

# N Korea suspends talks with South

## US-DPRK war possible: UN envoy

AFP, Seoul

North Korea on Saturday suspended planned economic cooperation and maritime talks with South Korea citing Seoul's military alert posture during the Iraqi war and its joint military drill with the United States.

North Korea's chief delegate to the inter-Korean economic cooperation committee, Pak Chang-Ryon, said in a statement the North had to postpone indefinitely the two meetings scheduled for the coming week.

He accused the South of putting its military on a high alert posture, dubbed a defense readiness condition, against the North "under the

pretext of the Iraqi war," according to North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency.

He also attacked the South for staging an annual joint military drill with the 37,000 US troops stationing here.

"The behaviour of the South Korean authorities is a rude perfidy to the dialogue partner and a reckless act of laying an artificial obstacle in the way of contacts and dialogue between both sides," he said.

"Such sabre-rattling of one party to dialogue against the other dialogue partner compels us to postpone (these meetings)," he said.

"The South is to blame for this," he added.

Officials of the unification ministry in Seoul said the South had not yet been officially informed of the postponement.

The move came a day after Pyongyang accused Seoul of threatening behaviour that could destroy inter-Korean relations after South Korea backed the US war on Iraq and expressed worries about the North's nuclear weapons drive.

The North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, which handles relations with the South, said in a statement on Friday that South Korea had raised its military alert

status to unprecedented levels and was staging joint military drills with the United States targeting the North.

Meanwhile, a top United Nations envoy returned from North Korea Saturday and said it was possible the United States and the Stalinist nation could go to war although Pyongyang was keen to avoid conflict.

Maurice Strong, special envoy of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, told reporters on arrival in Beijing: "There is no need for war and yet war could occur if the parties concerned cannot find a way of resolving the differences across the table diplomatically."



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan army troopers dismantle the equipment from the venue of military parade as the government announced the cancellation of National Day celebrations, in Islamabad on Saturday. A Pakistan National Day military parade in Islamabad due Sunday had been cancelled and the upcoming South Asian Games had been postponed in view of the "sad and tragic developments in Iraq and the deep anguish caused to the people of Pakistan."

## Pakistani PM postpones US visit

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali postponed his official visit to the United States scheduled for next week because of domestic opposition to the Iraq conflict officials said Saturday.

"In deference to the sentiments of the people, the Prime Minister has decided to postpone his visit to United States," a government spokesman told AFP.

The visit will be rescheduled through mutual consultation, spokesman Akram Shaheed said.

US officials in Washington earlier gave no explanation for the postponement, saying only that US President George Bush "looks forward to rescheduling" the Pakistani leader's visit at the earliest mutual convenience.

Earlier an official announcement said Pakistan National Day military parade in Islamabad on Sunday has also been cancelled, along with the upcoming South Asian Games, in view of the "sad and tragic developments in Iraq and the deep anguish caused to the people of Pakistan."

A foreign ministry official said Jamali's March 24-26 visit to China would, however, go ahead as scheduled.

Pakistan, a current member of the United Nations Security Council, has been placed in a highly delicate position by the Iraq crisis, torn between support for its US anti-terror ally and a recognition of firm opposition to war at home.

Official sources said that the postponement of the Washington visit had been made by mutual agreement.

## 5 killed in bomb blast in Kanpur

AFP, New Delhi

Five people were killed and another five injured in a bomb explosion in the northern Indian city of Kanpur, a report said Saturday.

The blast took place late Friday as a group of people was assembling the bomb, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said.

The explosion was so powerful that the building collapsed under its impact, said PTI quoting unnamed police sources.

Police are investigating the explosion and those making the bomb, the report added.

# UN, ministers seek more aid to battle water crisis

AFP, Kyoto

Developed nations must allocate greater financial resources to the battle against the global water and sanitation crisis, ministers and delegates at the Third World Water Forum said Saturday.

About 100 ministers from 96 nations attended the forum's closing two-day ministerial meeting, which was on Sunday to issue a declaration expected to outline ways to achieve the UN Millennium Goals of halving to one billion the number of people without adequate access to water and sanitation.

