

## Maoists want to extend truce for 'lasting peace'

### Nepal plans to hold election by mid-April

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels pledged Wednesday to extend a ceasefire in a bid to "establish lasting peace" in the Himalayan nation.

"As the peace process has moved in a positive direction, the three-month ceasefire will definitely be extended," Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara told AFP.

The spokesman did not reveal how long the ceasefire, which is slated to end in just over a week, would be extended but said the Maoists wanted "to establish lasting peace in the country."

The Maoists declared a ceasefire April 27 after King Gyanendra was forced to end 14 months of direct rule and reinstate parliament following weeks of pro-

democracy protests.

The protests, which left 19 people dead and hundreds injured, were organized by political parties and Maoists who formed a loose alliance last November.

The rebels have pledged not to return to war and said they will return land and property that they seized during the 10-year conflict.

Both sides have agreed to hold elections to a body that will redraft Nepal's constitution and formally remove the king from politics.

On Friday, the rebel leadership is scheduled to meet Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for a second round of high-level peace talks.

After the first round June 16, the two sides announced they planned to draft a temporary constitution, dissolve the recently reinstated parliament and

form an interim government that would include the rebels.

Since the rebels began their "people's war" in 1996, at least 12,500 people have been killed and some 200,000 displaced.

Meanwhile, Nepal's government plans to hold elections to a body to redraft the constitution before the end of next April, the country's premier said in a letter to the United Nations released Wednesday.

"As we plan to hold the election to the constituent assembly by the end of the current Nepali year (mid-April 2007), I would be grateful if you could start extending the necessary support of the United Nations," Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said in a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sent on July 3.

The letter marks the first time the government has publicly given a time-frame for the constituent assembly elections.

The staging of the ballot is a key demand of Maoist rebels, who Wednesday pledged to continue observing a truce with the Himalayan nation's recently reinstated government.

The two sides have been observing a ceasefire since weeks of street demonstrations forced King Gyanendra in late April to reinstate parliament and give up the direct power he had seized 14 months previously.

The protests, which left 19 people dead and hundreds injured, were organized by sidelined political parties and Maoists who formed a loose alliance last November.



Foreign nationals board French military ship "Jean de Vienne" at Beirut port yesterday. They were evacuated due to the Israeli military offensive on Lebanon.



People fleeing their homes in Pangandaran, Indonesia fearing another tsunami. Java has been rattled by 52 strong aftershocks since a major quake triggered a tsunami this week.

## Java rattled by 52 strong aftershocks

AFP, Pangandaran

Indonesia's Java has been rattled by 52 strong aftershocks since a major quake triggered a tsunami this week, four of which on Wednesday caused panic among survivors, officials said.

Four strong quakes on Wednesday morning with magnitudes of 4.9 to 5.4 prompted hundreds of people to flee for higher ground.

Local television footage showed frightened residents in the tsunami-ravaged area of Pangandaran jumping on motorbikes or in cars, almost causing traffic accidents as they tried to reach higher ground.

Crying women and children ran towards Pangandaran's main mosque and even soldiers and police were seen fleeing the beach area, witnesses told AFP.

A local official said an aftershock combined with a rising tide had sparked rumours that Pangandaran would be hit by another devastating tsunami.

"There was a rising tide, but we can be sure that there won't be a new tsunami," said Ciamis district spokesman Wasdi bin Umri.

"People are still traumatised. That's why they ran to higher ground in panic when they heard the rumours," he added.

Jajat Jatnika, an official at the meteorology office in Jakarta, told AFP that the latest quake hit at 11:19 am (0419 GMT) and had a magnitude of 5.1.

## Latest tsunami was small but 'very violent'

AFP, Jakarta

Compared with the giant Asian tsunami of December 2004, the walls of water that lashed Indonesia's Java island this week seemed small but the waves were powerful and fast, an expert said Wednesday.

The luckless inhabitants along the coast were struck by seawater that rose to a three-metre (10-foot) wave and then stretched six to seven metres high once it reached inland, killing more than 520 people.

"The wave was not very high, but very violent," said Franck Lavigne, who heads Tsunarisque, a joint French-Indonesian research and prevention programme focusing on tsunamis.

