

Pakistan to re-open Nato supply route

Peace talks with Taliban stalled

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan expects to re-open supply routes to Nato forces in Afghanistan, halted after a Nato cross-border air attack killed 24 Pakistani soldiers in November, but will impose tariffs, a senior security official told Reuters yesterday.

The move suggests tensions with the United States and Nato have eased, but more progress is needed for the kind of cooperation necessary to fight militancy in the border region which US President Barack Obama has called the world's most dangerous place.

The official said the fees were designed to both express continued anger over the November 26 attack and raise funds for the state to fight homegrown Taliban militants blamed for many of the suicide bombings across the country.

"The tariffs will cover everything from the port to security to roads, which after all belong to Pakistan," the security official, who asked to remain anonymous, told Reuters.

No date was given for reopening the supply routes. Pakistan's trade ministry was working out details of the tariffs, said the

official.

The Nato attack plunged relations between troubled allies Pakistan and the United States to their lowest point in years.

The two land routes to Afghanistan through Pakistan account for just under a third of all cargo that the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) ships into Afghanistan.

Exploratory peace talks between the homegrown Taliban, which is close to al-Qaeda, and Islamabad, raised hopes that Pakistan's leaders could eventually have one less major problem to deal with.

But the talks have made little headway, a senior security official told Reuters yesterday, after the Taliban flatly rejected a demand that it work through tribal elders to reach a deal whereby fighters approach authorities and lay down their arms.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday adjourned a contempt hearing for Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani in a case that could push him from office and imperil hopes that the longest-running civilian administration in the country's coup-marred history can complete a five-year term.

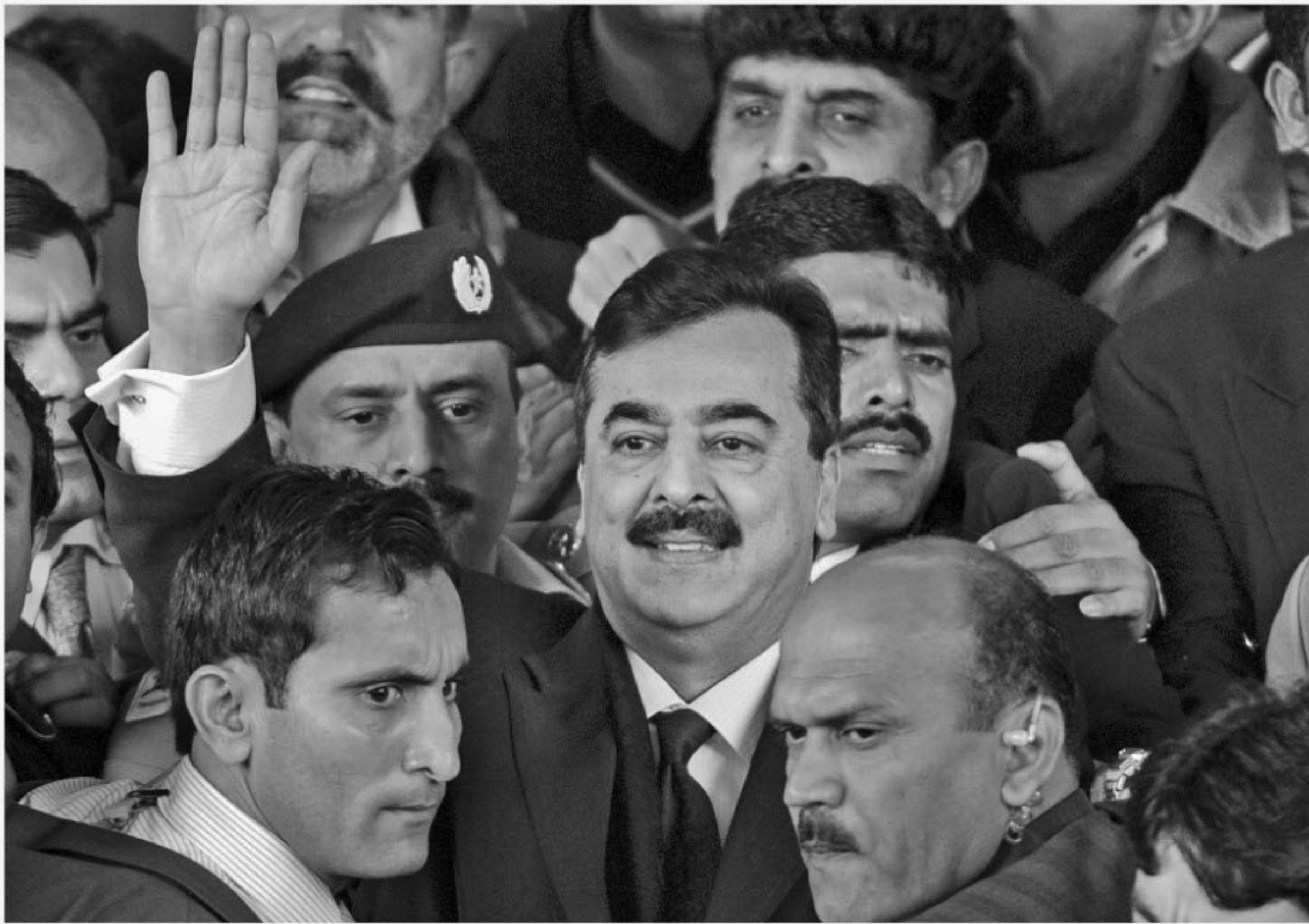


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, centre, surrounded by security personnel and lawyers acknowledges the crowd as he leaves the Supreme Court after the adjournment of the contempt hearing in Islamabad yesterday. The embattled prime minister yesterday defended himself against contempt charges before the Supreme Court, refusing to apologise in a case that could see him disqualified from office if convicted.

