

US to present Afghan pullout plan within week

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The United States and its allies plan to begin transferring security enforcement to Afghan forces in parts of the country in the next 18 to 24 months, The New York Times reported.

The US plan is to be presented at a Nato meeting in Lisbon later this week to decide on a "roadmap" that could allow the alliance to wind down its forces. Building up Afghan security forces as quickly as possible is key to the withdrawal strategy.

The US strategy, the most concrete to date, is similar to the path taken in Iraq, where a surge in troops initiated by the Bush administration enabled Barack Obama, the US president, to pull out most US soldiers by late 2009.

"Iraq is a pretty decent blueprint for how to transition in Afghanistan," an anonymous US official told the paper on Sunday.

"But the key will be constructing an Afghan force that is truly capable of taking the lead."

Leaders of the 28-member Nato bloc are gathering in the Portuguese capital Lisbon on Friday, where they are expected to endorse the aspiration expressed by Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, for Afghan security forces to take the lead in all provinces by 2014. Targets set by the US aim for the Afghan army and police to grow from 260,000 to 306,000 by next October.

TALIBAN ATTACK

On Monday, Taliban fighters launched an attack on a telecommunications tower, killing nine security guards and a police officer in the ensuing firefight, police have said.

Police said the raid on the tower, in Kunduz province, took place before dawn.

Seven Taliban fighters were killed in the attack, they said.

The guards were local villagers tasked with protecting the telecommunications tower and its workers.

Meanwhile, the number of Nato soldiers killed in a clash with Taliban fighters on the weekend rose to five. The death toll was the highest for foreign troops in six months.

The Nato-led forces did not say where the fighting occurred, but the Taliban said on their website that they had battled Nato troops for several hours in eastern Kunar province on Sunday.

A total of seven soldiers from the Nato-led force were killed on Sunday, including a Dane and Briton in separate explosions in the south.



A huge fire has broken out in a Shanghai building, killing at least eight people, injuring 90 and sending plumes of black smoke billowing across the city.

Fire engulfs Shanghai high-rise, eight dead

AFP, Shanghai

A fire engulfed a Shanghai high-rise building yesterday, killing eight and injuring 90, as panicked residents stumbled over each other as they fled and thick smoke spread over China's commercial hub.

The 28-storey building is one of the most densely populated districts of the city of nearly 20 million people was under renovation when the blaze broke out around lunch-time.

Spectacular bright orange flames could be seen enveloping the scaffolding and spreading to the building as the fire raged, gutting much of the structure. The smoke could be seen from several kilometres (miles) away.

Survivor Li Xiuyun, 61, said she fled down the steps of the building with her husband, son and a granddaughter from their home on the 16th floor until they met up with firefighters who took them to safety.

"The smoke was very strong and the glass from the windows was scalding," she told AFP at the Jingan District Hospital, adding that she cut her feet on shattered glass when fleeing.

PHOTO: ALJAZEERA

Dalai Lama hails Suu Kyi's release

AFP, Dharamshala/paris

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama yesterday hailed the release of Myanmar's democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi.

"I welcome the release of fellow Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and extend my appreciation to the military regime in Burma (Myanmar)," the Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, said in a statement.

"I extend my full support and solidarity to the movement for democracy in Burma and take this opportunity to appeal to freedom-loving people all over the world to support such non-violent movements," he said.

Suu Kyi, who was freed from house arrest on Saturday, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

The Dalai Lama also urged China to set free Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, who was jailed for 11 years last December on subversion charges.

The Tibetan leader issued his statement from the Indian hill town of Dharamshala, where he has been based since fleeing Tibet following a failed anti-Chinese uprising in 1959.

SUU KYI, BRUNI-SARKOZY HOLD PHONE CONVERSATION

France's First Lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy Sunday held a telephone conversation with Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi after her release from house arrest, the French presidency said.

The presidency did not provide any details of the conversation between Suu Kyi and Bruni-Sarkozy, the wife of French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

According to the French Aung San Suu Kyi Collective, the 65-year-old recognised France's constant support during her many years in detention, the group said in a statement.

