

Southeast Asia lays path for future

REUTERS, CEBU, Philippines

Southeast Asian countries laid the foundation for an economic and political bloc, signed a convention on counter-terrorism but failed yesterday to find common ground on Myanmar's woeful human rights record.

The Association of South East Asian Nations speeded up its goal for regional economic integration by five years to 2015 and agreed to transform itself into a rules-based organization with teeth at an annual summit in the central Philippines.

But as ever at Asean meetings, leaders disagreed over how to pressure Myanmar to democratize.

Embarrassed by a US resolution against its most notorious member at the UN Security Council - which was vetoed by China and Russia on Friday - Asean members such as Indonesia rebuked the junta at a welcome banquet on the eve of Saturday's summit.

"How are we going to help you if you are not making progress," President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said, according to an Asean official. DISPUTES

Security was tight in the resort city of Cebu, where the summit finally got under way after being postponed from December amid typhoon and terrorist warnings.

Western governments continued to warn of terrorist bomb plots and more than 13,000 troops guarded the streets as rain hammered down.

Inside the summit's plush hotel venue, the leaders inked a counter-terrorism agreement that will clamp down on the movement of arms and fighters between their remote islands through better information exchange and stricter border controls.

The security declaration also calls on countries to address the root causes of terrorism in a region with a kaleidoscope of religions and cultures and long-running territorial disputes.

In keeping with the summit's theme of, "One Caring and Sharing Community," leaders also agreed to improve the wages and treatment of migrant workers, redouble efforts to fight HIV/AIDS and better coordinate disaster prevention in a region that has seen a devastating tsunami, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, forest fires and pandemics over the last couple of years.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

China, Russia veto US

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also learned some lessons in the course of this entire process," Russia's UN ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, said. China's envoy, Wang Guangya, told reporters the United States acted like it was the only permanent council member.

South Africa also voted "no," while Qatar, Indonesia and Congo Republic abstained. Voting with Washington were Britain, which co-sponsored the draft, France, Belgium, Italy, Ghana, Peru, Panama and Slovakia.

To supporters of the failed resolution, pressure from the United Nations and elsewhere has had little effect on the junta, which cooperated a bit more with the world body only after the Security Council put Myanmar on its agenda.

The measure urged Myanmar, formerly Burma, to release all political prisoners, move toward democracy and stop attacks against minorities, many of whom are used for forced labour.

"The people of Burma should not feel disheartened by this. This was an effort to bring the situation to the attention of the world community and to send a clear signal that we have not forgotten you. And we won't forget you," Acting US Ambassador Alejandro Wolff told the council.

He argued that refugees were pouring over the border, the trafficking of people had increased and AIDS was spreading.

Myanmar's UN ambassador, Kyaw Tint Swe, said cooperating with the United Nations was the cornerstone of Myanmar's foreign policy.

Ibrahim Gambari, head of UN political affairs, visited Myanmar twice last year and met with Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest or in prison since her National League for Democracy

5 advisers sworn in

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stepped down from the post of the chief adviser on January 11 following the promulgation of a state of emergency in the country.

His nine advisers also resigned.

The president had taken over the charge of the chief adviser to the caretaker government as the country's two major political alliances failed to reach understanding on consensus candidate for the post under provision of the constitution.

FAKHRUDDIN JOINS OFFICE

BSS add: Newly appointed Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed joined office yesterday, a day after he took oath as the chief adviser.

He was welcomed at his office by the senior officials of the office as he arrived there at around 12:55pm.

Principal Secretary to the Chief Adviser Ali Imam Majumder, Secretary in charge Kazi M Aminul Islam, Director General of Special Security Forces (SSF) Maj Gen Syed Fatmy Ahmed Roomy and Military Secretary to the CA Brigadier Gen ANM Wazed Thakur received the chief adviser.

The chief adviser later placed

wreaths at the National Mausoleum in Savar.

He stood there in solemn silence for some time to pay homage to the martyrs of the War of Liberation.

A small contingent comprised of army, navy and air force presented guard of honour.

Chief of three services and GOC of the Savar Cantonment received the chief adviser on the premises of the National Mausoleum on his arrival.

Later, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed signed in the visitor's book.

Rules underway

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media over the issue.

They urged the interim government not to formulate any rule curtailing the freedom of the media, which is now playing a pivotal role in strengthening democracy.

