

Kashmiri separatists to go ahead with dialogue

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, Jammu

Kashmiri separatists will go ahead with bilateral talks with the Centre to resolve Kashmir issue despite serious differences within their own camp, but they wanted "India to speak in one voice."

"With hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani led Hurriyat faction having rejected the call to be on board for the dialogue, moderates were willing to go ahead with talks. All Parties Hurriyat Conference Chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is having a "cautious" hope with an "evident change" in Prime Minister's words in Kashmir, where October 28 he sent an unconditional invite for talks.

The change is seen in PM's assertion on August 15, when he said that successful elections had proved that "there is no place for separatist thought in Jammu & Kashmir."

UN to pull out 600 staff from Afghanistan

Australia rules out troop boost

AFP, Kabul/Sydney

The United Nations announced yesterday it was evacuating more than half its international staff from Afghanistan after a deadly Taliban attack on a guesthouse for UN workers.

But the UN said it had no intention of abandoning Afghanistan, where 100,000 US-led foreign troops are battling a bloody insurgency eight years after the extremist Taliban regime was driven from power.

Around 600 expatriate staff, from a total of 1,100 foreigners, will be temporarily relocated, UN spokesman Dan McNorton told AFP in Kabul.

"The only people who will remain are regarded as essential staff. This is to ensure the safety of all our staff in Afghanistan," the spokesman said.

The evacuations will begin immediately, he said.

Meanwhile, Australia has ruled out sending extra troops to Afghanistan, despite US and Nato calls for reinforcements to shore up the campaign against a resurgent Taliban, a report said yesterday.

Defence Minister John Faulkner told US

officials Australia had decided against boosting its 1,550-strong troop commitment to the strife-torn nation beyond the 450 extra soldiers it sent earlier this year.

"There is a very clear understanding and appreciation of the fact that Australia increased the number of troops to Afghanistan very significantly on April 29 this year," Faulkner said, according to public broadcaster ABC.

Faulkner, on an official visit to Washington, met with congressional members, military commanders and his American counterpart, Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

General Stanley McChrystal, Afghanistan's top US and Nato commander, has warned that the war could be lost within a year without extra resources to fight the Islamists, who were driven from power by the 2001 US-led invasion.

President Barack Obama is currently considering a large boost in US troop numbers in the face of growing public opposition in the United States.

In an insurgent attack, a US soldier serving under Nato was killed in eastern Afghanistan while on patrol, an ISAF state-

ment said Thursday.

His death took to 460 the number of international soldiers killed in Afghanistan so far this year, the deadliest of an eight-year anti-insurgency campaign being fought by about 100,000 Nato and US-led troops.

Apart from troop, UN has around 5,600 staff in Afghanistan, about 80 percent of whom are Afghans, and the relocations will affect around 12 percent of its total deployment.

The decision would be reviewed regularly and was expected to be effective for "a number of weeks while additional security is being put in place", McNorton said.

In a statement, the United Nations said it was "fully committed to helping all of Afghanistan's people, as it has been for more than half a century."

"Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to our activities while these additional security steps are being taken," it said.

The move comes eight days after Taliban suicide gunmen stormed a Kabul hostel in a dawn attack that killed five UN workers.



An Afghan shoe polisher reads a book in Kabul almost unconcerned yesterday. The United Nations is to evacuate around 600 non-essential foreign staff from Afghanistan after a Taliban attack on a guesthouse killed five employees on October 28, 2009.

Arabs seek UN-backed probe into alleged Gaza war crimes

AFP, United Nations

Arab nations held frantic talks at the UN General Assembly Wednesday to try and secure European backing for a resolution calling on Israelis and Palestinians to probe alleged war crimes in Gaza.

Arab and non-aligned states want EU nations to back a draft text endorsing a UN report that examined the conduct of Israel and Palestinian militants during a 22-day conflict in the Gaza Strip that ended in January.