The Nobel peace laureate was released on Saturday after being locked up by Myanmar's ruling generals for 15 of the past 21 years.

US media reports on LeT's control centre for 26/11

PTI, Washington

Stocked with computers, televisions and voice-over-internet phones, top commanders of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) had set up a control room from where they controlled and directed the 26/11 Mumbai carnage, a US report has said.

"Lashkar had set up a remote command post in a safe house or a hotel that US and Indian officials believe was in Lahore or Karachi," The Washington Post and ProPublica reported.

The new disclosures come as US counter-terrorism officials said that masterminds of the terror attack were still at large.

While attention has been focused on Pakistani-American terrorist convict David Headley, the real mastermind of the 26/11 attacks was Sajid Mir, according to the new investigative report.

Pakistan is unwilling to arrest the elusive mastermind Mir, who is wanted in four continents, because the LeT terrorist is "well connected" and "too powerful", US officials said.

India to release first assessment report on climate change

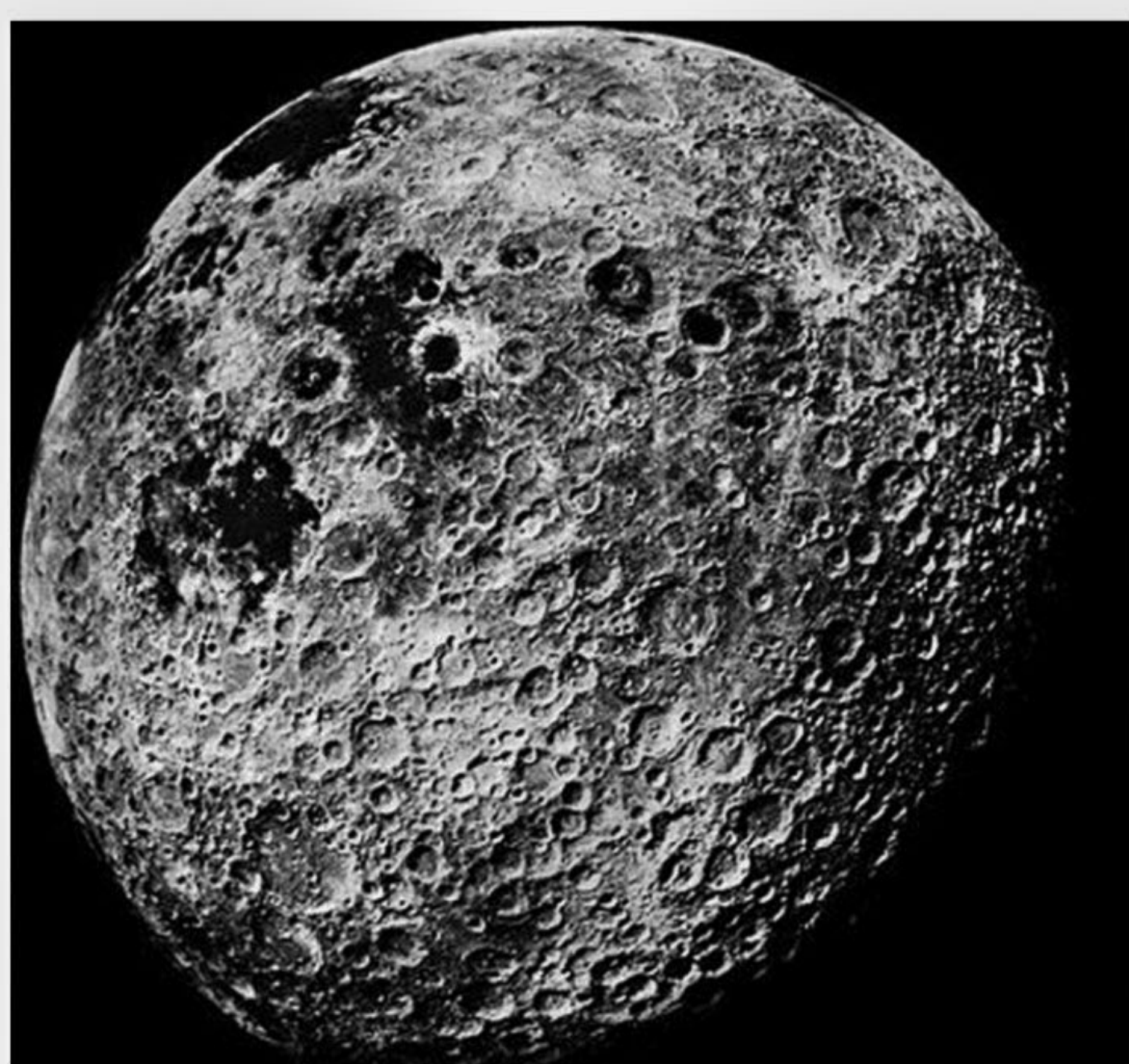
PTI, New Delhi

Ahead of the UN meet on climate change in Mexico this month-end, India will tomorrow release its first assessment report on the impact of global warming on four key sectors, including forests and water in the country's climatic regions like the Himalayas and the north east. Prepared by Indian Network of Climate Change Assessment (INCAA), the assessment report will address the concerns about climate change on the natural resources and livelihoods of the people in the four identified regions, an Environment Ministry official said.

These climatic hotspots are the Himalayan, the north east, the Western Ghats and the coastal plains and the four sectors under study are agriculture, water, health and forests. INCAA was set up last year by Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh as a mechanism to evolve institutions as well as engage other agencies already working in the area of climate change.

Ramesh was of the opinion that the understanding of the implications of climate change at the regional and sub-regional levels is rather inadequate and there is a need to have domestic studies on the issue. Comprising about 220 scientists from 120 research institutions across the country, INCAA had almost six months ago prepared the country's greenhouse gas (GHG) emission data "India: Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2007" which said the country's emissions grew by 58 per cent during 1994 to 2007.

By announcing the latest emission data, India has become the first developing nation to publish such updated statistics which reflects its strong domestic actions and is likely to strengthen the country's negotiating positions at the climate change meet at Cancun in Mexico in the month-end. On "4x4" assessment report, Ramesh had recently said that in view of a serious threat of climate change, "we need to know what would be the impact of such changes in the middle term, like by 2030, and not wait for reports that are predicting for 2050 or later."



The Moon, showing part of its far side, photographed from the Apollo 16 spacecraft in April 1972. The Earth may have played a major role in shaping the lunar surface, according to a new research study by US researchers.