"This year, the International Year of Freshwater, we must move from promises to practice, from commitments to concrete projects, from intent to implementation," said a statement from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan read by UN Environment Programme chief Klaus Toepfer.

"This is a social, economical, environmental and political crisis that should be among the world community's highest priorities."

"The investments, policies and

technologies required to rise to this challenge are within our means," he said.

Developed nations must increase their financial assistance for poor nations, said UNESCO director Koichiro Matsuura.

"Lack of political will, and inertia at the leadership level" were failing to meet the expectations of the poor, he said.

Empowering municipalities and financing the projects best-suited to their needs was the only way to ensure that the world's 2.4 billion without access to water and sanitation were served, said Michel Camdessus, a former head of the International Monetary Fund.

Camdessus led a 20-member panel of businessmen, international lenders and NGO representatives that presented recommendations to finance water and sanitation infrastructure and suggested an additional 100 billion dollars was needed annually to achieve the UN goals.

The report, "Water Financing for All," said international loans, public investment and official development aid needed to double to achieve the

estimated 400,000 water and sewage connections needed daily for the next 12 years to provide adequate access to water and sanitation.

Current global spending on water projects, agriculture, environment and sanitation hovers around 80 billion dollars.

"Decentralisation is key. Financing of projects should be done at the local level," he said. "There is no other way to achieve (the UN) goals."

The report was criticised by NGOs as too bound to corporate interests with not enough focus on the needs of the poor.

They rejected it as the product of "an unaccountable unrepresentative, inaccessible process no longer suitable for this day and age," Hilda Grace Coelho, the president of India's Center for Rural Studies and Development, said in an NGO response at the opening of the ministers' meeting.

"Despite ample and credible evidence of the value of local actions within river basins, (the poor) continue to be marginalised and trivialized."



PHOTO: AFP

Fleeing members of the Ijaw ethnic group load their wares into a canoe on Friday at Ogbel-joh jetty in the Niger Delta town of Warri. The US ChevronTexaco oil company said it had shut down its oil wells in the troubled region following ethnic strife between members of the Ijaw and Itsekiri communities in the crisis-torn Niger Delta towns. ChevronTexaco's decision, coming after a similar closure by Shell slashes 266,000 barrels per day or 13 percent from Africa's largest oil producing nation.

## Security biggest obstacle to Afghan peace: Annan

AFP, United Nations

Security is Afghanistan's biggest threat since the fundamentalist Taliban regime was ousted in 2001, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said.

"Security remains the most serious challenge facing the peace process in Afghanistan," Annan said.

In his report to the Security Council on Friday, Annan said that the "re-establishment of the rule of law, elimination of human rights abuses, reconstruction and political transformation are all impeded by the uncertain security situation."

"Elements of the transitional administrations continue to be seen by Afghans as serving primarily one Afghan constituency or another," Annan said.

"The political process should be broad and open enough so that all Afghans who wish to participate in good faith can do so," he added.

## 'Dozens dead' in Nigerian clashes

BBC ONLINE

Villagers fleeing violence in Nigeria's oil-rich western Niger Delta say dozens of people have been killed in clashes between soldiers and rival gangs of ethnic militants.

Fighting between two local communities, the Ijaw and Itsekiri, has been raging for more than a week, drawing in thousands of soldiers.

The refugees described soldiers and militants burning down dozens of villages and firing indiscriminately.

The violence prompted the US oil company, Chevron Texaco, to suspend operations in the region on Thursday - slashing output levels in Africa's biggest producer by 13%.

Some reports said the Anglo-Dutch company Shell had also confirmed it would not be able to meet its contractual obligations on Friday.

Refugees from both communities, retreating from the swampy

region south of the town of Warri, told of scores of deaths.

Ruth Tinghala described soldiers firing "horizontally" and torching homes and shops.

"I saw many [people] fall," she told news agency AP. "I didn't stay to see if they were dead or alive."

Ijaw leaders and refugees say 50 fighters were killed in battles with navy and army forces in the village of Okorenkoron on Thursday alone.

They say a state of siege has been imposed on the Ijaw community, with navy gunboats and troops imposing a 24-hour blockade on the creeks around their villages, according to the AFP news agency.

