summer capital yesterday, sending shoppers fleeing in panic, police said.

Security forces rushed to the scene as the firing erupted from the window of the small hotel near Lal Chowk, the major shopping area in Srinagar.

Police initially thought only one militant was involved but later said they believed there were two militants.

Security forces said the gunmen appeared to be targeting a nearby police paramilitary camp.

Two police commandos were killed and three policemen and four civilians were wounded in the attack, which was still continuing late Wednesday.

A group known as Al-Mansur claimed responsibility in calls to local media.

# Pakistan must 'walk the talk' on anti-terror vow

## Manmohan warns after police accused ISI of plotting Mumbai blasts

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan has to prove it is sincere about working with India to counter terrorism, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh warned after police accused Islamabad of plotting blasts that killed 186 commuters in India's financial capital Mumbai.

"Pakistan will have to walk the talk," to back up its promise to cooperate on terrorism, Singh told reporters Tuesday night.

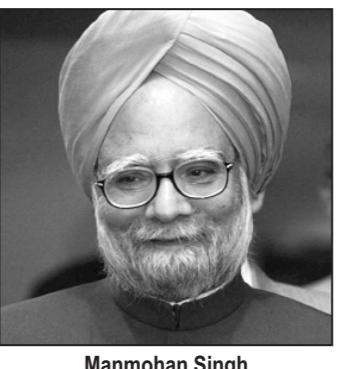
"Whatever has been discovered (by Mumbai police), we shall share that information with Pakistan and test them on how sincere they are in carrying forward the commitment I and President (Pervez) Musharraf have underlined," Singh said on his plane trip home from South Africa.

Mumbai police chief A.N. Roy on Saturday publicly accused Pakistan's spy agency, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), of orchestrating the July attacks on trains that also wounded 800.

Pakistan has pledged to take action if India produces evidence to show that ISI was involved in the Mumbai bombings, but has denied any role in the attacks.

India froze peace talks with Pakistan in the aftermath of the attacks but agreed to continue the dialogue after a meeting between Singh and Musharraf in Havana on September 16.

The leaders decided to "put in place an India-Pakistan anti-terrorism institutional mechanism to identify and implement counter-terrorism initiatives and investiga-



Manmohan Singh

tions."

When asked how the proposed counter-terrorism mechanism would work, Singh said: "We have set up this mechanism. How else can we ask for information except through a mechanism like this?"

"The mechanism is yet to take off," he said.

But once it does, "then we will test the waters," Singh said. He added that the peace process cannot "move forward until both countries sincerely work to gain mastery over this menace."

India's National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan echoed Singh's warning.

"If Pakistan is willing to help us out with this and says, 'Okay that they (militants) are located in Islamabad or Karachi,' the mechanism can operate.

"But if every time if it (Pakistan) comes back to us and says, 'It is not true,' then of course it means they are not willing to cooperate," Narayanan

told Times Now television.

India's million-plus military, locked in combat with Muslim rebels in Kashmir since 1989, has supported the mechanism but commentators said the allegations over the Mumbai blasts would now test Pakistan's intentions.

"The joint mechanism will not change the nomenclature of 'enemy' that the two sides use to describe each other, but still we must not reject it altogether as this is an opening point to talks," former army lieutenant general Afsir Karim told AFP.

Retired air vice marshal Kapil Kak said India, which accuses Pakistan of infiltrating Islamic militants into disputed Kashmir, had no choice.

"We must involve diplomatic, economic, technological and military options and this planned mechanism could be one of the tools," said Kak, the director of the privately-run Centre for Strategic Studies think-tank.

However, the opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has branded the mechanism a "national betrayal."

"The perpetrators of cross-border terrorism have been co-opted as partners in our fight against terrorism and the distinction between the aggressor and the victim of aggression have been done away with," said Yashwant Singh, a former BJP foreign minister.

## Dengue hits Indian PM's family

AFP, New Delhi

A major outbreak of debilitating dengue fever sweeping the Indian capital has hit the family of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, reports said yesterday.

Two national news television channels said two of Singh's grandsons had contracted the mosquito-borne virus. One of them had been admitted to a top public hospital under fire for failing to halt dengue on its own premises.

