

TOKYO CONFERENCE

Donors offer \$16b in aid to Afghans

REUTERS, Tokyo

Major donors yesterday pledged to give Afghanistan \$16 billion in development aid through 2015 as they try to prevent it from sliding back into chaos when foreign troops leave, but demanded reforms to fight widespread corruption.

Donor fatigue and war weariness have taken their toll on how long the global community is willing to support Afghanistan and there are concerns about security following the withdrawal of most Nato troops in 2014 if financial backing is not secured.

The roughly \$4 billion in annual aid pledged at the meeting, attended by 80 countries and international organisations, fell short of the \$6 billion a year the Afghan central bank has said will be needed to foster economic growth over the next decade.

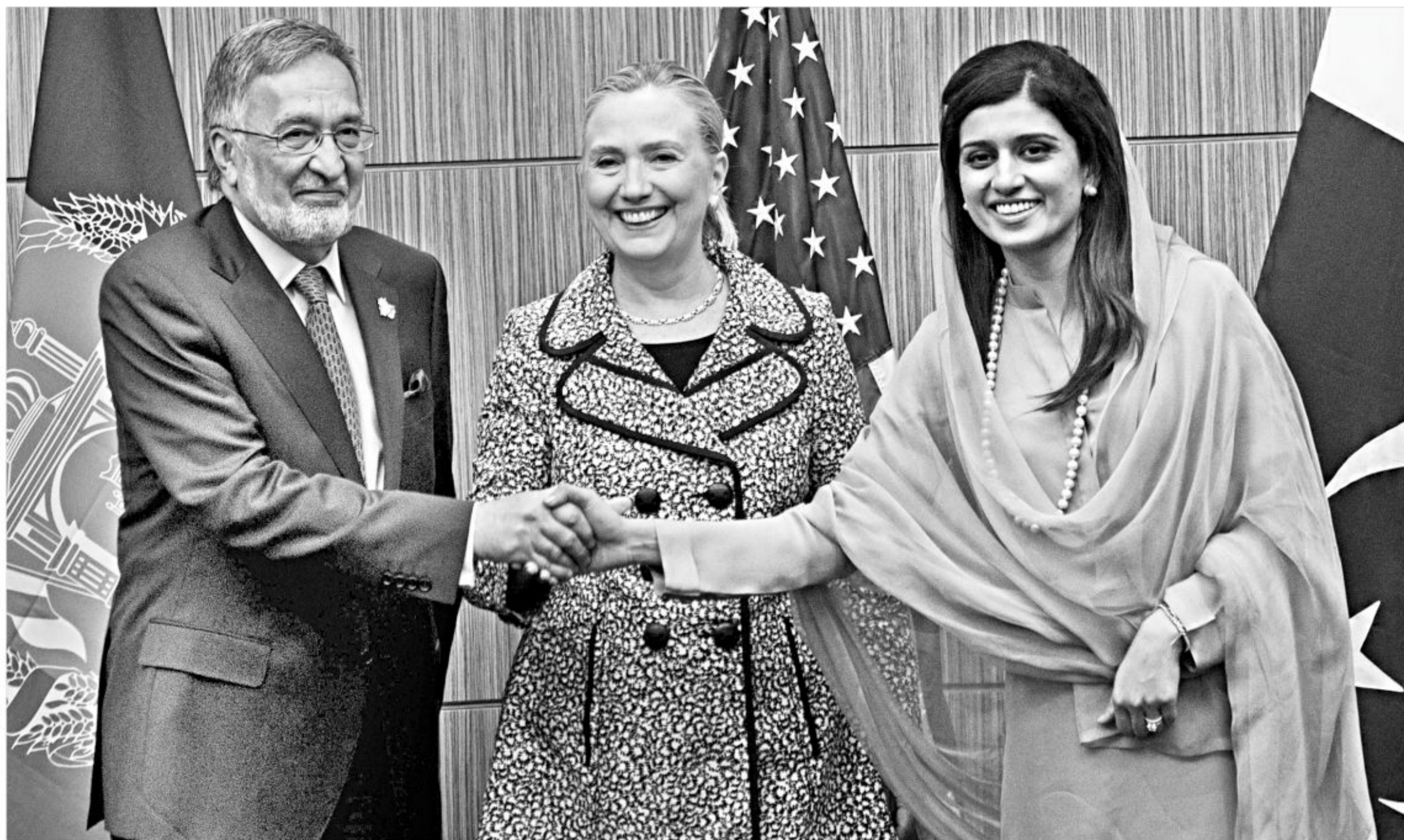
Hillary and other donors stressed the importance of Afghanistan - one of the most corrupt nations in the world - taking aggressive action to fight graft and promote reforms.

US officials gave no figure for their aid pledge but said the administration would ask Congress to keep assistance through 2017 "at or near" what it has given over the past decade.

Annual US aid to Afghanistan has ranged from about \$1 billion a decade ago to a peak of about \$4 billion in 2010. It stands at about \$2.3 billion this year.

Japan pledged \$3 billion in aid for Afghanistan through 2016.

