

India, Pakistan open talks on demilitarising Siachen

AFP, Rawalpindi

Top Indian and Pakistani defence officials held talks here yesterday on demilitarising a glacier in disputed Kashmir where freezing temperatures have claimed more lives than actual combat.

The two-day talks centred on the disclosure of Pakistani military positions in the 6,300-metre (20,800-feet) Siachen glacier, which India says it requires before demilitarisation of the world's highest battlefield can begin.

A nine-member Indian delegation led by Defence Secretary Shekhar Dutt arrived in Pakistan late Thursday for talks with Dutt's

newly appointed Pakistani counterpart, Kamran Rasool.

A Pakistani defence ministry statement said the first day's talks were "cordial and friendly". "Both sides presented their respective point of view on the subject and stressed the need for moving ahead," it added.

"The two sides are trying to arrive at some consensus on indicating present positions held by troops of each (side) on the glacier before withdrawal of forces," a senior Pakistani foreign ministry official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"If an agreement is reached in the meeting it will be formally announced when leaders of

Pakistan and India (President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh) meet sometime later this year."

The talks are part of the peace process launched in January 2004 by Hindu-majority India and mainly Muslim Pakistan, which both hold Kashmir in part and claim it in full.

Kashmir has sparked two of their three wars since 1947 and they fought regular artillery duels until November 2003 when they agreed a ceasefire along the heavily-militarised Line of Control that divides the region.

Analysts say the value of Siachen itself is mostly symbolic rather than strategic.

The Indian army, which has occupied most of the high-altitude battlefield since 1987, wants "iron-clad" evidence of existing troop positions to dissuade Pakistan from moving its soldiers forward in the event of a pull-out.

Pakistan however wants to go back to the pre-1987 positions and fears that giving details of its positions would be tacit acceptance of India's current claims to Siachen and the area as a whole.

Indian premier Singh on Thursday called a meeting of his security cabinet to chalk out a

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Dhaka's ties with Delhi now at irreversible stage: Iftekhar

UNB, New Delhi

Bangladesh's ties with India reached an "irreversible stage" as the two countries have agreed in principle to establish an institutional framework to smooth ties.

Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury stated this in an interview with leading English daily, The Hindustan Times.

Bangladesh also assured India that it would not allow any anti-Indian activity from its soil. "We have given enough signals that we will not permit such acts against India," the adviser said.

He was here in connection with the 14th Saarc Summit, which was attended by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The foreign advisor had a meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and other ministers to discuss ways to

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PHOTO: STAR

While power crisis forces consumption cut, streetlights near Sonargaon hotel in the capital are on at 4:30 in the afternoon yesterday.

Bangladeshi hurt as BSF opens fire in Jessor

STAR REPORT

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) traded gunfire on Shalkona border in Sharsha upazila of Jessor early yesterday.

The BSF troops of Bajitpur camp opened fire on some Bangladeshi who were fishing in Dublar beel (water body) near Shalkona border Thursday noon, leaving one of them named Monirul Islam, 25, injured, according to a correspondent.

Villagers rescued Monir and rushed him to Jessor General Hospital in a critical condition.

Following the incident, the BSF deployed additional troops on the border and opened fire at around 1:00am targeting the Shalkona BDR camp. The paramilitary Bangladesh troops retaliated by firing ten shots. No casualty was, however, reported.

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PHOTO: STAR

Locals crowd Dharmarajik Bouddha Bihar at Sabujbagh in the capital to fetch water while the summer is still days away. The photo was taken yesterday.

20 housing companies in Sylhet asked to free grabbed govt land

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The district administration has asked 20 housing companies to free the government lands they had included in their projects illegally.

The private companies had allegedly grabbed at least 289 acres of land estimated to be worth around Tk 500 crore.

Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet Jamal Hossain Majumder told The Daily Star that the lands grabbed include 173 acres of Khas land (those under state jurisdiction), 19 acres of vested property, 69 acres of

Waqf (endowed) property, 9 acres of tea estates, 6.5 acres of Roads and Highways and 11 acres of Bangladesh Railway.

The administration officials at a meeting Thursday asked the real estate companies to free the lands voluntarily and immediately. They directed two companies - Sonargaon Abashik Prokpalpa and Royal City Abashik Prokpalpa - to keep their businesses (sale and transfer of plots) suspended until further orders.

Besides, the administration asked all the realtors to adhere to

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Prayer Timing

April 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4:40	5:15
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:21	6:24
Esha	7:45	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Chlorine truck bomb kills 27 in Iraq

AFP, Ramadi/ Baghdad

A suicide bomber exploded a truck full of chlorine near a police station killing at least 27 people in the restive western city of Ramadi yesterday, police said.

"At least 27 people, many of them women and children, have been killed in the attack," said an officer, specifying that another 30 were wounded.

He said the bomber was targeting a police station, but blew himself up "200 metres (yards) away from it near the residential area of Al-Tamim."

The explosion occurred next to a market and residential buildings, he said.

"The truck contained many tonnes of chlorine and TNT which were covered by sacks full of fertilisers," he said.

A nearby residential building was also partially damaged by the explosion.

Earlier police Colonel Tark al-Dualami told AFP that two of the

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Manzur said in 1999 he had to pay Tk 80,000 to a recruiting agency which had promised him monthly wages of 9,500 riyals but his Saudi employer paid him only 650 riyals.

"We had to work about three times more than usual and the supervisors used to torture us if we failed to do so," he said.

The employer neither gave them resident permits nor allowed them to go out of the firm premises. "We worked there for 11 months, then escaped and stayed in a village for a month."

Finding no job there, he went to Riyadh and managed a part time job with poor wages. "Fellow workers sometimes used to steal that money but I could not say anything as I was staying there illegally. I also started a business."

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Three held with 10 revolvers in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested three people and recovered ten revolvers from their possession in Sunamganj and Jessor districts on Thursday night.

Acting on a tip-off, Rab men raided two houses at frontier Pekpara village under Doara Bazar upazila of Sunamganj at midnight and arrested two people along with seven revolvers, according to a correspondent.

The arrestees are Omid Miah, 52, and Mohammad Ali, 27. Rab officials said the arrestees had been involved in arms trading for long.

In Jessor, Rab arrested a listed criminal and recovered three revolvers, 12 bullets and two bombs from his possession at a

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