

# MUMBAI CARNAGE, 2008 Pakistan denies state role

India and Pakistan ended two days of peace talks Thursday, vowing to keep their dialogue on track despite renewed tensions over the alleged role of Pakistani "state actors" in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

The talks between Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai and his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani covered terrorism, confidence-building measures and the South Asian rival's core territorial dispute over divided Kashmir.

At a joint news conference, Jilani insisted the charge was baseless. "I would very strongly reject any insinuation of any involvement of any state agency in acts of terrorism in India," Jilani said.

"If we keep accusing each other, that will be of no benefit, and we will not find any result," he added.

The two top civil servants in their respective ministries said they would meet again in Islamabad in September.

The talks in New Delhi were clouded by charges arising from India's recent arrest of Sayed Zabiuddin Ansari, suspected of being a key handler for the Mumbai attackers who killed 166 people in India's financial capital.

India says Ansari has admitted helping to coordinate the deadly assault from a command post in Karachi, and his testimony has renewed Indian accusations that "state elements" in Pakistan were involved.

# Blow to Assad as top aide defects

## 'Friends of Syria' calls for regime ouster, sanctions in Paris

AFP, Beirut

The United States and its international partners called yesterday for global sanctions against Bashar Assad's regime, seeking to step up the pressure after the defection of a top general dealt a blow to the Syrian leader.

"General Munaf Tlass defected three days ago," a source close to the Syrian government said on condition of anonymity.

Tlass, the highest-ranking military officer to have abandoned the Assad regime, was on his way to Paris to join his wife and sister, Nahed Ojeh, widow of Saudi millionaire arms dealer Akram Ojeh, said the source.

Tlass, who is in his late 40s, was a member of the inner circle in Syria, and a childhood friend of Bashar al-Assad.

A general in the elite Republican Guard charged with protecting the regime, he is the son of former defence minister Mustafa Tlass, a close friend of Assad's late father

and predecessor, Hafez.

His defection comes two weeks after a colonel in the privileged Syrian air force won political asylum after landing his MiG-21 fighter in neighbouring Jordan.

The "Friends of Syria" meeting insisted that Assad would have to quit and sought a resolution under the UN charter's Chapter 7, which provides for possible sanctions and military action.

Some 100 nations and organisations meeting in Paris called on the UN Security Council to adopt a transition plan for Syria backed by economic sanctions if the regime refuses to comply.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also issued a clarion call for all nations to do more to push for political change in Syria and end the 16-month conflict, while lambasting Russia and China for "blockading" progress.

Washington urged countries around the world to pressure Russia and China into forcing Assad to leave power.