The EU has said it will continue with pledges of 1.2 billion euros a year, but warned that if progress is not made with rule of law and women's rights, this could be difficult to continue.



Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassou, left, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar shake hands before a Core Group Ministerial meeting at a hotel in Tokyo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Govt faces confidence vote in Greece

AFP, Athens

The government of Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras faced a confidence vote yesterday, capping three days of often heated debate over how the country can emerge from crisis and satisfy EU-IMF lenders.

The outcome of the vote in parliament held little mystery with Samaras's conservative New Democracy party leading a coalition of 179-seats in the 300-seat chamber with the socialist PASOK party and the much smaller Democratic Left.

In his Friday speech outlining the government's programme, Samaras insisted that Greece would push through delayed reforms and privatisations, but would also request a break from its EU-IMF bailout terms to fight a recession now in its fifth

MUMBAI CARNAGE, 2008 India provides proof to Pakistan

AGENCIES

India's External Affairs Minister SM Krishna met his Pakistani counterpart Hina Rabbani Khar yesterday during which he strongly raised the issue of anti-India activities being carried out from the Pakistani soil, maintaining that New Delhi has given additional concrete evidence of the same.

Krishna, who met Khar on the sidelines of a conference on Afghanistan in Tokyo, asked Pakistan to take steps to check terror activities directed against India.

Krishna conveyed to Khar that India had now even more reasons to believe that forces inimical to India's interests were being encouraged by certain Pakistan state agencies.

Khar said Pakistan did not believe that its agencies were involved in perpetrating terror strikes against India, something which her foreign secretary Jalil Jilani too had stated in India last week.

Official sources said that recent revelations by Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal, the LeT operative who allegedly handled those involved in the 26/11 carnage in Mumbai, the continued anti-India propaganda by LeT founder Hafiz Saeed and release of Sarabjit Singh were among the important issues that figured in the Krishna-Khar talks, which came two days after their Foreign Secretaries' meeting in New Delhi.

US-Pak ties still raise tough questions: Hillary

REUTERS, Tokyo

The US-Pakistani relationship remains challenging for both despite the reopening of Pakistani land routes to resupply US troops in Afghanistan, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said yesterday.

Hillary last week apologised for a November Nato air strike that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers and Islamabad responded by reopening the overland supply routes that are crucial to the US-led war in Afghanistan.

The supply route deal removed one headache, but ties are likely to remain strained by other differences. These include Pakistan's opposition to US drone strikes aimed at militants on its territory and Washington's allegations that Islamabad condones, or even assists, anti-American militants.

Speaking after she met Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, Hillary said both were encouraged they had "put the recent difficulties behind us" but she acknowledged the difficulties in the relationship in blunt terms.

"I have said many times that this is a challenging but essential relationship. It remains so. And I have no reason to believe it will not continue to raise hard questions for us both," she told a news conference in Tokyo, where both officials attended an Afghan donors conference.

"But it is something that I think is in the interests of the United States as well as in the interests of Pakistan."

The United States has pressed Pakistan to pursue the Taliban and its allies, especially the Haqqani network, which it blames for a series of attacks on US targets in Afghanistan.

After their bilateral talks, Clinton and Khar both met Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rasul, laughing as they staged a three-way handshake for photographers.

The three issued a statement that emphasised their desire for reconciliation between Taliban militants and the Afghan government. The United States wants Pakistan to bring the Haqqani network into peace talks, but is wary of exerting too much pressure on

Libya counts vote after historic poll

BBC ONLINE

Vote-counting was under way in Libya yesterday, after the country held its first free national election for 60 years.

Partial results are expected later in the week, with some unofficial exit polls suggesting a liberal alliance was leading Islamist parties. Officials said turnout on Saturday was about 60%.

Voting continued in some areas where technical difficulties caused delays.

The 200-member assembly will choose the first elected government since Col Gaddafi came to power in 1969.

The last fully free parliamentary election was held soon after independence in 1952. The last national vote was held in 1965, when no political parties were allowed.

On voting day there were pockets of unrest in the east, where there are fears the region will be under-represented in the new temporary assembly being elected.

US President Barack Obama said the election was "another milestone" in Libya's political transformation. Italy, the former colonial power, also hailed the vote.

More than 100 parties are competing in the poll, many of them formed only in recent months.

The most prominent party to emerge so far is the Justice and Construction Party, made up mostly of Muslim Brotherhood members.

Ian Martin, head of the UN's mission in Libya, told the BBC that



Egypt's Morsi annuls dissolution of parliament

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's new President Mohamed Morsi yesterday issued a decree annulling the Supreme Court's dissolution of the Islamist-dominated parliament, the official MENA news agency reported.

"President Morsi has issued a presidential decree annulling the decision taken on June 15, 2012 to dissolve the people's assembly, and invites the chamber to convene again and to exercise its prerogatives," MENA said.

It said the decree stipulates "the organisation of elections for the chamber, 60 days after the approval by referendum of the country's new constitution and the adoption of a new law regulating parliament."

