



UN chief Ban Ki-moon (C), Rwandan President Paul Kagame (3L, down) and Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos (3R, down) pose for a group picture with participants of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Advocacy Group at the Ritz Hotel in Madrid yesterday, before the first meeting of the group to advance the goals, which include halving extreme poverty by 2015.

Clinton to seek signs of progress in Afghanistan

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton heads to Afghanistan next week for a crucial conference that US officials hope will clarify the long-term goals of an expensive, unpopular and increasingly uncertain war.

breadth of the administration's challenge and sharpen doubts among U.S. lawmakers ahead of tough November elections that -- after nine years and \$345 billion -- the Afghan war is lurching in the wrong direction.

Clinton and other U.S. officials support outreach to "reformed" Taliban who renounce violence, cut ties to al Qaeda and pledge allegiance to the government - which would appear to rule out headline Taliban leaders.

Blast kills eight, injures 14 in Khyber

REUTERS, Pakistan

A bomb blast in a weekly bazaar killed eight people and wounded 14 in Pakistan's tribal region of Khyber on the Afghan border yesterday, a senior government official said.

There was no independent verification of the casualty figures, and militant groups often dispute the military's accounts.

Second day of unrest in Maldives

IANS, Colombo

Demonstrators were on the streets of Male, the Maldives capital, yesterday protesting the previous day's arrest of the leader of the main opposition party, officials said.

The Maldives National Defence Force took People's Alliance party chief Abdulla Yamin into custody Thursday, claiming it was at his request and for his own protection.

The defence force refused to bring him to a court hearing as requested by the judge and took him into military custody instead, prompting his supporters to protest and clash with supporters of the ruling Maldives Democratic Party.

The president's office released a statement yesterday saying, "the government will take legal action against those who have engaged in unrest in Male", and accusing Yamin's supporters of instigating the violence.

The tourism-dependent country has been in turmoil since the cabinet resigned June 29 protesting blocking tactics by the parliamentary opposition, who have a slim majority in the Maldivian Majlis.

The cabinet was restored July 8 after Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa intervened.

China bans plastic bags in Tibet

IANS, Lhasa

China has banned ultra-thin plastic bags in ecologically fragile southwestern Tibet Autonomous Region.

In a circular yesterday, the government ordered all prefectures and counties to replace these bags with the cloth ones.

The move is mainly aimed at tackling pollution at tourist sites, Xinhua reported.

The government has banned the manufacture, sale and use of plastic bags that are under 0.025 mm thick by the end of this year to curb 'white pollution' in the region.

Pakistan blames India for lack of progress in talks

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said yesterday that India's "selective" approach to issues has led to what analysts say is a stalemate in talks aimed to build trust shattered by the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Qureshi and his Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna met in Islamabad on Thursday and agreed on more talks but failed to announce any concrete measures that might soothe tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

"I could see from yesterday's talks that they want to be selective. When they say all issues are on the table then they cannot, they should not, be selective," Qureshi told reporters after attending a ceremony for new diplomats in Islamabad.

"Progress in talks can only be possible if we move forward on all issues in tandem."

He said that there had been no resistance from the Pakistani side in the talks.

Security remains India's top concern after the attack on Mumbai by Pakistani militants, which killed 166 people.

India blames Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants for the attacks, and in remarks published in an Indian newspaper on Wednesday, Indian Home Secretary G.K. Pillai accused Pakistan's main spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), of orchestrating the assault.

India has linked the relaunching of peace talks between the two South Asian rivals with Pakistan's action against the perpetrators of the attack.

But Qureshi warned against India's attitude.

"If we give heed to those issues which they consider important and those issues in which Pakistan is interested are neglected then things cannot move forward," he said.

"They have to sit with an open mind and we have to move forward with an open heart."

Pakistan wants discussions on other issues, including its core dispute with India over the Himalayan region of Kashmir, the cause of two of the three wars between the two countries since independence from Britain in 1947.

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