The report, produced by a panel led by former judge Richard Goldstone, has provoked a firestorm of controversy,

with the US House of Representatives condemning it Tuesday as "irredeemably biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy."

Some 43 representatives were scheduled to speak during debate in the 192-member assembly, but diplomats said a vote on the text was not expected until Thursday afternoon at the earliest.

Sponsors of the text are keen to secure broad support, but the resolution faces opposition from EU states because it essentially endorses the Goldstone report, which they view as biased.

They also oppose reference to possible Security Council action

if the report's findings are not implemented.

Goldstone, a South African Jew and respected former international prosecutor, recommended that Israel and the Islamist movement Hamas that rules Gaza face possible prosecution before the International Criminal Court in The Hague if they fail to conduct credible investigations within six months.

Israel, which has mounted a vigorous campaign to discredit the report, slammed Wednesday's debate as "yet another campaign against the victims of terrorism, the people of Israel."

Karzai is 'corrupt' but 'our guy': French minister

AFP, Paris

President Hamid Karzai is "corrupt" but Nato has to accept that "he is our guy" in Afghanistan, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said, according to the New York Times yesterday.

Kouchner also complained that President Barack Obama's US administration was drawing up a new strategy for the war in Afghanistan without consulting its European allies within Nato, leaving them in the dark.

"What is the goal? What is the road? And in the name of what?" Kouchner asked, according to the New York Times report. "Where are the Americans? It begins to be a problem... We need to talk to each other as allies."

US strike kills 5 militants in Pakistan

Taliban blow up girls' school again

AFP, Miranshah/Peshawar

Suspected US missiles killed five militants in Pakistan's al-Qaeda-infested tribal belt yesterday, not far from where 30,000 troops are battling a major offensive against home-grown Taliban while militant blew up the two-storey school on the outskirts of Bara town.

The attack, which Pakistani officials said was carried out by a US drone, targeted a house in North Waziristan, where Washington says Islamist militants fighting 100,000 US and Nato troops in Afghanistan are hiding.

"It was a US drone attack which targeted a compound of a local tribesman, Musharraf Gul,

in Norak village," a senior security official told AFP.

Two missiles were fired from a US drone at 1:30 am (2030 GMT Wednesday).

Another security official confirmed the attack and said "Taliban rebels were using the compound. Five militants were killed and four others wounded."

"It is not clear if there was any high-value target," the official said, adding: "We also do not know yet the identity of the militants."

Local residents and security officials said Musharraf Gul, aged between 28 and 30, was a cab driver who had fraternized with militants for more than 18 months.

"Musharraf opened fire after the missile strike in a bid to keep villagers away. He buried the bodies of militants killed in the attack with the help of fellow rebels, who are still guarding the place," said a security official.

In the meantime, militants on Thursday blew up a second girls' school in less than a week in the lawless district of Khyber, on the main supply line for US and Nato troops fighting in landlocked Afghanistan, local officials said.

"Militants used 25 to 30 kilograms (55 to 66 pounds) of explosives to blow up the two-storey school on the outskirts of Bara town," local administration official Farooq Khan told AFP.

IGP rejects

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United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), Times of India reported yesterday that the outfit's foreign secretary Sasha Choudhury and finance secretary Chitran Hazarika were picked up by Bangladeshi intelligence sleuths at midnight Sunday from a house in Dhaka's Uttara area.

"Seven to eight people in civvies took the two leaders saying the duo were being summoned for some interrogation by senior officials. After that there was no information of them and we suspect they might have been handed over to our enemies (meaning India)," Ulfa's military spokesperson Raju Baruah told the local media via telephone and email, the Times of India reported.

It also reported, there is, however, no confirmation from Dhaka or New Delhi. Assam police and Indian intelligence officials expressed ignorance about the reports.

New Delhi in the past had repeatedly claimed that northeast militants were operating out of bases in Bangladesh with several of their top leaders staying safe in Dhaka. Bangladesh had earlier denied such allegations.