Military officials have previously denied attacking civilians, and stressed they used minimum force when possible.

Ten government troops are said to have been killed.

On Thursday, Chevron Texaco evacuated hundreds of villagers by air from areas affected by the violence.

## 2 detained as US troops keep up Afghan drive against al-Qaeda

AFP, Bagram Air Base

Two people have been detained as a major operation involving US-led troops in southern Afghanistan began trawling villages for al-Qaeda-linked extremists, a military spokesman said Saturday.

The two were seized as up to 600 US, Romanian and a small number of Afghan troops backed by heavily-armed helicopters fanned out across the Sami Ghar mountains, 140 km east of the main southern city of Kandahar.

King said the 48-hour-old operation code-named "Valiant Strike", which began almost simultaneously with US-led air strikes on Iraq, had so far failed to result in any combat encounters with extremists.

"Operation Valiant Strike continues in the Sami Ghar mountains with coalition forces clearing several objectives in the area in the past 24 hours, there's been no enemy contact, however coalition forces have found a small cache of ammunition."

"They took two men under control who were associated with that cache."

King said the troops had established positions in the mountainous area close to the border with Pakistan and were now fanning out to check land, buildings and caves which intelligence indicated could contain "enemy" forces.

## 9 die in bus-truck collision in Rajasthan

AFP, New Delhi

Nine people, including three women, were killed and more than 30 injured when an overloaded passenger bus collided with a truck in India's western desert state of Rajasthan, a report said.

The accident occurred late Friday when the private bus with about 100 passengers on board collided with the truck in the Jaisalmer district, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

The injured were taken to hospital, the report added.

## Italy steps up security at nuclear storage sites

AFP, Rome

Italian authorities have reinforced security around nuclear waste storage facilities fearing they could be targets of terrorist attacks, the interior ministry said.

The measures were ordered by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the ministry said Friday.

Almost 55,000 cubic metres of highly radioactive nuclear waste and nearly 300 tonnes of spent fuel are stored at 19 sites in Italy, according to Sogin, the company that is mothballing the country's four nuclear plants since a 1987 decision to abandon nuclear power.

Entrances to the sites will henceforth be protected by concrete barriers and trucks.

Sogin said one facility, at Saluggia in northwestern Piedmont region, will be protected by a structure capable of withstanding the impact of a plane or a missile.

The operation, which has been speeded up following the start of the war in Iraq, is aimed at preventing suicide attacks by terrorist using explosive-laden trucks, the ministry said.

Since January, the Italian government has sought a site where it can deposit all its radioactive nuclear waste in order to better protect against a possible terrorist attack.

## 8 killed in Indo-Pak cross-border firing, Kashmir encounter

AFP, Srinagar

Four civilians were killed and two others were injured in overnight exchanges of artillery and mortar fire between Indian and Pakistani troops along the defacto Kashmir border, police said Saturday.

Separately four people died in an overnight gunbattle in the restive state.

The exchange of fire began late Friday in the Karna sector of the northern Kupwara district, which borders Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Indian police accused the Pakistani army of opening "unprovoked fire" from across the Line of Control (LoC) -- the defacto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

"Four civilians were killed and two others injured in intense Pakistani shelling in the Karna sector of Kupwara," a police spokesman said, adding the condition of the injured was critical.

All the dead and the injured were Muslim porters working with the

Indian army.

The spokesman said Indian troops returned fire and the exchange continued for several hours.

"Casualties, if any, on the other side of the border could not be ascertained," he said.

The firing coincided with a three-day visit by the Indian army chief who arrived in Kashmir Friday.

Indian and Pakistani troops exchange frequent fire along the 742-kilometre (460 miles) long LoC, resulting in military and civilian casualties on both sides of the region, which is divided between the two countries and claimed in full by both.

Meanwhile, two Indian soldiers and two Muslim rebels were killed in a fierce four-hour overnight gunbattle in the southern Rajouri district, police said.

The encounter erupted during a cordon and search operation also left two other troops seriously injured.

More than 37,500 people have died in Kashmir since the eruption of anti-Indian rebellion in 1989.

