

Water dispute fuels Indo-Pak tensions

AP, GUJRAT, Pakistan

A bitter dispute over limited water resources is fuelling India-Pakistan tensions at a time when the South Asian neighbours are trying to rebuild trust and resume peace talks.

It's a long-running feud that has worsened in recent months as a dry spell focuses attention on Pakistan's growing water shortage. Three days of talks in March ended with both sides trading barbs and failing to reach a resolution.

The issue was raised Thursday when the leaders of the two countries met at a regional summit in Bhutan and agreed on the need to normalize relations, the Pakistani side said.

Further complicating the situation, Islamic extremists are trying to capitalise on allegations that India is stealing water from glacier-fed rivers that start in the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Independent experts say there is no evidence to support those charges, but they warn that Pakistani concerns about India's plans to build at least 15 new dams need to be addressed to avoid conflict.

"If you want to give Lashkar-e-Taiba and other Pakistani militants an issue that really rallies people, give them water," said John Briscoe, who has worked on water issues in the two countries for 35 years and was the World Bank's senior water adviser.

Farmers in Pakistan's central breadbasket are certainly angry. "India has blocked our water because they are our enemy," said Mohammad, a 65-year-old farmer in the town of Gujrat who goes by only one name.

His farm sits a few miles (kilometres) from the Chenab River, which residents say has been shrinking since India completed a hydroelectric dam in its part of Kashmir in 2008. In some sections, water flows in only a tenth of the riverbed, and nearby irrigation canals have dried up.



Chinese hostesses raise the flags of all the participating countries at the Shanghai World Expo in Shanghai yesterday. Shanghai kicked off the World Expo by setting the skies along its riverfront ablaze with fireworks, welcoming the huge showcase of culture and technology with a bang.

Oil spill sparks new drilling ban

BBC NEWS

The US administration has banned oil drilling in new areas of the US coast pending investigations into the cause of the oil spill off Louisiana.

"No additional drilling has been authorised and none will until we find out what happened," White House adviser David Axelrod told ABC television.

Last month President Barack Obama eased a moratorium on new offshore drilling.

Up to 5,000 barrels of oil a day are thought to be spilling into the water after last week's rig explosion.

The slick has begun to reach the Louisiana shore, and the US Navy has been sent to help avert an economic and environmental disaster.

Mr Axelrod announced the ban on drilling in new areas in an interview with ABC's Good Morning America programme yesterday.

He also defended the administration's response to the April 20 explosion that destroyed the BP-operated Deepwater Horizon rig, saying "we had the Coast Guard in almost immediately".

Thai hospital evacuated after protesters storm it

AP, Bangkok

A major Thai hospital evacuated patients and suspended all but emergency surgery yesterday after anti-government protesters stormed in to hunt for security forces they suspected were taking positions there overlooking their barricaded enclave.

A group of the so-called Red Shirts broke into Chulalongkorn Hospital late Thursday despite pleas from its director, then withdrew after not finding soldiers or police within the sprawling compound.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, whom the protesters seek to overthrow, went on nationwide television to criticize recent Red Shirt actions that have paralyzed areas of central Bangkok.

The Red Shirts, drawn mostly from the rural and urban poor, are demanding dissolution of Parliament and new elections, saying Abhisit came to power through the connivance of Bangkok's elite bureaucrats and the military, which ousted their hero -- ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra -- in a 2006 coup.

"It's not necessary for me to condemn (the hospital break-in) since Thai society and the world community have already done that," Abhisit said, adding that the government would "not allow any movements that pose threats to the public."

Despite such warnings, the Red Shirts have defied authorities at every turn, entering the

Parliament building, laying siege to a telecommunications complex, blocking roads and staging mass motorized rallies since setting up camp in the capital March 12. At least 27 people have died and nearly 1,000 have been injured in outbreaks of street violence.

Security forces have in almost every instance been unable or unwilling to stop the Red Shirt forays, including the incursion into the century-old public hospital, which feared a second break-in Friday.

However, Weng Tojirakarn, a Red Shirt leader and medical doctor, issued a "deep apology" for the raid staged by up to 100 protesters. He called it "inappropriate, too much, and unreasonable."

Later, the protesters opened up a section of their barricade to allow vehicles access to one of the entrances to the Chulalongkorn Hospital compound.

It was not clear whether Weng apologised because of the sharp negative reaction, or whether the foray was staged by some of the more radical Red Shirts rather than by general consensus.

About 100 police were sent to guard the hospital grounds.

"They can protest all they want but they should not come here, and they should not have prevented us from receiving service," said an angry Purin Supadith, one of many being turned away at the hospital's outpatient department Friday morning.

