

Pakistan calls on India to respond to talks proposal

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday it had put forward a roadmap on how to revive talks with India's political leadership, calling on New Delhi to respond to the proposal.

Foreign secretaries of the two South Asian rivals met in New Delhi last week, holding the first official talks since a shaky India-Pakistan peace process was suspended following the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

The civil servants agreed to keep in contact but made no progress on core disputes leaving both sides at loggerheads on how to take the dialogue forward.

India, aware that its offer of talks had been

criticised in some quarters at home as a sign of weakness, stressed that the bulk of the meeting had consisted of pressing Islamabad to combat militancy.

Pakistan complained about India's "narrow focus" on terrorism and has called for a resumption of the full-blown peace talks that were suspended after New Delhi and Washington blamed the Mumbai attacks on Pakistani militants.

"India at this point of time only wants to engage with Pakistan at foreign secretaries' level and to have other issues discussed at a working level," Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Basit told reporters.

Mullah Omar's son-in-law detained

ANI, Karachi

Pakistani security agencies have claimed another prized catch as they reportedly nabbed the son-in-law of Afghan Taliban's supreme commander Mullah Omar here yesterday.

According to sources, Motasim Agha Jan was arrested during a raid on a house in the Ehsan Abad area of the city.

Two close aides of Jan were also arrested during the raid, The Nation reports.

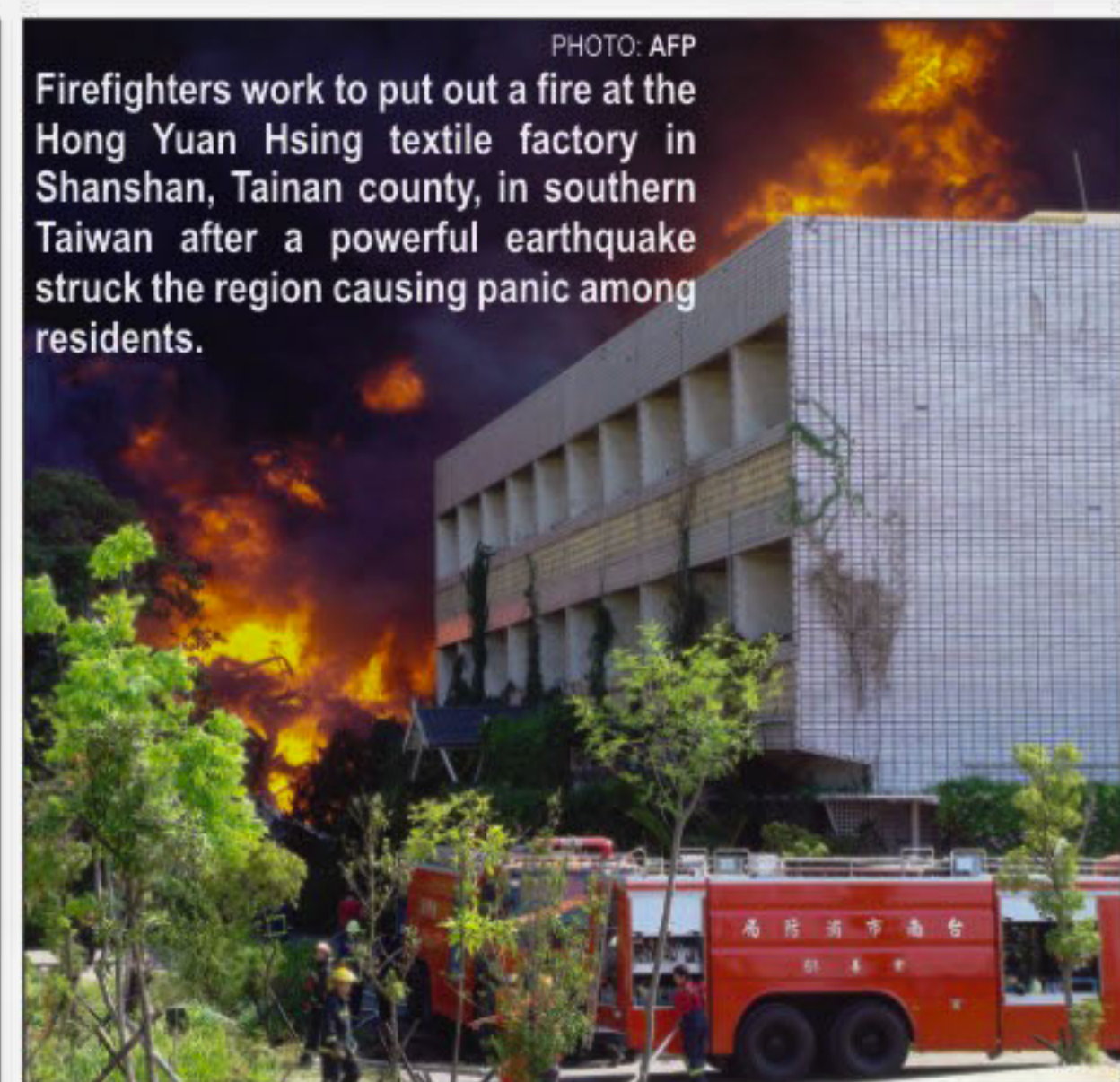


PHOTO: AFP
Firefighters work to put out a fire at the Hong Yuan Hsing textile factory in Shanshan, Tainan county, in southern Taiwan after a powerful earthquake struck the region causing panic among residents.

Strong quake strikes Taiwan

AFP, Taipei

A powerful quake jolted southern Taiwan yesterday, sending panicked residents fleeing from shaking buildings, toppling farm houses and derailing a carriage on a high-speed train.

