

Indo-Pak PMs to meet today in Thimphu

AFP, Thimphu

India and Pakistan's leaders are to hold direct talks at a regional summit that opened in Bhutan yesterday, even as a spy scandal clouded prospects of resuming a substantive peace dialogue.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani will hold a bilateral meeting Thursday evening on the sidelines of the two-day summit, an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said.

He gave no indication as to how long the talks would last or what would be on the agenda.

The announcement came a day after New Delhi said a female diplomat working at the Indian embassy in Islamabad had been arrested on suspicion of passing secrets to Pakistani intelligence.

Speaking to reporters in Thimphu on Tuesday, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said any meeting should address the need to resume a full-fledged peace dialogue.

"It's time for India to make up its mind whether it wants to engage or not... Engagement is the only way forward," he said.

"We need to go beyond a handshake," Qureshi said, referring to Singh and Gilani's cursory exchange of pleasantries at a summit on nuclear security in Washington earlier this month.

The two prime ministers were in the Bhutanese capital to attend the 16th summit of the eight-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), which groups Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India broke off all dialogue with Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, in which at least 166 people died and which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militants.



Traditionally dressed Bhutanese performers prepare to dance during a welcome ceremony for South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (Saarc) summit in Bhutan's capital Thimphu yesterday.

Afghan blast kills six civilians

Elder shot dead

AFP, BBC ONLINE, Khost

At least six civilians were killed driving home from the shops when their vehicle struck an improvised bomb in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, an official said.

They were heading home from a weekly shopping trip when the roadside bomb widely seen in Taliban attacks on military targets, struck their vehicle, Mubarez Zadrani, a spokesman for the provincial government told AFP.

The incident in Tani district, a troubled region in Khost province, is the latest in a string of Taliban-related violence taking its toll on Afghan civilians -- about 2,000 of whom are killed each year, the United Nations has said.

"According to initial information from the area six people, all civilians, have been killed and four others injured," he said.

A prominent Afghan tribal leader who spoke of his fears of assassination by the Taliban has been killed near the southern city of Kandahar.

Unidentified gunmen shot Abdul Rahman in the head as he was walking home.

Brown in 'bigoted woman' jibe

AFP, London

Prime Minister Gordon Brown was caught out calling a voter a "bigoted woman" yesterday, in an embarrassing gaffe barely a week before a British general election.

Brown telephoned the woman to apologise a short time after meeting her while out campaigning, but the incident risks clouding the poll race ahead of next Thursday's ballots, in which Brown is struggling to cling on to power.

The Labour party leader was meeting voters in Rochdale, northwest England, when he encountered an elderly widow and, in front of TV cameras, had a discussion with her about the size of the national debt, tax and immigration.

PM and 22 other ministers resign in Myanmar

ANI, Myanmar

The military Junta in Myanmar, including the Prime Minister, has resigned and is expected to contest general elections to be held this year as civilians.

The Prime Minister, General Thein Sein, and twenty-two other Cabinet Ministers are reported to have given up their uniforms on Monday.

No official reason was given for this move. Meanwhile, no date has been given for the elections, which will be the country's first in two decades. It is expected to take place in October or November.

The elections will bring into force a new constitution in which a new national legislature will be made up of 330 elected civilians and 110 military representatives.

"They will be wearing suits rather than uniforms, but it's just the first stage in the transition from a military dictatorship to a civilian dictatorship," The Guardian quoted Mark Farmaner, the director of the Burma Campaign UK, a pro-democracy pressure group as saying.

Farmaner said that under the new constitution, real power would reside in a national defence and Security Council. Parliament would serve as no more than a rubber stamp.

Bomber blows himself

Wounds 4 cops in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

A man being interrogated by police in Myanmar detonated a bomb, killing himself and wounding four officers in eastern Kayah state, residents and officials said yesterday.

The bomb Tuesday was the latest in a series of explosions to hit the military-ruled nation in recent weeks, as the reclusive junta government prepares to hold the country's first elections in 20 years.

"A man about 30 years old exploded the bomb and killed himself. Four police beside him were injured during the blast at the police station," a resident of Loikaw town in Kayah state told AFP, requesting anonymity.

"We do not know how he exploded the bomb," he said.

South Asian leaders admit failing their region

AFP, Thimphu

South Asian leaders admitted yesterday a common failure to overcome their differences and tackle the key challenges in their conflict-ridden region, including poverty, climate change and terrorism.

Opening a summit of the eight-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in Bhutan, the host nation's Prime Minister Jigme Thinley said it was time for the bloc to take a long, critical look at itself.

