

India, Pakistan ink accord to exchange security info

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan yesterday signed an agreement to exchange security information, officials said, opening up a new channel of communication between the two nuclear-armed rivals.

The accord clears the way for regular contacts between India's military-funded Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) and Pakistan's state-run Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS).

"The purpose is to build channels of communication at the level of scholars, because exchanges of security studies had been limited because of the strained ties we have had," ISS director Shireen Mazari said at a signing ceremony in New Delhi.

IDSA head Narendra Sisodia, a former Indian defence secretary, said the accord was a landmark because "except for contacts at international forums, we never had open discussions on security issues."

The pact stipulates that the two mutually-suspicious think tanks will send experts to participate in state-sponsored workshops in India and Pakistan and later engage in joint military research projects.

The South Asian rivals, who have fought three wars since their independence from British rule in 1947, set in motion a slow-moving peace process in 2004, five years after they came dangerously close to their fourth conflict.

The dialogue has led to closer political contacts and greater transport links, but the two armies have shunned direct contacts except for annual discussions on unresolved disputes.

Sisodia cautioned, however, that Monday's accord between the IDSA and the ISS would not replace any official dialogue.

3 killed in Israeli suicide bombing

AFP, Jerusalem

At least three people were killed and 10 wounded yesterday in a suspected suicide bombing in a shopping centre in the Israeli desert town of Dimona, rescue services reported.

"There were at least three dead," the Magen David Adom medical rescue service said. Another 10 people were wounded, three in serious condition.

"It appears to be a terror-related incident," it said in a statement.

If confirmed as a suicide bombing, it would be the first on Israeli soil since the relaunch of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks at a US conference in November and the first in just over a year.

It was not clear however if the bomber was among the three people killed in the blast that ripped through the shopping centre at 10:30 am (0830 GMT) in Dimona, site of Israel's top secret nuclear facility.

Women, children killed in Afghan raid

AFP, Herat

Raids by Afghan and Nato troops against Taliban insurgents in southern and southwestern Afghanistan killed several civilians, among them children, local officials said Monday.

Ten people were killed in southwestern Farah province and two others were killed in southern Helmand province, they said. Authorities from Farah gave conflicting figures for the number of civilians killed.

The strike in Farah late Sunday, involving ground and air forces, took place in Bakwa district, which has seen a series of attacks by fighters with the Taliban movement, in government between 1996 and 2001.

The governor of Bakwa district said that two women and three children were among the dead and only one Taliban fighter was killed.

"A Taliban commander had been invited to the house," said Khan Agha. "In the operation nine people were killed, which includes two women and three kids." The rest were men.

Kenya peace talks resume

AP, Chebale

Kenya's opposing political forces resumed peace talks Monday in a push to end weeks of violence as ethnic fighting flared in western parts of the country, once considered one of the most stable on the continent.

The meetings in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, mediated by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, came after the two sides agreed to a two-week plan to try to end ethnic clashes that followed the Dec. 27 presidential election, which foreign and local observers have said was rigged.

At least seven people were killed overnight in battles between Kisii and Kalenjin communities, in a region 155 miles west of the capital, said the district commissioner of Sotik town, Humphrey Nakitare.

On Monday, hundreds of youths armed with bows and arrows and machetes attacked one another in an area where 2,000 people have fled their homes during nine days of clashes, Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner Hassan Noor said. Dozens of houses were burned overnight, witnesses said.