PHOTO: BBC ONLINE

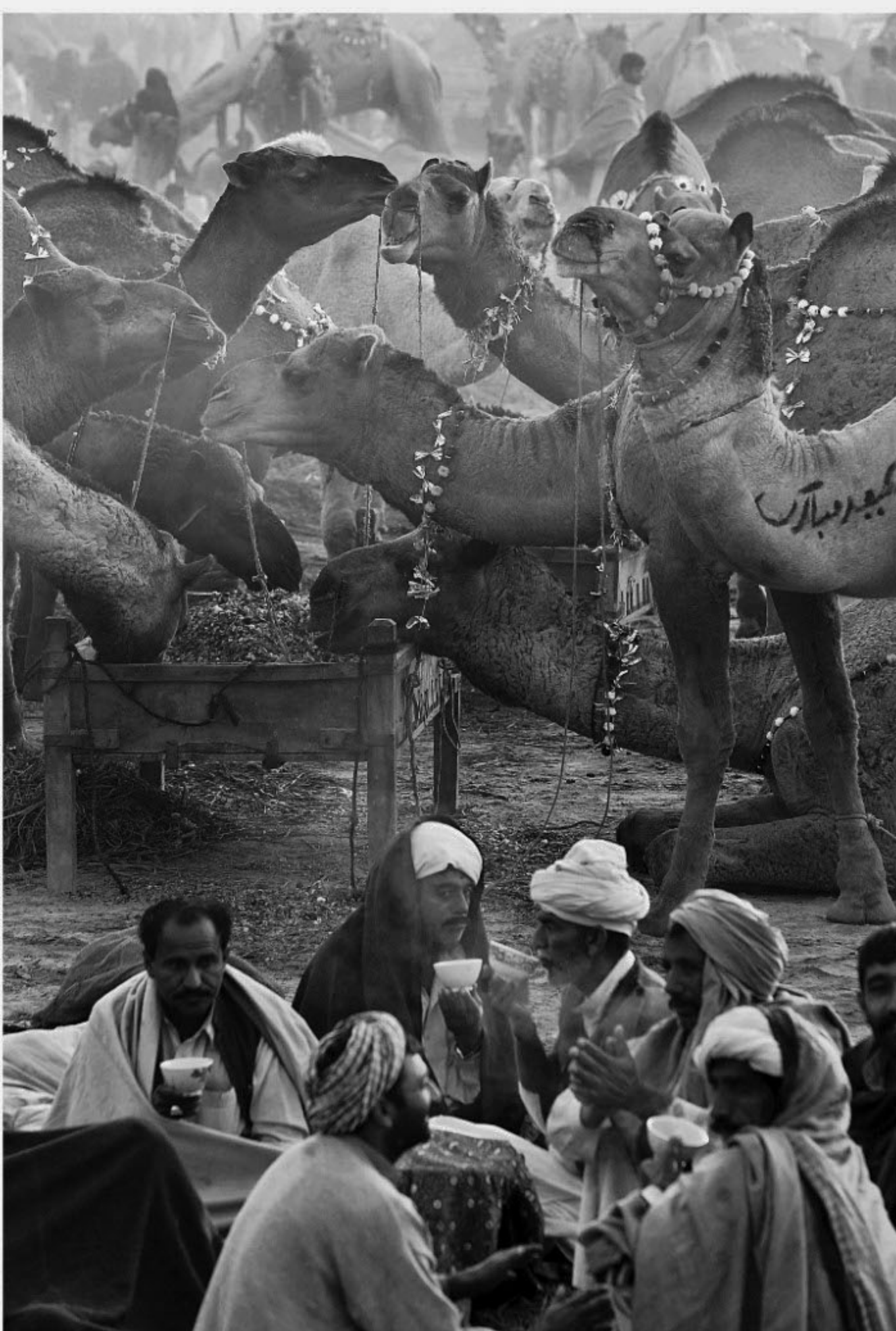


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani camel sellers drink tea at a sacrificial livestock market ahead of the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha in Lahore yesterday. Eid al-Adha, which commemorates Hazrat Ibrahim's acceptance of Allah's command to sacrifice his son Ismail, falls on the 10th of Dhul al-Hijja on the Islamic calendar. As Ibrahim was allowed to sacrifice a ram instead, Muslim families mark the day by ritually sacrificing sheep, goats, cows and other livestock, the meat of which is also shared with the needy.

Obama lands back in changed Washington

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama landed in a politically-changed Washington Sunday after 10 days abroad and called on newly empowered Republicans to drop their strategy of 'No' to work with him.

Obama returned from Asia to reverberating aftershocks of mid-term elections, which dealt Democrats a crushing defeat and handed Republicans the House of Representatives -- and the means to halt his reform program.

Flying into Washington on Air Force One on Sunday, after a trip that circled the globe, Obama reflected on the meaning of the election defeat two weeks ago, and promised to do more to honour his previous vows to reach across the aisle.

He said that early in his term, an "obsessive" focus on anti-crisis policies had led him to neglect the need to reach across political divides and to get out into the heartland to explain to Americans what he was doing.

"I think, moving forward, I'm going to redouble my efforts to go back to some of those first principles," Obama told reporters.

Obama will sit down with emboldened Republican adversaries on Thursday -- the next House speaker John Boehner and Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell -- to begin what is likely to be a tense two years.

