

Indo-Pak talks on track

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan will resume peace talks as planned, government sources said yesterday, despite a deadly restaurant bombing at the weekend that led to calls for the negotiations to be cancelled. As police scoured security camera footage of Saturday's blast in Pune, western India, a government source in New Delhi told AFP there was "no change" to a meeting of Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries on February 25. It will mark the first official talks between the South Asian rivals for 14 months. Another source said the government would refrain from any "knee-jerk reaction", amid calls from the main opposition Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the meeting to be called off. India broke off all official dialogue with Pakistan following the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, which it blamed on the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). New Delhi suspects Pakistan of supporting anti-India militancy and has consistently called on Islamabad to crack down on groups operating from its soil. Saturday's blast at the German Bakery in Pune was the first major attack on Indian soil since Mumbai and came just a

day after the two sides agreed to a meeting between their foreign secretaries. Two foreigners -- an Italian woman and an Iranian man -- were among the nine people killed. Twelve of the 57 people injured were foreign nationals. Pune police commissioner Satyapal Singh told reporters that three of the injured, including one foreign national, were still critical. Investigations were heading in the "right direction," he said, without elaborating. Indian media reports sought to link Saturday's blast to previous attacks by an India-based Islamist movement, the Indian Mujahideen, fearing sleeper cells were now active and further strikes likely. The Indian Mujahideen had claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in New Delhi in September 2008 and reports have highlighted similarities between them and the Pune blast. Home Secretary Gopal Pillai told the CNN-IBN television network on Monday that Pakistan-based rebel groups were behind all attacks in India, though he declined to say specifically who was to blame for the Pune blast. "I think there is no doubt in our minds all this activity is being masterminded from across the border," Pillai said.

A bomb hidden in an abandoned rucksack left under a table exploded at about 7.30 pm (1400 GMT) Saturday while the restaurant was packed with mainly young Indians. On Sunday, Home Minister P Chidambaram said New Delhi was keen to get access to David Coleman Headley, a US-Pakistani national currently awaiting trial in the United States on a string of terror charges. Headley, 49, is alleged to have scouted possible targets in India for the LeT before the Mumbai blast. He denies the claims. Chidambaram said Headley stayed at the Osho Ashram -- a religious retreat popular with foreigners -- which is a stone's throw from the German Bakery. A religious and cultural centre run by the orthodox Chabad-Lubavitch movement is also nearby. A similar centre was one of the targets in the Mumbai attacks. The Times of India said Monday that the bombing should be seen in the context of the resumption of the diplomatic talks and a major coalition offensive in southern Afghanistan. Pakistan-based Islamists "could well be trying to open up a conflict zone on Pakistan's eastern front, which would deflect attention from them," an editorial in the daily said.



US Marines with 1/3 Marine Charlie company fire mortar rounds on Taliban positions in the northeast of Marjah yesterday. Some 15,000 soldiers, including 4,400 Afghans, are taking part in Operation Moshtarak, which aims to clear militants from the Marjah and Nad Ali districts of the poppy-growing central Helmand River valley.



Lawyers torch a picture of the Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari as they shout slogans during a protest rally in Lahore yesterday. Hundreds of lawyers on Monday rallied across Pakistan to protest against Zardari after he clashed with the Supreme Court in a dispute, which could plunge the nation into crisis.

Pak lawyers stage rally against Zardari

AFP, Islamabad

Hundreds of lawyers joined rallies across Pakistan yesterday denouncing President Asif Ali Zardari after he clashed with the Supreme Court in a fresh crisis for the insurgency-hit nation. A rift opened on Saturday between the fragile government and influential judiciary when Zardari appointed two senior judges but the Supreme Court suspended the appointments, saying they appeared to violate the constitution. The showdown threatens Zardari's Western-backed government at a time of mounting US pressure on the country to eliminate Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants along its border with Afghanistan. Lawyers on Monday boycotted courts and protested in the capital Islamabad and the cities of Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta, following a strike call by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA). In the second-biggest city Lahore, about 300 lawyers in smart suits marched to the Punjab assembly building, where they burnt tyres and chanted, "Go, Zardari, Go!", lawyers' representatives and witnesses said. Most of the approximately 10,000 lawyers based in Karachi -- Pakistan's largest city and financial capital -- did not attend court proceedings.

