



Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) speaks with his French counterpart Nicolas Sarkozy (L) during their meeting at Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow on Tuesday. Sarkozy and Putin discussed the situation around Iran, the problem of Kosovo and Middle East settlement.

Sarkozy fails to soften Russian backing for Iran

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin refused yesterday to bend to western pressure over Iran, saying after talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy that he did not believe the Islamic republic was trying to build a nuclear bomb.

"We do not have information that Iran is trying to create a nuclear weapon. We operate on the principle that Iran does not have those plans," Putin told journalists after the end of the talks with Sarkozy who was in Moscow seeking to ease tensions.

He added that Russia shared the West's desire for Iran's nuclear programme, in which Russia is building the first civilian power station, to be "absolutely transparent."

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The Kremlin leader's statement reaffirmed an East-West split over Iran.

Moscow supports Tehran in rejecting accusations by Washington and in EU capitals that the country is hiding a secret bomb making project behind its Russian-backed civilian atomic programme.

Russia, which has veto power on the UN Security Council, has also been reluctant to back Western calls for tougher sanctions aimed at forcing Iran to halt sensitive nuclear activities.

Sarkozy said after his talks in the Kremlin that Putin's readiness was "important." "After that, there might be a difference in the analysis," he added.

India, S'pore ink defence pact

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India and Singapore have signed a defence pact under which the air force of the South East Asian city-state will be provided Indian land, air-space and air bases for training.

The five-year pact inked on Tuesday at the start of a bilateral defence policy dialogue will allow Singapore's armed forces to permanently park some of its fighter aircraft and other defence assets in India. Singapore already has similar agreements with the United States, France and Australia.

Singapore, the tiny country with a total area of just 700 sq km, has a shortage of air space and defence assets for training its personnel. It

now uses air bases in Australia, France and the USA for training its air force personnel.

While Singapore Air Force and army have been using Indian air bases for training exercises, this is the first time that a long-term arrangement to use Indian facilities for training has been inked, officials here pointed out.

Singapore armed forces personnel have also been utilizing India's missile testing range to test their advanced weapon platforms.

The agreement, signed by Indian Defence Secretary Vijay Singh and Singapore Permanent Secretary to Defence Chiang Chie Foo at the start of, came close on the heels of the navies of the two countries taking part in a multi-nation exercise in the Bay of Bengal along with the navies of the USA, Australia and Japan.

Officials said the agreement with Singapore is part of India's "Look East" policy under which New Delhi has been making sustained efforts to promote and further strengthen multi-faceted relationships with South East Asian countries.

After initiating moves for bilateral and multilateral free trade accords with ASEAN, India recently launched its defence diplomacy with some countries of the region and entered into talks with Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia defence cooperation.

India already has defence cooperation with Vietnam.

Stand Up and Speak Out Against Poverty and Corruption

Poverty is not natural, it is man-made. So, it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Poverty reduces all possibilities of improving life; however, we also know that poverty can be eradicated if all kinds of social discriminations are eliminated and people's access to resources ensured. So let us speak against all discriminations and corruptions and stand for establishing people's right to resources and justice.

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participated by your favourite folk singers and bands

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- Basic rights to food, clothes, education, health and shelter
- Fair wages for all workers
- Basic services to be ensured by the state, not indiscriminate privatization
- Protect the interest of producers like the farmers, growers and manufacturers
- Dignity of all human beings irrespective of men and women
- Immediate rehabilitation of victims of natural as well as man-made disasters
- Sustainable disaster management measures, not just aid
- Good governance, transparency and accountability at all levels of the state and nonpartisan and effective action against corruption
- Implementation of promises made by the world leaders (.7% of their ODI).

We believe all countries of the world including Bangladesh will come forward and keep their promises.

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For public interest: People's Forum on MDGs (PFM), Bangladesh

[A platform of more than two hundred NGOs including networks, coalitions, advocacy groups, coordination organizations and professionals working with slum-dwellers, day-labourers, women, children, root level people, disabled people and marginalized peasants and workers]



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Western powers ask Myanmar junta to stop 'repressive measures'

AFP, United Nations

The United States, Britain and France late Tuesday circulated a watered-down statement in the Security Council that deplores the military crackdown in Myanmar and urges the ruling junta to stop "repressive measures."

Following amendments offered by China and other council members, the three sponsors softened their earlier draft, notably replacing the word "condemn" by "strongly deplore."

The three western powers submitted their first draft Friday after the council heard a report from UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari on his recent mission to Myanmar to defuse the crisis.

The new, non-binding text was worked out by experts of the 15-member council in bargaining sessions Monday and Tuesday. It now awaits approval by the ambassadors.

The experts were to have a fresh meeting on the draft early yesterday ahead of consultations by council ambassadors later in the day.

