

Afghans need help for another decade

Karzai tells Bonn summit

AFP, Bonn

Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday told a major conference on the future of his country after Nato combat troops withdraw in 2014 that it would need international help for at least another decade.

Karzai told around 1,000 delegates gathered in the western German city of Bonn for the one-day meeting that his government would battle corruption and work toward national reconciliation but it needed firm international backing.

"We will need your steadfast support for at least another decade" after the troops' pullout, he said.

The meeting comes 10 years after another conference here put an interim Afghan government under Karzai in place after US-led troops ousted the Taliban in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

There are around 140,000 international troops in Afghanistan and all Nato-led combat forces are due to leave by the end of 2014, when Kabul will assume responsibility for the country's security.

The event's host, German Foreign

Minister Guido Westerwelle, insisted there would be no rush to the exit.

"We send a clear message to the people of Afghanistan: we will not leave you alone, you will not be abandoned," he said.

"Afghanistan and its people need a clear and reliable commitment to a long-term engagement for the next decade beyond 2014."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told a meeting of representatives of civil society including women's groups that Western countries had also come to Bonn to hear about the most pressing needs on the ground.

"We need your best advice about how we can help the government develop ... professionalism and abilities," Clinton said.

She also announced that the United States was ending a freeze on hundreds of millions of dollars in development funds for Afghanistan amid financial reforms.

US President Barack Obama called Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari Sunday to express his regrets over the "tragic loss", saying the casualties were not intentional, but Islamabad remained unmoved.



Greenpeace activists and supporters along with other non-governmental organizations protest at the Global Business Day conference in Durban yesterday. Six activists were detained as they tried to hang a banner reading "Listen to the People, not the Polluters" at a Durban hotel.

PHOTO: AFP

Greenpeace activists break into French nuclear plant

AFP, Paris

Activists from environmental group Greenpeace managed to sneak into a nuclear power plant near Paris yesterday in a move they said highlighted the dangers posed by France's reliance on atomic energy.

Police confirmed the intrusion and said activists had tried to break into two other nuclear sites in the south of France.

French energy giant EDF, which runs the nuclear plants that France relies on for 75 percent of its energy, sought to play down the incident, saying the activists at the plant near Paris had been detected but a decision made not to immediately intercept them.

EDF said activists had unfurled banners at two other sites but did not specify whether they had managed to enter the nuclear plants.

NEWS IN brief

Islamists seek to extend gains in Egypt run-off vote

REUTERS, Cairo

Egyptians voted yesterday in run-off contests for parliamentary seats, with the Muslim Brotherhood's party trying to extend its lead over hardline Islamists and liberal parties in a political landscape redrawn by the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak.

The Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) is set to take the most seats in Egypt's first free election in six decades, bolstering its hand in any struggle with the ruling army council for influence over the most populous Arab nation.

Dutch govt to apologise for 1947 Indonesia massacre

AFP, The Hague

The Dutch government will formally apologise to Indonesia for the Dutch army's 1947 executions of scores of people, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

Dutch troops fighting to retain Indonesia as a colony swept into the Javan village of Rawagede and carried out the mass executions. Dutch officials say 150 people were killed, but a support group says the death toll was 431.

In September, a Hague-based court ruled in favour of seven widows and a survivor of the massacre in the village east of Jakarta, known today as Balongsari. An eighth widow in the case died earlier.

The Netherlands agreed to pay 180,000 euros (\$242,000) total in compensation.

All values lost

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though that was the spirit of the 1990 mass upsurge against autocrat H M Ershad.

"We have failed to fulfil people's expectations. We politicians didn't even try our level best to make the country democratic and to ensure a constitutional system of a transfer of power," he told The Daily Star.

Huda played an active role in the BNP during the party's movement to oust former dictator Ershad. He served as information minister in Khaleda's cabinet after Ershad's fall. After the BNP returned to power through the 2001 polls, he served as communications minister.

The country's constitution has been violated frequently and, very often, only to serve the ruling party's interest instead of the national interest, noted the outspoken politician.

Rulers have always ruled the law instead of establishing the rule of law, he said.