Taliban hinder offensive with booby traps

12 Afghan civilians killed in Nato offensive, US general apologises

AFP, Haji Qari Saheb

Improved bombs slowed the progress of US-led troops fighting the Taliban yesterday in a major offensive that has already claimed the lives of 12 Afghan civilians. Nato claimed responsibility for the deaths, the first reported civilian casualties since the pre-dawn launch Saturday of the operation, part of a new strategy aimed at re-asserting government control over southern Afghanistan. Nato on Monday announced the death of a seventh foreign soldier in the south of the country since Operation Mushtarak started. US Marines are leading 15,000 US, Nato and Afghan troops in the assault focused on Marjah town, in the central Helmand River valley, which has been controlled by Taliban and drug traffickers for years. Nato said the civilians died Sunday when

two rockets missed their target and landed on a compound as troops came under fire in the Nad Ali district of Helmand province. The announcement of the civilian deaths -- and an apology by the commander of foreign troops in Afghanistan, US General Stanley McChrystal -- came as US President Barack Obama's national security adviser James Jones said the offensive was going well after the first 24 hours of fighting. "It's an important moment in time because this is the first time we put together all of the elements of the president's new strategy," Jones, who visited Afghanistan and Pakistan last week, told CNN. Jones's assessment was echoed by British military spokesman Major General Gordon Messenger, who told journalists at a briefing in London that British commanders were "very much of the view this has gone according to plan".

Police study video for Pune attackers

AP, Pune

Indian investigators examined security camera footage yesterday as they tried to identify who planted a deadly bomb in a bakery popular with foreigners. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack Saturday night that killed nine people in the city of Pune, 200km southeast of Mumbai. Suspicions, however, quickly fell on Islamic militant groups blamed for past attacks, including the 2008 Mumbai massacre when Pakistan-based militants ran amok in the country's financial hub. Officials said one or two people posing as customers left a backpack containing a bomb in the German Bakery. In addition to the nine deaths, 60 people were wounded. While the restaurant did not have security cameras, police were examining video shot by cameras installed at a hotel across the street, police said. On Monday, police showed the footage to bakery workers who had spotted the abandoned backpack before it exploded, a police officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to reporters about an ongoing investigation. The bombing was India's first major terrorist attack since the Mumbai siege and came just a day after India and Pakistan scheduled their first formal dialogue since New Delhi suspended wide-ranging peace talks in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. Security forces have been put on high alert at airports, train stations and markets across India, and Hindu nationalists have blamed Pakistan and demanded the talks be cancelled. Meanwhile, Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said India wanted to question a terror suspect linked to Pakistani militant groups who is detained in the United States and accused of scouting out targets ahead of the Mumbai attack. Officials said David Headley had cased the Osho Ashram, a meditation retreat near the German Bakery, and the Chabad Jewish centre. Nitzan Nuriel, head of counterterrorism at Israel's National Security Agency, said the Pune attack wasn't directed at Chabad.

BJP politicising Pune blast, says Congress

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The Congress yesterday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of politicising the terror attack in Pune by demanding that talks with Pakistan be called off and said such a step would be considered only if there is concrete evidence of the involvement of Pakistani elements. "BJP is trying to derive political mileage from misery of people because investigating agencies are yet to identify who were the forces behind the blast," Congress spokesman Shakeel Ahmed told IANS. Replying to queries about BJP's demand that bilateral talks with Pakistan be called off in the wake of the Pune terror strike, Ahmed said: "If there is any concrete evidence of involvement of elements or government agencies in Pakistan (in the blast), the government may consider it (calling off talks)," he said. He said that the government had decided to go for talks "in its wisdom and had to decide the pros and cons". Ahmed said it was premature to talk of cancelling the bilateral talks unless investigative agencies point to evidence against the perpetrators of the blast.

