



PHOTO: AFP
Policemen inspect a police van after an explosion on the outskirts of Peshawar yesterday. At least seven Pakistani security forces and four civilians were killed when a car bomb exploded on the outskirts of Peshawar.

Bombings kill 11 in Pakistan amid political feuds

Militants shoot down US drone

AP, AFP, Peshawar/Miranshah

A bomb-laden car exploded yesterday in northwest Pakistan as police tried to pull a body from it, authorities said, killing seven police and a bystander as international fears grow over security and political stability in the nuclear-armed country.

al-Qaeda, Taliban and linked militants have staged numerous attacks against security forces along Pakistan's northwest border with Afghanistan, but Saturday's appeared to be the first to use a body as a lure. It occurred in the Badaber area, where residents recently evicted militants with help from police, prompting threats of retaliation.

Separately, a roadside bomb struck a military convoy in the northwest town of Darra Adam Khel, killing three passers-by and wounding four troops, government official Asif Khan said. The explosions came days after gunmen attacked Sri Lanka's cricket team in eastern Pakistan and ahead of expected anti-government rallies later this month involving the main opposition party.

Meanwhile, Taliban militants on Saturday shot down a pilotless US drone

in a Pakistani tribal area bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

Residents and a local police official said two drones were flying low over a village in the South Waziristan tribal district when one of them was hit by militant fire.

"We heard the firing by Taliban and then a drone fell down," tribal police official Israr Khan told AFP.

Another security official said the drone crashed in a forest near a Pakistani border post.

"Apparently a drone has crashed in the nearby forest, we are searching for its wreckage," a security official told AFP.

The turmoil is of great concern to US and other Western officials, who need Pakistan to focus on fighting militancy. Many militants are believed to use pockets of Pakistan's northwest as bases to plan attacks on American and Nato forces in Afghanistan.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband on Friday urged Pakistani politicians to stop feuding and focus on the threat from Islamist militants the most direct appeal yet from the West regarding the country's political turmoil.

Miliband said it was "vital" that Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif "unite against the mortal threat that Pakistan faces, which is a threat from its internal enemies."

On Saturday, officers were dispatched to Badaber, which lies on the outskirts of the main northwest city of Peshawar, after an unknown caller told them a body was in a parked car, according to Police Chief Rahim Shah.

"Police went there. They found the white car. They also saw a body inside, but when they were pulling it out, the car bomb went off," he said, calling the set-up a "new technique."

Footage from the scene showed a police van whose front was decimated.

The attack occurred just outside the Khyber tribal region, a part of Pakistan's semiautonomous tribal belt where military forces have staged offensives to stem militant activity. Pakistan recently claimed victory in an offensive against militants in Bajur, another tribal region. Officials also say they are close to flushing out militants in nearby Mohmand tribal area.

15 tcf offshore gas

FROM PAGE 1
with these investments is extreme, especially as there is no seismic coverage for the oil and gas blocks to be explored." He adds it was unwise for the government to put its money for such risky ventures in Bay and let oil companies take the risks.

However, the Bay also promises chances of hitting more than 15 tcf gas, as the neighbouring India has discovered at least 100 tcf gas and Myanmar 7 tcf there in recent years.

But the third round bidding of 2008 that involved only offshore oil and gas blocks generated poor response from international oil companies (IOCs) due to lack of financial incentives and lack of any sign that the government would increase the gas sales tariff to ensure a healthy financial condition of the sector, analysts say.

Again, neither the caretaker government nor the newly elected political government has taken any decision to sign Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) with two oil companies under the third round bidding.

The offshore gas will be three times costlier than

onshore gas, experts say. An expert explains that if this 15 tcf offshore gas is found, the exploration cost would be \$5 per barrel oil equivalent (Boe) and development cost will be another \$15 Boe.

Giving subsidy to gas tariff has become very difficult as presently international oil companies (IOCs) supply 60 percent of gas, and local state-owned companies the remaining 40 percent. A few years ago, the IOCs gave 30 percent gas.

