



PHOTO: AFP
The US Joint Chief of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen (L) shakes hands with Indian Defence Minister AK Antony during a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. India and the US have signed an anti-terrorism pact, a day after Pentagon's top military officer warned extremists could try and stage fresh attacks on the South Asian country.

India-US sign counter terrorism cooperation initiative

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India and the United States yesterday signed a Counter Terrorism Initiative that includes steps to check financing of terror activities, joint probe in cases of bomb blasts besides cooperation in cyber and border security.

"Today, with the formal signing of the initiative, we take several significant steps forward against terrorism," US Ambassador to India Timothy J Roemer, who signed the agreement along with Indian Home Secretary G K Pillai, told reporters here.

Terming the pact as symbolic of the "indispensable partnership" against terrorism, Roemer said both the countries will work closely in matters like intelligence sharing and probe into bomb blasts.

"In the coming days and months, there will be even closer information sharing and collaborative efforts on issues ranging from bomb blast probe and major event security to mega-city policing, cyber and border security," he said.

The pact was initiated on the sidelines of the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the US in November, 2009.

"President (Barack) Obama and Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) have acknowledged the common threat that international terrorism poses to all people," Roemer said.

The initiative provides for strengthening capabilities to effectively combat terrorism; promotion of exchanges regarding modernisation of techniques; sharing of best practices on issues of mutual interest; development of investigative skills and promotion of cooperation in forensic science laboratories.

Besides, it seeks to establish procedures to provide mutual investigative assistance; enhancing capabilities to act against money laundering, counterfeit currency and financing of terrorism; exchanging best practices on mass transit and rail security; increasing exchanges between Coast Guards and Navy on maritime security.

Hillary denounces Myanmar oppression

AFP, Hanoi

The United States told an Asian security forum yesterday it was "deeply concerned" about oppression in Myanmar, calling for the release of political prisoners and an end to attacks against ethnic minorities.

Speaking at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Hanoi, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Myanmar's "restrictive electoral laws" further stifled civilians' lives and made polls due this year "unlikely" to be free and fair.

Her comments came after the US Congress on Thursday renewed a ban on imports from Myanmar, also known as Burma, for another year, seeking to pressure the regime over human rights and democracy as well as alleged ties to North Korea.

"The United States... remains deeply concerned about the oppression taking place in Burma," Clinton told the 27-member ARF in prepared remarks.

She urged the junta to "put in place the necessary conditions" for its first polls in two decades to be credible, including releasing political prisoners, ceasing attacks on ethnic minorities and respecting human rights.

The opposition National League for Democracy, led by detained Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, is boycotting the vote because of laws which would have forced it to expel her and other members in prison before it could participate.

The party won Myanmar's last polls in 1990

by a landslide but the military never allowed it to take power, and Suu Kyi has spent much of the past 20 years in jail or under house arrest.

Separately, the top European Union minister at the ARF talks said Myanmar was at a crossroads.

Janos Martonyi, the Hungarian foreign minister, said "there is perhaps now an opportunity to steer the country towards a better future. There is at least a possibility for that if the elections turn out to be fair and inclusive."

The alternative, he told reporters, is for the country to maintain its present policies "and this leads to further economic stagnation and isolation."

Clinton also called on Myanmar's Asian neighbours to remind the regime of its international obligations in terms of nuclear nonproliferation, saying "recent events have called that commitment into question."

On Thursday Clinton expressed concern over exports of military equipment from North Korea to Myanmar and reports that the regime may be seeking Pyongyang's assistance over a nuclear programme.

"What's happening in Burma is not only dangerous for the people who endure life under the regime, though they are first and foremost on our minds," she told the forum yesterday.

"There is a direct link between whether a society is open and free, whether it respects human rights and the will of the people, and whether it is stable, secure, healthy, and economically dynamic."

BJP alleges 'misuse' of CBI, refuses lunch with Manmohan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The top leadership of India's main opposition BJP yesterday refused to lunch with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, angered by summons by an investigation agency to a key aide of Gujarat Minister Narendra Modi in connection with the killing of a man in a fake encounter with the police.

Hours before the lunch to be hosted by Singh--customary ahead of a new session of Parliament, for BJP President Nitin Gadkari, senior leader L K Advani and leaders of the opposition in both Houses of Parliament Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley, the party called it off.

Advani called leader of the House in Lok Sabha Pranab Mukherjee and expressed his inability to attend the lunch. Parliament's monsoon session begins on Monday.

The four leaders, who had accepted the lunch invitation, met Thursday evening and decided that they would not honour it since the "environment was not cordial", Swaraj told a press conference yesterday after a meeting of BJP leaders at

Advani's residence.

The atmosphere had become so vitiated that it would not appear well to have lunch with him, she said.