Torture for mobile, torchlight

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was unable to move due to the excessive beating, I forced myself to get up and headed towards home," the victim said.

He estimated that he was about five to seven kilometres inside Indian territory.

Habibur Rahman, 22, son of Saidur Rahman of Sateroroshia village under Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj, used to smuggle cattle from India. He had never been caught by the BSF in his one-year stint as a smuggler until December 9 last year, the day he experienced his worst nightmare.

The video footage of the BSF torture that had been aired by different television channels in India, including NDTV, sent shock waves across the nation.

The Daily Star yesterday interviewed Habibur at Monakosha border outpost in Chapainawabganj.

On the morning of December 9, 10-12 men, including Habibur, sneaked into Murshidabad district through Khanpur border in Paba upazila of Rajshahi to fetch some cattle as instructed by a Bangladeshi trader.

"We found no cattle when we reached the rendezvous point. So, we started back for home," said Habibur, adding that it was around 11:00pm when the BSF men caught him with two others.

"They demanded Rs 1,000, a mobile phone and torchlight from me. As I said I did not have those, they started kicking and punching me. But that was only the trailer of what was to happen next. They took me to their camp at Raninagar on a tractor," he said.

Habibur was wearing a lungi, a pink shirt and a jacket.

"The real beating began the next morning," said Habibur, "Two jawans

stripped me, tied my hands at the back and to a stick. They also tied my legs. Then they started to beat me with a stick." Habibur still was in shock as he described the BSF brutality.

"As I fell on the ground, three of them indulged in beating me up indiscriminately," said Habibur, failing to hold back his tears.

The video footage of the Indian TV channels and on the website matches the description of the victim.

"At one point, one of them sat on my abdomen and held my feet up while another hit me on the bare sole with a stick. The torture continued for at least an hour," he said, adding that the jawans then dragged him a few yards, pulled him up and asked him to walk on his own.

"But I blacked out and fell down. A few hours later, I found myself lying in a mustard field," the victim said.

He showed the marks of injuries on his face, hands, legs and back.

On his return, Habibur did not dare go to a hospital out of fear of more ordeals. He chose traditional treatment instead.

About his former profession, Habibur said each cattle smuggler got Tk 1,000 for bringing a pair of cattle and one could bring up to six cows on each trip.

Pointing out that the chances of cattle smugglers getting caught were high, he said BSF men let them go in exchange of bribes.

After reports were published in different newspapers and aired on television channels, BGB officials also met the victim yesterday.

"We tracked him at his home in Sateroroshia village," Lt Col Jahangir Hossain, commanding officer of 39 BGB Battalion in Chapainawabganj, told The Daily Star.

Preparations on

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ceremony and culminate with a concert and a formal closing ceremony on March 23. The port city is expected to be abuzz with lots of fanfare and cultural activities on the occasion.

During the period, people of Chittagong will witness an array of diverse events promoting the rich history, cultural heritage and business prospects of Chittagong. The programmes include food festival, book fair, paintings and photography exhibition, boat race, traditional wrestling (Bolkhela), music, dance and poetry festivals, theatre and film festival, indigenous festival, fashion show, car show, business conferences, Chittagong Brand exposition, tourism, biodiversity exhibition, and honouring the eminent citizens of the port city.

The programme is being arranged in association with Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), Chittagong Development Authority (CDA), the district administration and different business establishments.

The Odmo Chattagram initiative was formally announced by Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, at a press conference in the party centre of Chittagong Club on Wednesday.

CCC Mayor M Manjur Alam, CDA Chairman Abdus Salam, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Senior Vice President Mahbubul Alam, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Ehsan E Elahi and high officials of some prestigious business establishments in Chittagong also attended the press conference.

FALKLANDS DISPUTE British PM stokes war of words

AFP, London

Prime Minister David Cameron accused Argentina of "colonialism" towards the Falklands and warned Britain was ready to defend them, stoking tensions over the islands 30 years after they sparked a war.

Speaking to the House of Commons on Wednesday, Cameron condemned Argentina's increasingly strong rhetoric over the British-held South Atlantic archipelago, which Buenos Aires claims as its own.

He revealed that Britain's National Security Council had met on Tuesday to review its military plans for the islands, saying he was "determined we should make sure that our defences and everything else is in order".

"What the Argentinians have been saying recently, I would argue, is actually far more like colonialism because these people want to remain British and the Argentinians want them to do something else," he said.