In the 25 years since it was formed to encourage development and raise the living standards of a region that is home to one-fifth of humanity, "Saarc's journey has not been one of outstanding success", Thinley said.

"We are losing focus," he added, citing squabbles and tension between the bloc's member states that had prevented implementation of its numerous, but ultimately toothless, commitments to change.

"Fractious and quarrelsome neighbours do not make a prosperous community," he said. Many Saarc critics have blamed its failure to

exploit the region's common potential to the long and bitter rivalry between its two most powerful members, India and Pakistan, which has often hijacked the bloc's agenda.

The nuclear-armed neighbours have fought three wars since the subcontinent's 1947 partition and remain at loggerheads over the region of Kashmir.

They are also locked in a struggle for influence in Afghanistan, which joined Saarc in 2007.

The Indian and Pakistani prime ministers Manmohan Singh and Yousuf Raza Gilani both attended the summit, which comes at a time when their countries are, once again, barely on speaking terms.

A bilateral meeting between the two leaders has been scheduled for Thursday.

Addressing the regional gathering, Singh acknowledged that Saarc had fallen short of its founding aspirations.

"In looking back at these two-and-a-half decades we can claim the glass is half full, and compliment ourselves, or we can admit the glass is half empty and challenge ourselves," he said.

Sarkozy slams Israel PM's 'foot-dragging' on peace

AFP, Jerusalem

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has slammed Israel's prime minister for "foot-dragging" amid international efforts to relaunch the Middle East peace process, an Israeli newspaper said yesterday.

Citing unnamed officials, the centre-left Haaretz said Sarkozy had voiced disappointment with the hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a "very difficult" meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres.

"I'm disappointed with him," Sarkozy reportedly said. "With the friendship, sympathy and commitment we have toward Israel, we still can't accept this foot-dragging. I don't understand where Netanyahu is going or what he wants."

The comments were made during a meeting with Peres in Paris two weeks ago in which Sarkozy criticised Netanyahu for the first 15 minutes, the paper said.



Chinese President Hu Jintao (R) and French President Nicolas Sarkozy shake hands after a joint press statement at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Sarkozy arrived in Beijing for a visit aimed at reinvigorating ties tested two years ago over Tibet and winning China's support for new sanctions against Iran.

Channel 1 to challenge

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The government on Tuesday evening clamped a moratorium on the Channel 1 transmission for using rented broadcasting equipment in violation of the law.

Channel 1 Director Mazidul Islam, however, at the briefing claimed that One Entertainment Limited, the owning company of Channel 1, still owns the equipment, which was mortgaged to Prime Bank.

He said the bank sent a letter on April 14, 2010 in this regard to Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) saying One Entertainment broadcasting equipment had not been transferred to any other company.

"We are getting ready to take legal steps against the government move," Mazidul said.

Zia Ahmed, chairman of BTRC, said Peoples Entertainment won the bid and wanted to buy the channel. BTRC has the court judgment on the issue.

"The court also expressed its anxiety about the process of selling equipment to another party," he added.

The Channel 1 director announced that their employees will receive salaries in due time for the next six months. He, however, said, "The man-

agement is not ready to continue with the financial burden for a long time."

"I am not talking about laying off the channel. But it's a reality that without earning no organisation can run."

Channel 1 was established on June 1, 2005. It started broadcasting on January 24, 2006 with 400 employees. The channel's founder Giasuddin Al Mamun is known as a close associate of BNP Chief Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman.

Channel 1 had sold off its broadcasting equipment and has been using machinery owned by another company. But as per law, the licensee must own the equipment, said BTRC in its notice to the channel.

One Entertainment Ltd, owning company of Channel 1, took a loan of Tk 24 crore from Prime Bank in 2005 mortgaging the broadcasting equipment. The bank put it up for auction as the channel failed to pay back the loan.

Later, a company named Peoples Entertainment Ltd bought the equipment, but as per the Telecommunication Act 2001, radio equipment is not transferable to anyone who does not have a licence issued by the BTRC, said BTRC.

Mazidul said that the management of Channel 1 tried to reschedule the loans but the bank did not come forward.

Accused

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him out of the courtroom.

Court sources say Sumon, hailing from Jalalpur village in Dakshin Surma upazila, has been facing the charge since 2006 without much progress in the trial.

Sumon was furious yesterday when Additional District Judge-III Md Belayet Ullah started quizzing him around midday as witnesses' deposition could not be recorded amidst a court boycott programme by the lawyers.

At one stage, Sumon got agitated and asked the judge why the trial was being delayed so much. The judge ordered to put Sumon down from the dock.

An angry Sumon, all of a sudden, hurled one of his sandals at the judge.