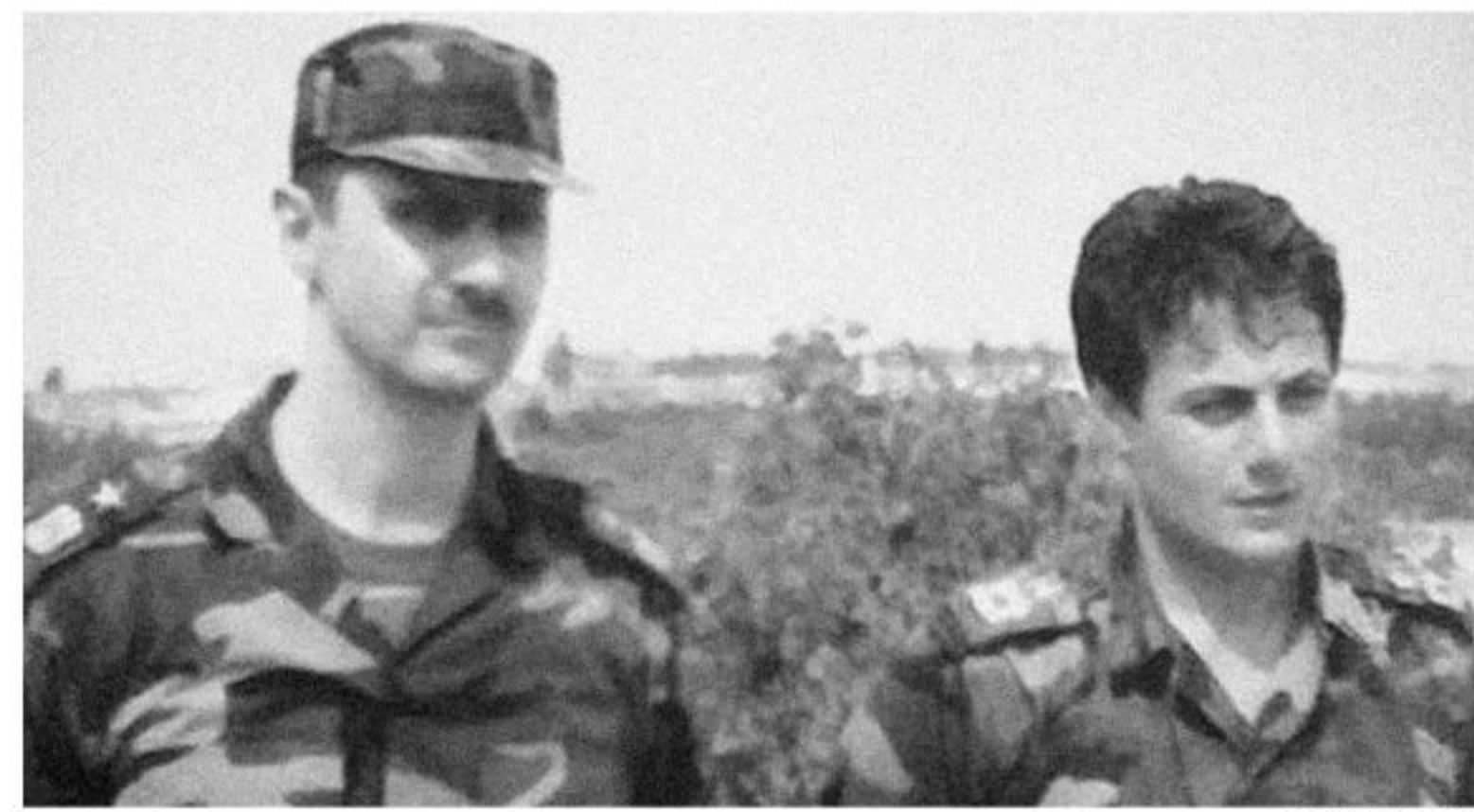


PHOTO: AFP

An undated file photo shows Syrian General Munaf Tlass, right, with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad.

But it stressed that the immediate action under Article 41 provided only for non-military intervention.

French President Francois Hollande also pushed for the Security Council to get tough with Damascus, while the Syrian opposition called for humanitarian corridors and a no-fly zone.

On the ground, dozens of people

were killed across Syria yesterday as protesters took to the streets to call for a "people's liberation war".

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 53 people were killed on Friday: 35 civilians, 14 soldiers and four rebels. On Thursday at least 95 people were killed in raging violence.

# WikiLeaks publishing Syria emails

AFP, London

WikiLeaks said Thursday it was publishing over two million emails from Syrian political figures dating back to 2006 but also covering the period of the crackdown on dissent by Syria's regime.

"Just now... WikiLeaks began publishing the Syrian files, more than two million emails from Syrian political figures, ministries and associated companies dating from August 2006 to March 2012," said Sarah Harrison, spokeswoman for the anti-secrecy website.

The latest disclosures could throw fresh light on the workings of the Syrian regime and its interactions with allies in the run-up to and during the current bloody crackdown.

There are around 400,000 emails in Arabic but also 68,000 in Russian.



PHOTO: AFP

Cuban President Raul Castro (L) and China's President Hu Jintao pose for a photo in Beijing yesterday. China on Thursday pledged financial aid to Cuba, promising visiting President Raul Castro a new credit line as well as help in health care and technology.

# No graft 'explosion' on my tenure

## Indian PM hits back at critics

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister has hit back at critics of his graft-tainted government, stressing his own "high standard" of personal integrity and lauding his administration as a beacon of transparency.

In an interview yesterday in the Hindustan Times newspaper, Manmohan Singh also argued that the Indian economy was healthier than media "pessimism" suggested, and promised further measures on tax issues that have rattled foreign investors.

Singh rarely grants media interviews, but has ramped up his public statements since taking on the finance ministry portfolio last month, in what analysts see as an effort to secure his legacy.

Singh is not expected to continue as premier after elections in 2014 and his personal reputation has taken a beating during his second term, amid a series of high-profile corruption scandals and accusations of policy drift.

"Coming to the personal criticism, not only have I maintained a high standard of integrity in my conduct, I have endeavoured to raise the levels in the system as well," Singh said.

Citing legislation like the Right to Information Act and a Whistleblowers Bill, the premier said his administration had made important strides in improving official accountability that would benefit future generations.

"Never before in the history of India have so many steps been taken in such a short time to bring in transparency into the functioning government, make government accountable to the people for its actions and bring in measures to control corruption," he said.

Singh's ruling coalition has been embroiled in a series of scandals.

Singh, who as finance minister in 1991 was credited with opening the Indian economy after decades of quasi-socialist planning, took over the ministry again last month, after Pranab Mukherjee quit to run for president.

# ROHINGYA UNREST 10 aid workers held in Myanmar: UN

AFP, Yangon

Ten aid workers including some UN staff have been detained in western Myanmar in the wake of deadly communal unrest, the body said yesterday, as rights groups warned of mass detentions of Muslims in the restive area.

