



PHOTO AFP  
Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani (R) welcomes his British counterpart Gordon Brown upon his arrival at the prime minister's house in Islamabad yesterday. Brown pledged to help Pakistan tackle terrorism on its soil after meeting President Asif Ali Zardari to discuss security in the wake of the Mumbai attacks.

## Pakistan ties depend on militant crackdown

Says Indian PM

AFP, AP, Khundroo

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday that relations with Pakistan could only be normalised when it no longer provided safe havens for militant groups.

Singh, speaking at an election rally in disputed Kashmir, stressed India was open to better ties with Pakistan but that improvements depended on Pakistan taking action against groups such as those behind the Mumbai attacks.

"Our desire to normalise relations with our neighbour will not get fulfilled until our neighbour prevents its land from being used for terrorist activities against India," he said.

"There are some people in Pakistan who are always ready to carry out such attacks against our country."

Singh was speaking in Indian Kashmir, where ongoing state elections are being boycotted by

separatist politicians and rebels who argue that voting strengthens New Delhi's hold over the Muslim-majority region.

Singh travelled to Khundru town in Kashmir after a breakfast meeting with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in New Delhi. The two leaders discussed the attacks on Mumbai, which have been blamed on a Pakistani-based Kashmiri militant group, Lashkar-e-Taiba.

India has called on Pakistan to crack down on militant groups operating out of Pakistan.

Pakistan has carried out raids on a charity believed to be linked to Lashkar, but also urged India to provide further evidence.

India finds itself in the awkward position of having to investigate terrorist attacks hand-in-hand with its longtime nemesis. The two countries have fought three wars against each other since independence. Despite a peace process that began in 2004, tensions remain high.

## Taliban militants kidnap 7 in Afghanistan

AFP, Ghazni

Armed Taliban militants abducted six musicians and an election worker in eastern Afghanistan, one of whom was later found dead, a local official said yesterday.

The body of one musician was found Sunday, one day after the group was kidnapped in Pakika province, provincial spokesman Hameedullah Jowak told AFP.

"One of the six musicians abducted yesterday by Taliban was found dead today in the district. We have no information on the fate of the other five," he said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility, saying the hostages had flouted a ban on music, but denied killing the victim.

# Pakistan accuses India of violating its airspace

Brown seeks to defuse Indo-Pak tension

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan accused India's air force of violating its airspace, drawing a swift denial from New Delhi, as Britain's visiting prime minister sought to defuse tensions yesterday.

Pakistan's statement that Indian jets made an "inadvertent" intrusion threatened to further harm ties between the nuclear-armed South Asian states, whose relations have plummeted in the wake of the Mumbai attacks.

"There has not been any airspace violation as has been alleged," Wing Commander Mahesh Upasani, spokes-

man for the Indian Air Force, told AFP.

The row broke out as British leader Gordon Brown, who is visiting Pakistan, held talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on regional security after the assault on Mumbai.

Relations between India and Pakistan have deteriorated in the wake of the devastating siege on India's financial capital, which New Delhi has blamed on "elements" in Pakistan.

Pakistan's air force said Indian jets had Saturday flown over the Pakistani-administered part of Kashmir and the eastern city of Lahore, both places where the militant group India blames over the

attacks is active.

The government said it had confirmed the incident with India.

"We contacted the Indian air force and they said the violation was inadvertent. We don't want to escalate the situation," Information Minister Sherry Rehman said.

A total of 172 people died when gunmen ran riot in India's financial capital last month, leading to a 60-hour siege in which hundreds of others of terrified locals and tourists were caught up.

India this week called Pakistan the "epicentre" of terrorism and demanded it do more to crack down on militant groups on its soil, but ruled out military action.

## Iran shuns Paris meeting of Afghan neighbours, allies

AFP, Paris

Iran failed to send its envoy to a major conference in Paris yesterday aimed at persuading Afghanistan's neighbours to play a greater role in restoring stability in the war-torn state.

French officials said delegates would urge the states around Afghanistan, in particular Iran and Pakistan, to play a more positive role in supporting Kabul's attempts to regain control over its territory.

Tehran had promised to send its Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, according to French officials, but in

the end he failed to make the trip and the Iranian ambassador also failed to show up, a diplomatic source said.

French-Iranian relations were strained this week after the foreign ministry in Tehran summoned the French ambassador to protest remarks by President Nicolas Sarkozy condemning Iran's threats against Israel.

