PAKISTAN SAYS

dismantled

AP, Islamabad

very harshly.

Nuclear network

Pakistan said Thursday it had taken all "appropriate action" to break up the underground nuclear network run by its former chief nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan.

Foreign Minister Khursheed

Kasuri made the remarks one day

after a British newspaper alleged Khan's network may still be in opera-

tion. The Guardian report cited an unidentified European Union

"Pakistan is very sorry and is very upset and has taken all appropriate

action in dismantling the under-ground network," Kasuri said. "Dr

A.Q. Khan has fallen from the high pedestal that he had," he said, adding

that Khan had already been "treated

Kasuri was speaking after meeting Taro Aso, the Japanese minister for foreign affairs, in Islamabad.

Khan, the founding father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons

programme, acknowledged in February 2004 that he gave sensitive

nuclear technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya. President Bush has

labeled North Korea and Iran part of an "axis of evil" and analysts say both

INTERNATIONAL

Lanka seeks US help to avert war

One person was killed and six were wounded in sporadic attacks in Sri Lanka's troubled eastern region overnight, the military said yesterday, as the government sought US diplomatic help to avoid a slide

A civilian died and three others were hurt when an unidentified gunman lobbed a grenade and opened fire near rebel-held territory in the eastern district of

In the neighbouring Trincomalee district, three soldiers were wounded in a grenade attack.

Amid the continuing violence, the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are locked in a propaganda war, each accusing the other of being behind a string of deadly attacks that are straining a 2002 ceasefire to break-

Foreign Minister Mangala

of State Condoleezza Rice on the island's deteriorating security situation overnight during an official visit to Washington.

"It's ... the psychological impact of maintaining pressure and trying to make the Tigers feel they are diplomatically and internationally isolated," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives

Suspected rebel attacks escalated after the Tigers helped sink the chances of of the candidate seen as most likely to reach a peace deal by boycotting a November presidential poll. Analysts say this shows they are using the truce to regroup and rearm.

The two sides cannot even agree on a venue for peace talks, with the Tigers insisting they be held in Europe and the government insist-

Norwegian peace envoy Erik

23 to try to break the deadlock and the government has put the onus on him to sort out the venue.

Analysts say both sides will have to compromise or risk facing a very grim scenario.

"They'll look bloody stupid if at the end of the day the only reason why they couldn't get to talk to each other is because they couldn't agree where to do it," Saravanamuttu said.

The government is hoping the European Union will make good on a threat to list the Tigers as a banned terrorist organisation, which diplomats say the 25-nation bloc could do if the suspected rebel attacks continue The United States banned the

LTTE in 1997 and US forces have been training Sri Lankan troops, but diplomats say there is no chance it would wade in militarily if the violence spirals into war.

India has already sidestepped Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse's call to get more involved in the peace process, mindful of an abortive peacekeeping mission in the 1980s that turned into all-out war with the Tigers.

Norway said this week it would adhere to a United Nations list of banned terror organisations rather than the European Union's list.

"It makes perfect sense. It's a pre-emptive move. An EU ban would make life very hard for Norway as mediator," said one diplomat on condition of anonym-

The Tigers say they want a political solution to the conflict, which has killed over 64,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. But they have declared they are ready for war unless they are given wide autonomy in the north and east, where they already run a de facto state



least 53 people were killed and dozens more injured when a building collapsed in the latest tragedy to hit the annual

Saudi rescuers work at the site of a collapsed old hotel near the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Makkah Thursday. At hajj pilgrimage in Makkah

Sri Lankan children carry a banner during a peace walk with children from all over the country in Colombo yesterday. The walk was organised by the Sri Lanka National Trinity Foundation Of Children.

Musharraf Says

Kashmir should enjoy self-governance

REUTERS, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf told Kashmiri independence leaders that he hoped India would respond positively to Pakistan's proposal to demilitarise the disputed Himalayan region and grant it self-governance.

