

India, Pak ink liberal visa deal

PTI, Islamabad

India and Pakistan yesterday signed the much-awaited liberalised visa agreement, introducing for the first time group tourist and pilgrim visas, separate visa for businessmen and visa on arrival for those over 65 years of age.

The new pact, signed between external affairs minister S M Krishna and Pakistan interior minister Rehman Malik, replaces a 38-year-old restrictive visa agreement and will pave the way for time-bound visa approval and greater people to people contacts and boost trade.

While there was no time-frame for issuance of non-diplomatic visas, the new pact says that visa has to be issued with a period of not exceeding 45 days of application.

Under the new regime, one can visit five places

INDO-PAK RELATIONS It's time for greater understanding Says Pakistan president

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari said the time has come for India and Pakistan to show greater understanding of each other's concerns and sensitivities and to "move beyond reiteration of their positions to more substantive results" in the peace process.

Finding amicable and just solutions to resolve outstanding issues was important for Pakistan and India to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region, he said.

Zardari made the remarks during his meeting with visiting Indian External Affairs Minister S M Krishna at the presidency on Friday night.

Zardari "emphasised that it was time for the two countries to move beyond reiteration of their positions to more substantive results," presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babarsaid.

He further said the two countries "must not allow the derailment of the normalisation process."

In this regard, Zardari suggested the revival of the Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism comprising representatives of the foreign ministries, home and interior ministries and intelligence agencies of the two countries.

Multifaceted cooperation between the two sides is imperative for socio-economic development of people and



Asif Ali Zardari

Canada breaks off relations with Iran

AFP, Ottawa

Canada has closed its Tehran embassy and ordered Iranian diplomats expelled yesterday as The EU threatened to expand sanctions on the already sanction-burdened Islamic Republic.

Canada did not cite a specific incident that caused the breakdown, but issued a strongly worded attack on Tehran's support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's pariah regime and Iran's "incitement to genocide" against Israel.

"Canada views the government of Iran as the most significant threat to global peace and security in the world today," Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird said in a statement on Friday.

"Diplomatic relations between Canada and Iran have been suspended. All Canadian diplomatic staff have left Iran, and Iranian diplomats in Ottawa have been instructed to leave

EU agrees to beef up Syria sanctions

AFP, Paphos

EU foreign ministers agreed on the need to beef up sanctions against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime at talks in Cyprus yesterday, said Cypriot Foreign Minister Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis.

"There is consensus also on the increase of sanctions in Syria," she said, after announcing that the bloc's 27 ministers were agreed on the need to massively strengthen humanitarian aid.

Meeting on an island as close as 100 kilometres from Syria for their first talks since the summer break, the ministers also urged the fractured Syrian opposition to unite and agreed to try to work with Russia in efforts to find a peaceful solution to the 18-month conflict.

The Cypriot minister said European nations believed it was important to work with Moscow, Assad's main diplomatic and military supporter, despite anger over Russia and China vetoing three UN Security Council attempts to exert more pressure on Syria.

"There is a general feeling that more pressure must be placed on the regime in order to end the violence and enable the distribution of humanitarian aid throughout the country," added Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia Margallo.

Brussels on Friday announced an extra 50 million euros (\$63 million) for civilians trapped in the conflict, bringing the EU contribution in all to 200 million euros, half of all international help.

The United Nations on Friday almost doubled its humanitarian appeal for Syria to \$347 million, estimating that more than 2.5 million people need food and medical help in the country.

US campaign opens amid jobs data row



BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama and challenger Mitt Romney have hit the campaign trial on Friday in swing states in the wake of a disappointing jobs report.

Both men appeared in Iowa and New Hampshire on the first full day after the end of the party conventions.

Obama conceded that the unemployment figures were "not good enough", while Romney said the president's policies had failed.

The two men are neck-and-neck in the polls two months from election day.

Obama's hope for a poll boost after the three-day Democratic convention, which finishing in North Carolina on Thursday night, faced a challenge from the latest set of weak economic data.

Friday's report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed 96,000 jobs were added in August, fewer than expected. The unemployment rate fell from 8.3% to 8.1%, but only because more people gave up looking for work.

The two men spent Friday campaigning in the swing states of Iowa and New Hampshire, with the president in New Hampshire in the morning before holding an evening rally in Iowa.

Romney did the reverse, making his first appearance of the day in Sioux City, Iowa, before ending his Friday in Nashua, New Hampshire.



Sudan clashes kill dozens

BBC ONLINE

Sudan's army and rebels said on Friday that they have clashed on two fronts, reportedly leaving dozens of people dead.

The army says it killed 32 insurgents who attacked a village in the western Darfur region. The rebels claim they drove government troops out.

Separately, Khartoum says 45 rebels were killed in a village in South Kordofan, near South Sudan's border.

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebels said they liberated the village, killing at least one soldier.

Last year, rebel groups in the two states and also in Blue Nile state formed an alliance with the aim of toppling the government of President Omar al-Bashir.

Khartoum accuses South Sudan of backing the insurgents. The government in Juba denies the charge.

The latest fighting comes as the US has warned of an "outright conflict" between Sudan and South Sudan over a prolonged border dispute.

South Sudan has accepted a border roadmap proposed by the African Union, but Sudan is refusing to do so.

APEC summit begins

Asia-Pacific leaders call for unity

AFP, Vladivostok

Asia-Pacific leaders yesterday called for unity in tackling a raft of economic challenges, as an annual summit began amid deep divisions over worsening territorial disputes and other rows.

