

India now strong contender for permanent seat

Says Krishna on becoming non-permanent member of UN Security Council

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, IANS, UN

After securing a non-permanent berth in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Tuesday, India is looking at ways to overcome the formidable obstacles on the road to be a permanent member at the UNSC.

Asserting that Indian shoulders are strong and broad enough to carry the varied responsibilities of a UNSC non-permanent member, External Affairs Minister SM Krishna stressed that the victory margin shows that India is a strong contender for a permanent seat.

The Minister was interacting with editors a day after India won 187 votes in the 192-member United Nations to become a non-permanent member for 2011-12 after a gap of 19 years.

India last held a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council in 1992. With Kazakhstan withdrawing from the race in January, India became the sole candidate from the Asian region and its election to the non-permanent seat had become a near certainty.

South Africa and Colombia also won the African and Latin American seats for a two-year term on the powerful decision-making body starting Jan 1, 2011.

The victory margin, and the presence of its G-4 partners, Germany and Brazil in the UNSC as well as South Africa as non-permanent members in the council have obviously bolstered India's plans for a permanent seat.

Krishna hoped India as a non-permanent member can deal with all the challenging issues before the world body. When asked about how it would balance its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Krishna said it's a much greater responsibility. The Minister, then, recounted India voting against Iran on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolutions and how later it prevailed over the Tehran leadership with its explanation.



The last of the 33 Chilean miners to be rescued, Luis Urzua (C), greets Chilean President Sebastian Pinera (R) after exiting the Fenix 2 capsule after being brought to the surface from the San Jose mine, near Copiapo, Chile yesterday.

Rescued miners reveal details about confinement

CNN ONLINE

A note, written in red and recovered on August 22, filled a nation with hope.

"We are fine in the shelter, the 33 of us," the note, attached to a probe by miners trapped inside the San Jose mine, said. It was the first evidence found that they were alive.

On Wednesday, the last of the 33 miners was rescued, marking the end of a harrowing 69 days.

With the rescue, new details are emerging from the miners about their experiences in captivity. Among the revelations is that the famous proof of life note was not the only note that the miners wanted to send to the surface.

Luis Urzua, the shift foreman and last miner out, recounted for Chilean President Pinera the exciting moment when the probe reached the miners for the first time.

"We had a protocol for when it arrived, but everyone nearly forgot it," Urzua said. "Everyone wanted to hug the hammer (on the probe)."

Some of the miners wanted to send notes to the surface such as "Send me some potatoes," "I'm hungry," and many messages to family members on the surface.

These potential notes reflect what some miners have described as the hardest times, the first part of their ordeal. At the time that the probe reached the miners, they had survived for 17 days by sharing small amounts of tuna and mackerel that were in the shelter. At that point, they were eating only once every 48 hours.

They didn't know when their next real meal would come. They didn't know when they would see their loved ones again.

In the end, their training kicked in and they sent the now-famous note.

Even during the difficult times, Urzua said that "we had hope that some day we would be rescued."

Another miner, Mario Sepulveda, said Wednesday that he emerged from his confinement a changed man.

"I was with God, and I was with the devil. They fought, and God won," he said.

Sepulveda has advice for those who take undue risks in their lives.

Karnataka govt wins second confidence vote

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The BJP government in southern Indian state of Karnataka yesterday won a fresh vote of confidence by just six votes in the state assembly, just three days after a similar exercise, which was marred by controversy.

Chief Minister B S Yeddyurappa, who moved the trust motion, won 106 votes, as against 100 MLAs who said they had no confidence in his government. A lawmaker of Janata Dal (Secular) abstained from the voting.

Karnataka Governor H R Bhardwaj had declared Monday's confidence vote a 'farce' and offered Yeddyurappa a second opportunity to prove his majority in the 224-member House yesterday. The entire opposition had rejected the October 11 exercise.

PAKISTAN ARRESTS 7 MILITANTS Foils plot to kill PM

AP, Multan

Pakistani police arrested a group of Islamist militants who were plotting to kill the prime minister and other top government officials, a top officer said yesterday.

The conspiracy against Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani was "almost complete," said Abid Qadri, a regional police chief. He said the militants were planning to attack Gilani when he travelled to his hometown of Multan, but gave no more details.

Militants in Pakistan have frequently attacked government officials, security officers and political leaders as part of a campaign to destabilize the US-allied government and take over the state. Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was killed in a gun-and-bomb attack near Islamabad in 2007.

Like other top officials, Gilani does not publicize his movements ahead of time and travels with extensive security.