The researcher from the University of Paris, currently visiting the affected area, insists this was in no way a "mini-tsunami."

"This is false. People are so focused on the completely exceptional event that occurred at Aceh, that some are speaking about this being a mini-tsunami. But it was a completely normal tsunami," he told AFP from Pangandaran.

Indonesia's Aceh province bore

the brunt of the major tsunami in December 2004 which killed about 168,000 people, out of the estimated 220,000 who lost their lives across 11 Indian Ocean nations.

Lavigne has already begun studying the trajectory, power and impact of the latest tsunami on the south coast of Java.

"All the houses which had only one floor were destroyed. The others have a hole in place of the lower level," he said.

The fact that even large, solid hotels had their frontage smashed in demonstrated the "impressive force" of the tidal wave, he said.

Deadly water rushed approximately 500 metres (1,659 feet) inland, according to initial work carried out by Lavigne's team, although it may have gone further in certain zones, such as along the mouths of rivers.

Tsunarisque, involving seven French and Indonesian universities as well as several specialised public organisations, was set up to study the 2004 Asian tsunami.

Through numerical modelling, its experts estimated that the waves reached a maximum height of 33 to 34 metres along the north-western coast of Sumatra.

## India orders for 3 Russian frigates

AFP, Moscow

Russia is to build three warships for India's navy under a 1.6 billion-dollar contract signed Tuesday, the Interfax-AVN military news agency said, quoting an unidentified defence industry source.

"A contract for building three frigates for the Indian navy was signed on Tuesday in Delhi in the presence of representatives of the Russian arms export agency Rosoboronexport and the Yantar shipbuilding factory of Kaliningrad, the source said.

"The overall value of the contract is in the area of 1.6 billion dollars," with delivery planned in 2010-2011, the source told the news agency.

Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee had already announced details of the frigate purchase, but quoted a cost equal to 1.1 billion dollars.

Indian defence ministry sources told AFP earlier that an additional 88 million dollars was to be spent on arming the three new ships with Brahmos cruise missiles built jointly by Russia and India.

Other military equipment was also due to be bought from Russia, which accounts for 70 percent of India's military hardware.

The signing follows a visit by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Saint Petersburg last weekend to attend a summit of the G8 (Group of Eight) industrialised countries.

## Sweden's fresh bid to salvage Lankan truce

AFP, Colombo

Sweden launched Wednesday a fresh effort to salvage Sri Lanka's faltering ceasefire ahead of a Tamil rebel deadline for European Union peace monitors to quit by September 1, officials said.

Swedish envoy Andres Oljelund was meeting Sri Lankan officials and was set to have discussions with Tamil Tiger rebels on Friday, government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said.

"The Swedish envoy is here to have talks with both sides following the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) demand for ceasefire monitors from EU member states to leave by September 1," Rambukwella said.

But as talks began, a powerful mine exploded killing two people and wounding 15 others aboard a bus in northern Sri Lanka, military officials said.

Ten soldiers, two policemen and three civilians were wounded in the blast on the Jaffna peninsula.

Sri Lankan police also arrested a suspected Tamil suicide bomber and three would-be accomplices in President Mahinda Rajapakse's home constituency, the defence ministry said.

The Swedish-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) says a 2002 truce between the Tigers and the government of Sri Lanka exists only on paper following a surge in violence since December.

Attempts to push both parties back to face-to-face talks have failed.

Tensions rose again in May when the European Union outlawed the Tamil Tigers, which led the rebels to demand that monitors from Denmark, Finland and Sweden quit by September 1.

The Tiger demand would mean the departure of 37 of the 57-member SLMM at a time when the monitors have asked for a 25 percent increase in their numbers to monitor the collapsing ceasefire effectively.

## NAM calls for deployment of int'l force in Mideast

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The Non-Aligned Movement on Wednesday condemned Israel's offensives in Gaza and Lebanon and called for an international force to be deployed to prevent the violence from spiralling into a regional conflict.

Malaysia is the current chair of the 116-nation NAM, and Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said in a statement on the grouping's behalf that the international community must act to reduce tensions.

