

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, who did not want to be identified.

But other countries, particularly newer members of Asean from Indochina, maintained that the organization should stick to its traditional policy of non-interference in domestic affairs.

"This golden rule of 'hear no evil, see no evil' is up for review under bold proposals, endorsed by the leaders this weekend, for drafting a mini-constitution for Asean this year.

Anxious to compete against the growing financial might of China and India, Asean wants to establish itself as a rules-based organization, more akin to the European Union, with faster decision-making processes, particularly for economic decisions.

The charter would include systems to monitor and enforce agreements and panels that could issue binding decisions in disputes.

But the most ground-breaking proposal gives Asean, whose combined population of 558 million is greater than the European Union, the

power to suspend, or in extreme cases, expel members for serious breaches of the charter.

That could possibly put Myanmar's membership in jeopardy if the junta continued to put up road-blocks to democracy.

But the 10 leaders, whose members range from an absolute monarchy and military juntas to parliamentary democracies and one-party communist states, failed to agree on the inclusion of a human rights mechanism within the charter's blueprint.

The human rights suggestion from Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the current chairman of Asean, was shot down by Indochina at a private leaders' retreat, 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 kicked 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.

won elections in 1990.

"There are many issues that deserve -- in fact, demand -- the immediate and undivided attention of the Security Council," he said. "Myanmar by no stretch of the imagination is among them."

The military has run Myanmar in various forms since 1962 and no one has denied its abusive policies, which have been condemned by the 192-member General Assembly. At issue was whether the Security Council had the mandate to deal with the issue rather than the assembly and other UN bodies, whose resolutions carry less weight.

"Myanmar must respond to the imperative of restoring democracy and respect for human rights -- that is a matter of principle," Indonesian Ambassador Rezan Ishar Jenie said. "But it is a matter of principle ... whether this council is the appropriate body to address the problem of Myanmar."

Beijing has only used its veto four times in the past, the last time in February 1999 on extending a peacekeeping force in Macedonia because of the Balkan's nation's ties with Taiwan, over which China claims sovereignty. Russia last used its veto in April 2004 on a Cyprus resolution for technical reasons.

Britain's UN ambassador, Emyr Jones Parry, who co-sponsored the resolution, told reporters he could look himself in the mirror for pushing the measure.

"I want tomorrow morning to be able to reassure myself that we did the right thing, the right thing by the people of Myanmar," he said. "They have had 50 years of the most abject misery."

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

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 Rukanuddin Mahmud, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury and Sheikh Awsafur Rahman.

In his complaint, Omar Sadat said Rukan 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 a 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.

Leaders of the 14-party alliance and other political parties filed the writ petitions that also challenged the chief adviser's activities and announcement of the schedule for the next general election.

Oriental Bank

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only Obaedul Karim but also some top level BNP leaders like Mosaddek Ali Falu are also beneficiaries of the scam.

Amarshesh Publications Limited, of which Mosaddek Ali Falu is one of the major shareholders, took loans of about Tk 28 crore from Oriental Bank, a source in the bank said.

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, Oriental 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 factitious companies to relieve Amarshesh 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 Amarshesh 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.

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.

Emergency ordinance

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unions, clubs and associations and ban any kind of strike or lockout with controlling dissemination of any news or information in this regard.

Publication or printing of newspaper, book, document or paper and broadcasting and news or information detrimental to public safety can be banned and any kind of such materials can be seized from the printing press along with confiscating machinery of the press or media under the same ordinance.

Disruption in the supply of essential goods and services will be prohibited under the ordinance.

Security of the seaports, river ports, airports, dockyard, railway, roads, bridges, canals, telegraph, gas and power supply system, water transports, aircraft, trains go-downs, factories, business centers and properties of local government authorities will be ensured.

The ordinance will empower the government to arrest or detain any person or restrict the entry, living, stay or movement of any person to refrain him from any activity harmful to the relations with any foreign country or in the public interest.

Under the ordinance, the government can control entry, stay or visit of any person to Bangladesh. The government can also control or disrupt or block any message or news through postal service, radio, telegram, telex, fax, internet and telephone.

