

Cabinet reshuffle talks grow in India

PTI, New Delhi

Congress General Secretary Rahul Gandhi met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday amid talks of a cabinet reshuffle.

While there was no official word as to what transpired at the meeting, the Prime Minister has been time and again inviting Rahul to join the government.

There have been repeated demands from within the Congress that Gandhi play a "larger role" in the organisation and the government.

The meeting comes a day after Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had separate meetings with President Pranab Mukherjee.

There has been speculation about a



Manmohan



Rahul

reshuffle in the Cabinet for quite some time now, especially after the exit of Trinamool Congress ministers both at the levels of Cabinet and ministers of state levels.

There have been berths vacated by DMK representatives A Raja and Dayanidhi Maran in the last two years after their names cropped in the 2G scam. However, DMK president M Karunanidhi has recently made clear that his party will not not like to reclaim their lost berths.

Congress sources said that the reshuffle and induction could be largely from the party. There is speculation that some young faces, considered close to Rahul, like Manicka Tagore and Meenakshi Natarajan could be inducted into the council of ministers.

Pak floods kill 455, affect 5m

AFP, Islamabad

Monsoon floods in Pakistan have killed 455 people over the past five weeks and affected more than five million, according to the latest figures from the government's disaster relief agency.

Pakistan suffered devastating floods in the past two years, including the worst in its history in 2010 when catastrophic inundations across the country killed almost 1,800 people and affected 21 million.

More than 260,000 people around the country have sought shelter in relief camps since early September, though this figure is down from the 290,000 reported by NDMA two and a half weeks ago.

NUKE FUEL DEAL Australia, India take first steps

AFP, New Delhi

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard yesterday agreed to open negotiations to export uranium nuclear fuel to energy-hungry India after meeting her counterpart Manmohan Singh in New Delhi.

The deal, which will provide a boost for India's civilian nuclear ambitions, comes after Australia reversed its policy of refusing to sell uranium to India as it has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Gillard overcame opposition within her own Labor party to reverse the ban last year, arguing that the deal was necessary to improve ties with one of Asia's biggest economies.

The two countries will now kick off formal discussions, but have warned that negotiations are likely to last up to two years. New Delhi -- backed by the US -- won a special exemption in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which governs global nuclear trade, to allow it to buy reactors and fuel from overseas.

India, which has fractious relations with its nuclear-armed neighbour Pakistan, had been subject to a global embargo since 1974 when it first conducted a nuclear weapons test.

NEWS IN brief

BJP chief accused in irrigation scam

BBC ONLINE

India's top anti-corruption campaigner Arvind Kejriwal has accused Nitin Gadkari, chief of the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, of involvement in a massive corruption scandal.

The activist alleged that Gadkari was involved in an irrigation scam worth millions of dollars.

Kejriwal accused the BJP leader of stealing "the water, power and land of poor farmers". Gadkari has rejected similar charges by activists in the past.

In recent days, Kejriwal has made serious corruption allegations against Law Minister Salman Khurshid and Robert Vadra, son-in-law of the ruling

Amnesty Int'l hit with strike

AFP, London

Amnesty International, the body which defends human rights around the world, faced protests from its own staff on Wednesday as they went on strike over a dispute about redundancies.

Members of Unite, Britain's largest trade union, who work at Amnesty's global headquarters in London, organised a 24-hour walkout over a planned restructuring programme that could lead to dozens of job losses.

Amnesty is proposing to redistribute more than 500 staff in London to 10 regional hubs around the world, which Amnesty said would put representa-

7 masterpieces stolen from museum

AFP, Rotterdam, Netherlands

Seven masterpieces, including paintings by Picasso, Matisse, Monet and Gauguin, were stolen from a Dutch museum in a pre-dawn heist Tuesday, police said, with an expert adding the haul could be worth up to 200 million euros (\$260 million).

Alerted by an alarm but arriving at the museum in Rotterdam after the thief or thieves had fled, police said they had launched a major investigation that includes interviewing possible witnesses and examining closed-circuit television.

The art theft is the biggest in the Netherlands in more than 20 years.

Museum director Emily Ansenk, who flew back to Rotterdam after hearing of the theft during a visit to Turkey, told a press conference that what had happened was "a nightmare for any museum".

The stolen paintings were "unique works that are known around the world," she said.

S Lanka frees wanted Tiger leader

AFP, Colombo

The last leader of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, who is wanted by India over the assassination of former premier Rajiv Gandhi, has been freed from military custody, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Selvarasa Pathmanathan, who was arrested in August 2009, was no longer in detention and was free to carry out work for a charity he had formed, said Lakshman Hulugalle, the head of the defence ministry's media centre.

India regards the 58-year-old Pathmanathan as a key suspect in the May 1991 assassination of Gandhi by a Sri Lankan Tamil suicide bomber during an election rally in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

400 species added to 'threatened' list

AFP, Hyderabad

An island-dwelling cockroach and a tiny snail were declared extinct yesterday while 400 plants and animals were added to a threatened "Red List" as global environment ministers met in India.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) updated its authoritative study on the state of biodiversity on Earth, saying 20,219 species were at risk of dying out.

It added 402 species such as the Egyptian dab lizard and the Sichuan Taimen, a fresh water fish from China, to the "Red List", which puts them in the threatened category.

A quarter of the world's mammals, 13 percent of birds, 41 percent of amphibians and 33 percent of reef-building corals are at risk of extinction, according to the IUCN.

The report set alarm bells ringing as more than 70 environment ministers met for talks on halting the depletion of the Earth's natural resources, with pressure for them to match political pledges with hard cash.

Cows' milk protects against HIV!

