

THREE-STEP ROADMAP

India 'takes note' as China, Bhutan ink border talks MoU

TOI, New Delhi

China and Bhutan signed an MoU Thursday for what they called a "Three-step roadmap" for expediting the boundary negotiations and which according to Thimphu will provide fresh impetus to talks and can bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion acceptable to both sides.

The MoU comes at a time India's own talks with China to resolve the military standoff in eastern Ladakh remain inconclusive.

Like India, Bhutan remains locked in a boundary dispute with China and while the two have held 24 rounds of border talks since 1984, the last time they held these boundary negotiations was in 2016, or before the Doklam dispute involving India in 2017.

India closely follows all boundary engagements between Bhutan and China as Chinese claims over disputed territories have serious security implications for New Delhi. India's MEA was extremely cautious in reacting to the development as it said the government had noted the signing of the agreement.

"We have noted the signing of the MoU between Bhutan and China. You are aware that Bhutan and China have been holding boundary negotiations since 1984. Similarly, India has been holding boundary negotiations with China," said MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi, when

asked about whether or not Bhutan had kept India informed about the MoU.

For many, and going by past behaviour, it's inconceivable that Bhutan would not have discussed an MoU on the boundary issue without explaining at least the broad contours to Indian authorities. Bhutan has so far not accepted the Chinese 1996 "package deal" that offered to exchange territory in central Bhutan for Doklam, located dangerously close to India's Siliguri Corridor. China reiterated this land swap offer last year.

The 2017 Doklam standoff further complicated the border issue as India saw PLA's construction of a road in the Doklam area as a violation of the 2012 bilateral agreement that tri-junction boundary points between India, China and third countries will be finalised in consultation with the concerned countries.

China settled the boundary with Russia with a formal agreement in 2008 and has reached agreements in some other cases, but remains embroiled in maritime disputes with Japan and several Asean nations.

Bhutan said in its announcement that during the 10th expert group meeting with China in April this year, the sides had agreed on the roadmap that will apparently build on the 1988 Guiding Principles for the settlement of the boundary and expedite negotiations. In the media then, it was reported that Bhutan and China had discussed a three-step roadmap.



A boy stands at the entrance of a tent at an illegal improvised camp, outside Northern-Bosnian border town of Velika Kladusa yesterday. Some 300 illegal migrants from Asia, mostly Afghan people, set up an illegal camp in the outskirts of Velika Kladusa, to be closer to Bosnia-Croatia border in hope to cross into EU.

PHOTO: AFP

UN chief delayed Asean meeting to avoid Myanmar military envoy

AGENCIES

UN chief Antonio Guterres asked to postpone a virtual meeting with Southeast Asian ministers at the last minute to avoid signalling any recognition of Myanmar's military government by being in the same online room as the military's envoy, United Nations diplomats have said.

The meeting between the UN secretary-general and foreign ministers from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) - including Wunna Maung Lwin, the foreign minister appointed by the military - had been due to take place last Friday.

But the day before, Guterres asked Asean to postpone the meeting "until a time when it can be held in a mutually agreeable format, in view of the ongoing urgent international and regional issues", according to an October 8 note from Asean chair



Brunei - seen by the Reuters news agency - notifying members of the delay.

UN diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Guterres did not want to get ahead of a decision by UN member states on who will sit in Myanmar's seat at the world body after rival claims were made by the military and Kyaw Moe Tun, the current UN ambassador who was appointed by the elected government.

News of Guterres' reluctance to be seen at the same meeting as

a military envoy comes as Asean foreign ministers were due to hold a special meeting yesterday to discuss excluding coup leader and military chief Min Aung Hlaing from an upcoming summit, amid mounting frustration over the ruling military's failure to comply with a road map for peace that was drawn up six months ago, reports Al Jazeera.

Myanmar insisted Thursday it would not allow a regional special envoy to meet Suu Kyi. Meanwhile, the chief lawyer for Suu Kyi said yesterday he had been banned by the junta from speaking to journalists, diplomats or international organisations.

The gag order came after he relayed vivid testimony from the country's deposed president Win Myint - describing how he rejected a military offer to resign to save himself during the February 1 coup, reports AFP.

Two Indian soldiers killed as Kashmir tensions escalate

AFP, Srinagar

Suspected rebels killed an Indian army officer and a trooper during a manhunt in Kashmir, where 22 people have died in spiralling violence in the past two weeks, officials said yesterday.

The soldiers were chasing rebels in a forested area in southern Kashmir when a gun battle erupted late Thursday, Colonel Devendar Anand told AFP.

The hunt in the Mendhar region had been intensified since five soldiers were killed nearby three days earlier.

Violence in the Muslim-majority territory, also claimed by Pakistan, has escalated since last week, when armed militants staged attacks that left seven civilians dead, including three from the minority Hindu and Sikh communities.

Some members of the minority communities have since left the restive Kashmir valley fearing they will be targeted, media reported, echoing scenes during another surge in violence in the 1990s when thousands of Hindus fled the region.

Taliban will join Moscow talks next week

REUTERS, MOSCOW

Representatives of the Taliban have confirmed they will take part in talks on Afghanistan in Moscow next week, President Vladimir Putin's special representative on Afghanistan said yesterday.

The official, Zamir Kabulov, said in comments published by Russian news agencies that the Taliban had confirmed their attendance at the talks next Wednesday.

Moscow hosted an international conference on Afghanistan in March at which Russia, the US, China and Pakistan released a joint statement calling on the Afghan sides to reach a peace deal and curb violence.

CONTROL OVER TECH FIRMS

Microsoft shuttering LinkedIn in China

AFP, New York

Microsoft on Thursday said it will shut down career-oriented social network LinkedIn in China, citing a "challenging operating environment" as Beijing tightens its control over tech firms.