They said they believe the newly formed caretaker government will not take any such decision against the media and will rather consider its role as a supportive power for holding a free and fair election.

The chief adviser later placed

Hectic lobbying

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The Director General (DG) of Shipping Shafiqullah recently sent a proposal to the shipping ministry recommending four surveyors as eligible for the post.

The post of chief engineer is a departmental one and one among the departmental officials should get the appointment, the shipping DG said.

The ministry will give the appointment that will be made known after January 16, he added.

None of the four recommended officials is eligible for the post as per requirement of the service rule, sources said, adding that the recommendation was made on the basis of seniority but the concerned officials are accused of various irregularities and corruption.

The senior most official allegedly got appointment through submitting false document. The second recommended official is accused of corruption and a departmental case against him is pending.

The next official is known as a most corrupt person in the department and faced temporary suspensions on several occasions. He also lost two years seniority for his alleged involvement with various malpractices.

A departmental case is pending against the official whose name was mentioned as number four.

Monirul Islam was appointed chief engineer in 2003 as the then chief engineer Motiur Rahman was made officer on special duty (OSD).

Although the post of the chief engineer belongs to the third grade, the government earlier appointed higher grade officials to the post, costing huge amount from the government exchequer.

It cost the government around Tk 56 lakh for accommodating a higher grade official in the post, sources said.

Vandalism at SC

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Khairul Alam Pipul, Mohammad Khasruzzaman, Suhrawardi, Syed Mamun Mahbub and Habibur Rahman, an outsider.

Barrister Omar Sadat, son-in-law of BNP leader and former minister Shahjahan Siraj, filed the criminal case with the CMM's Court on December 4 naming four lawyers and against 50 to 60 other unidentified lawyers and others for vandalising the offices of the chief justice and the attorney general, and also for disturbing court proceedings on November 30.

Those named in the complaint are Rokanuddin Mahmud, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury and Sheikh Ahsafur Rahman.

In his complaint, Omar Sadat said Rokan asked the accused lawyers and outsiders to vandalise the chief justice's chamber, court-rooms and other public property, and also to threaten the attorney general.

The vandalism on the SC premises took place after the chief justice stayed the proceedings of three writ petitions minutes before a HC bench was about to issue a rule on a writ challenging the legality of the president's takeover as chief adviser to the caretaker government.

The Department of Shipping randomly inspects an imported vessel after it reaches Bangladesh's territorial waters but we cannot inspect every ship due to a lack of adequate logistics," said Ashraf.

Mercantile Marine Department too carries out inspections of ships to be scrapped but still the authorities cannot inspect many ships due to a lack of manpower.

A total of 186 ships were imported to Bangladesh in 2006 for scrapping.

European Navigation Inc of Greece owns both the contaminated ships heading towards the shore of Bangladesh.

Greenpeace in its comment on the ships said the Apsheron is a sister ship of the Gudermes. The ship is a single hull tanker, now carrying mainly vegetable oil.

Apsheron was sold in 2006 to a broker, Wirana Shipping Corp in Singapore. Wirana has close ties to both Indian and Bangladeshi ship breakers.

The ship was expected to arrive in Bangladesh on January 9, 2007, but now it is expected to arrive at Chittagong on January 21. Sources said the Gudermes is also sailing to Bangladesh ship breaking yard. In December 2006, the ships were at the west coast of India.

Gudermes was built in 1977 and carries the flag of Malta.

The outstanding amount of Falu's loans now stands at near about Tk 32 crore.

Interestingly, with the help of some bank officials, the loan was later transferred to five fictitious companies -- Elegant Traders, United Traders, Ahmed Brothers, Tarek Timber and Furnisher House, and KB International with guarantees from Falu and his brother Hasmat Ali.

The loans were transferred to the fictitious companies to relieve Amardesh Publications Limited from the liability, sources said. After the central bank had taken over Oriental bank, an investigation revealed the irregularities.

And then, after submitting nomination paper to take part in the ninth general election, Falu took the liability of the loans of Amardesh Publications Limited and rescheduled it.

Falu also took loans from Oriental for International Television Channel Ltd, which owns the TV channel ntv.

The loans taken for International Television were also under the names of the company and some other fictitious names.

They said they believe the newly formed caretaker government will not take any such decision against the media and will rather consider its role as a supportive power for holding a free and fair election.

All of these loans were later

lumped together in a single account under the name of International Television Channel Ltd and rescheduled in last July.

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