Employees in the judge's office confirmed the incident. His personal staff informed The Daily Star he (judge) was not available and was busy in a meeting with the district judge.

Trial of many other cases remained in a virtual halt in Sylhet as all the lawyers have been boycotting the court of Additional District Judge-III Belayet Ullah since March 24 demanding his withdrawal, for what they claim, corruption and irregularities.

Contacted, Sylhet District Bar Association President EU Shahidul Islam confirmed yesterday's incident at the courtroom.

He said none of the lawyers are attending Belayet Ullah's court since March 24. "We have submitted written memo to the district judge and also to the higher judiciary demanding his immediate withdrawal from Sylhet."

2 more unsolicited deals

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installing and operating 2,000 MW rental power units. While Aggreko fits in to this category, Desh Energy does not.

According to Power Development Board, Desh Energy has experience of commissioning a 10 MW small power plant in Kumargaon under a 15-year contract with the PDB that it had won through an open tender. The company failed to commission the plant within the deadline, and it has obtained a court injunction against paying any penalty to the PDB.

Aggreko would sell power to the PDB for a price of around Tk 14.4 per kilowatt hour. The price is much higher than PDB's power sale tariff. The power ministry in its proposal to the cabinet purchase committee sought a monthly subsidy of Tk 140

crore to the PDB in this regard.

Desh Energy would sell power at a price of around Tk 10.7 per kilowatt hour. The PDB would need a Tk 64-crore monthly subsidy for purchasing power from this plant.

Besides, the ministry is negotiating with international rental power companies like GE, APR Energy, Caterpillar, M Power, Critical Power, Karkey Karadeniz Elektrik Uretim, Shoaibi and Global Power to ensure another 400 to 1,000 MW power before August.

The country's power shortage hovers between 1,000 MW and 2000 MW. The government's previous deals with several local power companies for installing rental power units on an urgent basis had failed to produce desired results because none of these companies owned power plant equipment. But a rental

power company is supposed to own such equipment.

Asked why Desh Energy's proposal was selected for unsolicited negotiation when it did not have experience of commissioning 2,000 MW power units, a top official of the PDB said, "We are negotiating with different categories of companies of different types. Desh's proposal fits into one category."

He explained that the first category of companies that are talking unsolicited deals with the government are the most experienced ones. The second category consists of those which are already in operation in the country, such as Summit and Desh Energy. And the third category includes companies which won rental power contracts in recent times but could not sign deals due to various reasons.

22 RMG units hit

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The workers, however, withdrew the barricades around 11:30am when high-ups of the factory assured them of partly fulfilling their legal demands. The workers did not go back to work.

On Tuesday, at least 38,000 workers of Sinha Group's Kanchpur unit brought out a procession and put barricade at Kanchpur point on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway for the same demands.

In another incident, workers of Arrow Apparels and Arrow Fashions Ltd in Ruppang blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway around 11:00am. Buses and trucks remained stranded for hours at the Ruppang point on the highway because of the barricade.

The workers withdrew the barricade around 1:00pm when officials of the two sister concerns of Mohammadi Group assured them of fulfilling their legal demands.

Talking to The Daily Star, Chairman of Sinha Group Anisur Rahman Sinha said he would talk with the workers to

fulfil their legal demands.

"The labour unrest is taking place because of a communication gap with the workers. I will sit with them to minimise the gap and fulfil their legal demands," Sinha said.

Labour unrest is no more an isolated incident for any garment factory, he said. A collective effort is a must to control such unrest, he added.

"I have already told Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association to take steps to quell the unrest in the sector," Sinha said.

Chairman of Mohammadi Group Anisul Hque, who is also the president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said his factory is not in arrears of salary and overtime. The workers are agitating for increased salary and attendance bonus.

"But, such kind of frequent incidents of labour unrest is a very bad signal to the country as international buyers lose confidence because of it," he said.

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**Invitation of Bids (IFB) for
Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Auditorium
Sound System at PKSF Bhaban.**

1. Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) is an apex microcredit funding and employment generation organization established by the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. PKSF now invites bids from reputed firms for Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Auditorium Sound System of PKSF Bhaban at Agargaon, Dhaka.
2. Interested firms are requested to collect the bid documents from the office of the Assistant General Manager (Construction & Maintenance) of PKSF and to visit the installation site.
3. Bids must be delivered to the office of the undersigned on or before 4:00 pm on May 09, 2010 and must be accompanied by earnest money of Taka 25,000/- (refundable) in the form of pay order or bank draft in favor of PKSF from any scheduled bank in Bangladesh.
4. PKSF reserves all rights to accept or reject any or all the bids without showing any reason and is not bound to award work order to the lowest bidder.

Assistant General Manager (Administration)