While local companies sell gas to the government at less than \$1 per thousand cubic metres (mcf), the IOCs charge \$2.3 to \$3. However, a good part of the costly IOC gas comes free as Petrobangla's share.

The offshore exploration and production cost has increased by 355 percent from 1996 to 2008 and, experts forecast, will rise further.

The era for industry to awaken to higher gas prices has arrived and it is only through acceptance of this fact can new exploration take place," says an official of an oil company, adding that while the neighbouring countries tailored their model agreements with oil companies to accommo-

date the price factors, the Bangladeshi PSC terms and conditions are region and have not changed for more than 15 years.

Though these cost factors are high, the government has to tap its oil and gas resources from the Bay of Bengal or face critical energy crisis from 2011, which will retard economic growth and eventually cause wide public discontent.

"We may opt for dual-fuel power plants in future so that they can run on both gas and imported oil. This will add only 10 percent additional cost on the projects," says energy adviser to the prime minister Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury.

"But how do we solve gas supply shortfall for the existing power and fertiliser plants?"

While the government would tap coal as a new basic source of energy, the existing infrastructure would need natural gas to avoid chaos. Natural gas may be temporarily imported from other countries in the form of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), while the government emphasises onshore and offshore gas exploration to tap new resources, he adds.

Congress-SP keep talking on polls alliance

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lucknow

Talks are 'on' with the Samajwadi Party for an alliance ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress said Saturday, adding it is prepared for a 'friendly contest' with the party in at least seven constituencies in Uttar Pradesh.

Congress general secretary Digvijay Singh said Saturday: "Alliance talks are on and we will soon reach a consensus (on seat sharing). We will have a friendly contest with the Samajwadi Party in at least seven places."

Speaking at the party headquarters here, Singh also made a clear move to woo the Muslim votebank, saying the party apologises for the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition. "We are sorry for the demolition of the Babri Masjid."

Asked by a reporter for his reaction to a statement by Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh that the party would not give more than 17 seats to the Congress, Singh refused to comment.

Meanwhile, Darul Uloom Deoband, India's most respected Islamic seminary, has not given its approval to Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav's bonhomie with former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Kalyan Singh, a senior cleric said Saturday.

Darul Uloom pro-vice chancellor Maulana Abdul Khaliq Madrasī told IANS that the institution's head, Maulana Maghrubur Rehman, had never given his blessings to Yadav's new found friendship with Kalyan Singh, who was chief minister of Uttar Pradesh when the Babri masjid was razed in 1992.

"Maulana Rehman never gave any assurance to Mulayam Singh, for the simple reason that we (in Deoband) do not believe in discussing or encouraging any kind of politics," Maulana Madrasī said over telephone.