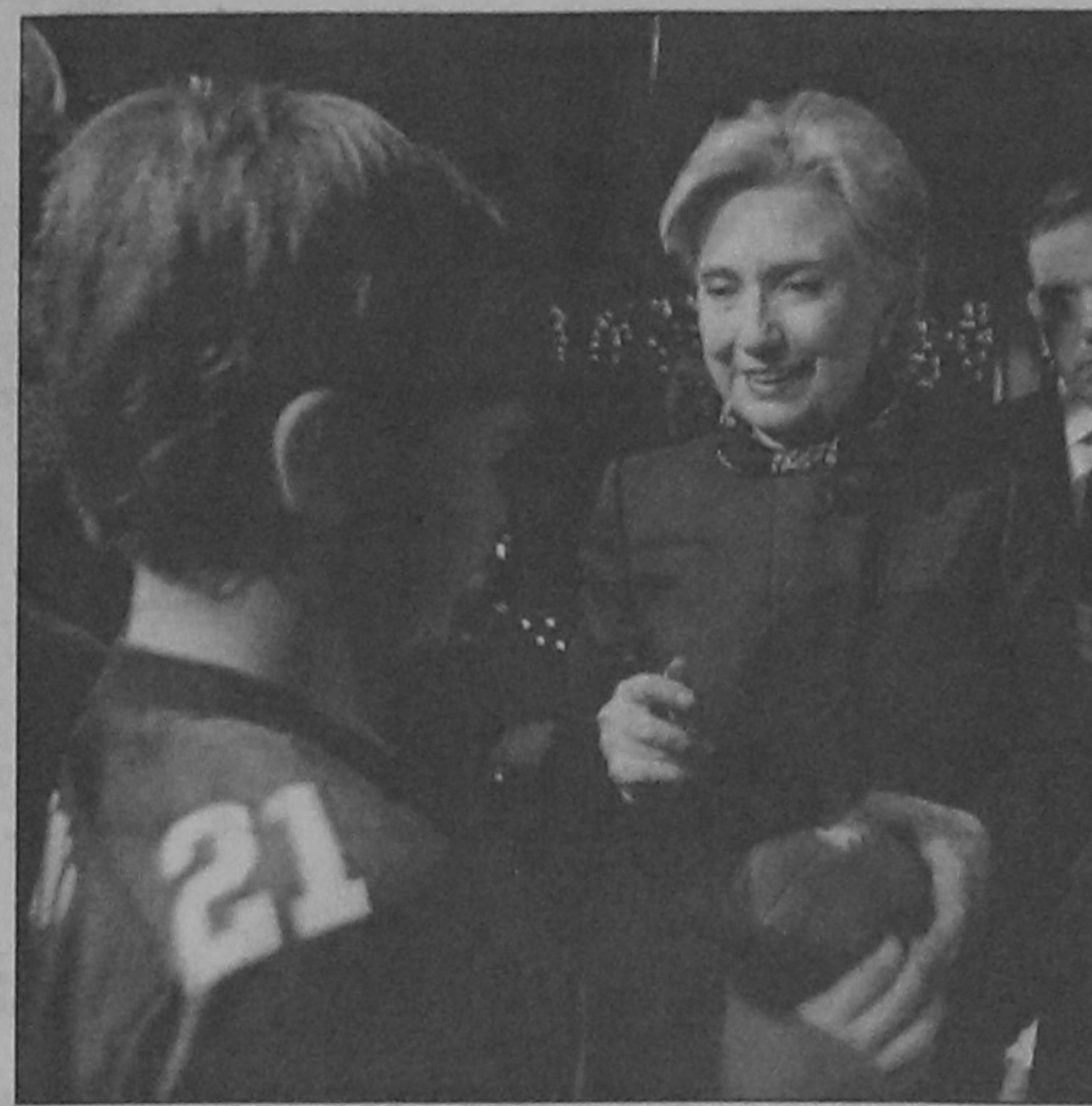


PHOTO: AFP

US Democratic presidential hopeful New York Senator Hillary Clinton returns a football she autographed for a young boy (L) at a Super Bowl party at Dixie's Smokehouse Bar & Grill in St Paul, Minnesota on Sunday.

Obama surges on eve of 'Super Tuesday'

AFP, Minneapolis

Barack Obama wiped out White House foe Hillary Clinton's large nationwide poll leads and chased her in key states, on the frenzied eve of "Super Tuesday," a unique countrywide nominating showdown.

The cliffhanger Democratic race contrasted with signs that Senator John McCain would all but settle the Republican nominating fight Tuesday, and complete one of the most staggering comebacks in recent political history.

The former first lady clung to a 45-44 point lead in a USA Today/Gallup national poll after the Illinois senator ignited a wave of momentum with his landslide primary victory in South Carolina last month.

A CNN/Opinion Research national poll out Monday had Hillary Clinton narrowly leading Obama 49 percent to 46 percent, within the poll's 4.5 percent margin of error, suggesting tightening contests countrywide.

A CBS/New York Times poll had,

the national race deadlocked at 41 percent. In early January, Hillary Clinton had led by 15 percent.

Targeted surveys in Clinton strongholds which hold contests on Tuesday, like California, New York and New Jersey also suggested Obama's campaign was the one with most energy and momentum.