UK poll puts Cameron on top after final debate

AP, London

A new poll has declared Conservative Party leader David Cameron the winner of the final political TV debate before the British election, leaving Prime Minister Gordon Brown fighting to retain power with less than a week to campaign.

The Guardian/ICM poll, published yesterday, found that 35 percent of the respondents chose Cameron, compared to 29 percent for Brown, the Labour Party leader. Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg -- considered to have won the two previous debates -- attracted 27 percent.

The pollsters interviewed 510 adults by telephone -- they were randomly selected for a separate poll, and agreed to participate in a post-debate survey -- after Thursday night's broadcast.

The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

Vietnam celebrates 35th anniversary of war's end

AP, HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam

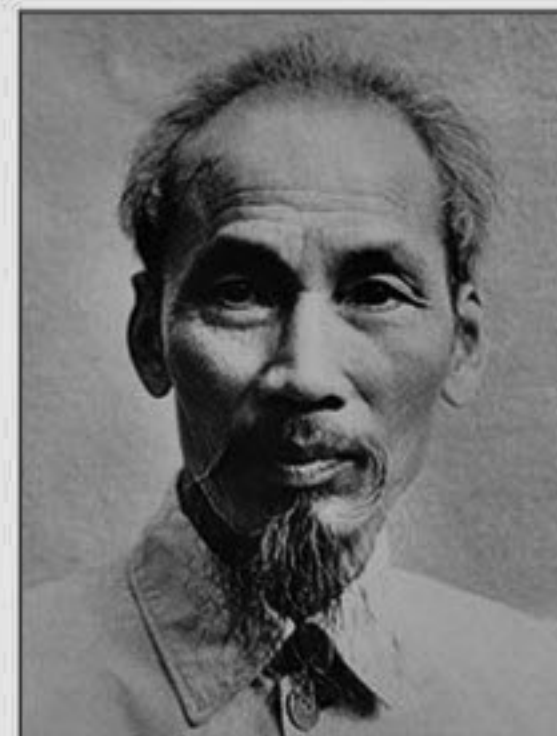
Communist Vietnam marked the 35th anniversary of the end of its war yesterday with a dramatic re-enactment of the day North Vietnamese tanks smashed through the gates of the former Presidential Palace and ousted the US-backed South Vietnam government.

The celebration took place as signs of the emerging market economy are everywhere in the city once known as Saigon and communist banners now compete with corporate logos.

A crowd of 50,000, many waving red and gold communist flags, lined the parade route, which was adorned with a massive poster of Ho Chi Minh, the father of Vietnam's revolution.

The proceedings brought back vivid memories for Do Thi Thanh Thuy, 49, who watched the tanks roll by her home on this day in 1975, when she was a junior high student. She and her neighbours on the outskirts of the former Saigon ran into the streets to cheer.

"When I saw those tanks, I felt so happy," said Thuy, who carried a red and gold flag adorned with communism's



Ho Chi Minh

hammer and a sickle symbol. "The South had been liberated, the country was united, and the war was over."

The fall of Saigon marked the official end of the Vietnam War and the decade-long US campaign against communism in Southeast Asia. The conflict claimed some 58,000 American lives and an estimated 3 million Vietnamese.

Yesterday's celebration featured patriotic songs, some of them put to a pulsing disco beat.

And in the day's re-enactment of the war's end, everyone in the former Saigon greeted the troops with jubilation.

Most of those in attendance were war veterans, party cadres and others selected by local communist organisations. The area was sealed off from ordinary citizens due to security concerns and police carefully monitored the foreign media in attendance.

Leading the delegation of dignitaries in attendance was President Nguyen Minh Triet, who presented Ho Chi Minh City with the highest honour he can bestow, a Gold Star medal. Also in the crowd were leaders and dignitaries from Cuba, Russia, Cambodia and Laos.

Farmer sets himself ablaze in China school attack

AFP, Beijing

A farmer attacked children with a hammer at a primary school in eastern China yesterday before fatally setting himself on fire in the latest in a wave of apparent copy-cat attacks, state media said.

The rampage in Shandong province left five children and a teacher hurt but in stable condition, Xinhua news agency said, as China ordered stepped up security at schools nationwide to prevent further attacks.

Before the incident, China had seen three stabbing frenzies at schools in the past month, including two this week alone, by mentally disturbed adults that left eight children dead and nearly 50 injured.

The attacks underscore how China -- which has enjoyed lower violent crime rates than the West -- faces a growing public safety threat from disgruntled individuals amid rising mental illness rates and loosening social controls.

In the Shandong attack, farmer Wang Yonglai broke through a gate at the Shangzhuang Primary School in Weifang city with his motorcycle and began hitting children with the hammer.