PTI, Melbourne

Cows' milk can be potentially developed into affordable creams that can help protect humans against HIV, a study has claimed.

Lead scientist from University of Melbourne Marit Kramski found that when pregnant cows were vaccinated with an HIV protein, the first milk produced by the cow after giving birth, called colostrum, produced high antibodies to protect its newborn against disease.

Researchers were now planning to test the effectiveness and safety of the milk before turning it into a cream which will hopefully allow women to protect themselves against contracting the virus during sex, without relying on men, the Herald Sun reported.

However, the final result could be a decade off.

The researchers were able to inhibit the

virus from infecting cells when combing the virus cells with milk.

"We think the antibodies bind to the surface of the virus and blocks the protein which needs to be freed to get in contact with human cells like a key and lock system. If the key's not accessible or you change the key, you can't open the door," Kramski said adding "It's a very cheap and easy way to produce a lot of antibodies."

Kramski had partnered with Australian biotechnology company Immuron Ltd to develop the milk, and would continue working with them to produce a preventative cream.

"We have the antibodies at the moment the next step will be formulation," Kramski said.

Condoms were "cheap and easy" but not an option for everyone with millions of people getting infected with HIV every year, she added.

Defence lawyers castigated for delay

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defence of Quader Mollah were not "cooperating" with the court and were lingering cross-examination "to kill time".

Yesterday was fixed for cross-examination of Abdur Razzaque Khan, one of two investigation officers of the case against the Jamaat leader in connection with crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

Only Quader Mollah's case was on the tribunal's "cause list" yesterday.

When the judges of the tribunal took their seats at

10:40am, none of the defence was present at the courtroom. Two prosecutors, Abdur Razzaque and a number of journalists were present at that time.

At around 10:30am, the stipulated time to start the court proceedings, a court employee enquired about the defence but did not find anyone present.

Quader Mollah was produced at the courtroom at 10:45am and a junior member of the defence came as well.

"Where are your seniors? We have turned up in the

court, but none of your seniors is present," said Justice Obaidul Hassan.

Mohammad Shazzad Ali Chowdhury, the junior member of the defence, just said, "coming" and left the courtroom.

At that moment, Quader Mollah said from the dock that he was feeling unwell since Tuesday and urged the jail authorities to carry him in an ambulance, but they brought him in a prison van.

At that point, Judge Shahinur Islam asked him, "Where is your counsel?"

At 10:50am, the tribunal

ordered one of its bench officers to go to the defence's room on the ground floor.

"Go there and tell them [the defence] to come within five minutes. Otherwise, we will leave the bench [courtroom] and wouldn't allow them to cross-examine [the investigation officer]," said Justice Hassan adding, "What is this? It is indecency."

At 10:53am, Abdus Sobhan Tarafder and Ekramul Hauque, two senior members of the defence, appeared before the tribunal.

"We are here for last 15 minutes but none of you was present," said Justice Hassan.

"Sorry, my lord," apologised Abdus Sobhan.

"Sorry is not enough," said Judge Shahinur Islam, adding, "It appears that you are not cooperating [with the court]."

"You could have sent a person [counsel]. Your client wanted to say something. He has some problems. But none of you is present," said Justice Hassan.

"Newspersons are also here. What would be their impression and notion [about the court]?" said Judge Shahinur Islam.

The tribunal recorded cross-examination of Abdur Razzaque Khan, twelfth and last prosecution witness in the case, before adjourning the proceeding until today when Razzaque will face further cross-examination.

Following a plea from the defence, the tribunal allowed Quader Mollah to leave the courtroom at around 12:00pm as he was feeling "unwell".

Abdus Sobhan cross-examined Razzaque and Mohammad Ali and AKM Saiful Islam appeared on behalf of the prosecution.

On May 28, the tribunal indicted Quader Mollah on six charges of crimes against humanity including murder and mass killing.

SAYEDEE'S CASE

Two defence witnesses yesterday gave deposition in favour of war crimes accused and another Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

Prosecutor Syed Haidar Ali later completed cross-examination of the 14th defence witness -- Emran Hossain -- but could not cross-examine the 15th

defence witness -- Abdus Salam Hawladar -- since he suddenly fell ill.

Emran, 59, in his deposition claimed Sayedee was in Jessore until mid-May during the Liberation War in 1971.

Salam, 65, said some Razakars looted some houses in Parerhaat and adjacent localities and set fire to those on May 7-8, 1971.

The tribunal went to lunch break soon after the prosecutor began the cross-examination.

After the break, the defence informed the tribunal their witness threw up twice and suddenly fell ill and was taking rest on the ground-floor room.

Tribunal Chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq expressed surprise over Salam's sudden illness and asked the defence to bring him at the courtroom.

Salam entered the courtroom with the help of two persons. He was coughing. He was given a comfortable chair as per the tribunal's direction. The tribunal chairman then observed the witness for about 10 minutes while Salam was rubbing his head and neck.

The tribunal asked the witness if he would be able to face cross-examination and the witness replied in the negative.

The tribunal then sent him back and told the defence that the tribunal was not satisfied with the sudden illness of the witness.

"He [Salam] does not seem that much ill that he could not be able to face cross-examination," Justice Huq observed.

The tribunal also criticised the defence as they neither gave any treatment to the witness nor informed anyone including the tribunal about it.

The tribunal then asked the defence to produce him until the cross-examination of Sayedee's son is completed.

The prosecution later cross-examined Sayedee's son Masud Sayedee over the documents produced by him. The proceeding of the case was adjourned until today.

Sayedee, facing 20 charges of crimes against humanity allegedly committed by him during the Liberation War, was produced before the tribunal.

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