

India pledges \$10m to Palestinians

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday announced a ten million dollar contribution to Palestine and pledged its support to Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and visiting Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas held talks on a host of bilateral issues and exchanged views on regional developments, particularly the developments in West Asia and the Gulf region.

Three pacts, including one in the field of Information Technology, were also inked after the talks.

Appearing at a joint media conference with Abbas, Singh said, "support for the Palestinian cause has been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. I reiterated India's firm support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital."

The prime minister said India supported an independent Palestine living within secure and recognised borders, side-by-side and at peace with Israel.

He also announced India will "contribute USD 10 million to Palestine's budget for this year to help address its financial requirements."

Singh said, "we will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the UN."

Singh's remark comes in the backdrop of the US making it clear that it will veto the Palestine bid for a non-member status in the United Nations later this month. At present, Palestinians only have observer status.



In this photograph taken on Monday, Indian police clash with protesters on the beach at Idinathakarai village near the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in southern Tamil Nadu. Police in southern India yesterday launched a crackdown, to arrest activists who led a mass protest against the loading of uranium at a nuclear power plant, local police chief told AFP.

PHOTO: AFP

OIC tours unrest-hit western Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Members of an influential Islamic body have visited Myanmar's Rakhine state, a government official said yesterday, to survey fallout from deadly sectarian unrest between Buddhist and Muslim communities.

A delegation from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) led by the group's representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Ufuk Gokcen, arrived in the western region on Sunday, an official in the state capital Sittwe said.

"They met the union border affairs minister and Rakhine chief minister here and also visited some refugee camps and made donations," he said, adding that the group concluded their visit on Monday.

Fighting in Rakhine state has left almost 90 people dead, both Buddhists and Muslims, since it erupted in June according to an official estimate, although rights groups fear the real toll is much higher.

New York-based Human Rights Watch has accused Myanmar forces of opening fire on stateless Rohingya Muslims during the violence -- an accusation denied by the government -- prompting concern across the Islamic world.

At a summit last month in the Saudi Arabian holy city of Mecca, the 57-member OIC decided to take its concerns over the treatment of the group to the UN.

It also condemned "the continued recourse to violence by the Myanmar authorities against the members of this minority and their refusal to recognise their right to citizenship".

US concerned over Nepal political deadlock

PTI, Kathmandu

The US yesterday expressed concern over the current political deadlock in Nepal as a American top diplomat held discussion with the country's top leaders.

US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Robert O' Blake, who is here on a brief visit, met UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Prachanda and CPN-UML President Jhala Nath Khanal among others and discussed the current political situation in the country.

During the meeting Blake expressed concern over the political deadlock in the country, hurdles in drafting constitution, peace process, bilateral relation with US, among other issues, according to official sources.

Blake will also hold meetings with Nepali Congress president Sushil Koirala, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Narayankaji Shrestha.

Bus crashes kill 55 in India, Nepal

BBC ONLINE

At least 28 people were killed after a bus plunged off a highway in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh yesterday.

The bus fell into a gorge in the Kangra valley, some 250km from the state capital, Shimla.

A similar crash has taken place in neighbouring Nepal yesterday, leaving at least 27 people dead.

Road accidents in both countries are

common, often due to poor driving or badly maintained roads and vehicles.

The state-owned bus in Himachal Pradesh was carrying 45 passengers from Palampur to Ashapuri when the accident happened late on Monday.

One survivor said the driver lost control of the vehicle and it reversed into the gorge.

India has the world's highest number of road deaths, with more than 110,000 people killed every year in accidents.

A hungry leopard can be seen carefully selecting its dinner from a flock of unsuspecting birds before snatching it straight from the air and tucking in. Photographer Matt Prophet, 37, snapped the rare encounter at Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, an exclusive animal hide away which crosses the borders between Botswana and South Africa.



PHOTO: THE DAILY MAIL ONLINE

Conspiracy

FROM PAGE 1 discussion meeting at the Jatiya Press Club.

The BNP leader also said that Khaleda Zia's life is under threat, and everyone has to be alerted against the conspiracy.

Criticising the government for amending the Grameen Bank Ordinance, Fakhrul said the government wants to take the Grameen Bank to the level of Sonali Bank.

"Money was looted not only from Sonali Bank but also from other banks," he alleged.

He also condemned Monday's attack by Bangladesh Chhatra League workers on the Jatiyabadi Chhatra Dal leaders on Dhaka University campus and demanded resignation of the university vice-chancellor.

"Chhatra Dal leaders came under attack when they were waiting to meet the vice-chancellor," he said.

As the VC has failed to create a congenial atmosphere on the campus, he should resign, Fakhrul told the meeting.

Jatiyabadi Krishak Dal, a front body of BNP, organised the discussion, marking the jail release anniversary of Khaleda Zia.

The BNP chairperson was arrested in September, 2007 on charge of corruption and released in September, 2008.