"For any solution to Kashmir to be durable it has to be in accordance with the wishes of Kashmiri people," Musharraf was quoted as saying by the Associated Press of

His reported remarks were made during a meeting late on Thursday with leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference visit-ing from the Indian side of divided

Musharraf said Pakistan and India had moved forward on confi-dence-building measures since starting a peace process two years ago, but needed solid progress on conflict resolution, according to the Pakistani news agency.

Pakistan wants to inject more urgency into the peace process, particularly regarding the Kashmir dispute.

Musharraf's comments came before a Jan. 17 meeting in New Delhi between India and Pakistan's foreign secretaries for a third stage of their "composite dialogue", which aims to resolve a range of issues between the two rivals.

So far the most significant result has been the opening of road links across the ceasefire line, known as the Line of Control, dividing

Both governments were criticised for refusing to shed their long-held mutual distrust to ease the plight of Kashmiris caught in the earthquake that struck both sides of the border on Oct. 8. They did, however, exchange aid supplies after negotiations.

Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said proposals for self-governance in Kashmir should

"These proposals should be discussed and taken forward formally, beginning with the next round of Pakistan-India dialogue at foreign secretaries' level," he

in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

Thursday was one of the bloodies days for US forces in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, with 11 soldiers dying in a fresh spasm of violence that also killed 130 Íraqis, the US military said on Friday.

Roadside bombs, favoured by the insurgents but feared by US soldiers for their devastating effectiveness, accounted for seven of the American

US commanders have expressed concern in recent months at the growing use of more powerful and ophisticated bombs

George W. Bush and his Republican party face pressure at home over the rising American death toll, but the US president said on Wednesday a cut in troops would be based on the situation on the ground and decisions by military commanders, not a timetable imposed from Washington.

The United States hopes the formation of a coalition government encompassing leaders of Iraqi's Shia, Kurdish and Sunni groups after last month's election will help undermine the Sunni Arab-led insurgency and pave the way for a troop withdrawal.

Bloody Thursday for US military UN asks Nepal to stop gross HR abuses

Kathmandu fears new wave of bloodshed

REUTERS, AFP, United Nations/

The UN human rights commissioner, Louise Arbour, urged the Nepalese government and Maoist rebels to stop fighting and abusing civilians now that a four month cease-fire has ended.

"It is a tragedy for the people of Nepal that full-scale armed conflict may now resume," Arbour said in a statement released in New York and Geneva on Thursday.

"But there need not and must not be the same gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights standards that have been perpetrated during previous phases of the conflict,"

Arbour referred to a history of executions, abductions, attacks on buses, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and widespread torture. Children have been killed,

recruited, used as informers, and arbitrarily detained and beaten. She said that Nepal had ratified

the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners as well as other human rights treaties while the Nepalese Communist Party had made general commitments to espect international humanitar-

Both sides should "declare publicly their acceptance of all that these principles, and to explain to their cadres their responsibility to respect them in practice," Arbour said.

On Thursday, three police officers were killed by the rebels and at least 11 people were wounded in the worst day of violence since the cease-fire ended this week, police and witnesses

The rebels -- who have been fighting since 1996 to topple the Hindu monarchy and set up a singleparty Communist state -- on

Monday ended their four-month unilateral cease-fire, accusing gov-ernment forces of provoking the

Meanwhile, a Nepal Maoist rebel died in a battle with soldiers Friday, the army said, a day after three policemen were killed in the deadliest clash with the guerrillas since a ceasefire ended earlier this The latest bloodshed came as human rights groups and analysts

in violence in the Himalayan kingdom and one leading Nepal human rights group called for a new Friday's clash took place in Rauthat district, 150 kilometres (93 miles) south of Kathmandu, an

expressed fears about an upsurge

army official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"There were no army casual-

Sharon stroke leaves US The burly warhorse with hard choices

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's massive stroke leaves the United States with hard choices in tackling a Middle East peace process challenged on several fronts, US analysts said Thursday.

They said the absence of Sharon from the political scene left Washington with no Israeli partner of his clout and standing to push through deals with the Palestinians and clouded the future of USbacked peace efforts.