The US-based company will replace LinkedIn in China with an application dedicated to applying for jobs but without the networking features, according to senior vice president of engineering Mohak Shroff.

"We're... facing a significantly more challenging operating environment and greater compliance requirements in China," Shroff said in a blog post.

According to The Wall Street Journal, LinkedIn was given a deadline by Chinese internet regulators to better oversee content on the site.

LinkedIn, which launched in China in 2014, lets people use personal and professional relationships to find job opportunities.

Aside from being a venue for finding jobs, LinkedIn is a place for exchanges over business developments or news.

"You have to figure that on a business social network, you are going to have conversations about getting around regulations or complaining about regulations," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle of Engerle Group.

"The Chinese government has no sense of humor when it comes to criticism; the result is they have been very aggressive in stopping that kind of information."



Hindu devotees wearing personal protective equipment apply "sindhur", or vermilion powder, on each other after worshipping the idol of the Hindu goddess Durga on the last day of the Durga Puja festival in Kolkata, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Germany parties agree initial deal for next govt

AFP, Berlin

German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz yesterday took a step closer to succeeding Angela Merkel as chancellor, as his Social Democrats, the Greens and liberal FDP announced a preliminary deal to form a new government.

The three parties have been holding talks since Scholz's centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) won the general elections on September 26 with Merkel's conservatives in second place as she prepares to leave politics.

"Overall, we can sense here that a new beginning is possible, brought about by the three parties that have come together here," Scholz told reporters.

"We have agreed on a text from the exploratory talks," he said, calling it a "very good result that clearly shows that a government that aims to ensure we achieve progress can be formed in Germany."

Greens co-leader Annalena Baerbock said the initial agreement heralds a "coalition of progress" to "really use the next decade as a decade of renewal."

The agreement that will form the basis of formal coalition talks all but means that Merkel's CDU-CSU alliance is headed for the opposition benches after scoring their worst post-war election result.

CDU leader and chancellor hopeful Armin Laschet had recently said his party remains open to forming a governing coalition, but even his own job is hanging on a thread.

Facing their worst crisis in decades, the conservatives are planning a clean sweep of their leadership, with a congress by December to elect their new bosses.

Scholz, who is also Merkel's vice chancellor, this week voiced confidence that the three-way talks involving his party will produce Germany's next government before Christmas.

A coalition of SPD, Greens and FDP - known as "traffic-light" after the three parties' red, green and yellow colours - has found favour with Germans, with 62 percent approving the constellation as the next federal government, according to a poll published yesterday.

S'pore cancels license of news site critical of govt

Critics cry 'intimidation' of independent media

AFP, Singapore

A Singaporean news website often critical of the government had its licence canceled yesterday for failing to declare funding sources, with the editor slamming it as "harassment and intimidation" of independent media.

The Online Citizen (TOC) had long been in the authorities' crosshairs for running stories more critical of the authorities than those in the pro-government mainstream media.

Its license was suspended last month by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which had ordered the website to comply with a requirement to disclose funding sources.

IMDA said the website had "repeatedly refused to comply" despite reminders and extensions and canceled its permit with immediate effect.

The regulator said registered websites engaged in the "online promotion or discussion of political issues relating to Singapore" must disclose funding sources to prevent foreign interference.

The website's chief editor Terry Xu said he refused to comply because it would have meant disclosing the identities of his subscribers.

"We cannot betray the trust and privacy of our subscribers just simply to continue our operations," he told AFP.

He described the regulator's move as "nothing more than harassment and intimidation of independent media" in Singapore, which has been frequently accused by rights groups of stifling media freedoms. Last month, Xu and one TOC writer were ordered to pay substantial damages after losing a defamation suit against Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Singapore's parliament earlier this month also passed a law aimed at preventing foreign interference in domestic politics, but which the opposition and activists criticised as a tool to crush dissent. The law would allow authorities to compel internet service providers and social media platforms to provide user information, block content and remove applications used to spread content they deem hostile.

Partially shredded Banksy canvas sells for record £18.58 million

AFP, London

A partially shredded canvas of one of Banksy's most celebrated works sold at auction in London on Thursday for £18.58 million (\$25.38 million), a new record for the British artist, three years after the artwork was bought for a fraction of that price.

The artwork - now called "Love is in the Bin" - sold for nearly £1.1 million at the same Sotheby's auction house location in October 2018, before it dramatically passed through a shredder hidden in the large Victorian-style frame moments later.

The surreal prank was orchestrated by the elusive and irreverent Banksy, whose identity is said to be known to only a handful of friends, and caused a global sensation.

Thursday evening's sale, which



saw nine bidders battle for around 10 minutes for the work formerly called "Girl With Balloon", beats the previous record of £16.75 million set for Banksy in March. Bidding for "Love is in the Bin" quickly climbed from the starting price of £2.5 million, with auctioneer Oliver Barker revelling in the drama. "I can't tell you how terrified I am to bring down this hammer," he said as the final bid went unchallenged.

The work was reportedly sold to a private investor. The seventh lot in a wide-ranging contemporary arts offering, it had an estimated selling price of between £4-6 million.

"It is almost three years to the day since one of the most ingenious moments of performance art this century made auction history," Alex Branczik of Sotheby's said following the record haul.

"Banksy is no stranger to making headlines and this latest chapter in his story has captured imaginations across the world - we can only begin to guess what might come next."

The 2018 stunt, which poked fun at the traditionally staid world of fine art, is typical of the graffiti artist's disruptive style evident since his work first began appearing on the streets of Bristol in southwest England in the 1980s.