Qadri did not offer any evidence to back up his allegations.

He said authorities learned about the plot during an initial interrogation of the seven militants, who were arrested late Wednesday after a shootout near a village in central Pakistan.

The militants opened fire when police tried to pull their car over for a routine check, Qadri said. Nobody was wounded in the shooting, but two men managed to escape, he said.

The men are members of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a banned Sunni Muslim militant group linked to both the Taliban and al-Qaeda, Qadri said. The group has been blamed for attacking minority Shiite worship places as well as assaults on security forces and other targets.

Some of the suspects are believed to have taken part in an attack last year on the offices of Pakistan's main spy agency in Multan, which is in Punjab province in central Pakistan, Qadri said.

Nepalese teen becomes world's smallest man

AFP, Pokhara

A Nepalese teenager whose tiny stature has made him a celebrity in his homeland entered the record books as the world's shortest man yesterday as he celebrated his 18th birthday.

Khagendra Thapa Magar takes over from 24-year-old Edward "Nino" Hernandez from Colombia, who loses the title after just five weeks, following final checks that found his Nepalese rival was 0.4 inches (one centimetre) smaller.

A team of Guinness World Records adjudicators put Magar's official height at 26.4 inches (67.08 centimetres) after taking final measurements early Thursday, and named him the new record-holder.

"Khagendra Thapa Magar is now officially the shortest man in the world," said head of global records Marco Frigatti at a ceremony in the picturesque Himalayan town of Pokhara in central Nepal, near where Magar grew up.

Taliban ready for talks Says Afghan peace council chief

AP, Kabul

A former Afghan president who heads a new peace council said yesterday that he's convinced the Taliban are ready to negotiate peace.

Burhanuddin Rabbani told reporters in Kabul that the Taliban have not completely rejected the idea of negotiating a non-military resolution of the war.

"They have some conditions to start the negotiations process. It gives us hope that they want to talk and negotiate," Rabbani said.

"We are taking our first steps," he said. "I believe there are people among the Taliban that have a message that they want to talk. They are ready."

The Afghan government has acknowledged that it has been involved in reconciliation talks with the Taliban, but discussions between the two sides have been described as mostly informal and indirect message exchanges relying on mediators.

The Afghan Taliban, meanwhile, have denied having discussions. In a message posted on its website this week, the group said the notion of talks with the enemy was "baseless propaganda" and that negotiations would be a "waste of time."

In Brussels on Wednesday, a senior Nato official confirmed that it has provided safe passage for top Taliban leaders to travel to Kabul for face-to-face negotiations with the Afghan government.

CHINA UNDER FRESH PRESSURE Nobel prize tantamount to 'encouraging crime'

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday denounced the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to dissident Liu Xiaobo as tantamount to "encouraging crime," as state media said the award was part of a Western "ideological war" against Beijing.

"Liu Xiaobo is a convicted criminal. Awarding the Nobel Prize to him is equivalent to encouraging crime," foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu told reporters.

Liu, 54, was sentenced last December to 11 years in jail for subversion. He was awarded the peace prize last week by Oslo's Nobel Committee for his advocacy of political reform and human rights in one-party China.

China faced fresh criticism over its angry reaction to dissident Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Prize, with Norway calling it "inappropriate" and Japan urging Beijing to free the jailed peace laureate.

"Liu Xiaobo is a convicted criminal. Awarding the Nobel Prize to him is equivalent to encouraging crime," foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu told reporters.

The comments came after his wife, Liu Xia, complained bitterly on Wednesday over her "illegal house arrest", a move that had already drawn a rebuke from Washington and Brussels. She has been largely confined to her Beijing home since Friday, when Oslo's Nobel Committee awarded this year's peace prize to her dissident husband for his advocacy of political reform and human rights in one-party China.

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan on Thursday added his voice to those urging the release of the 54-year-old writer and former professor, risking Beijing's ire just as Japan and China seek to put a damaging diplomatic spat behind them.

"From the viewpoint that universal human rights should be protected across national borders, it is desirable" that Liu be released, Kan told his parliament.

"I think it is important that human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are universal values, should also be guaranteed in China."



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and visiting Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse attend the closing ceremony of the XIX Commonwealth Games at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi yesterday.

Rights groups won't testify to Lanka panel

AP, Colombo

Three international rights groups have declined to testify before a government-appointed commission inquiring into Sri Lanka's civil war, saying it lacks independence and has no mandate to investigate alleged war crimes.

Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and Amnesty International have jointly written to Sri Lanka's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission to decline invitations to testify, a statement said Thursday.

The groups contend the commission would not operate independently because its members were appointed by the government; moreover, the body had no real mandate to probe alleged war crimes reported in the last stages of the war.

Queen cancels staff Christmas party for austerity

AFP, London

Queen Elizabeth II has called off this year's Christmas party at Buckingham Palace to show restraint as Britain braces for a wave of austerity cutbacks.

The biennial December party for around 600 royal staff, paid for out of the queen's private money, costs around 50,000 pounds (80,000 dollars, 57,000 euros), The Sun newspaper said.

"Given the current economic climate, it was thought that it was appropriate for the household to show restraint," a palace spokesman told AFP on Thursday.

"The Queen is acutely aware of the difficult economic circumstances facing the country."

Hiroshima, Nagasaki protest US nuclear test

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese officials from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world's only cities to have been hit by atomic bombs, expressed their outrage and regret yesterday at a US nuclear test conducted last month.

The US government said on Tuesday that it had carried out a subcritical nuclear test, which does not entail a chain reaction for a nuclear explosion, at a Nevada underground test site in September.

"I am outraged by your trampling on the expectations and hopes of the A-bomb survivors and the vast majority of the Earth's inhabitants," Hiroshima mayor Tadatoshi Akiba said in a protest letter sent to the US embassy in Japan.

OVER NOBEL LAUREATE Ahmadinejad to tour Israel border

AFP, Beirut

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad comes the closest he has ever been to his arch-enemy Israel yesterday when he tours Lebanon's southern border region on the second day of a high-profile visit.

The hardline leader, who has questioned the Holocaust and described Israel as a "tumour," will stand some four kilometres (about two miles) from the Jewish state on the final leg of a controversial two-day visit to Lebanon that Washington has described as "provocative".

Israeli officials have slammed his visit as a sign Lebanon had "joined the axis of extremist states." "It is a provocative and destabilising visit," foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told AFP in Jerusalem. "It appears his intentions are blatantly hostile and he is coming to play with fire."

Ahmadinejad's visit was "like a landlord visiting his domain," he added.

The Iranian leader has received a hero's welcome among supporters of Shiite militant

Hezbollah who turned out en masse and showed him with rice and rose petals on his arrival Wednesday.

The visit has underscored Iran's reach in Lebanon through its proxy Hezbollah, the most powerful military and political force in the country.

However, the trip has drawn criticism from Lebanon's pro-Western parliamentary majority, who see it as an attempt to turn the country into "an Iranian base on the Mediterranean."

Thursday's tour includes a stop in Bint Jbeil, a village demolished by Israel during its 2006 war with Hezbollah.

He will also visit Qana, which has earned a grim place in history after being targeted by Israeli shelling that killed 105 civilians who had sought shelter in a UN base in 1996 during the Jewish state's "Grapes of Wrath" offensive on Lebanon.

The village was again the site of tragedy when a shelter collapsed on dozens of residents, including disabled children, during Israeli strikes at the height of the month-long 2006 war.

Greek riot police storm Acropolis

AFP, Athens

Riot police yesterday stormed the Acropolis, Greece's best-known monument, to break up a blockade by protesting culture ministry staff.

The police broke into the monument perimeter through a side entrance and pursued dozens of protesters, who grabbed onto the fence to prevent their removal from the site in central Athens, television footage showed.

Police subsequently used tear gas to disperse media thronging the front entrance in order to surround the protesters.

The union representing temporary culture ministry staff began the blockade on Tuesday to protest the imminent dismissal of 320 employees whose contracts expire at the end of the month.

They also want the state to settle unpaid salaries which they say are worth five million euros (seven million dollars) over two years.

The protesters had intended to blockade the Acropolis until October 31.

The chairman of temporary culture ministry staff, Nikos Hasomeris, had earlier warned the authorities not to attempt to break the blockade by force.

"All our colleagues stand beside us, so the monument will not operate today no matter what happens," he told Mega television.

IVF births result in taller kids: Study

AFP, Wellington

Children born using in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) are likely to be taller than their naturally conceived counterparts, New Zealand researchers have found.

The study by Auckland University's Liggins Institute found IVF children conceived from fresh, rather than frozen, embryos were about 2.6 centimetres (1.02 inches) taller than non-IVF children by the age of six.

The research, which examined about 200 children, found the height difference was statistically significant, even after adjusting for variables such as the parents' height.

Liggins Institute director Wayne Cutfield said the phenomenon was most striking in girls.