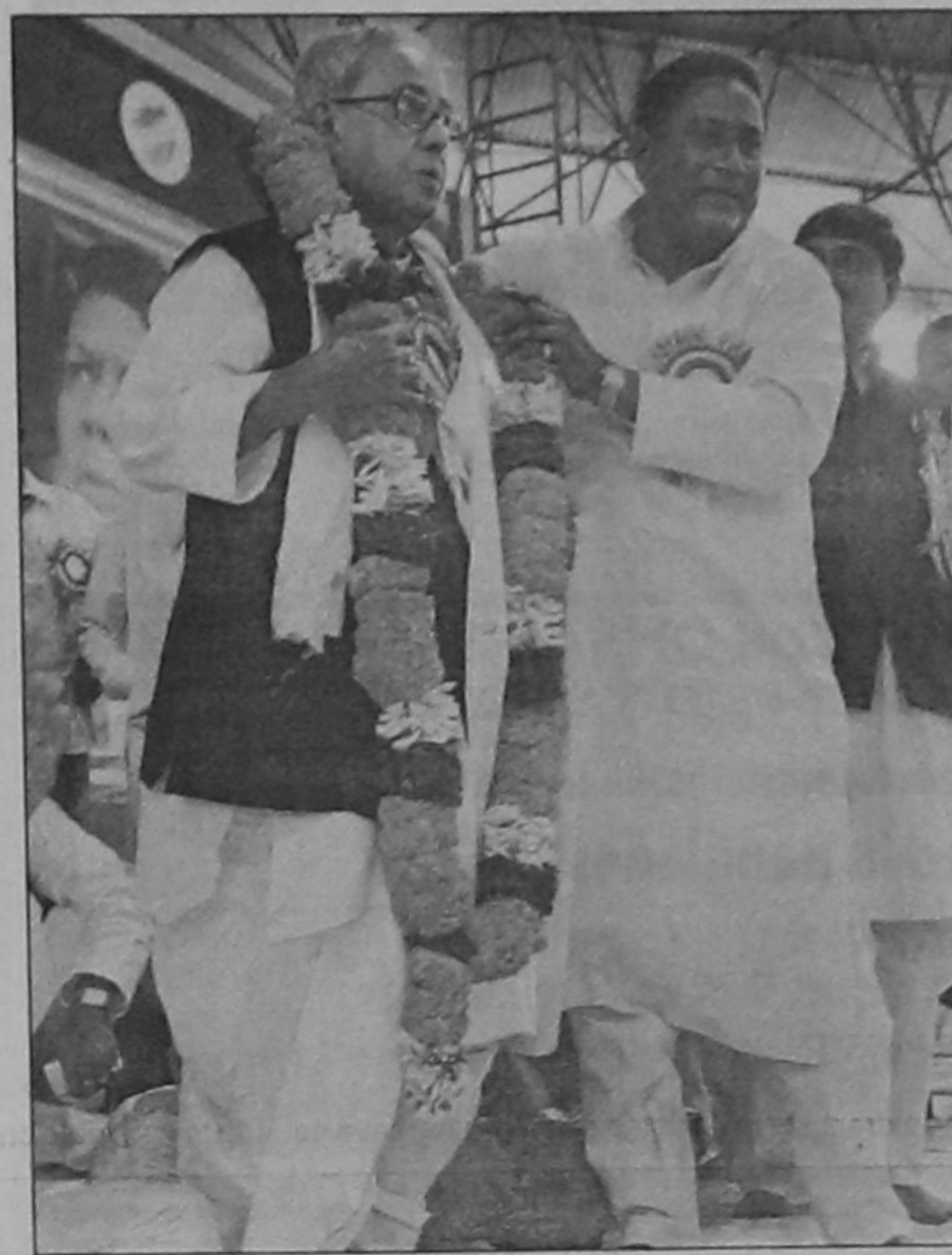


PHOTO: AFP
Indian External Affairs and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee is welcomed at a Congress Party election campaign rally in Siliguri yesterday. India will hold general elections staggered from April 16 to May 13, kick starting a frenetic campaign for the 700 million votes up for the grabs in the world's biggest democracy.

Bilawal Bhutto urges world not to lose faith in people of Pakistan

ANI, Vienna

Assassinated Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto's son and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chairman, Bilawal Bhutto has urged the international community not to lose faith in the people of Pakistan who are striving to find their place in the world.

Addressing the Women's World Award ceremony here, the Bhutto scion admitted that Pakistan was going through a tough time. Commenting on the current political instability in the country, he said that the present turmoil was a result of year's long trouble and that the PPP government had inherited the backlog of years of political instability in the region.

Bilawal Bhutto commended the work done by the Pakistan Government led by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani.

Indian rebel leaders were in Ctg

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introduced with one Zaman before the 2001 election. Later, he came to know that the said Zaman was Ulfā military commander Paresh Barua.

Zaman told Hafiz a huge consignment of machinery would land in Chittagong and he assigned him (Hafiz) to hire a trawler and decide on a jetty for offloading the delivery. Zaman also said they themselves would handle the rest.