"The international community... should make every effort to ensure

that these aggressive military actions by Israel do not lead to a widening of the conflict involving other countries in the region," Syed Hamid said.

"They must exert efforts for an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of an international force, so as to de-escalate the conflict and stabilise the situation," he said.

Syed Hamid, who called for special efforts from the UN Security Council and the diplomatic "quartet" of the US, Russia, the European Union and the UN, said NAM condemned Israel's

"disproportionate use of force".

The grouping also accused Israel of undermining peace efforts and said its offensive showed the country's "cynical attitude" towards the peace process.

"Israel's brutal military actions in Gaza and Beirut... have not only weakened efforts towards peace but also reflect its lack of seriousness to be a genuine 'Partner for Peace'," said Syed Hamid.

Thousands of foreigners are being evacuated by sea to Cyprus. The United Nations warned of a humanitarian "catastrophe" that has already displaced half a million

people in Lebanon.

The European Union and the United States are preparing to send envoys to the region. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has outlined plans for an international force for Lebanon that he said should be "considerably larger" than the current 2,000-strong UN peacekeeping force.

But Israel has said it is "too early" to discuss such a possibility.

The Non-Aligned Movement is a grouping of mainly developing nations formed during the Cold War as an alternative to the Western and Eastern power blocs.

## Mumbai now probes if the deadbody is bomber's

AFP, Mumbai

Indian police Wednesday were investigating if the sole unclaimed body from the Mumbai train attacks was a bomber after a little-known group said a member of a 16-strong terror team was killed in the operation.

Police have cast doubt on a claim of responsibility by Lashkar-e-Qahhar for the well-planned attacks on July 11 that killed 182 and wounded more than 800. The group said it would provide video evidence to back up its claims.

"One body is unidentified lying in the morgue. We don't know if he is one of the terrorists, so we're investigating," additional commis-

sioner of police Jayjit Singh told AFP.

The group warned of further attacks on historic and government sites in India in an e-mail sent to the private Aaj Tak television network late Monday.

"We are Muslims, we never tell lie," said the e-mail in badly-written English and signed by Abu Mahaz who claimed to be a spokesman for the group.

It said a member of the team had died but "all the remaining 15 mujahideens are totally safe, and celebrating the success of this mission and also preparing for the next mission."

It accused the government of "exploiting" Muslims but did not go

into detail. Experts have cast doubt on the e-mail because it was sent under the name of "John Smith" -- a name unlikely to be used Islamic militants.

Police have traced the e-mail to the city of Indore in central Madhya Pradesh province, according to the Press Trust of India, quoting an unnamed senior police official.

"It is most likely to be an Internet cafe and we will have to find out if the sender could be identified," the official said, but did not rule out that it was a hoax.

Singh blamed "hooligans" for the e-mail, the second from the group after a claim of responsibility on Saturday, and said officers were treating its claims with caution.

## N Korea scraps North-South family reunions

AFP, Seoul

North Korea said Wednesday it would scrap cross-border family reunions on the divided peninsula, accusing South Korea of siding with its Western allies in the standoff over Pyongyang's missile launches.

The North's Red Cross chief, Jang Jae-On, slammed South Korea for "abusing the humanitarian issue for meeting its sinister purpose to serve the outsiders."

"Our side is, therefore, of the view that it has become impossible to hold any discussion related to humanitarian issues, to say nothing of arranging any reunion between separated families and relatives between the two sides," he said in a letter to South Korea.

At inter-Korean ministerial talks last week, South Korea urged the defiant communist country to give an assurance that it would stop test-firing any more missiles and return to six-party talks on its nuclear weapons program.

But North Korea refused to budge, insisting Washington should first remove financial sanctions imposed on it for alleged money-laundering and counterfeiting.

In response South Korea, the biggest donor to the impoverished North, refused to discuss further humanitarian aid until a breakthrough is made on the missile and nuclear issues.

North Korean delegates issued an angry statement at the time warning of "disastrous" consequences for relations.

South Korea's Red Cross chief Han Wan-Sang expressed strong regret over North Korea's "disappointing" decision to scrap the reunions.