He also used it to strike the foot of one teacher who tried to block him, Xinhua said.

Wang then poured petrol over himself and ignited it while holding two of the children in his arms. Teachers pulled the children to safety and the man died at the scene, the report said.

The Ministry of Education yesterday issued an "urgent" notice calling on schools to strengthen security, tighten restrictions on campus visitors and devise emergency plans.



Activists from Pakistani working women's organisations shout slogans for better wages and conditions during a protest in Lahore yesterday, on the eve of International Labour Day.

Myanmar premier forming new election party

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's prime minister, who recently retired from his military post, has applied to form a new political party ahead of rare elections expected later this year, state media reported yesterday.

Thein Sein and 26 others registered to form the "Union Solidarity and Development Party" on Thursday at the election commission in the capital city of Naypyidaw, the Myanmar Ahlin and New Light of Myanmar newspapers said.

Although he was not named as the party's candidate for premier, official sources said the newly formed USDP was led by Thein Sein.

UN-backed Cambodia court rejects bail for Khmer Rouge leaders

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodia's UN-backed genocide court yesterday denied bail for three former Khmer Rouge leaders, saying they may commit serious crimes and their detention was necessary to prevent trial tampering.

Judges rejected appeals from former Khmer Rouge head of state Khieu Samphan, foreign minister Ieng Sary and his wife, minister of social affairs Ieng Thirith, who all asked for release ahead of their trial expected next year.

The three leaders, who have been charged with genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, murder, torture and religious persecution, appealed against their detention late last year and earlier this year.

"The Pre-Trial Chamber of the (tribunal) dismissed appeals lodged by the charged persons," a statement from the court said.

The tribunal said detention of the ageing suspects "remains a necessary measure" to prevent the suspects from fleeing the trial and to ensure their security.

Khieu Samphan, 78, Ieng Sary, 84, and Ieng Thirith, 78, were arrested in November 2007 over their roles in the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge government, and have appealed annually for release from detention at the court.

India, Japan to work on nuclear cooperation

ASIAN NEWS INTERNATIONAL, New Delhi

In a landmark development yesterday, India and Japan have agreed to put aside past differences on the nuclear issue, and will now work towards a civil-nuclear treaty with the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on civil-nuclear cooperation.

This key decision is said to have been finalised during a meeting between the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India, Montek Singh Alhwalia, and Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Masayuki Naoshima during the fourth ministerial-level meeting of the India-Japan Energy Dialogue here.

The Japanese industry is basically pushing its government to consider engaging India in nuclear trade, as companies from the United States, France and Russia seem to have already acquired a head start in terms of cornering Indian nuclear business.

The chairmen of leading Japanese compa-

nies like Toshiba, Mitsubishi and Hitachi, who are accompanying Minister Naoshima on his current visit to India, form the core-lobbying group, which is encouraging the Japanese Government to work out a civil nuclear deal with India.

During the dialogue, both Alhwalia and Naoshima welcomed the progress made so far in Working Group discussions by Japanese and Indian officials on energy efficiency, renewable energy, coal and electricity, and power generation.

While welcoming India's formal joining of the International Partnership for Energy Efficiency Cooperation (IPEEC) last year, both recognized that a viable and vibrant energy policy can contribute to addressing both energy requirements and reducing the negative impact of climate change.

It was agreed that the two countries would step up cooperation in the energy sector through concrete and pragmatic projects.

2 stranded Mexican journalists rescued

AP, OAXACA, Mexico

Mexican authorities have rescued two journalists who were stranded for nearly three days among feuding militants after a caravan of rights activists was caught in a deadly ambush.

Mexican magazine Contralinea says photographer David Cilia and reporter Erika Ramirez are being escorted to safety by police.

Contralinea Reporter Mayela Sanchez said yesterday the journalists were in stable condition and were being treated for injuries and dehydration.



A Bangladeshi woman is Nominated for the Oxford City Council Election

Mrs. Farida Anwar is the first Bangladeshi woman who has been nominated and selected by the liberal democrats to stand for UK general election as a councillor for Oxford city council election to be held on 6th May 2010.

Mrs. Farida has been living in UK for the last 40 years. She was in British civil service where she worked for the local government as a commissioner. Apart from her career she is engaged with various social organizations. She is an active member of Unison, the largest union for public service employees.

She is an elected member of the executive committee, Oxfordshire council for community relations, elected chairperson of Bangladesh association in Oxford and now honorary secretary of Oxfordshire Bangladesh Association. In the past several years she was always been a devoted Bangladeshi and organized and celebrated events on all the special days of Bangladesh.

She is the elder daughter of late Shah Mohammad Israil Haq of Laskardia, Faridpur. She is married, mother of a daughter.