Paresh Barua assured him of not worrying about anything as chiefs of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) had already made all arrangements.

As per the records of the Hotel Golden Inn register on Station Road in Chittagong where Ulfā operatives stayed, room-305 was allocated to Asif Zaman at 5:45am on March 28, 2004, just three days before offloading the arms cache.

Asif Zaman's address was recorded as 97/5 Sher-e-Bangla Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka. It is the same Zaman who actually went by the name of Paresh Barua. Asif was believed to be another fake name of Ulfā leader.

Anthony Davis in the August 1, 2004 issue of Janes Intelligence Review wrote Naga rebel leader Anthony Shimray also accompanied Paresh Barua when the arms were being offloaded in Chittagong.

Anthony Shimray who is based in Manila in Philippines

had flown to Chittagong via Bangkok around the time of the shipment.

Proofs were found that Asif, Zaman, Abul Hossain, Shahidul Islam and several others believed to have been involved in offloading arms and ammunition rented rooms in Hotel Golden Inn during March 28-30 in 2004.

They left the hotel never to return after the caches of weapon were seized in the morning of April 2.

Shahidul Islam rented room-317 of the hotel at 5:45 on March 28, 2004. The address of this Islam was also shown as 97/5 Sher-e-Bangla Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka meaning that Shahidul Islam and Zaman lived in the same address.

Visit to the address in Dhaka reveals that none by the name of Shahidul Islam or Zaman had ever lived in that building.

Four more youths checked in the Hotel Golden Inn at the dead of night of March 28, 2004. They are Farhad Ahmed (Gulshan, Dhaka, room no-314), M Rahman (12/10 Islampur, Dhaka, room no-207), Shafiqur Rahman (459/2 South Kafirul, Dhaka, room no-405) and Anisur Rahman (459/2 South Kafirul, Dhaka, room-505).

Earlier 10 rooms of the hotel were rented for 20 Indian nationals; most of their addresses in the hotel register were shown as Babupara of Habra, West Bengal, India. They were not found in the room from the moment of the

seizure of arms.

Investigations also revealed that the register book in which the names of those allegedly involved in the arms smuggling were recorded, disappeared from the hotel.

Hotel authorities said they sold the old register books with other odds and bits. But, a source close to the hotel management said intelligence agency men seized the register book six to seven months into the arms seizure.

The hotel authorities, however, denied the matter.

The investigation says Hafizur Rahman knew all about arms smuggling. Then chief of CID Chittagong region AKM Kabir Uddin and inspector Mohammad Shah Alam sent a review report on the arms haul to the CID headquarters in the last week of April in 2004.

The report reads Hafizur Rahman is proved to have had link with the international smuggling network of Pakistan's largest intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

The same report also goes on to say that Hafiz met a Pakistani at a room of Hotel Sundarban in Dhaka six months before the ten truckloads of arms seizure. After that Hafiz went to Pakistan, China, Rangoon (Myanmar) and Bangkok, sources close to Hafiz told the CID.

[Judging importance of the Prothom Alo news, we decided to re-run the report for our readers in English]

Morocco cuts ties with Iran

AFP, Rabat

Morocco on Friday severed diplomatic ties with Iran, the Moroccan foreign ministry said in a statement, resurrecting a row sparked by a senior Iranian official who questioned Bahrain's sovereignty.

The decision followed Rabat's express backing for Bahrain -- despite Iran moving to patch up their differences -- with Morocco accusing Tehran of seeking to impose its Shia Muslim ideology on the Sunni-ruled Arab state.

Karzai accepts Aug 20 polls

AP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai said yesterday that he accepts the recent decision by the country's election commission to hold the presidential vote on Aug. 20.

According to the Afghan constitution, Karzai's term ends on May 21 and a vote for president should be held 30 to 60 days before that.

But the country's election commission has said the vote will be held in August because of security issues, bad spring weather, and a lack of money for the distribution of ballots.

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Application Deadline: April 2, 2009

Admission Test: April 3, 2009

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