A spokesman for the prime minister's office refused to confirm or deny the reports.

At least 35 people have died nationwide in the last two weeks from the virus, including 13 in the capital.

India's health minister has summoned top health officials from four dengue fever-hit states to an emergency meeting in the capital on Thursday, but the government has so far stopped short of declaring an epidemic.

Children in the sultry capital have been ordered to wear long-sleeved winter uniforms to school from Wednesday to protect against mosquito bites.

More than 2,000 municipal workers have fanned out in New Delhi to spray insecticide and go house-to-house to tell residents to clean up pools of stagnant water where infected mosquitos can breed.

Officials say nearly 500 people have been hospitalised with dengue since June in the New Delhi region alone. In southern Kerala state, 12 people have died and some 500 have the fever, said senior state official M.K. Jeevan.



PHOTO: AFP

Dengue patients being treated at the special ward at Swami Daya Nand (SDN) Hospital in New Delhi yesterday.

## Thai junta may hold peace talks with Muslim insurgents

AFP, Bangkok

Thaksin with solving the southern violence, and had gone against the government line by suggesting talks with the insurgents.

General Surayud Chulanont, who was appointed interim premier at the weekend, confirmed on Wednesday that Sonthi would be retaining his role in the south.

"There are signals from insur-

gent groups and local people that they are ready to cooperate for the sake of peace in the region," Lieutenant General Viroach Buacharoon, the new southern army commander, told reporters.

"Sonthi will continue to oversee

the southern unrest problem at the top of his agenda, said that his government may consider negotiations with leaders of the insurgency, but urged caution.

"It's too soon to say anything on

this issue, we have to wait," he said. "There is no contact yet... I have to consult with others on this matter."

Nearly 1,500 people have been killed since the unrest erupted in January 2004. The violence has been blamed variously on ethnic Malay separatism, religious extremism, local police corruption and smuggling rings.

## US urges Thai rulers to lift martial law in 10 days

AFP, Bangkok

The United States yesterday urged Thailand's military coup leaders to lift martial law within seven to 10 days and to bring forward elections the generals have promised for late next year.

"A year seems like a very long time," said a US embassy official in Bangkok, speaking on condition of anonymity. The diplomat added that "if martial law is not lifted in a week to 10 days, that would be a problem."

The junta that ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra on September 19 installed retired General Surayud Chulanont last weekend as interim prime minister until polls they have promised for October 2007.

The generals had initially pledged to make way for a civilian government, but their new constitution maintains military influence over the new premier, and restrictions on political activity and the media remain in place.

The White House had called Tuesday for "a quick return" to democracy in Thailand and warned its new military leaders that Washington was weighing action beyond US sanctions imposed last week.



PHOTO: AFP

## Indians take centre stage at Frankfurt book fair

AFP, Frankfurt

The world's biggest book fair got underway yesterday with Indian authors taking on center stage and a new scheme to protect writers' copyrights from Internet piracy creating a buzz.

The 50th Frankfurt Book Fair brings together publishers from more than 100 countries and has spotlighted India this year as its guest country with a packed program of readings and debates.

More than 70 authors from the world's largest democracy have arrived in the German financial capital for a broad cultural showcase that will also feature drama, films and even live yoga demonstrations.

Mahasweta Devi, an 80-year-old grande dame of Indian literature, said the fair would have to struggle to capture the endless contradictions and breathtaking pace of change in her country.

"India has learned to survive, to

adapt, to keep the old with the modern, to walk hand in hand with the new millennium whistling a tune from the dawn of time," she told a gala opening ceremony late Tuesday.

"Culture is what will take us into the future yet keep us in close contact with our roots, our history, our tradition, our heritage."

Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri and Kiran Desai – shortlisted this year for the Man Booker prize -- are among the Indian writers who will present their work at the event with more than 7,000 exhibitors and some 280,000 visitors expected before the fair closes Sunday.

Zadie Smith, Donna Leon, Ken Follett and German Nobel laureate Guenter Grass, fresh from a scandal over his late revelation that he served in the Nazis' feared Waffen SS force during World War II, are among other writers who will be walking the vast halls in Frankfurt.

"India has learned to survive, to