Initial reports said at least 12 people had been injured in the 6.4-magnitude quake, which the US Geological Survey said struck about 70km from the island's second largest city Kaohsiung.

It was felt as far north as the capital Taipei, several hundred kilometres away.

Blasts claim 17 in Baghdad

AP, Baghdad

A string of blasts across the Iraqi capital targeting voters killed 17 people yesterday, authorities said, ratcheting up fear in an already tense city as many Iraqis cast early ballots ahead of Sunday's nationwide parliamentary elections.

Insurgents have repeatedly threatened to use violence to disrupt the elections, which will help determine who will oversee the country as US forces go home and whether the country can overcome its deep sectarian divides. Two of Thursday's blasts hit voters outside polling

stations.

"Terrorists wanted to hamper the elections, thus they started to blow themselves up in the streets," said Deputy Interior Minister Ayden Khalid Qader, who's responsible for election-related security across the country.

He said that because the bombers were not able to reach polling places due to security measures, they were targeting voters on their way to polling centres. Many of the victims were believed to be security personnel the main group to cast their ballots during early voting since they will be working on Election Day.

Benazir assassination case takes new turn

ANI, Islamabad

Investigations into the assassination of former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto have taken a new turn as Interior Ministry officials have revealed that they are looking for four retired military personnel who had eloped just before the December 2007 killing.

According to The Dawn, the officials are searching for four out of the eight ex-army officials associated with the main accused in the case Ibad ur Rehman.

The four other soldiers are still serving in the army. This is the first time that the investigators are probing into the possibility of army soldiers' involvement in Bhutto's assassination.

It is pertinent to mention here that the UN commission probing the murder is likely to submit its final report to the Pakistan government on March 31.

The commission's findings would be submitted to the US Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and would also be shared with the Pakistan government, a UN spokesperson said.

Iran threatens to withdraw nuke offer made to IAEA

AFP, Tehran

Iran may withdraw a counter-offer it made to the International Atomic Energy Agency in response to proposals from the major powers for the supply of nuclear fuel, its IAEA envoy warned yesterday.

"Iran's proposal for a simultaneous exchange on Iranian soil of our low enriched uranium for fuel enriched to 20 percent is still on the table but it will not stay there forever," Ali Asghar Soltanieh said, quoted by Mehr news agency.

His words echoed similar warnings of a time-limit from the major powers.

"Any development which might disturb the climate of cooperation" would prompt Iran to withdraw the offer, he added, alluding to the threat of new sanctions being levelled by Western governments with Russian support.

British PM faces Iraq war grilling today

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown faces a grilling over his role in the Iraq war to a public inquiry today, in an appearance fraught with risk ahead of a general election expected within weeks.

Former premier Tony Blair has been endlessly questioned about Britain's part in the 2003 invasion -- including by the inquiry in January -- but Brown has kept largely silent about his involvement while serving as Blair's finance minister.

Commentators suggest Brown held back from taking part in preparations until just before the war, although he has recently faced damaging allegations that, while in control of the Treasury, he squeezed the armed forces' budget.

Whether he emerges as a bit-part player or a key decision-maker, the hearing is a wild card ahead of an election expected to take place on May 6.

Inquiry chairman John Chilcot initially said he would not call Brown and other serving ministers until after the vote to avoid the hearing "being used as a platform for political advantage".

British boy kidnapped in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Robbers kidnapped a five-year-old British boy in Pakistan yesterday demanding a 150,000-dollar ransom, prompting his mother to make a tearful plea for the return of her "sweet little boy".

Sahil Saeed was snatched in the town of Jhelum about 100km south of the capital Islamabad at the end of a three-week family holiday visiting his grandmother with his Pakistani father, officials said.

4 militants jailed in Germany

AFP, Duesseldorf

A German court yesterday jailed four Islamic militants who dreamed of "mounting a second September 11" for a thwarted plot to attack US diplomats, soldiers and civilians.

Sentencing the extremists to between five and 12 years, Judge Ottmar Breidling said that they planned to stage a "monstrous bloodbath."

The four included two German converts to Islam, Fritz Gelowicz and Daniel Schneider, who each received 12 year jail terms. Adem Yilmaz, a Turkish citizen got 11 years while Atilla Selek, a German of Turkish origin was given five years.



PHOTO: AFP
A recent image released by the Field Museum shows the life reconstruction of Asilisaurus kongwe, a close dinosaur relative, from the Middle Triassic of Africa.

Dinosaur's oldest relative found

BBC ONLINE

Scientists have discovered a dinosaur-like creature 10 million years older than the earliest known dinosaurs.

Asilisaurus kongwe is a newly discovered herbivore that lived during the middle Triassic period - about 245 million years ago.

The scientists say that its age suggests that dinosaurs were also on the Earth earlier than previously thought.

They described their findings in the journal Nature.

The study was led by Dr Sterling Nesbitt from the University of Texas at Austin in the US.

He said: "This new evidence suggests that [dinosaurs] were really only one of several large and distinct groups of animals that exploded in diversity in the Triassic period, including silesaurs [like this one], pterosaurs, and several groups of crocodylian relatives."

Dr Randall Irmis from the Utah Museum of Natural History in the US was also involved in the study. He said that this group of creatures - the silesaurs - were the "closest relative of the dinosaurs".

63 KILLED IN TEMPLE STAMPEDE AT PRATAPGARH, UP



PHOTO: AFP
Frame taken from Headlines Today television channel shows an Indian woman crying at the scene of a stampede in Pratapgarh, 650km southeast of New Delhi yesterday. Sixty-three people, all of them women and children, were crushed to death in a stampede at a temple in northern India where a crowd had gathered for a religious festival.

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