The government under the purview of the state of emergency can control the trade and business to ensure smooth supply of essentials to members of the public. It can

also control generation, supply, distribution and use of electricity.

The government under the ordinance can take up management of any organisation related to providing essential services to the people and can take also preventive measures against hoarding, black marketing and exorbitant profit on any goods.

Apart from controlling export-import, money market and use, transfer and trade of gold, silver, banknote, currency note, security or foreign currency, the government under the ordinance can take necessary measures by applying the Customs Act, 1969.

The government can arrest and try any person if found responsible for violating rules and orders under this ordinance, and can also award capital punishment or life term or 14-year jail or penalty or both.

The government will make transfer of power to any government official or agency to execute either one or all rules under Clause-3 of the ordinance.

According to the ordinance, no question on the legality of orders to be proclaimed under the authority of this ordinance can be raised in any court.

No civil or criminal case can be lodged against any person in the civil or criminal court, who will act on good faith under any rule or order of the ordinance.

If there is no clear provision in the ordinance, none can file a suit against the government in any criminal or civil court even if affected by any of its rules or orders.

According to Greenpeace, Gudermes was sold in July 2006 for delivery in Pakistan. The vessel was refused entry. The ship was sold again in November 2006 to Wirana Shipping Corp.

Then Gudermes was supposed to be scrapped in India. But it did not arrive at Alang by January 9, 2007. It is now expected to arrive at Chittagong on January 21.

The price of per ton scrap from a ship is higher in Bangladesh than it is in India. A ton of scrap in India is US\$420 while it is \$480 in Bangladesh.

President of Bangladesh Ship Breakers' Association Sufi Mizanur Rahman could not be contacted for comments, as according to his personal staff he was not well."

BSF guns down 3

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The bullet injured, Jahangir Hossain, also a cattle trader, could reach Bangladesh territory and was admitted to Sathkhira Sadar Hospital. He was later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital, according to our Sathkhira correspondent.

BDR sources said the Indian border guards opened fire on the Bangladesh cattle traders while they were returning home with cattle from India at about 9:00pm, killing Abul and Arshad on the spot and injuring Jahangir.

The BSF men dumped Arshad's body into the Ichhamati river. Locals found the body floating on the river yesterday morning. On information, police went to the spot and recovered the body.

BDR protested the killing of the cattle traders and asked its Indian counterpart to return the body of Abul Hossain. The BSF did not hand over the body as of 5:00pm yesterday.

Our Jhenidah correspondent reported that Momin Mondol received bullets when he was irrigating his Irri crops at Baghadanga village in Moheshpur upazila at around 2:30am yesterday. He died instantly.

Later, the BSF entered the village and took away the body. BDR asked the BSF authorities to return the body. The BSF did not respond until 5:30pm yesterday.

rate raids in Kushtia town and Daulatpur upazila on Friday night, our correspondent from Kushtia said.

Police suspected that the bombs were to be used in subversive activities in the district.

Tipped off, two teams of police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) led by an assistant superintendent of police (ASP) raided a house at Kuthipara in the town at around 9:30pm, police said.

The law enforcers found nine bombs in a polythene bag in a room.

The owner of the house Hossain Ali, 50, and his son Abul Khair, 24, were arrested.

In Daulatpur, police raided the house of Nizam Uddin at Datapara at around 10:00pm and recovered 11 bombs. They also arrested Nizam.

According to police, criminals have been using bombs more frequently in ten southwestern districts. At least 156 bombs were exploded in the region last year that killed 26 people and injured around 200.

Create conditions

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responsibilities to ensure national and international confidence in the democratic process of Bangladesh.

The EU underscored the need for a judicious approach by the chief adviser and his caretaker government to the present restrictions imposed on fundamental rights and media freedom.

It hailed the armed forces for playing a neutral role during the moment of crisis of the country and urged them to maintain it.

The EU also urged full restoration of civil and political rights to the people of Bangladesh at the earliest opportunity.

More raids

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conducted raids to arrest Commissioner of Ward No 56 and 57 Chowdhury Alam and Khaja Habib respectively.