Swaraj and Jaitley accused the government of "unashamedly misusing" Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for political purposes.

The CBI, controlled by the federal government headed by ruling Congress party, has summoned Gujarat's junior minister for Home Amit Shah in connection with the killing of Sheikh Sohrabuddin in a fake encounter with police in Gujarat in 2005.

BJP said the entire investigation in the Sohrabuddin encounter killing case was "motivated with a political agenda in mind and was concocted".

On the other hand, government rejected BJP's charge that it misused CBI in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case in which Amit Shah has been summoned by the probe agency.

"These charges have been levelled on a number of occasions. In these politically sensitive cases, CBI has gone into investigation following court orders and it is

being supervised by the Central Vigilance Commission", Minister of State for Personnel, Prithviraj Chavan, told reporters.

In such a situation, how can anyone say that it was working on the directions of the central government, Chavan, under whose ministry CBI functions, said on BJP's allegation that the agency has become "Congress Bureau of Investigation".

Parliamentary Affairs Minister P K Bansal described as "unfortunate" the rejection of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's invitation to top BJP leaders for lunch.

"I wish they had responded to the prime minister's invitation. In a democracy, they could have utilised the opportunity to bring the matter to the notice of the prime minister," he said.

Congress said BJP leadership was "scared" of investigations in Sohrabuddin encounter killing case and termed BJP leadership's rejection of the prime minister's lunch as "churlish".

Caged, they see life

FROM PAGE-16

zoo authorities and unsuitable weather.

A few of these animals have already spent several years in tiny cages, have aged, are sick and are waiting like inmates in death row. They had entertained thousands of people during their stay in the zoo.

However, the government is now thinking about purchasing mates for these lonely animals.

"We have submitted a proposal regarding this. We'll buy some new animals if the project gets approval," said ABM Shahid Ullah, acting curator of Dhaka Zoo, yesterday.

At the Dhaka Zoo yesterday, it was seen a male wildebeest, a female mandrill, a female civet, a Guinea baboon, two male estuarine crocodile, a male ostrich, a male white pelican, a dingo dog, a male ratel, two male spotted wolves, two male striped wolves, two female greater kudu, a male chimpanzee and a female rhinoceros are alone in the zoo.

When asked if the last surviving rather weak and skinny looking rhino was sick, the acting curator said, "The rhino is well. Even the elephant seemed well in the morning. It died suddenly due to old age complications."

Following the death of the oldest animals in the zoo, Pabantara, nearly a century old female elephant Thursday, the acting curator said another 41 animals are very old.

"Some of the animals have survived more than their usual life span in captivity. In other countries, the old and sick animals are moved out of the zoo. But we do not have such provisions," he said.

According to the official statements of the zoo authorities, an elephant named Kusumtara, two hippopotamuses, a sambar deer, a rhinoceros, a chimp, three Asian black bears, two Indian lions, a Bengal tiger, two striped wolves, a spotted wolf, six great adjutants, two lilford cranes, a sarus crane, an ostrich, two banded krait snakes, an olive baboon, a civet, a otter, pythons, a golden breasted monkey, alligators, an estuarine crocodile and a female guinea baboon are living beyond their life expectancy.

The official age chart of the zoo shows that some species including the lilford crane, pelican and great adjutant, ostrich, striped wolves and banded kraits have lived beyond their life expectancy by seven to 17 years.

"We need more space to take good care of the animals. We are doing our best within this limited space and budget," said Shahid Ullah claiming that all the staff of the zoo work hard all day long.

The government had formed several enquiry committees and suspended and transferred many zoo officials in last 18 months following deaths of 23 animals. But the situation in the zoo has not improved at all.

The zoo is located on about 186 acres of land in Mirpur housing around 2,160 animals, 157 species.

Of them, 57 species are mammals, 61 bird species, 11 reptile species and 28 species of fish.

Every day the zoo attracts about 10,000 visitors.

Pakistan extends army chief's term

BBC ONLINE

Pakistan's prime minister has extended the term of the country's army chief by three years to maintain continuity in the fight against the Taliban.

Gen Ashfaq Kayani had been due to retire in November.

Correspondents say the decision was widely expected in Pakistan, particularly due to Gen Kayani's good relationship with the US.

Pakistan has a long history of military rule, and the army still plays a dominant role.

The BBC's Aleem Maqbool in Islamabad said the move could alarm some Pakistanis, and some of the country's neighbours, concerned with the influence of senior army figures in the country.

In a short, unscheduled television address, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani said it was essential that Gen Kayani stay on at such a crucial time in the "war against terror".

Gen Kayani, who succeeded Gen Pervez Musharraf three years ago, is regarded by the US as a crucial player as it plans its military withdrawal from Afghanistan, our correspondent says.

He has led several major offensives in the volatile north-west border regions with Afghanistan.

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