His comments sparked a furious response in Argentina, with Interior Minister Florencio Randazzo telling reporters they were "totally offensive, especially coming from Great Britain".

Foreign Minister Hector Timerman added that "obviously at a time when there are only remnants of colonialism, Great Britain, in an imperial decline, decides to rewrite history", in remarks to the official Telam news agency.

Dhaka protests

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foreign ministry press release.

"The Ministry has also requested the concerned authorities of India to conduct a thorough enquiry into the incident and take appropriate action against the BSF personnel responsible for the abusive and violent action. The Ministry has also requested for immediate action to prevent such and other violent incidents from recurring in future," the release added.

The protest was conveyed through the Indian high commission in Dhaka.

Different Indian TV channels including NDTV aired a video on Wednesday showing several BSF personnel beating up a stripped off Bangladeshi man, tying his

hands at the back to a stick in Murshidabad district of Paschim Banga.

A senior official of the Bangladesh foreign ministry said yesterday, "We are highly disappointed with such a barbaric incident. We have asked Border Guard Bangladesh to give an inquiry report immediately."

The official said BGB already identified the victim and the investigation report is expected to reach the foreign ministry very soon.

"The incident is very unfortunate and we are disappointed," Mashfee Binte Shams, director general (South Asia) of the foreign ministry, told The Daily Star.

Reporting on the Indian

authorities' move, our New Delhi correspondent quoted a spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs as saying, "BSF has taken prompt action to suspend its jawans involved in the incident, and full investigations have been ordered into the matter."

"Eight personnel have been identified and suspended pending enquiry," said Vikas Chandra, deputy inspector general at the BSF headquarters.

The suspended jawans have been identified as constables Birender Tiwari, VS Victor, Dhananjay Kumar Rai, Anand Singh, Amar Jyoti, Sanjeev KR, Suresh Chand, and Sunil Kumar.

They belong to the 105th battalion of BSF, and the incident took place at the Charmurasi border outpost.

A staff court of inquiry has been ordered by the BSF inspector general of the South Bengal Frontier to probe the incident.

"Vijay Kumar, commandant of BSF's 119 battalion, who is from a sector other than the place where the incident had happened, has been detailed to conduct the probe," a statement issued by the BSF headquarters said yesterday.

BSF sources said BGB will be requested to bring the victim to the zero-line for questioning and recording of a statement, and the enquiry report is expected to be submitted soon.

They said "strict disciplinary action" will be taken against the eight jawans based on the findings of the enquiry.

Brother succeeds Lokman

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they got nominal votes compared to the winning candidate.

Of the 31 polling centres, Montaz won in a single centre, an election official told The Daily Star, adding, he even lost in his own local centre.

Voting kicked off at 8:00am with unprecedented foolproof security measures in place. Voters braving cold weather wholeheartedly thronged different centres to cast their votes. A large number of voters were well dressed and seen in a festive mood, making the turnout 67.2 percent, informed Assistant Returning Officer Nazrul Islam.

In an instant reaction, winner Kamruzzaman and Nurat Tamanna Bubi, widow of the slain mayor, in emotion-choked voice said they are overwhelmed

by the love the people of Narsingdi have shown.

"Voters of Narsingdi have not betrayed the blood of my husband. They have evaluated his contributions and devotion for the welfare of the district," Nurat told reporters with tear rolling down her cheeks.

Amid a free, fair and peaceful atmosphere, many voters, especially women and elderly people, were seen coming out from different booths, 198 in total, with smiling faces.

Asked, Nabi Newaz, 75, said it took just a minute to cast his vote thanks to the machine [electronic voting machine]. "In the last municipality polls in 2011, I needed at least 10 minutes to complete voting formalities," he said.

The post of mayor fell vacant after the country's two times best mayor Lokman was shot dead on

November 1 last year inside the district AL headquarters. Considered as a very popular mayor for his contributions, Lokman won the hearts of people, voters said.

Although six candidates contested the mayoral race, the battle of ballots was projected to be fought between the prime minister-blessed Kamruzzaman and Montaz, who is also an accused in the Lokman murder case.

Hundreds of voters of all ages and all walks of life were seen crying in joy and celebrating after Returning Officer Md Abdul Wadud declared Kamruzzaman winner at around 5:30pm.

"People of Narsingdi are missing Lokman very much at this happy moment. This feeling caused mixed emotions in our minds. Today's victory brings tears in our eyes as well as makes us

happy," Maulana Habibur, imam of a local mosque, said.

Businessman Swapan Saha said, "We wanted to give Lokman bhai a posthumous award for his good deeds by making his brother to win."

Before casting his vote, Hasan Habib, a college teacher, told this correspondent, "We have no alternatives to supporting Lokman's brother. This is only for choosing a proper successor to Lokman, who changed the sorry state of our district."

Except one or two stray incidents, the eight-hour polls went quite peaceful. A huge number of members of law-enforcement agencies kept patrolling on every road in the poll areas.

A dog squad was also on guard to check any suspicious activities or movement.

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