Egypt's top court made the controversial move last month, a day before the second round of the presidential election that saw the Islamist Morsi become Egypt's first democratically elected head of state.

The Supreme Constitutional Court had said certain articles in the law governing parliamentary elections were invalid, annulling the Islamist-led house.

It also ruled as unconstitutional the political isolation law, which sought to bar senior members of ousted president Hosni Mubarak's regime and top members of his now-dissolved party from running for public office for 10 years.

Morsi beat Ahmed Shafiq -- Mubarak's last prime minister -- in the presidential election.

In the absence of a parliament -- in which nearly half of the seats had been won by the Muslim Brotherhood and another quarter by hardline Salafists -- the Supreme Council of the



A man stands near his flooded house in the southern Russian town of Krymsk yesterday. The death toll from severe flash floods in Russia's southern Krasnodar region climbed to 150 people as President Vladimir Putin called for an investigation to find out the cause of the sudden floods.

PHOTO: AFP

East Timor PM heads for poll win

BBC ONLINE

East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao is set for a new term of coalition government after his party won parliamentary elections - but without an overall majority.

Provisional results published yesterday suggested he would take around 30 seats in the 65-seat chamber. The opposition Fretilin party was expected to win around 24 seats.

The UN praised the conduct of the poll, seen as a key factor in deciding whether peacekeepers leave this year.

The UN said that it would withdraw its troops if the parliamentary polls went smoothly, following peaceful presidential elections in April.

UN peacekeepers arrived in 2006 after widespread fighting and unrest.

East Timor gained independence from Indonesia in 2002 after three years of UN administration, which followed more than two decades of bloody guerrilla

incident, Kazi Monirul said, "The office has talked with the demonstrators. They demanded a postponement of the restructure process and placed some other demands."

JS BODY TO SUMMON GP CEO

Meanwhile, the parliamentary standing committee on labour and employment ministry yesterday decided to summon the chief executive officer of Grameenphone to explain the company's recent termination.

"Many staff members have been terminated from Grameenphone not properly following the labour law. So, we will ask the CEO of the company to explain the action at our next meeting," Israfil Alam, chief of the House body, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The date of the next meeting is yet to be fixed.

Many brilliant boys had joined Grameenphone instead of joining government service, Israfil said. He asked, "What will they do if they are now terminated in a wholesale manner?"

Time dubs Indian PM as 'underachiever'

PTI, New York

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has long been lauded for his pivotal role in liberalising the Indian economy, has been dubbed as an "underachiever" by a top US magazine which says he appears "unwilling to stick his neck out" on reforms that will put the country back on growth path.

79-year-old Singh is featured on the cover of Time

magazine's Asia edition, which will be out next week. With his portrait in the background, the title on the cover reads 'The Underachiever India needs a reboot'.

Is Prime Minister Manmohan Singh up to the job? Time's report titled 'A Man in Shadow' asks, adding that apart from facing the challenges of a slowdown in economic growth, huge fiscal deficit and a falling rupee, India's Congress party-led UPA coalition "has found itself fending off corruption scandals and accused of showing a lack of economic direction."

"...investors at home and abroad are



beginning to get cold feet. Voters too are losing confidence, as rising inflation and a litany of scandals chip away at the government's credibility," the magazine said.

Pointing towards Singh's fall "from grace," the magazine said, "in the past three years, the calm confidence he (Singh) once radiated has been absent. He seems unable to control his

ministers and his new, temporary portfolio at the Finance Ministry notwithstanding unwilling to stick his neck out on reforms that will continue the process of liberalisation he helped start."

The magazine said at a time when India cannot afford a slowdown in economic growth, "laws that could help create growth and jobs are stuck in Parliament, sparking concerns that politicians have lost the plot in their focus on shorter-term, populist measures that will win votes."

GP employees

FROM PAGE 20

in the capital. About 50 officials started the demonstration around 7:45am as they were barred from entering the office, witnesses said.

Their contracts are valid till July 31, but the administration had their electronic access cards disabled, sources have said.

Soon after, several hundred of their colleagues joined the demonstration and formed a human chain protesting the decision.

However, the officials who had been barred were later allowed to enter the office after a meeting with the demonstrators and the leaders of the newly formed Grameenphone Employees Association, sources added.

A Grameenphone statement issued following the incident said, "This [yesterday] morning a group of employees started a demonstration in front of the head office obstructing the other employees from entering the office. To avoid any untoward situation the Grameenphone manage-

ment has asked the employees to go home using company transport and if possible work from there."

All customer services of Grameenphone remained operational, according to the statement.

"To remain competitive in its business and serve its customer base with more efficiency the company is realigning its business. Due to this process many new functions have emerged while other functions have been merged to create new roles. Unfortunately the company has to let go some of the employees as there are not enough posts to accommodate everyone in the restructured organisation," it added.

Grameenphone has 4,800 officials at present, said Kazi Monirul Kabir, chief communication officer of Grameenphone.

Over the past few years, the mobile phone operator has terminated about 150 officials in phases, he said, adding that all legal procedures were followed in the process.

Asked about yesterday's



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