The one-day Paris conference brought together top envoys from Afghanistan, its neighbours and the world's great powers to discuss ways out of the beleaguered country's seemingly endless state of war



PHOTO: AFP

(From R) Foreign ministers of France Bernard Kouchner, Afghanistan Rangin Dadfar Spanta and Tajikistan Khan Zarifi attend an informal conference on Afghanistan to enlist the support of neighbouring countries in a stepped-up effort for Afghan peace yesterday in La Celle Saint-Cloud, outside Paris.

## Iraq's reconstruction a \$100-billion failure

AFP, Washington

An unpublished US government report says US-led efforts to rebuild Iraq were crippled by bureaucratic turf wars, violence and ignorance of the basic elements of Iraqi society, resulting in a 100-billion-dollar failure, The New York Times reported on its website late Saturday.

The newspaper said it had gotten hold of a copy of the 513-page federal history of the

reconstruction effort that is circulating in Washington in draft form among a tight circle of technical reviewers, policy experts and senior officials.

The document has former secretary of state Colin Powell complaining that after the 2003 invasion, the Defence Department "kept inventing numbers of Iraqi security forces -- the number would jump 20,000 a week! We now have 80,000, we now have 100,000, we now have 120,000."

The overarching conclu-

sions of the history is that the US government has in place neither the policies nor the organisational structure that would be needed to undertake the largest reconstruction programme after the Marshall Plan, the report said.

All in all, the document concludes that the rebuilding effort never did much more than restore what was destroyed during the invasion and the pervasive looting that followed, The Times pointed out.

## No move to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, says US

THE DAWN, Washington

The US State Department has said that neither the United States nor the United Nations have ever considered declaring Pakistan a terrorist state.

At a Friday afternoon briefing, spokesman Sean McCormack noted that Pakistan had banned Jamaatut Dawa because it felt

it was in its interest to do so and not because it felt that the United States was about to declare it a terrorist state.

"The Pakistani defence minister has said that Pakistan had to ban the Jamaat because if that hadn't happened it would have been branded a terrorist state. Is that the message the US has sent out?" McCormack was asked.

## Greece calm after 8 days of riots

AP, Athens

Athens was calm Sunday after eight days of the worst riots Greece has seen in decades, sparked by the police killing of a teenager.

No demonstrations were planned for Sunday. In Athens, traffic returned to normal in the centre of town and an open-topped double-decker bus carried tourists round the city's main sights.

Greek youths who have protested daily since the boy's death are angry not just at the police but at an increasingly unpopular government and over economic issues.

Overnight, youths attacked a police station, stores and banks

and fought running battles with police, as candlelit vigils were being held to mark a week since the shooting.

Several hundred protesters set up burning barricades and attacked police with rocks and flares. Riot police fired tear gas and chased the youths through parts of the city. The protesters chanted "murderers out" and used laser pointers to target officers for attack.

Violence has wracked Greece every day since the death of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos. The riots in cities throughout the country have left at least 70 people injured. Hundreds of stores have been smashed and looted, and more than 200 people have been arrested.

## Mumbai gunman's confession sheds light on massacre

AP, Mumbai

The gunman captured in last month's Mumbai attacks had originally intended to seize hostages and outline demands in a series of dramatic calls to the media, according to his confession obtained Saturday by The Associated Press.

Mohammed Ajmal Kasab said he and his partner, who massacred dozens of people in the city's main train station, had planned a rooftop stand-off, but abandoned the plans because they couldn't find a suitable building, the statement to police says.

Kasab's seven-page confession, given to police over repeated interrogations, offers chilling new details of the three-day rampage through India's commercial centre that left 164 people plus nine

gunmen dead.

He said the assault, which started Nov. 26, was initially set for Sept. 27, though he doesn't explain why it was delayed. The gunman had been told by their handlers to carry out the attacks during rush hours when the station is teeming with commuters.

After reaching Mumbai, Kasab and his partner, Ismail Khan, the group's ringleader, headed to the train station by taxi.

"Ismail and myself went to the common toilet, took out the weapons from our sacks, loaded them, came out of toilet and started firing indiscriminately toward the passengers," Kasab told police.

As a police officer opened fire, the two militants retaliated with grenades before entering another part of the station and randomly shooting more commuters.

## BNP's polls manifesto

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The manifesto's proposals for industrialisation are again vague, but there are some specific promises too. Establishment of an export park is certainly a good idea and promises of soft loan for SMEs is just what the sector needs. But the hiccup comes again when one finds promises of collateral free loans for university graduates against their certificates. If one may remind, a similar project was launched by military dictator General HM Ershad when he was in power, which later turned out to be a big hoax as his party flunkies gobbled up the fund from Sonali Bank.

