

ABU DHABI CONFERENCE Qureshi says Afghan war should stay out of Pakistan

AFP, Abu Dhabi

The Afghanistan war against Taliban militants should be fought in the country itself and not spill over into Pakistan, the Pakistani foreign minister said yesterday.

"The Afghan war has to be fought within Afghanistan. The challenges within Afghanistan cannot be resolved in Pakistan," Shah Mahmood Qureshi told reporters on the sidelines of a Meeting of Special Representatives for Afghanistan and Pakistan, held in Abu Dhabi.

"The challenge that we have in Pakistan is being faced very bravely and very courageously by the people of Pakistan," he said. "On our side of the border, Pakistan is capable of looking after the problem."

Pakistan faces its own Taliban insurgents and militants who have killed more than 2,900 people since July 2007.

The insurgents are fighting to impose Islamic Sharia and oppose Islamabad's alliance with the United States in the eight-year war against the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Also speaking on the sidelines of the conference, Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta said the surge in US troops in his country must form part of a comprehensive strategy if it is to succeed.

"The surge in the (US) military presence ... has to be a part of a comprehensive strategy," he said.

That strategy must include "reconstruction and sustainable development in Afghanistan, strengthening the Afghan state and institutions, strengthening the leadership of Afghan security forces, and preparation for transition of the leadership to the Afghans," Spanta said.

DIFFERENT BITES

Man facing charges for first 'Twitter murder'

ANI, London

A man is facing charges in what police think is the first murder sparked by a row on Twitter.

According to the detectives, Jamie Blake blasted friend Kwame Dancy in the neck with a shotgun after the duo had a feud on the micro-blogging website.

Criminal experts said that the 140-character messages, known as tweets, have never been used as evidence in a murder trial before.

Police said that childhood pals Blake, 22, and Dancy, also 22, lived on the same floor of a block of flats but fell out over a girl and spent weeks trading insults on Twitter.

It is believed that hours before Dancy was killed, Blake allegedly sent him a tweet that said: "N***** is looking for u don't think I won't give up ya address for a price betta chill asap!"

8-yr-olds save drowning man

AP, Adelaide

Two 8-year-old boys in a young lifeguards training program rescued a man who was struggling in the ocean off Australia's east coast.

Jake Satherley told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio that he and friend Spencer Jeams saw a middle-aged man having trouble Sunday off Northcliff beach, in Queensland state.

"We saw him put his hand up and saying, 'help, help,' so we went over to him and pulled him on our board," Satherley said Monday.

The boys are part of the under-14 lifeguard training program at Northcliff Life Saving Club.

Club president David Shields said he'd never seen a rescue like it.

"They really did perform well above their years," he told ABC. "We're just so proud of them and the way they acted instinctively."

Russian soldier threatens to blow up shop for alcohol

RIA NOVOSTI, Irkutsk

A Russian soldier in east Siberia's Irkutsk region threatened to blow up a grocery store as he had no money to pay for an alcoholic beverage, police said.

According to a police spokesman, the detained military serviceman is a private first class from a detachment in Russia's North Caucasus republic of Karachai-Circassia, who was vacationing in the town of Tulum.

The military serviceman, while under the influence of alcohol, threatened to blow up a local grocery store instead of paying for an alcoholic beverage he had wanted. He drew a grenade to scare a shop assistant. However, he escaped as the alarm went off in the store, the spokesman said.

On the issue of maritime border dispute between the two countries, the premiers agreed to amicably



Supporters of Sri Lanka's President Rajapakse attend an election rally in the coastal town of Ambalangoda on Tuesday. Ambalangoda is the hometown of the main opposition candidate and former army chief General Sarath Fonseka who has thrown a stiff challenge to Rajapakse in the presidential election to be held January 26.

Rajapakse announces \$4bn package to woo Tamil voters

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse unveiled a USD 4 billion-reconstruction package for the war-ravaged North to pursue Tamil voters ahead of the election in which the minority community could play a decisive role.

Seeking a second term, Rajapakse said 'the end of the war does not mean the end of the conflict' and asserted, "we need to politically address the needs of the Tamils".

His comments come as Tamils have long demanded genuine devolution of power and regional autonomy. Tamils constitute about 13 per cent of Sri Lanka's population of 20 million.

Rajapakse, who was speaking to foreign correspondents at a breakfast meeting at his residence, charged his opponents of carrying out a "mud-slinging" campaign against him.

The Tamil voters could prove to be decisive in the January 26 election as both Rajapakse and his main opponent former top general Sarath Fonseka are Sinhalese.