He warned that the Republican strategy of simply opposing everything he does, will no longer do now they have a share of government -- even though they have vowed to do everything possible to deprive him of a

second term.

"Campaigning is very different than governing," Obama said.

"They are still flush with victory, having run a strategy that was all about saying no, but I am very confident that the American people were not issuing a mandate for gridlock."

"My expectation is ... they are not going to want to just obstruct, they are going to want to engage constructively," he said.

Obama has a few weeks in a "lame duck" session of the previous Congress starting Monday to enact key agenda issues, before candidates who drove the Republican wave are officially installed in January.

He said Sunday he feels "reasonably good about our prospects" for getting a new nuclear arms reduction treaty with Russia ratified by the Senate, after

weeks of negotiations with Republicans who have reservations about it.

Earlier in the day, Obama told Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in talks in Yokohama, Japan, that his "top priority" was winning Senate ratification of the deal.

US Senate ratification requires 67 votes, meaning Obama's Democratic allies will need to pick up considerable Republican support.

Obama is also locked with Republicans in a battle over tax cuts dating from the era of former president George W. Bush which are due to expire at the end of the year.

Republicans want all of the measures extended permanently, arguing that failure to do so would harm small businesses and the slowly recovering economy.

China, India, Russia vow to deepen cooperation

AFP, Beijing

The foreign ministers of developing giants China, India and Russia pledged yesterday to step up cooperation in trade, energy and geopolitical affairs including climate change.

The pledges were made in a joint communique after two days of meetings in the central Chinese city of Wuhan by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and his Russian and Indian counterparts Sergei Lavrov and SM Krishna.

The communique also said China, India and Russia had deepened cooperation on international and regional issues during the talks, but stressed that such cooperation would not target "any other country".

The foreign ministers said they supported a "multi-polar, equitable and democratic world order" and expressed their commitment to the use of "multilateral instruments" for finding solutions to global and regional issues.

China and Russia are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a

grouping of mostly central Asian states that many view as a bid by China and Russia to counter global US influence.

India is an observer country in the body.

They also pledged to further explore potential cooperation in energy, high-tech sectors, innovation, aerospace, cultural exchanges and disaster relief, the communique said, without providing details.

Noting that the global recovery remained "uneven, fragile and unbalanced", the three ministers called for worldwide coordinated efforts to promote "strong, sustainable and balanced" growth and oppose "all forms of protectionism".

Russia's entry to the World Trade Organisation also received backing at the foreign ministers' meeting from China and India, already members of the global trade body.

WTO chief Pascal Lamy said last month that Russia's 17-year membership bid was accelerating after significant progress in recent weeks.

J&K removed from UN's list of 'disputes'

PTI, United Nations

In a significant development, Jammu and Kashmir has been removed from the United Nations (UN) list of unresolved disputes, giving a setback to Pakistan which has been asking the world body to intervene on the issue.

The omission of Jammu and Kashmir from a list of disputes under the observation of the UN Security Council was noticed by Pakistan whose envoy has lodged a protest.

"Jammu and Kashmir dispute was not mentioned in the context of unresolved long-running situations," said Amjad Hussain B Sial, Pakistan's acting envoy to the UN.

"We understand this was an inadvertent omission, as Jammu and Kashmir is one of the oldest disputes on agenda of the Security Council," he added.

Sial was speaking at the UN General Assembly session, which was discussing the functioning and reform of the Security Council. It was organised by the UK that holds the presidency of the Security Council this month.

Pakistan has been asking the UN to intervene to help resolve the issue but India has always maintained that it has to be resolved bilaterally between the two countries.

Speaking earlier at the General Assembly, the UK envoy to the UN, Mark Lyall Grant, said that "some long-running situations, including in the Middle East, Cyprus and Western Sahara remain unresolved, as do issues where the Council has become engaged in recent years, including Nepal and Guinea Bissau."

"Huge challenges remain in Sudan, Somalia and the DRC," he added.