## Israel mulls lowering state of alert

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel on Saturday was considering lowering its state of alert as the already minor threat of Iraqi missile strikes dwindled even further with the taking by coalition forces of key airfields in western Iraq, the only part of the country within striking range of the Jewish state.

"The government will make a new evaluation of the situation with security officials at its weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday after the American army apparently took almost complete control of western Iraq," said a government official who asked not to be named.

"The government will act carefully and will not tell the population to not carry gas masks around permanently until we are certain the Iraqi danger has passed."

Deputy Defence Minister Zeev Boim told Israel radio it was still "too early" to tell the population not to carry their gas masks, though after the first day of the war few Israelis could be seen with the trademark cardboard boxes containing masks.

Army radio said the decision to lift the state of alert could come at

the "beginning of the week," which in Israel is Sunday, since the US army controls almost the whole of western Iraq, including the military air bases known as H2 and H3, from which Iraq fired Scud missiles in the 1991 Gulf War.

On Friday a spokesman for the government said the chances of Israel being attacked by Iraqi missiles were almost zero.

"If the chances were one percent yesterday, they are maybe 0.1 percent today," said Danny Seaman.

The United States had frequently reassured Israel that one of its first priorities in its invasion plan would be to secure Iraq's western desert to avoid Israel being dragged into the conflict.

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz has said that unlike in 1991, Israel would strike back this time if attacked, without specifying what level of force would be used.

The head of military intelligence, General Aharon Zevi, said on Wednesday before the US and British forces initiated their attack on Iraq that President Saddam Hussein had no missiles deployed in western Iraq.

## US fails to tame Indo-Pak nuke ambitions

PTI, Washington

The United States has admitted it faces a "conundrum" in convincing India and Pakistan to go slow on their nuclear ambitions, but said it was working hard to get them to exercise restraint.

"Under the rules of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India and Pakistan, which are not signatories, cannot be accepted as nuclear weapon states. But they do have nuclear weapons and we see no realistic prospect that they will be getting rid of them any day soon," US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca said on Friday.

Testifying before the International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Rocca said the Bush administration is working on three key areas to solve the

problem.

"We are working hard with both nations to get them to exercise restraint. We are asking them not to conduct nuclear tests, to minimise missile tests, to announce their missile tests in order to keep the tensions down, to announce them in advance, to bring an early end to the production of fissile material, which would be in line with their stated policies of having these weapons as a minimum credible deterrent."

"We are also asking them not to build sea-launch or intercontinental ballistic missiles, not to deploy nuclear-capable warheads or ballistic missiles, and to keep missiles and warheads at separate locations," she said.

The US, she added, was working closely with both countries on

stopping proliferation. The third area is one of defusing tensions between them. "The high levels of tension and the lack of dialogue and the cold war that exists increases the risk that the nuclear threshold might be crossed through misperception or inadvertence."

On the issue of the reported transfer of uranium enrichment technology from Pakistan to North Korea, Rocca said the US has carefully reviewed all the information available "and decided that they did not warrant the imposition of sanctions under applicable US laws."

Asked what reply she would give India when it points out that France broke the moratorium on nuclear testing and nothing happened, she said, "there is no easy answer."



PHOTO: AFP

Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (L) welcomes Nepal's King Gyanendra (C) and his wife Queen Komal Raj (R) Laxmi Devi before a meeting at presidential palace in New Delhi on Friday. Gyanendra is in India for a 10 day-long visit.

## Blasts damage 2 police posts in Kosovo

AFP, Pristina

Bomb explosions rocked two police stations in Kosovo's capital Pristina late Friday, causing damage to the buildings and vehicles but no casualties, a UN official said.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the blasts, which took place in different parts of the city within one hour, Al Garcia, spokesman for the UN police in Pristina told AFP.

"At around 8:30 pm two explosive devices went off at a police station in central Pristina, followed by another explosion at a different police station in the west of the city," Garcia said.

Two police vehicles were damaged and windows were shattered in the police stations and buildings nearby. No injuries were reported.

"We have no suspects for the time being. Security has been heightened at other police stations in the city," Garcia said.