In a bulletin on the situation in violence-racked Rakhine state, the UN said humanitarian staff have been held for "questioning" -- adding that Myanmar's government has failed to respond to queries about those detained.

More than 80 people were killed in a wave of communal violence between ethnic Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya which swept the state in June, forcing tens of thousands to flee as homes were torched and communities ripped apart.

A state of emergency is still in force over several areas and Human Rights Watch alleged some within Myanmar's security forces have carried out "mass round-ups" and other abuses on Muslim communities.

# ARAFAT DEATH CONTROVERSY Tunisia backs call for int'l probe

AFP, Ramallah

A Palestinian call for an international probe into Yasser Arafat's death won official backing from Tunisia on Thursday, after a report showed the iconic leader may have been poisoned.

Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Malki told the official Voice of Palestine radio on Thursday that such an enquiry could finally "close the file" on Arafat's mysterious death.

And Tunisia called for the Arab League to convene.

On Tuesday, Al-Jazeera television broadcast the results of a nine-month probe it commissioned into the 2004 death of the veteran Palestinian leader that indicated he could have been poisoned with the radioactive substance polonium.

The next day Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, who succeeded Arafat, endorsed exhuming his body from its mausoleum for a forensic examination.

Tunis hosted the Palestine Liberation Organisation, of which Arafat was the chairman, after it was expelled from Lebanon during the 1982 Israeli invasion and until the 1994 launch of Palestinian autonomy.

Suha Arafat, wife of the Palestinian leader, gave Al-Jazeera permission to take the items, which contained strands of Arafat's hair and traces of sweat, urine and blood, for testing at several European laboratories, including the Swiss institute, which reported finding high levels of polonium.

Suha Arafat rejected an autopsy after her husband's death but on Wednesday told AFP that she was "immediately to send a formal letter to the Swiss laboratory that conducted the tests, to authorise collection of samples of the remains of the martyr Arafat to verify the results."



Yasser Arafat

# Pakistan to scan all Nato containers

AFP, Karachi

All containers passing through Pakistan to supply Nato troops in Afghanistan are to be scanned to ensure they do not contain lethal supplies, customs officials said yesterday.

"We scanned the containers randomly in the past, but now every container will be duly scanned," Karachi customs spokesman Qamar Thalho said.

"We can seize any item, anything that be, if it is not mentioned in the agreements between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Nato."

Islamabad reopened overland routes to Nato convoys earlier this week after closing them in protest at a US air raid that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers at a border post in November.

A number of trucks have already crossed into Afghanistan after US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said sorry for the deaths.

An official speaking on condition of anonymity said the move was intended to stymie opposition parties and religious groups -- who have criticised the resumption of supplies.

"A strict scanning of the cargo is just one important measure not to give enough space to the opposition to exploit public sentiments," the official said.

# Don't need Mamata's vote: Congress

IANs, Kolkata

Raising the pitch against ally Trinamool Congress, a leader of the Congress's West Bengal unit said the Mamata Banerjee-led party has become irrelevant in national politics and its support is not needed for the presidential poll.

"(UPA candidate) Pranab-da (Mukherjee) will win the presidential poll with more than 65 percent votes. We don't need them (Trinamool). Whether they support us or not, it doesn't matter. They have become irrelevant in national politics," said party leader Abdul Mannan.

# NEWS IN brief

## SC quashes Mayawati graft case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Supreme Court of India yesterday quashed a case relating to alleged accumulation of disproportionate assets against Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati and pulled up the country's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for initiating the probe against her without specific directions from the court.

The apex court passed the judgment on the plea of Mayawati, former Chief Minister of India's largest state Uttar Pradesh, seeking quashing of proceedings against her in the disproportionate case lodged against her by CBI.

## Fukushima disaster 'man-made'

AFP, Tokyo

Last year's Fukushima nuclear accident was a man-made disaster caused by Japan's culture of "reflexive obedience" and not just the tsunami that hit the plant, a damning parliamentary report said Thursday.

Ingrained collusion between plant operator Tokyo Electric Power, the government and regulators, combined with a lack of any effective oversight led directly to the worst nuclear accident in a generation, the report said.

The probe is the third of its kind in Japan since the huge tsunami of March 2011 crashed into the

## Argentina's ex-junta leaders jailed

AFP, Buenos Aires

Two former Argentine dictators were handed heavy prison sentences Thursday for their involvement in the kidnapping of babies from leftist activists killed during the 1976-1983 dictatorship.

Jorge Videla, 86, was sentenced to 50 years in prison and Reynaldo Bignone, 84, was given a 15-year jail term, presiding judge Maria Roqueta said as she read the ruling before a packed courtroom in Buenos Aires.

Several other defendants were handed sentences ranging from 15 to 40 years for their roles in a "systematic plan" to kidnap the babies of activists, in a

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