However, the new Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina assured New Delhi of all support and cooperation to evict any Indian separatists from Bangladesh, the Indian daily reported.

The report concluded saying Ulfa general secretary Anup Chetia -- in a Dhaka prison since 1997 -- is in Bangladesh due to the absence of any extradition agreement between the two countries, despite New Delhi's formal appeals to hand him over for trial in India.

Thailand recalls envoy to Cambodia over Thaksin

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand recalled its ambassador to Cambodia yesterday after Phnom Penh appointed fugitive former Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra as an economic adviser, a senior official said.

"We are recalling our ambassador to Cambodia by this evening," Chavanond Intarakomlayasut, secretary to Thailand's minister of foreign affairs, told AFP.

US ready to improve ties with Myanmar, sanctions to continue

AFP, Bangkok

Washington is ready to boost ties with Myanmar but will not lift sanctions until there is progress on democracy, a US diplomat said yesterday after the highest-level talks with the ruling junta in years.

US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and his deputy Scot Marciel held a rare meeting with opposi-

tion leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Prime Minister Thein Sein during their two-day visit which ended Wednesday.

"This is early days, the first time we met most of these people. It's going to take some time to see how they respond," Marciel told a public forum on Thursday in Bangkok, capital of neighbouring Thailand.

"We are willing to move

ahead in terms of bilateral relations but we are only going to do that if there is real progress."

The trip came two months after the administration of US President Barack Obama changed its policy on Myanmar, saying it would push for engagement with the military regime because sanctions on their own had failed to bear fruit.

Congress wins speaker, dy speaker's posts in Arunachal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, ITANAGAR

Candidates of the ruling Congress, Wanglin Lowangdong and Tapang Taloh were Wednesday elected unopposed as the speaker and deputy speaker respectively of the Arunachal Pradesh assembly.

Lowangdong and Taloh, who were elected to the assembly for the second time, were declared elected unopposed to their new posts by the pro-term Speaker Chow Tewa Mein in the absence of any other candidates for the two posts.

G20 ministers to talk climate change and recovery

AFP, London

Bolstering the world economic recovery and crafting a deal to fight climate change will be top of the agenda for G20 finance ministers meeting in Scotland from Friday.

Ministers plus central bankers from the 20 richest and fastest-emerging economies will hold their third get-together of 2009 over two days in St Andrews, a seaside town known as the home of golf.

Now that countries like the

US, Japan, Germany and France have emerged from recession after last year's global financial crisis, the G20's focus has switched from disaster management to building a secure economic future.

But this time, the grouping will also have to turn its attention to climate finance ahead of December's key UN conference in Copenhagen which aims to seal a deal to replace the Kyoto Protocol, although hopes of an accord are fading.

9 firearms

FROM PAGE 16

rounds of bullet. Moon, president of Faridpur Bus Owners Group, was not available during the raid.

The battalion also arrested caretaker Farid Sheikh, 65, night guard Md Aknot Ali and Nasir Lashkar, 30, a relative of Moon.

According to Rab, Moon is known as the crime godfather in Faridpur. His accomplices - Ujjal, Lengra Selim and Babu Koshai -- had died in encounters with Rab at different times.

Rab sources said, Emon, the prime accused of Faridpur district BNP vice president Liakat Ali Khan murder at Mirpur in 2004 and arrested earlier in this connection, told CID that Moon had given money to kill Liakat.

Besides, Moon was also arrested with arms during the Operation Clean Heart but later got released using loopholes in the laws, sources added. Two extortion cases had been filed against Moon with Faridpur Sadar Police Station in February and April this year.

Major Sabbir Rahman Osmani, company commander of Rab-8, said, the arms might have been gathered in the house to supply to another criminal group.

Fight Lt Moinul Alam, sub commander of Faridpur Rab camp, said the arms could be used for massive violence. It might cause heavy casualties. Police were deployed at the house to avert any untoward event.

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