Summit host President Vladimir Putin opened the two-day gathering of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation bloc in the Far East Russian port of Vladivostok with a call for a renewed joint commitment to open up regional trade.

"By getting together and lifting barriers, we encourage dynamic development of the entire Asia-Pacific region and the global economy in general. It is important to build bridges, not walls," Putin told his fellow leaders.

The 21 members of the grouping that accounts for nearly half of world trade meet every year to build goodwill in their effort to break down trade barriers, with the bloc's rules decided by consensus.

But this year's summit began with APEC giants China, Japan and South Korea embroiled in various territorial disputes that have fanned intense nationalist flames, and with US-Chinese relations also heating up over the South China Sea.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said he would not hold customary bilateral summit talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao nor South Korea's Lee Myung-Bak because of Japan's separate territorial disputes with their nations.

APEC members Vietnam and the Philippines have also spoken out strongly against China in the lead-up to APEC.



Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao

They have accused their more powerful neighbour of a campaign of intimidation to enforce its claims to virtually all of the South China Sea, parts of which they contest.

Speaking at a pre-summit business forum yesterday, Chinese President Hu Jintao called for all countries to ensure the tensions did not escalate into more serious conflicts.

"To maintain peace and stability as well as the sound momentum of economic growth in the Asia-Pacific is in the interests of all countries in the region. It is our shared responsibility," Hu said.

Nevertheless, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang later reaffirmed his country's hardline stance against Japan over rival claims to islands in the East China Sea that are known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

China has also been riled by US lobbying for a code of conduct for the South China Sea and insisting on freedom of navigation in the strategic waterway, which the United States has declared in its national interests.

Social media poses risk

Says Manmohan Singh

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Premier Manmohan Singh yesterday warned over the use of social media to inflame ethnic tensions after online threats and text messages sparked a mass exodus of migrants from southern cities.

The use of "social media to aggravate the communal situation is a new challenge", Singh told a conference of senior police officials in New Delhi.

"We need to fully understand how these new media are used by miscreants... and devise strategies to counter the propaganda that is carried out by these new means," he said.

Tens of thousands of migrant workers and students from India's northeast fled last month from the high-tech centre of Bangalore and other southern cities.

The unprecedented exodus was triggered by inflammatory text messages and videos posted online which warned that Muslims would target them in reprisal for deadly clashes between the tribals and Muslims in remote Assam state.

The government imposed a two-week ban on bulk messages that ended in late August and blocked some Internet pages to halt the spread of incendiary material that could fuel tensions.

PATRIOTISM CLASSES

Hong Kong scraps China's plan

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's government yesterday backed down on a plan to force school children to take Chinese patriotism classes, after weeks of protests and on the eve of crucial legislative polls.

"The amendment of this policy means that we are giving the authority to the schools," the city's leader, Leung Chun-ying, told reporters a day after activists said more than 100,000 protesters rallied at government headquarters.

"Now the schools will decide how they would like to introduce the moral and national education," he added, blaming the mandatory nature of the policy on his predecessor's government.

The proposal to introduce mandatory "national education" classes in all schools from 2016 was condemned as brainwashing by students and teachers, and sparked weeks of protests that brought scores of thousands onto the streets.

The government said the subject was important to foster a sense of national belonging and identity, amid rising anti-Beijing sentiment in the semi-autonomous southern city of seven million people.

Schools were meant to adopt the subject voluntarily this year but many said they wanted more guidance from the government about how it should be taught.



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NEWS IN
brief

Pranab's son to contest by-poll

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi



A section of West Bengal state's ruling Congress party favour Abhijit Mukherjee, son of Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, to contest a by-poll to Jangipur Lok Sabha seat in Murshidabad district.

Pranab Mukherjee vacated the seat after he was elected the country's president.

"Large sections of Congressmen are in favour of the party high command nominating Abhijit for Jangipur," president of state unit of Congress Pradip Bhattacharjee said in Kolkata adding this would be

Blast kills six in Kabul

REUTERS, KABUL

A 14-year-old suicide bomber detonated explosives near the heavily barricaded Nato headquarters in Kabul on Saturday, killing six civilians including children, Nato and local officials said.

The bomber wore a vest packed with explosives and rode right up to the Nato gates on a bicycle, underscoring the insurgents' ability to strike deep inside the Afghan capital, ahead of the withdrawal of most foreign combat forces by the end of 2014.

Pieces of flesh and splattered blood lay on the street near the base, where the small bodies of children were lifted into ambulances. Scores of young children peddle trinkets and chewing gum

32 'criminals' killed in Sinai

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's armed forces have killed 32 "criminal elements" in an ongoing operation against Islamists in the lawless Sinai peninsula, a military spokesman said yesterday.

Colonel Ahmed Mohammed Ali said 38 people including "non-Egyptians" had been arrested during "Operation Sinai," which was launched on August 7 days after gunmen killed 16 soldiers at a border post.

"The operation will continue until its goals have been achieved," Ali said.

The statement is likely to unnerve Israel, which had expressed "reservations" over Egypt's deployment of reinforcements in the peninsula, with which it shares a border.

McCartney honoured in France

AFP, Paris



Ex-Beatle Paul McCartney yesterday received the French Legion of Honour award at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris, the president's office said.

President Francois Hollande bestowed the medal on the British musician in the presence of his family but not the press, the office said in a statement, adding that the award was granted for his entire body of work.

Born in Liverpool, McCartney was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1996, earning him the title "Sir".