



PHOTO: AFP
Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna (R) shakes hands with his Bangladeshi counterpart Dipu Moni during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Dipu Moni held talks during her unofficial visit to New Delhi with Indian leaders on bilateral affairs and is expected to hand over a letter from Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh, who is now attending the G-8 summit in Italy.

Iran warns of crackdown on any student demos

Khamenei aide blasts Britain, France

AFP, Tehran

Iran authorities, still reeling from the massive public protests over last month's election, warned yesterday of a harsh crackdown against any demonstration to mark the anniversary of student unrest which rocked the Islamic republic on this day in 1999. The warning was issued after the G8 world powers expressed "serious concern" over the violence unleashed after the hotly-disputed re-election of hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad which left at least 20 people dead.

Iranian authorities have banned all gatherings amid a fierce crackdown on protesters, reformists, journalists and political activists after the election crisis, which rattled the pillars of the 30-year-old Islamic republic.

Witnesses said leaflets were being distributed in several Tehran squares urging people to join a

march on Thursday to mark the 10th anniversary of student protests which were violently suppressed by the authorities.

"No permission for a gathering or march has been requested or issued," Tehran governor Morteza Tamaddon said in a strongly worded statement to the official news agency IRNA.

"But if some people make moves that are contrary to security initiatives under the influence of anti-revolutionary networks, they will be trampled under the feet of alert people."

Meanwhile, a top aide to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that Britain and France were "worse" than the United States when it comes to interfering in Iran's internal issues.

Ali Akbar Velayati, advisor to Khamenei on international affairs, accused Britain and France in particular of wanting to stop Iran's nuclear drive.

China extends hand to foreign media

But govt chokes information flow within China

AFP, Shanghai

Foreign journalists have been given unprecedented access in the aftermath of deadly unrest in Urumqi, in what China has hailed as a new era of openness to the outside world.

At the same time, however, the government has choked the information flow within China, shutting down the Internet in Urumqi, cutting phone lines and blocking Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and other independent websites.

"They're trying to seize the initiative and guide the coverage instead of just reacting passively as they did last year to the riots in Tibet," said Willy Lam, a Chinese politics expert at US think tank the Jamestown Foundation.

Beijing's new tactics are not only a response to the anti-China riots in Tibet last year, which gave China a public relations black eye before the Olympics, but also the protests in Iran after last month's election, Lam said.

"They have been watching the Iranian situation with a lot of nervousness, particularly this so-called Twitter revolution," Lam told AFP.

"Globally, Beijing's image to a certain extent has improved because of this. There has been less criticism of Beijing and total censorship this time compared to last year."

Unlike in Tibet and for other sensitive news stories in China, foreign reporters have been allowed into restive Xinjiang region, of which Urumqi is the capital, and given freedom to interview people on both sides of the unrest.

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India, China to hold border talks next month

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Putting behind China's objections to an Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan to India, special representatives of the two countries will meet next month to resume their dialogue on finding a solution to their vexed border issue, External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna said Thursday.

"India and China seek a fair and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary issue. We have a mechanism of special representatives for working out a framework. The special representatives will be meeting next month," Krishna said in the Rajya Sabha while replying to a supplementary during question hour.

Qaeda leaders hiding in Pak tribal areas
Says US General

PTI, Washington

Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen has said the al-Qaeda leadership resides in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and the United States is determined to defeat them.

"The top priority, with respect to that strategy, is to defeat al-Qaeda, whose leadership resides in the FATA in the federal areas, the tribal areas in Western Pakistan," said Mullen in his remarks at a luncheon held at the National Press Club in Washington on Wednesday.

Massive bomb blast kills 25 in central Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

A massive bomb blast yesterday in central Afghanistan killed 25 people including primary school students, destroying shops and scattering pieces of the vehicle that carried the explosives more than a mile away, police said.

Another bombing in the south killed two Nato soldiers.