Though Obama was making most of the headlines with a string of endorsements and a mammoth 32 million dollar fundraising push in January, Hillary Clinton was banking on under-the-radar core support among women and blue collar workers.

Clinton led Obama 53 to 39 percent in her home state of New York in a new Quinnipiac University poll, but the same survey had the race narrowing in neighboring New Jersey with the former first lady leading 48 to 43 percent.

In the biggest prize California, Obama led Clinton by 46 to 40 percent in a Zogby poll, though other surveys still had her just ahead in the key state.

US accidentally kills 9 Iraqi civilians

US soldier killed in RPG attack

AP, AFP, Baghdad

The US military said yesterday that it accidentally killed nine Iraqi civilians during an operation targeting al-Qaeda in Iraq south of Baghdad.

The civilians were killed Saturday near Iskandariyah, 30 miles south of the Iraqi capital, US Navy Lt. Patrick Evans told The Associated Press. Three more civilians were wounded and taken to US military hospitals nearby, he said.

The incident and the events surrounding it are under investigation, Evans said.

The killings occurred as US forces pursued suspected al-Qaeda in Iraq militants in the area. Shortly after the incident, American officers met with a Muslim sheik representing citizens in the area, he said.

"We offer our condolences to the families of those who were killed in this incident, and we mourn the loss of innocent civilian life," Evans said in a statement e-mailed to the AP.

Saturday's strike was the deadliest known case of mistaken identity in recent months.

In November, a leader of one of the so-called awakening councils Sunni tribesmen allied with American forces fighting to oust al-Qaeda from their hometowns said US soldiers killed dozens of his fighters during a 12-hour battle north of Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the US Army on Monday announced the death of a soldier whose vehicle was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in eastern Baghdad on January 31.

Iran launches rocket, opens space centre

AP, Tehran

Iran launched a research rocket Monday and unveiled its first major space centre, which will be used to launch research satellites, state-run television reported.

The report said the rocket was the first launched by Iran "into space." But analysts have expressed doubts about similar technological achievements announced by the country in the past.

Iran launched its first domestically built rocket last February, which did not reach orbit level.

"The first Iranian rocket Explorer-1 was fired into space," reported state TV, which showed live images of the event at the space centre, with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad issuing the launch order. "With the launch, Iran has joined the world's top 11 countries, possessing space technology to build satellites, and launch rockets into space."

The report did not specify the altitude reached by the research rocket. Space is considered to begin at 60 miles above ground. Ham radio satellites orbit between 100-300 miles, while communication, weather and global positioning satellites fly between 250-12,000 miles up.

Some Western experts also have raised the possibility that Iran's space program may be a cover to more fully develop its military ballistic missiles, a prospect many find troubling at a time when the US and others worry Tehran is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

Before the launch, Ahmadinejad opened the space centre, which includes an underground control station and space launch pad, according to state TV.

Thousands flee Chad as rebels vow fresh attack

AFP, Ndjamena

Thousands fled the Chadian capital Ndjamena on Monday, the UN refugee agency said, as rebels threatened a fresh offensive after two days of heavy fighting saw them pull out of the city.

Dead bodies littered the streets of Ndjamena, where buildings were pockmarked with bullet holes after a weekend of fighting, as Sudan denied claims by President Idriss Deby that it was backing the rebellion.

General Mahamat Ali Abdallah, operational commander of government forces, told AFP the rebels had been "completely routed ... Time is going to show that they have been defeated."

But rebel spokesman Abderaman Koullamallah, contacted Monday by satellite telephone, said the insurgency -- the most serious that Deby has faced since coming to power in 1990 in this central African state -- was far from over.

"We have pulled out of the city and we are waiting for the civilian population to be evacuated," Koullamallah told AFP, adding that the rebels were surrounding the capital that is home to an estimated 700,000 people.

"We opted to leave the city, but we certainly will go back on the offensive," he said. "We're asking the civilian population of Ndjamena to leave immediately because their safety cannot be assured."

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Sightsavers International, a leading international agency working for the prevention of blindness as well as rehabilitation and education of the visually impaired people worldwide, invites applications from qualified candidates for the following positions for its country office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Both the positions will report to Programme Manager and require extensive travel.