The BNP feels the need for helping the garment sector and for perking up the stock market, but again the manifesto stops short of specific action plans, while making some blanket promises to net in foreign direct investment.

It is heartening however to see the manifesto proposing formation of an advisory committee to tackle the impacts of global economic crisis, but specific action plans are missing again.

On the agricultural front, many promises have been made, again without spelling out the means for realising those. How new agricultural inventions will be disseminated among farmers, how agricultural production will be raised or how seeds and fertilizers will be supplied are all questions hanging in the air. But good to know that there is a plan to set up warehouses and cold storages for preserving produce. But is that not a job of the private sector? Are we again talking about the state getting engaged in business?

Inexplicable are the proposals in the manifesto for encouraging farmers to grow region specific crops and to go for multi-cropping, and also for providing higher technology to poultry, fisheries and the cattle rearing sector. Our farmers are already practicing localisation of crops -- potato is cultivated in Munishganj and not in Barisal, wheat in Rajshahi not in Chittagong. Then what is the catch here that the manifesto is talking about? Are our poultry and fisheries not two of the most productive?

The BNP exhibits modern thinking when it proposes setting up a high-tech city for development of information technology. India, the US and many other countries developed this way and there is no reason why Bangladesh cannot. However, it leaves much to be desired in telecommunications and the spread of internet, while the document

only mentions briefly that those will be improved. Improvement is an ongoing process and does not need mentioning.

Oxymoron is the proposal for sending nurses to the Middle East and Britain while Bangladesh itself is facing an acute shortage of medical assistants. A few big hospitals recently went to Kerala to recruit nurses and came back empty handed.

The manifesto talks a lot about infrastructure which is good for perking up the economy. But again many of those such as the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, and flyover and monorail projects are all legacies of the past BNP-led government, which were not achieved during the party's five years in power. We can only hope that the party has now become more sincere about keeping its promises.

The manifesto touches upon the quintessential power and energy sector, but again without being specific. Instead of apologising to the public for BNP's failure in the energy sector, the manifesto claims that due to massive development in the industrial and agricultural sectors during 2001-2006, the energy demand exceeded the supply capacity. Such a claim mocks the 2006 Kansat tragedy where several people were killed in police firings while they were demonstrating demanding power supply.

Overall, the manifesto does not provide the nation with any road map for resolving the ongoing energy crisis in the country. It makes general commitments about small power plants, renewables, and atomic energy, and talks about a transparent and effective power generation and distribution policy.

It proposes nothing original regarding new power projects, but promises to implement power projects 'approved by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan' passing the entire onus on external organisations.

The manifesto specifies only two power projects Bibiyana 450 megawatt (mw) and Sirajganj 450 mw contracts for which the party wants to award to successful bidders through re-tendering within 100 days of its ascension to power.

Firstly, the present caretaker government has already completed preparations for both of those power projects, and the World Bank and other financiers are ready to finance them. It would not take much special initiative to complete the bidding process upon coming to power. Secondly, such a commitment stands as

a stark contrast to the fact that in 2004 the BNP-led alliance government cancelled a bid for Sirajganj 450 mw power project at its matured stage.

The BNP also promises formation of a specialised committee within 100 days of its ascension to power, to frame a policy for optimal energy utilisation. The government formed by BNP would implement its recommendations regarding oil, gas and coal. But the promise raises questions about the party's move in 2002 to set up two expert committees -- one for gas utilisation and the other for gas resources assessment. The BNP-led past government did not follow any recommendation of the gas utilisation committee except that it did not export gas as per the US company Unocal's proposal. The gas utilisation committee had warned that the country will face a gas crisis from 2011 and that the government should initiate oil and gas exploration to find more gas reserves.

The party promises to make Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) more effective. BERC was created in 2003. Till the dissolution of the immediate past BNP-led government in October 2006, BERC had no power. The present caretaker government however vested some critical issues like energy pricing on BERC making BNP's commitment of making it 'more effective' sound rather hollow.

## Somali president sacks PM

AFP, Baidoa

Somalia's president announced Sunday he was sacking the cabinet but the premier rejected the move as unlawful and an attempt to scupper ongoing peace efforts with the Islamist-led opposition.

"As of now, I have sacked the prime minister and his current government and I will nominate a new prime minister within days," President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed told reporters.

"The government of Nur Hassan Hussein was unable to perform its duties and I am obliged to save the country," he added. But Hussein himself told AFP that the president alone did not have the power to sack him.

"The president was speaking in his usual personal capacity, contrary to the rules and regulations, as he is not mandated to sack the prime minister of the transitional federal government," Nur Hassan Hussein said.