Missile strike from US drone kills 3 in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

A US drone attack killed at least three militants in Pakistan's tribal belt on the Afghan border yesterday, the second such strike in 24 hours, security officials said. Pakistani officials said the US aircraft fired at least one missile into a vehicle as it left a village in North Waziristan, a stronghold of the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Haqqani network fighting against US troops in Afghanistan. The US drone programme targets Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants in the lawless northwest tribal belt, which Washington calls the global headquarters of al-Qaeda and the most dangerous region on earth. "The US drone fired one missile, which hit a vehicle. According to our reports, three militants were killed," a Pakistani security official told AFP on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media. Local officials put the death toll at four, saying the drone targeted a vehicle carrying militants just as they were leaving Tabi Ghundi Kala village. "It was a drone attack. Two missiles were fired into the vehicle. Four militants were killed," said a local security official. The identities of the dead were not immediately clear, nor was it known if they were high-value targets. Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud has been a prime target of the drone attacks and US and Pakistani officials increasingly believe he was killed in a January strike in the northwest, although the Taliban insist he is alive. US drone attacks in North Waziristan have increased since Mehsud appeared in a video alongside a Jordanian al-Qaeda double agent claiming responsibility for a suicide attack on CIA agents across the border in Afghanistan. The December 30 attack at a US base in Khost province killed seven CIA employees in the deadliest attack on the US spy agency in 26 years. Monday's attack struck around 20 kilometres (13 miles) from the border with Khost, in a known stronghold of Afghan warlord Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who is reputed to control up to 2,000 fighters whom attack US troops in Afghanistan.



An image grab taken on February 15, 2010 from video footage released courtesy of A Wilting and A Mohamed of the Cat News journal shows a newly identified Sundaland clouded leopard, caught on camera for the first time ever, stalking through the Dermakot Forest Reserve in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah state.

Image of new leopard species captured

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The Sundaland clouded leopard, a newly identified and little understood species of big cat in Borneo, has been filmed for the first time. The leopard, a healthy-looking animal a metre long (3 feet) and weighing about 40 kilos (90 pounds) was caught on video at night at the Dermakot Forest Reserve in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah state. "What surprised us was that while clouded leopards are very elusive cats, this one was not scared at all," said Azlan Mohamed, a field scientist with University Sabah Malaysia. "Despite our powerful spot lights and the roar of our vehicle's engine, it walked around our vehicle calmly," he told AFP. "It is rare to see the big cat in the wild. These cats are usually shy of humans, it was by chance we caught it on video."

Governor stresses on peace amid Telangana protests

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

Andhra Pradesh Governor ESL Narasimhan Monday called for conducting struggles based on the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence even as Congress party legislator from Telangana tried to disrupt his address to the joint session of the state legislature. The legislators who supported the demand for a separate Telangana state continued to shout "Jai Telangana" slogans throughout the governor's 45-minute speech and later walked out of the assembly. The Congress is in power in Andhra Pradesh, but the demand for a separate Telangana state has created a rift among party legislators. Legislators of main opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) from coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema region -- opposing bifurcation of the state -- countered them with slogans of "samakhiya Andhra" or unified Andhra.

Mohaiminul not involved in politics

FROM PAGE 16

brother Mominul Islam, three sisters Nasrin Sultana, Afrin Sultana, Taslima Sultana and uncle Nurul Islam were also present. Meanwhile, Mohaiminul, who witnessed the killing of Mohiuddin Masum on February 11 at Sholohahar Railway Station, was placed on a five-day remand following his arrest Sunday night. The court of Chief Judicial Magistrate Shamsul Alam granted the remand around 3.20pm following a 10-day remand prayer by the investigation officer of the case and Officer-in-Charge of Chittagong Railway Police Station Md Shahid Ullah. The family members of Mohaiminul, second-year student of management department, said he is a victim of the gruesome attack by four unidentified miscreants at the railway station that left political science final-year student Mohiuddin Masum dead. He was a victim of the attack and he was in no way involved in