Project Manager (CBR)

The purpose of the position is to support Sightsavers programme team to achieve the Social Inclusion Goal to promote the inclusion of visually impaired persons in mainstream society, and development and other initiatives. S/he will be responsible to manage, develop, establish and monitor mainly community based rehabilitation (CBR) projects operating in various parts of Bangladesh. The position will closely work with partners at local and national level through an integrated approach e.g. linking eye care/education & primary low vision. Establishing linkages between CBR projects & local self-help groups and national level networking organisations of persons with disabilities will be one of the major tasks.

The applicant should have post-graduate education in any discipline of social sciences and education, development studies for at least five years experience in development sector in NGO environment. Working experience with rehabilitation of the disabled people and understanding of community approaches are essential. The core competencies and skills required would include use of log frame for project planning/ budgeting/forecasting and financial management, partnership development, monitoring and report writing. S/he should have excellent communication and networking skills and be an excellent team player. Computer literacy is also essential.

Project Manager (Education)

The purpose of the position is to support Sightsavers programme team to achieve the Social Inclusion Goal to promote the inclusion of visually impaired persons particularly children in mainstream development by ensuring their inclusion to education. The position will be responsible to manage, develop, establish and monitor Education Programme of Sightsavers International, Bangladesh Country Office at community and/or national levels with the aim to mainstream education of visually impaired students of Bangladesh with NGOs. The position will also work closely with Department of Social Services, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MOPME) and partner/collaborating NGOs.

The applicant should have post-graduate education in any discipline of social sciences and education and development studies and at least five years experience in development sector in NGO environment. Working experience in education sector is essential. The core competencies and skills required would include use of log frame for project planning/ budgeting/forecasting and financial management, partnership development, monitoring and report writing. S/H should have excellent interpersonal communication and networking skills and be an excellent team player. Candidates having working experience with government ministries, educational institutions and early child education will be given higher preference. Computer literacy is also essential.

Salary for both the position @ Tk. 64,440 (Taka Sixty Four Thousand Four Hundred Forty) per month plus other admissible benefits.

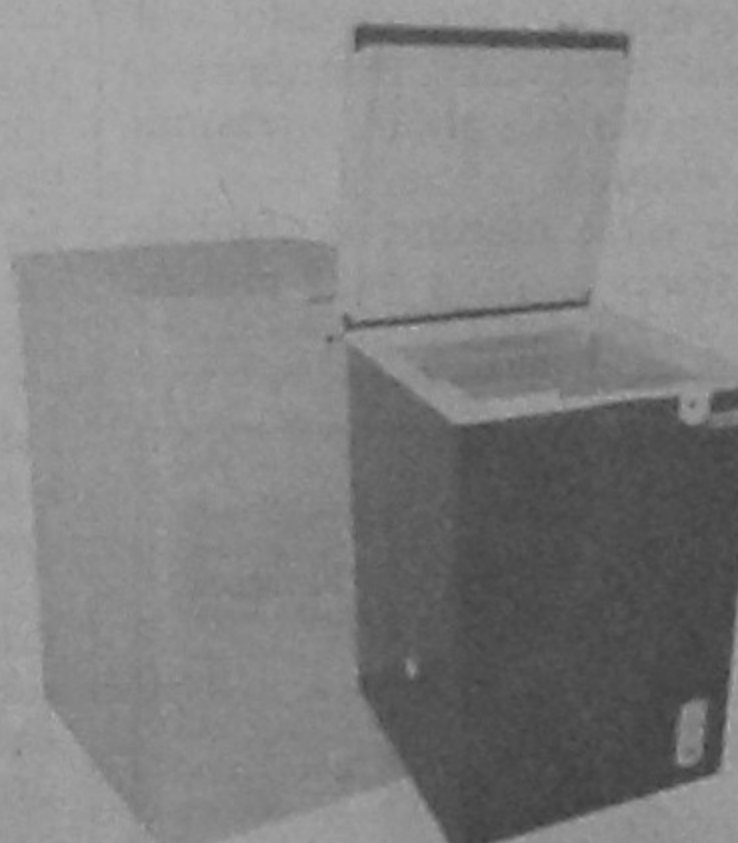
Application with CV and a recent photograph should be forwarded to Sightsavers International- House No. 11, Navana Shefali (3rd Floor), Flat-3C & 3D, Road No. 14, Gulshan 1, Dhaka 1212 within 17 February 2008.

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