Rab sources said they are also trying to arrest DCC Ward Commissioner Mirza Khokon as his name is on the 'list of criminals' which was handed over to law enforcers immediately after the state of emergency had been declared.

VC Faiz said normal academic activities of the university would resume, as the situation of the country has changed.

The students have been on strike since November 20 last year. Even though the DU authorities began their academic activities yesterday, no classes were held as most of the students were unaware of the resumption of academic activities.

Classrooms of the Arts building (Kala Bhaban), Curzon Hall and Commerce Faculty building were opened yesterday but no classes were held.

A number of students said they were puzzled as the authorities suddenly resumed academic activities even though the students' strike has not been called off.

The authorities resumed academic activities in the university amid tight security measures. A large number of law enforcers, including police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men were deployed on the campus.

The university was virtually closed since the last week of October, 2006. Since the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, it only had three working days when classes were held.

Kashmir issue

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More than 44,000 people have been killed since the 1989 outbreak of a separatist insurgency against Indian rule.

Mutual trust-building measures have improved the relations but produced no breakthrough on contentious issues, including a decades-old military stand-off at Siachen glacier and the boundary dispute in Sir Creek marshland.

Coal shortage

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Consequently, the Power Division and Energy Division had jointly formed a two-member survey committee, comprising Md Mahbubur Rahman, managing director (MD) of Barapukuria coal mine (BCMCL), and former project director of the power plant Md Fazlul Haque, to assess the coal reserve and operational problems of the coal mine.

The committee submitted its report mentioning coal shortage, sources said.

As production at the mine did not resume in time, the mine officials verbally informed the power plant authorities about this, and urged them to arrange alternative coal supply.

Some sources at the coal mine however said the BCMCL is facing a fund crisis, which might have delayed phase development. Developer of the mine project Chinese company CMC had asked the BCMCL in July last year to pay their arrear bills by September and threatened to suspend coal production in case of non-payment.

The managing director of BCMCL informed Petrobangla that due to fund shortage, they could not pay the arrear bills of Tk 34 crore.

To arrange the money, BCMCL had also urged the PDB to pay the coal bills amounting to Tk 87 crore till October 30 last.

PDB officials at the plant site said they have already paid the arrears.

In such a situation, BCMCL had urged the PDB in November to arrange coal from alternative sources. Accordingly the PDB floated open tender and piled up coal samples at the site for test run of the plant, which is now going.

When contacted, Md Kamruzzaman, a mining expert at Barapukuria, said the mine will resume production next month.

Excavation starts

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21-35cm thick road with a by-lane challenged the established idea that there was no urbanisation in the region.

The other major discovery, a pit-dwelling, in which people lived in small ditches, is considered to be more than 4,000 years old. No such thing has been found in the region earlier. Similar dwellings discovered in India and Pakistan also date back to the same period.

Encouraging the excavators for their work, Justice Rahman in his inauguration speech said, "With the excavation here at Wari-Bateswar, the village itself has turned 2,500-year-old, but the history of people of this land is much older," he said referring to Java civilization, which is not far from the region.

"We hope to dig-out more this year and track our history," Rahman added.

He also inaugurated an open-air exhibition of the artefacts that the archaeological team has dug out in the past six years. Hundreds of villagers and students from the local schools were seen thronging the display yesterday, eager to learn about their past.

Habib Ullah Pathan, one of the local archaeologists whose father Hanif Pathan first identified the signs of existence of industries at the site in the 1930s said, "We should be proud of our history as it had rich and ancient cultures." Referring to the United States, that "rules the world now," he said, "They got only a history of 300 years."

Pathan will also participate in the excavation this year under the banner of Oitihya Onneshwan, an organisation for archaeological researches, along with the students of JU. The digging will continue until their rain starts.

GrameenPhone is sponsoring the excavation, while The Daily Star and Channel-I are its media partners.

Dr Afia Akhter, director general of Geological Survey of Bangladesh, Kafil HS Mueyed, director of New Business Division of

GrameenPhone and Capt (ret'd) Imam Anwar Hossain, chairman of Prime Bank and the Oitihya Onneshwan also spoke on the occasion.