Some experts also questioned whether the administration of President George W. Bush would maintain its high-profile investment in the search for peace if continuing political turmoil made substantive gains doubtful.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed confidence Thursday the Israeli people would remain committed to the peace process advanced most notably by Sharon's decision to evacuate the Gaza Strip in September.

"I do believe that the desire for peace, the desire for a stable relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians, is one that runs wide and deep in Israeli society," she told a breakfast meeting with

But analysts such as Tamara Wittes, a Middle East watcher for the Brookings Institution, said such sentiment still required leadership and there was no obvious replacement for Sharon and his close ties to Bush.

"It's not at all clear who the Israeli political leader is who ... has the trust of the Israeli public to take what would be bold and probably divisive and painful steps in order to advance the peace process,' Wittes said.

Acting prime minister Ehud Olmert is a close ally of Sharon and has stood by him through the difficult Gaza operation as well as his boss's move to found a new

But US officials were still feeling their way with Olmert, a former Jerusalem mayor whom State

Department spokesman Sean McCormack said was "well known, well respected to members of this administration.

Officials said Thursday Rice had spoken more than once to Sharon's top aide Dov Weisglas since the crisis broke but was still trying to organise a phone conversation with Olmert.

The sharp deterioriation in Sharon's health came at the most delicate of moments in the region. with the Palestinians facing crucial parliamentary elections on January 25 and the Israelis on

It also came with the United States struggling to parlay the Gaza handover, which it once billed as a milestone, into renewed efforts to implement a peace "roadmap" aimed at creation of an independent Palestinian state.

trouble making stick an agreement on freedom of movement for Palestinians that Rice brokered in November after marathon talks in

The Americans are even having

turned man of peace

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, fighting for his life after suffering a massive stroke, is a towering figure known as "the Bulldozer" who transformed himself from a former general and hawkish politician into a man regarded as a peacemaker.

The 77-year-old Sharon underwent seven hours of surgery before doctors were able to halt bleeding in his brain but the prime minister remained in a critical condition.

The powers of the premier, who is seeking re-election at a general election scheduled for March 28 at the head of a new centrist party, has been transferred to Finance Minister Ehud Olmert. Sharon, who turns 78 in

and controversial mark on Israel's military and political landscape over the last half-century. Despite concerns about his health, particularly his weight, Sharon has maintained the kind of punishing work schedule that would have exhausted a man half

February, has etched an indelible

Although the burly premier has

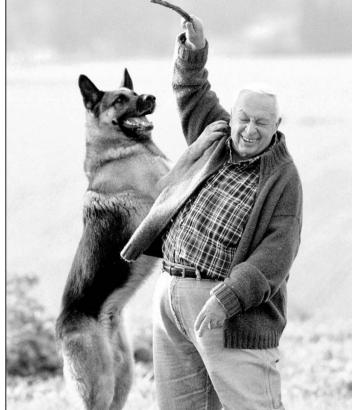
cut down on his foreign travels in recent years, he has continued to lead from the front during some of the most far-reaching changes in Israeli history.

In November, the domineering Sharon announced he was leaving the right-wing Likud party that he was instrumental in forming in 1973 and setting up his new party, The decision came as a result of

his frustration at having to battle hardliners within Likud who refused to forgive him for pulling settlers and troops out of the Gaza Strip over the summer.

His abandonment of Likud was seen as the ultimate political gamble for the man once reviled for masterminding Israel's disastrous invasion of Lebanon and now lauded for withdrawing troops and settlers from Gaza.

Over the years, the prime minister has shown himself an artful politician, trading in his image of nardline to one of moderate, with US President George W. Bush and even Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak describing him as a man



A file picture shows Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon with his dog at his Sycamore ranch in southern Israel's Negev desert. Sharon was rushed back to the operation theatre yesterday after doctors detected new bleeding in his brain.

Evicted Gaza settlers see divine retribution for Sharon

Jewish settlers evicted from the Gaza Strip by the now critically ill Ariel Sharon, said the premier's plight was divine retribution for selling out to the Palestinians.