ISI regards US worst enemy

Says jailed bin Laden doctor

IANS, Washington

Pakistan's powerful spy agency ISI considered the US its "worst enemy" and Islamabad's cooperation with Washington was just a sham to extract billions of dollars in aid, said the doctor who was jailed for helping the CIA hunt down Osama bin Laden.

The Pakistani doctor has been quoted as saying he was unaware of his role in the al-Qaeda chief's death.

In an exclusive interview with Fox News, Shakil Afridi who helped track down Osama's Abbottabad compound before the May 2 raid by US commandos, described torture at the hands of the ISI.

He said the agency was openly hostile to

the US.

"They said 'The Americans are our worst enemies, worse than the Indians'," Afridi, who spoke from inside Peshawar Central Jail, was quoted as saying.

He added: "I tried to argue that America was Pakistan's biggest supporter ... but all they said was, 'These are our worst enemies. You helped our enemies!'"

"I tried to argue that America was Pakistan's biggest supporter - billions and billions of dollars in aid, social and military assistance -- but all they said was, 'These are our worst enemies. You helped our enemies!'"

Afridi helped the CIA by running a fake vaccination programme that allowed him to collect the DNA of bin Laden's children from the family compound in Abbottabad.

ATN Bangla

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premises.

They also reiterated their ultimatum to the government until September 25 for proper investigation into the murder of journalist couple Sagar Runi and other journalists.

They would go for tougher movement from the following day if their demands were not met, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, announced at a rally held in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital.

Sagar Sarwar, a news editor at Maasranga Television and his wife Meherun Runi, a senior reporter of ATN Bangla, were killed in their rented flat in West Rajabazar in the capital on February 11.

Iqbal Sobhan said that Mahfuzur has posed a challenge for them by filing the case but they are ready to embrace the challenge. He said their decision to hold a sit-in programme in front of

ATN Bangla office on September 16 would remain unchanged.

They also criticised barrister Rafique-ul Huq for legally representing Mahfuzur.

The journalist leaders reproached those media houses which are not paying salaries on regular basis to the employees according to the wage board and demonstrated for their right to trade unions at newspapers, news agencies and television channels.

They also criticised Jugantor, a Bangla daily for humiliating its former reporter Rafique Azad by publishing false statement against him.

Frequent incidents of repression and murder of journalists are a threat to democracy and freedom of the press, the journalist leaders observed.

The rally was organised by Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka Reporters' Unity, two factions of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists.

Key issues

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any decision to keep staying off the House, they added.

"People in our constituencies criticise us for not speaking in parliament on different important issues. We want to participate in the House proceedings. But we cannot do so, as our high command thinks otherwise," said a BNP legislator asking not to be identified.

Many other opposition MPs expressed similar views. The Daily Star talked to 16 out of 40 opposition lawmakers over the phone in the last couple of days.

"Some senior leaders even condemn us if we speak in favour of attending the House sessions," said a frustrated BNP MP wishing anonymity. "We are giving the government a walkover. We just cannot do that," he added. When his attention was drawn to the issue, Nazrul Islam Khan, a member of the BNP's national standing committee, said:

"It doesn't matter what the MPs say. Everyone should abide by the party's decision."

For his part, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, another member of the standing committee, the highest decision-making body of the BNP, said it would have been better had the opposition joined the House.

"But there is no atmosphere conducive to our MPs' joining the parliament proceedings," Mosharraf claimed.

Another member of the BNP standing committee, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, said his party MPs should join the House to raise their voice against the government's "misdeeds".

As in the past, the two MPs of the Jamaat-e-Islami and one of Bangladesh Jatiya Party, components of the BNP-led four-party alliance, are following the BNP's decision.

Oli Ahmad, the lone MP of

the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has also remained absent from the House.

"We will join parliament if the BNP decides to return to the House," Jamaat MP ANM Shamsul Islam said.

Oli Ahmad, chief of the LDP, which recently joined the BNP-led opposition alliance, said there was no congenial atmosphere in parliament.

"We are now able to speak for people freely outside the House," Oli said, claiming: "We believe it is more effective to drum up public support against the government."

The current Jatiya Sangsad, which began its journey on January 25, 2009, has been witnessing a very poor presence of the opposition. Till date, the House has had 319 sittings, of which the opposition boycotted 266 and joined only 53.

Leader of the Opposition and BNP chief Khaleda Zia joined only eight sittings.

The opposition last joined the House on March 20 this year and then began a fresh boycott, which still continues.

"My opinion is we should join parliament to speak on different issues. But it depends on the party high command whether we will join the House or not," said BNP MP Nazrul Islam Monju.

Nazim Uddin Ahmed, another BNP MP, echoed Monju.

BNP MP Hasina Ahmed, however, said, "I don't have any personal opinion. Please ask my party high command about joining parliament."

BNP MP Jafrul Islam Chowdhury offered similar advice.