Kafil said that GrameenPhone would continue its support to discover and preserve the heritage and history of the country.

US troops fatter, drinking more

Pentagon survey says

REUTERS, Washington

US troops were fatter and drank harder in 2005 than before the Iraq war started, according a Pentagon survey of more than 16,000 service members released on Friday.

Still, the Pentagon said service members appeared to fare better than civilians in measures of lifestyle and health-related behaviors.

"I am pleased, and even a little surprised, that despite the stresses of war and ongoing deployments, nearly all indicators of service members' health and well-being continue to be quite good compared with civilian populations," said William Winkenwerder, assistant defense secretary for health affairs.

Some 60.5 percent of respondents in the 2005 survey were overweight compared with 57.2 percent in the previous survey conducted in 2002.

The survey also showed 44.5 percent of respondents participated in "binge drinking," up from 41.8 percent in 2002. The Iraq war began in March 2003.

Personnel deployed from 2002 to 2005 had higher rates of work and family stress as well as higher rates of heavy alcohol, cigarette and illicit drug use than those who did not deploy, it said.

A greater number of personnel who deployed in that period met criteria for depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms than those who were not deployed, according to the survey.

for stopping the violence in Baghdad.

"To oppose everything while proposing nothing is irresponsible," Bush said.

In a pitch to lawmakers and the American people, Bush said the United States will keep the onus on the Iraqi government to take charge of security and reach a political reconciliation. He countered Democrats and his fellow Republicans who argue that Bush is sending 21,500 more U.S. troops into Iraq on the same mission.

"We have a new strategy with a new mission: Helping secure the population, especially in Baghdad," Bush said in his weekly radio address. "Our plan puts Iraqis in the lead."

The president asked for patience from lawmakers who grilled Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when they testified before Congress in defense of the president's new plan.

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate intend to hold votes within a few weeks on Bush's revised Iraq policy. The nonbinding resolutions would be one way to show their opposition to any troop buildup and force Republicans to make a choice about whether they support the president's plan.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (news, bio, voting record), R-Ky., has charged that what Democrats really want to do is cut off funding for the troops. Democrats deny that.

"Members of Congress have a right to express their views, and express them forcefully," Bush said. "But those who refuse to give this plan a chance to work have an obligation to offer an alternative that has a better chance for success. To oppose everything while proposing nothing is irresponsible," he said.

Many Democrats want to see a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops beginning within a few months.

Bush insisted that as part of his strategy, he would hold the Iraqi government to benchmarks it has set, including taking responsibility for security in all provinces by November.

Democratic congressional leaders are pushing for a resolution opposing a troop increase and hope to garner enough Republican support to leave Bush politically isolated. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (news, bio, voting record) intends to bring a vote on the resolution to the Senate floor next week.

FIRST BRIGADES ARRIVING SOON

Many in Congress acknowledge they have few options for halting Bush's strategy short of cutting off funds. Many lawmakers appear reluctant to take that step and the White House is already moving ahead with the increase, with the first of five additional brigades to Baghdad scheduled to arrive within days. Other brigades are to be sent in waves over the next few months.

Pennsylvania Democratic Rep. John Murtha (news, bio, voting record), who heads a House panel overseeing defense spending, said he would try to attach restrictions to a \$100 billion request for new war money Bush will send to Congress in February. The proposal might prohibit the use of the money for more troops or tie the funding to the closure of the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Bush said a cutoff in funding should not even be considered because such a debate would undercut soldiers. "Our brave troops should not have to wonder if their leaders in Washington will give them what they need," he said.

In an interview with CBS this week, Bush vowed to press ahead with the troop increase, regardless of whether Congress tried to block it.

"I fully understand (Congress) could try to stop me from doing it," Bush said. "But I made my decision -- we're going forward."

DEFENDS IRAQ PLAN

President Bush challenged lawmakers skeptical of his new Iraq plan to propose their own strategy

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

Chiefs 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.