And other hardliners even said he had fallen under the spell of a death curse they put on him last

"The Torah says that whoever touches the land of Israel gets his punishment. Everything is from God," said Koby Zohar, a 30-yearold teacher, standing outside a four-star Jerusalem hotel that is his temporary home.

Along with his wife and four children, Zohar was forced out of his home in the Gaza Strip last summer. The Israeli state is paying for their sojourn in the Shalom Hotel until new permanent housing is ready.

Although Sharon master-minded Israel's settlement policy, it was he who decided to dismantle 25 of them last year, mostly in the Gaza Strip, after a 38-year occupation.

A Pakistani Kashmiri earthquake survivor sits with her children outside her tent in a hilly area covered with snow in Awan Patti, some 38km from the devastated city of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan Administered Kashmir

Asia shivers under low temperatures

Large parts of Asia shivered under record low temperatures and snowfall yesterday in an unusually severe winter that has killed dozens and forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of people.

At least 57 people have died in Japan and transport has been paralysed after some of the heaviest snowfall on record. Television has showed drifts burying the ground floors of houses and almost covering street lamps.

Heavy snowfall in China's far western region of Xinjiang and temperatures as low as minus -43 degrees Celsius have forced the evacuation of almost 100,000 people, the state weather bureau said. Rescue teams have rushed to the

area where up to one 1 metre of snow

has fallen since late December, the China Meteorological Administration said on its Website (www.cma.gov.cn). Snow has blanketed the eastern province of Shandong too, cutting off roads and grounding aircraft, as China chills in what the China Daily said this week was the coldest winter in 20 years.

In South Korea, temperatures fell as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius in some northeastern parts of the country while snow hit southwestern regions, including Cheju Island. Late on Friday, the Korea Meteorological Administration

issued warnings of more heavy snowfall in parts of Cheju and other smaller islands along the southwestern cost line. In northern Pakistan, up to 18

people have died from pneumonia in the region hit by a killer earth-quake in October, which left over 73,000 dead and millions homeless. Heavy snowfall and chill winds

last weekend disrupted helicopter relief flights, and caused the collapse of many makeshift tents sheltering families next to their destroyed homes high in the Himalayan foothills of Pakistani Kashmir and North West Frontier

'3.9 million dead from war in DR Congo'

AFP, Paris

Eight years of war in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have left nearly four million people dead, making it the deadliest humanitarian crisis today, according to a study published on Saturday in the British medical weekly The Lancet.

The estimate is extrapolated from a nationwide survey among 19,500 The national mortality rate was found to be 2.1 deaths per 1,000 per month, 40 percent higher than other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, investigators caid

investigators said The war's death toll was estimated at 3.9 million people, from the outbreak of the conflict in 1998 to mid-2004, when the survey was carried

Casualties were significantly higher in DRC's violence-torn, resource-richeastern provinces.

"Most deaths were from easily preventable and treatable illnesses rather than violence," according to the study, lead-authored by Richard Brennan of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in New York.

RICE SAYS

US may initiate UNSC action against Iran

AFP, Washington

The United States may initiate action to haul Iran before the UN Security Council if it pursues its latest threat to resume nuclear fuel research, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned

"They shouldn't do it because it would really be a sign that they are not prepared to actually make diplomacy work," Rice told report-

"In terms of the next phase, if negotiations have been exhausted, we have the votes, there is a resolution sitting there on the Security Council, we'll vote it," she said.

Rice declined to give a timeline for such action but said "the Iranians are digging their own hole of isolation deeper and deeper."

Her remarks here came as Iranian delegates failed to show up at the headquarters of the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, in Vienna Thursday for a scheduled meeting to discuss Tehran's plan to resume atomic fuel research, which was suspended two years ago.

nuclear energy". It has said it will re-start the programme on The plan was revealed in a letter Tuesday to the IAEA, prompting

as a "programme for peaceful

Tehran has described the plan

the world nuclear watchdog to seek "clarifications".

The European Union and the United States fear Iran's civil nuclear programme could provide cover for developing a nuclear bomb. Tehran denies the accusation, insisting the programme is designed solely to meet its electric-