A woman waits to board a bus at a water-logged street in Kolkata yesterday. Life was badly disrupted in the eastern Indian city after a record overnight 180 mm rain, flooding most of the streets.

## 6 killed in fresh Kashmir shoot-outs

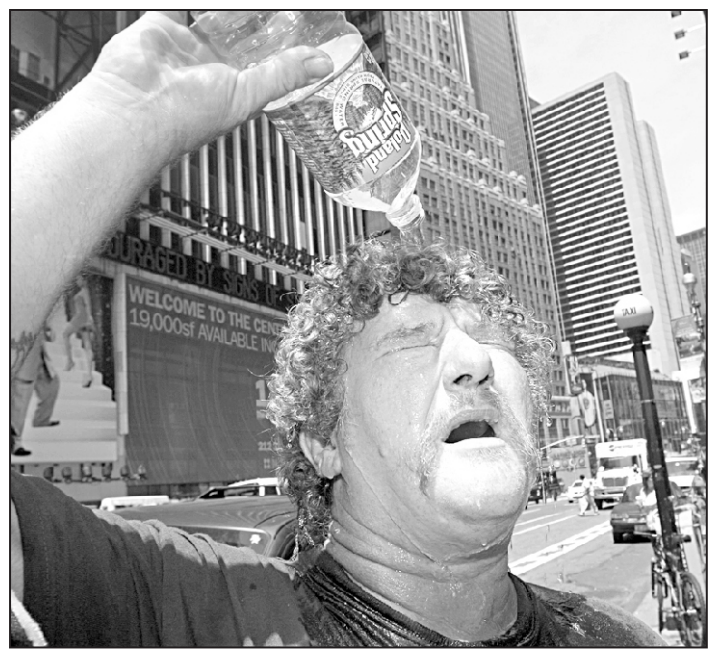
AFP, Srinagar

Two policemen and a six-year-old boy were among six people killed in a fresh surge of violence in Indian Kashmir that also saw a bloody shooting near a revered shrine, police said Wednesday.

"A Sikh policeman posted near the shrine of Hazratbal was shot dead from point blank by suspected militants," a spokesman said.

None of the dozen rebel groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir claimed responsibility for the shooting that sparked panic near the Hazratbal mosque in the summer capital Srinagar. It houses a whisker which Muslims believe comes from the Prophet Mohammed's beard.

The relic is shown to devotees on important days of the Islamic calendar and was scheduled to be displayed Wednesday, the anniversary of the death of an early disciple of the Prophet.



Wayne Semanick of Trenton, New Jersey pours water on his head to cool himself off in New York City Tuesday. Much of the United States reeled under a severe heat wave, with many cities opening special "cooling centers" as temperatures soared into triple digits.

## Suu Kyi barred from honouring father

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military junta barred pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi from honoring her father Wednesday at annual ceremonies paying tribute to him and other slain independence leaders.

The junta left the detained 61-year-old Nobel peace laureate, who has spent 10 of the last 17 years under house arrest, locked in her home. She was also barred last year but had attended previously.

The regime also stopped members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party from attending the ceremonies in Yangon.

Instead, national police chief

Khin Yee and the culture minister, Lieutenant General Khin Aung Myint, laid wreaths at a mausoleum in an official ceremony.

Aung San Suu Kyi's older brother, Aung San Oo, attended to represent the family. Unlike his sister, he has steered clear of politics.

The NLD held its own ceremony at party headquarters with some 500 people, including western diplomats.

Some 200 members of the NLD's youth wing then tried to bring flowers to the mausoleum but were stopped by police at a roadblock.

In a statement, the party renewed its calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the 1,100

other political prisoners believed held by Myanmar.

"The NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi is always working together with the people to find a solution through dialogue and national reconciliation, leading to the establishment of a union with a democratic system," it said.

A heavy security presence and numerous checkpoints were scattered across Yangon after the government last week accused the NLD and other dissidents of plotting with "terrorists" to disrupt the annual event.

The ceremony marks the 1947 killing of General Aung San, a nationalist hero, and members of his cabinet.

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