"An autocratic attitude still exists among political leaders, and this is why democracy is weakening day by day."

Looking back at the 1990 joint declaration of the three alliances in relation to the present, Huda said national interest has now become

inferior to party interest, which in turn has seen the rise of confrontational politics instead of creating an environment of mutual understanding.

As a result, all sorts of values have disappeared from politics. Arrogance now dominates everything, said the former minister.

"We [whoever has been in power] did not keep our commitment which we had made to the people during our united movement against military dictator Ershad."

Continued Huda: "Constitutional rule has not been established and transfer of power in line with constitutional provisions has not been ensured."

Opposition political parties have always obstructed the working of elected governments over the years, he added.

When his attention was drawn to a pledge of the three alliances 15-party, seven-party and five-party not to allow any of Ershad's associates to join the constituents of the alliances, Huda, a member of BNP's first standing committee, said it had not been maintained as going to power became the main objective of the political parties.



Putin party wins, loses majority in Russia polls

AFP, Moscow

The ruling party of Vladimir Putin yesterday won Russia's parliamentary elections but with a sharply reduced majority, in a blow for the Russian strongman ahead of his planned return to the Kremlin in 2012.

The results mean his United Russia party has lost the constitutional majority of two-thirds in the State Duma required to pass any changes to the constitution, amid signs that Putin's once invincible popularity is on the wane.

The opposition said Sunday's vote was shadowed by mass violations as the authorities sought to maintain United Russia's dominance with dirty tricks including cyber attacks on critical websites and harassment of monitors.

"Based on these results, we will be able to ensure the stable development of our country," Putin said at his party's campaign headquarters.

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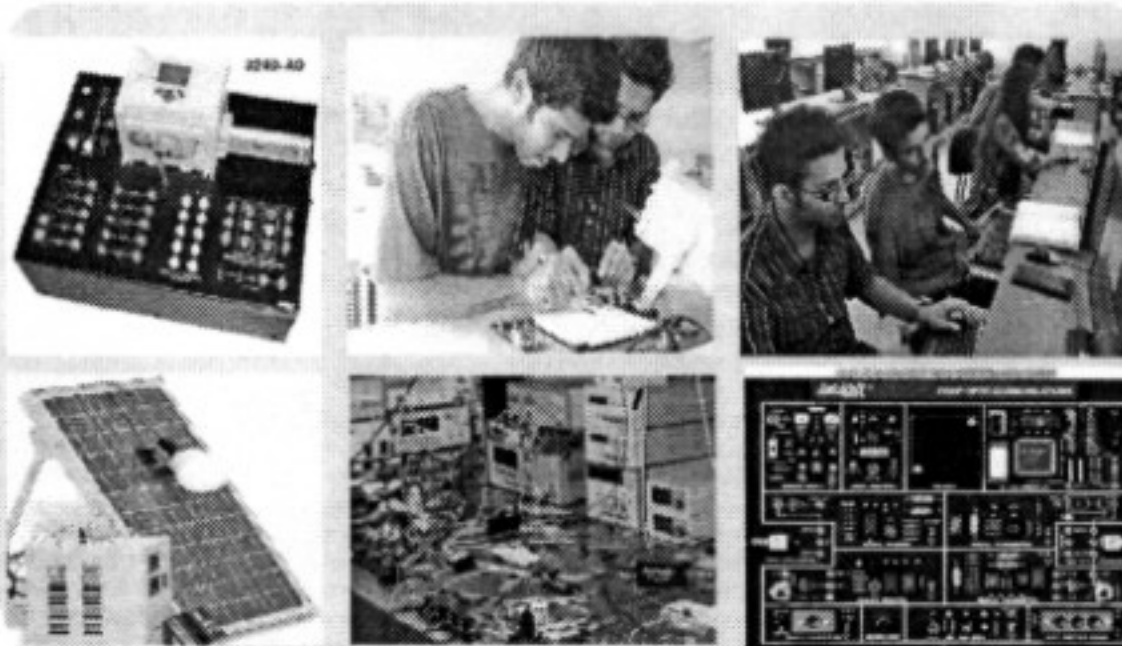
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