The central Afghanistan bomb was detonated in a stationary timber truck, killing 21 civilians and four policemen in Logar province, south of Kabul, ministry spokesman Zemeral Bashary said. At least nine of those killed were children from a nearby school,

Jackson beats Pope, Diana in top funeral race

PTI, New York

The media coverage of Michael Jackson's funeral tops the list of "celebrity deaths" like those of Pope John Paul II, Princess Diana and Mother Teresa, according to a study.

Jackson's death also became the second top story of the 21st century for mainstream and Internet media, only trailing the election of Barack Obama as president of the US. Measured by the coverage in global print and electronic media from the day of death to the day after funeral, Jackson was way above the rest in cases since 1997.

In its analysis, Global Language Monitor (GLM) found that the death, aftermath, and funeral of Jackson had about 18 per cent more stories in the global print and electronic media than that of Pope John Paul II in 2005.

Khmer Rouge victim says brother forced to kill father

AFP, Phnom Penh

A woman who said she survived the Khmer Rouge's main torture centre told Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court Thursday that one of her brothers was forced to kill their father at the prison.

Nam Mon, 48, was testifying at the trial of prison chief Duch, who is accused of overseeing the torture and execution of around 15,000 people who passed through Tuol Sleng prison during the regime's terrifying 1975-1979 rule.

Lanka asks aid agencies to scale down operation

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has directed all international relief agencies, including the Red Cross, to scale down operations following the defeat of the Tamil Tiger rebels, the human rights minister said yesterday.

Mahinda Samarasinghe said the directive was not solely aimed at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which had first revealed the order to cut back on its work.

"We have not specifically targeted the ICRC. It is something we have told all international agencies," Samarasinghe told AFP.

"Since there is no more fighting now, we have told them and others that they should scale down their work. It is a decision we took after careful consideration," he added.

The ICRC handled, among other things, the swapping of dead bodies of combatants and also manned entry and exit points from the rebel-held territory before it was finally overrun by government forces in mid-May.

Samarasinghe stressed that Sri Lanka still needed help from international aid agencies to carry out relief operations for some 300,000 civilians displaced by the fighting with Tamil rebels.

"What we are looking for is to add value to what we are doing," he said. "We have told all foreign relief organisations that we will let them bring down expatriates only if they can't find people locally to do their job."

The ICRC is in the process of reviewing its set-up and operational priorities in Sri Lanka," said Jacques de Maio, the agency's head of operations for South Asia.

"As a first step, it will close its offices and withdraw its expatriate staff from the Eastern Province while winding down its operations in the area.

Indonesian president wins 2nd term

AP, Jakarta

Indonesia's election was largely free and fair, independent observers said yesterday, as preliminary results showed the president had easily won enough votes to govern for another five years.

Early returns showed President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had more than 60 percent of the votes, more than enough to avoid a September runoff.

But the campaign of former President Megawati Sukarnoputri on Thursday alleged that Yudhoyono's Democratic Party committed electoral fraud.

Without providing proof, they questioned the validity of quick counts after polling and threatened to contest the final results, raising fears of political deadlock.



PHOTO: AFP
This picture taken on July 7 shows Sri Lankan Tamil students, who were displaced by fighting between troops and Tamil Tigers, attending class in a tent inside a camp where they are being held by authorities at Cheddikulam in the northern district of Vavuniya.

Pak jets pound militant base in S Waziristan: 12 killed

AP, AFP, Dera Ismail Khan / Quetta

Pakistani jets killed 12 suspected militants in South Waziristan yesterday, a day after suspected US missile strikes killed up to 45 insurgents in twin strikes in the stronghold of Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, intelligence officials said.

The convergence of US and Pakistani interests against Mehsud suggests the two uneasy allies are cooperating in the US missile strikes, making it harder for Islamabad to protest them publicly as it has in the past.

The jets pounded suspected Taliban hideouts

in four villages Thursday in Ladha and Kani Guram areas of the South Waziristan tribal region, near the Afghan border, four intelligence officials said on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to speak to the media.

Two of the officials said 12 militants were recovered from destroyed houses where they were staying. The other officials confirmed the bombing runs, but had no details of casualties.

Earlier a landmine killed five paramilitary soldiers and wounded four others in Pakistan's insurgency-plagued province of Baluchistan on Thursday, security officials said.

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