The new draft "strongly deplores the violent repression by

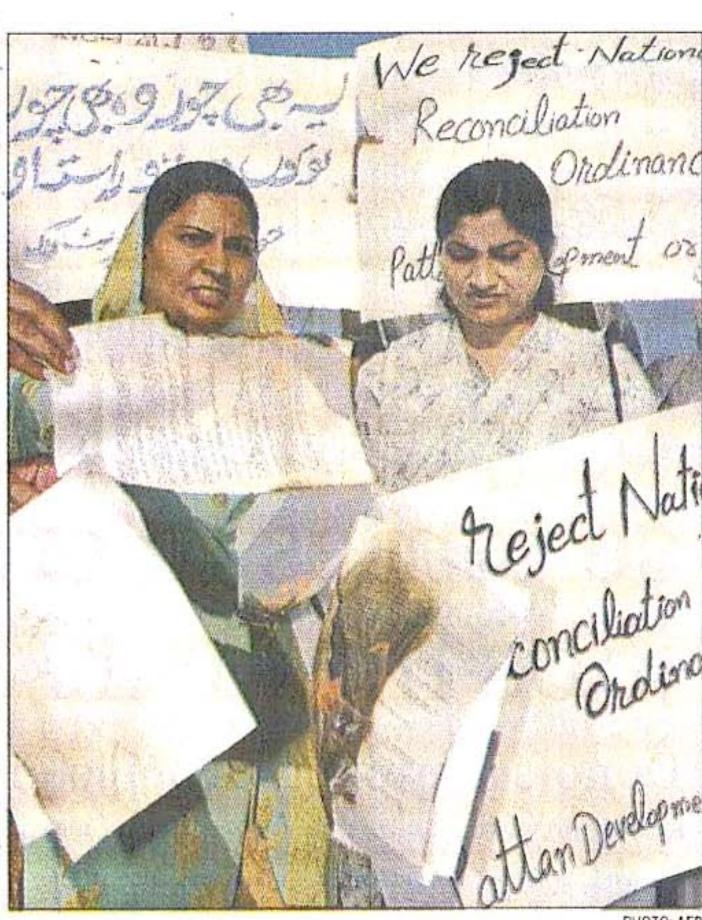
the government of Myanmar of peaceful demonstrations, including the use of force against religious figures and institutions."

It urges the military regime "to cease all repressive measures, including the detention of protesters" and to release all political prisoners, including opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

It stresses the need for the regime "to engage without delay in a dialogue with leaders of all political and ethnic groups towards an inclusive national reconciliation process, with the direct support of the United Nations."

The text backs an early return of Gambari to Myanmar "to facilitate concrete actions and tangible results" and urges the authorities and all parties concerned "to cooperate fully with Mr. Gambari and to respond positively to his requests during his visits."

It notes the key role played by Myanmar's neighbors and its partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations "in urging restraint, calling for a peaceful transition to democracy, and supporting the good offices mission (of Gambari)."



Pakistani human rights activists set fire to copies of the 'reconciliation ordinance' during a demonstration against the ordinance in Multan, yesterday. President Pervez Musharraf on October 5 signed the ordinance that drops corruption cases against Benazir Bhutto and paves the way for a power-sharing deal with the former premier.

NWFP assembly dissolved

AFP, Peshawar

The government of a troubled Pakistani province bordering Afghanistan was dissolved yesterday, four days after military ruler Pervez Musharraf won a presidential election.

North West Frontier Province (NWFP) governor Ali Jan Aurakzai issued the dissolution order and was to appoint a caretaker chief minister later yesterday. Opposition parties had tried to dissolve the NWFP assembly last week in an bid to erode the credibility of Saturday's election by the federal parliament and four provincial assemblies, which Musharraf won in a landslide.

But internal differences among opposition Islamist leaders and a no-confidence motion against provincial chief minister Akram Durrahi by Musharraf supporters thwarted the plan.

The NWFP has been governed since 2002 by an Islamist coalition who are opposed to Musharraf's alliance with the United States in the "war on terror".

Musharraf won Saturday's controversial election after it was boycotted by most of the opposition, but he must await a Supreme Court ruling on the legality of the vote.

He has pledged to step down as military ruler and become a civilian head of state once his re-election is declared official.

Clashes leave over 100 dead in DR Congo

AFP, Kinshasa

More than 100 fighters, including 85 rebels, have been killed in clashes in the Nord-Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a top army officer said yesterday.

Colonel Delphin Kahimbi, the army's second in command in the eastern province, said: "16 troops and 85 rebels had been killed around Karuba, town about 40 kilometres north-west of the provincial capital of Goma."

"We have been in control of Karuba since yesterday," he told AFP.

The enemy has abandoned 85 bodies on the ground," he added. His own forces counted 16 dead including 27 wounded, five of them seriously.

Government forces have been fighting followers of renegade general Laurent Nkunda, who claims that his aim is to defend the minority Congolese Tutsis of the east from other population groups and armed movements, around Karuba.

Nkunda spokesman Rene Abandi told AFP that government forces had shelled their positions and that they had taken their wounded back to their bases.

He was not able to give figures for their casualties.

But Kahimbi said: "These are the heaviest losses that he (Nkunda) has suffered" since he broke the ceasefire. Government troops had also captured ammunition and a jeep left by the rebel forces, he added.

MONUC, the United Nations peacekeeping force in the region, confirmed that government forces (FARDC) had made progress after two days of fierce fighting.

"Karuba was taken by the FARDC yesterday. Nkunda's forces are gathered around the (neighbouring) village of Ngengwi," MONUC spokesman Major Prem Tiwari, told AFP.

Japan opposition refuses to budge on Afghan mission

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's main opposition leader yesterday refused to budge in his bid to end a controversial naval mission supporting US-led troops in Afghanistan, saying Tokyo should not simply follow Washington.

Ichiro Ozawa, president of the Democratic Party of Japan, which took control of one house of parliament in July elections, said his party may propose alternative plans on troop deployments overseas.

After the ruling coalition has submitted its new bill, we may submit our own bill to show our opinions on the matter," Ozawa told reporters.

"Joining a military operation

just because the United States tells us, that's not a consensus of the international community nor a consensus of the Japanese people," he said.

The latest opinion poll, however, showed more voters supported extending the mission than ending it and that recently installed Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda enjoyed strong backing.

Japan refuels US and other coalition ships and planes in the Indian Ocean under legislation allowing participation in the "war on terror" passed after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

The new premier has vowed to renew the deployment, saying Japan must take responsibility in



Japan's main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) leader Ichiro Ozawa speaks at a press conference at the party's headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. Ozawa refused to budge in his bid to end a controversial naval mission supporting US-led troops in Afghanistan, saying Tokyo should not simply follow Washington.