To woo the voters in the North, Rajapakse vowed to rebuild the war-ravaged region with a whopping USD 4 billion-dollar package.

"We will be spending 4 billion dollars for rebuilding the Northern Sri Lanka and that will include roads, electricity, irrigation projects and Railway lines," he said.

Besides India and China, World Bank and Asian Development Bank will provide funds for the rebuilding efforts that will continue for the next few years as well.

One killed in Lanka poll attack

AFP, Colombo

Gunmen in Sri Lanka yesterday opened fire on a bus carrying supporters of the main opposition presidential candidate, killing one political activist, police said.

Several other people were wounded when unidentified attackers sprayed bullets into the vehicle of campaigners backing Sarath Fonseka in elections due on January 26.

"One person was killed instantly, another opposition supporter was hospitalised and several others had minor injuries," a local police officer, who declined to be named, told AFP by telephone.

Sri Lankan elections have been marred in the past by violence but Tuesday's shooting, near the town of Hungama in the south of the island, was the first in the run-up to the presidential vote.

Nepal urges United Nations to extend mission

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal has asked the United Nations to extend its mission in the country, a government official said yesterday, following international criticism of delays to the peace process.

The UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was set up in 2007 to support the peace process after a 10-year civil war between Maoist rebels and the state, and its mandate is due to expire on January 23.

"A formal request has been sent to the UN Security Council for the extension of UNMIN until May 15, 2010," foreign ministry spokesman Durga Prasad Bhattarai told AFP.

UNMIN's mandate has already been extended four times since it was established, and the UN has expressed serious concern over the slow progress of the peace process, blaming continuing disagreements between political parties.

Nepal's Maoists waged a decade-long insurgency before winning landmark elections in 2008.

But their government fell last year and the resulting political chaos has severely hampered the peace process, which includes drafting a new constitution and the integration of Maoist former fighters into the regular army.

Bangladesh may miss deadline

FROM PAGE 1

this project. Despite this, it is not being finalised due to the lobbying and counter lobbying by influential quarters," he said without naming.

In less than a month, the seven-member evaluation committee headed by Brig Gen Md Refayet Ullah changed its decision a couple of times, allegedly due to lobbying and counter lobbying of those quarters. Brig Gen Refayet is the project director (PD) of MRP and MRV project.

The committee on November 23 last year selected Malaysian IRIS Corporation Berhad as the lowest bidder and recommended the government to give the job to the firm. It recommended awarding the project to Flora Telecom Ltd, which came out as second lowest bidder, if IRIS declined to implement the project.

On December 8, the same committee following suggestion of the home ministry held a re-evaluation meeting and

IRIS Berhad quoted Tk 267 crore while Flora Telecom

quoted Tk 347 crore in the bids. As per evaluation cost, IRIS will get Tk 697 crore for issuance of 11 million passports in five years against Flora's Tk 956 crore.

As per requirement of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), Bangladesh has to introduce MRP and MRV from April 1 to ensure a safe and risk-free travel of its citizens. Soon after this Awami League government assumed office, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved a Tk 283 crore on March 19, 2009 to implement the project.

The government involved the armed forces division to expedite the finalisation of the project and go for introduction of MRP and MRV before the deadline expires.

In the summary, home ministry officials said IRIS was reconsidered as it quoted much less than Flora. The government has to pay about Tk 260 crore additional if the job is given to the second lowest bidder, they said.

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New era of cooperation opens

FROM PAGE 1

Recognising the sufferings of the people of both sides in the face of scarcity of flow in the Teesta river during the lean season, the prime ministers expressed that the discussions on sharing Teesta waters should be concluded expeditiously.

They directed their respective water resources ministers to convene the ministerial level meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) in the current quarter of this year.

The commission will also discuss issues relating to the Feni, Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumi, Dhalra and Duhukmara rivers.

Both leaders also agreed on dredging the Ichhamati river and on protecting the Mahananda, Karatola, Nagar, Kulik, Atrai, Dhalra, and Feni rivers.

The prime minister of India agreed to support implementation of Bangladesh's strategy to dredge rivers for flood control, navigation and access to ports.

In that context, India agreed to provide dredgers to Bangladesh on an urgent basis. Bangladesh indicated the need for 9 dredgers.

Both prime ministers agreed that Rohanpur Singabad broad gauge railway link will be available for Bangladesh for transit to Nepal. Bangladesh informed India of its intention to convert Radhikapur Biroi railway line into broad gauge, and requested railway transit link to Bhutan as well.

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