it, they said. They said Mohaiminul, resident student of Shahjalal Hall, was waiting for the shuttle train to campus that night, sipping tea and talking on his mobile phone after giving lessons to a student in the port city. "As the train was a little late, Mohaiminul was having a cup of tea at a nearby tea stall on the platform and was talking to a friend over the phone," said Moinul quoting his brother. Four masked men started hitting him in the head, right arm and face and he tried to save himself with his bag which fell and he managed to run away, said Moinul, adding that Mohaiminul was rushed to Niramoy Clinic at Panchlaish. Moinul said Mohaiminul while running away heard one of the attackers say, "he is not the target". When asked why his brother went into hiding after the incident, the family members said they were scared and felt insecure following news published in different media. They said Mohaiminul had a heart disease and underwent an open-heart surgery two years ago. They asked police for not torturing him during remand. He said Mohaiminul meets his educational expenses working as a private tutor. A Detective Branch of Police team of Chittagong Metropolitan Police picked up Mohaiminul's elder brother Mominul Islam and his nephew Ovi at a flat in Bakalia of Chittagong Sunday afternoon tracking Moinul's mobile phone. Following Moinul's information, police arrested Mohaiminul at Firingibazar around 9.00pm, said sources. The investigation officer of the case Sub-Inspector Shahid Ullah told The Daily Star yesterday that he hoped to get important information from Mohaiminul about the attackers.

Deliver on pledges

FROM PAGE 1

Hasina said Bangladesh has already started some self-preservation programmes for adaptation to climate change. The measures include dredging of major rivers, land reclamation, homesteads for displaced people, introduction of climate change-tolerant crop varieties and protection of biodiversity. "Our developing partners should also, considering the gravity and grimness of impacts of climate change, now ensure fulfilling their ODA (Official Development Assistance) targets of 0.7 percent of GNI for developing countries, and 0.2 percent for LDCs as reaffirmed in the Brussels Programme of Action," Hasinasaid. "We have also approved 134 climate change action plans. To meet the costs, we have established a US \$100 million climate change fund; and also a multi-donor trust fund with US \$150 million from friends," she said. At the inaugural session, Finance Minister AMA Muhiut said based on the Poverty Reduction Strategy document (NSAP 2-Moving Ahead) the government is working for making a five-year plan for poverty reduction to 2011 in an uninterrupted manner. World Bank Vice-president

Bangladesh wants to get it thru' UN

FROM PAGE 1

unfavourable "strings and conditions". Britain was expected to press Bangladesh to change its mind at a two-day meeting that started in Dhaka yesterday. If it refuses, the money may be withdrawn, according to the report by the London-based newspaper. The row comes days after British Prime Minister Gordon Brown accepted a UN offer to co-chair an advisory group responsible for climate change financing. "If this money is channelled through the World Bank and the IMF it will attract strings and conditions which are not favourable to Bangladesh," said a spokesman for the Bangladesh government. "If the money goes [via the bank] then it does not go to its real purpose. [We] want it to go through the UN." The Guardian revealed last summer that under the UK plan, known as the Multi Donor Trust Fund for Climate Change, £4.9m of the pledge will not reach Bangladesh but will be siphoned off by the bank as administration costs. Campaigners from the World Development Movement (WDM), Jubilee Debt Campaign and Friends of the Earth plan to protest tomorrow at Dfid over the UK proposals. They are also concerned that further payments planned for Bangladesh are loans, the repayment of which they say will force the country further into debt. "Tim Jones of the WDM said: 'The UK must be careful not to fall into the pattern of its former colonial ways by imposing conditions on an independent country. The World Bank is a deeply mistrusted institution that through its lending to developing countries has increased inequality, carbon emissions and debt in those countries.'" A group of 30 British and Bangladeshi campaign groups has suggested an alternative mechanism under which Bangladesh would distribute all the money through a national board. Md Shamsudhoha, a campaigner with Justice and Equity Bangladesh, said: "Channelling climate funds through the World Bank is a trickery of the British government to weaken the argument for channelling funds through the United Nations or national funds. Developing countries are opposing involvement of the World Bank in the management of climate finance because of its long history of imposing economic conditions on developing countries, fueling unjust debts and promoting dirty development." The £60m fund has also drawn criticism from the Bangladesh government because it will be paid from within existing Dfid budgets, potentially draining resources from other projects. Britain has pledged several times that such climate finance should be provided on top of existing aid commitments. A Dfid spokesperson said: "The government of Bangladesh will have full control over how the fund will be spent, with the World Bank simply administering the money. This approach is a tried and tested financial mechanism that ensures UK investment is used effectively." "The World Bank has a proven track record of administering funds on behalf of contributing donors and recipient governments."