

Iran to expand atomic work with UN checks

REUTERS, AFP, Tehran

Iran will expand its atomic fuel work whenever it feels the need to do so, chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani said yesterday, rejecting a UN resolution demanding an end to uranium enrichment.

"We will expand nuclear technology wherever necessary and all of Iran's nuclear technology including the (centrifuge) cascades will be expanded," he said.

He added the work would be conducted under UN inspection.

Larijani said his country will not suspend uranium enrichment, in a clear rejection of a UN resolution calling for a freeze of the sensitive nuclear work.

"Our activities respect the Non-Proliferation Treaty... so we will not accept the suspension (of uranium enrichment)," he told a news conference, in the first formal reaction to the July 31 resolution.

"They should know that such resolutions will not affect our determination. We will pursue the nuclear rights of Iranians which are enshrined in the NPT."

The UN Security Council resolution requires Iran to halt uranium enrichment and other sensitive nuclear fuel work by August 31 or face the prospect of sanctions.

"This resolution has no legal credibility and it negates the purpose of the (International

Atomic Energy) Agency," Larijani said.

The resolution was pushed through after Iran ignored a previous non-binding deadline and failed to respond to the offer of a package of incentives in exchange for a moratorium on nuclear fuel work.

Opec member Iran insists it wants to enrich uranium only to make reactor fuel for power stations but there is widespread suspicions the country wants the capacity to make weapons-grade uranium.

Larijani also warned that Iran could expand its nuclear activities by increasing the cascade of centrifuges used for uranium enrichment.

However, he said Iran was still studying the package of incentives, offered by Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States and handed to Tehran on June 6, saying it "had the potential to resolve the nuclear issues".

The package offers trade, technology, diplomatic and other incentives as well as multilateral talks -- also involving the United States -- if Iran agrees to freeze enrichment.

"It has positive points as well as ambiguities. Negotiations must be constructive and away from pressure, to enable the ambiguities to be removed," Larijani said.



People cycle through a flooded road in Kanisa village, about 100km south of Ahmedabad, in India.

PHOTO: REUTERS

5 Lashkar men arrested in Kashmir

PTI, Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir police yesterday said it had unearthed a Lashkar-e-Taiba module with the arrest of five terrorists of the outfit involved in a series of grenade throwing incidents in Doda district over the past three months.

The five Mohammad Qasim, Javid Ahmad, Mohammad Hussain, Javid Iqbal and Riyaz Ahmed were involved in separate grenade throwing incidents in the district which claimed two lives and left 69 others injured. Inspector General of Police, Jammu range, SP Vaid told reporters in Jammu on Sunday.

He said Mohammad Qasim, a hard core terrorist, was working as a guard with the chairman of Jammu wing of Huriyat Conference and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Saidullah Tantray.

"It is obvious that Tantray would be knowing about the activities of his domestic servant and investigations are going on in the matter," Vaid said.

Asked whether police would initiate action against Tantray, he said nobody would be allowed to go unpunished if found involved in the heinous crime of attacking innocent people.

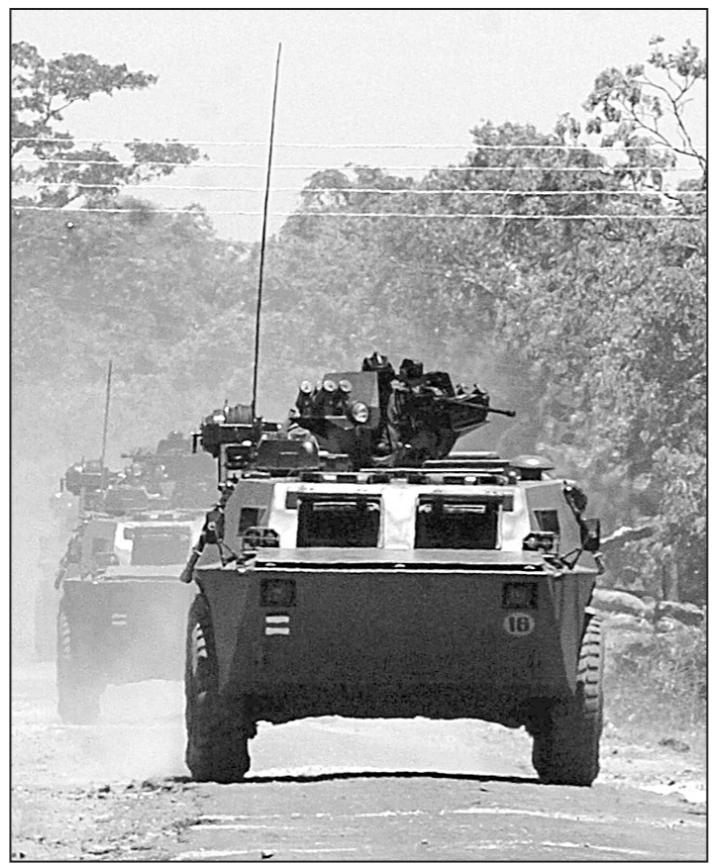


PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan army vehicles roll through Kallar, near to the northeastern town of Trincomalee yesterday. Tamil Tiger rebels said they had agreed to lift a water blockade behind weeks of fighting that has killed hundreds, but warned new strikes by the Sri Lankan military would lead to full-scale war.

Afghan forces kill 17 insurgents in south

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan troops and police killed 17 rebels and wounded another five in two separate clashes in the southern province of Helmand, police said yesterday.

Three insurgents were killed and one was wounded in a firefight with police in Garmser district Saturday afternoon, district police chief Ghulam Rasoul Aka told AFP.

Following the incident Afghan soldiers and police launched a joint search in the district overnight. This sparked a battle lasting several hours with the Taliban in which 14 insurgents were killed, he said.

"At least 14 Taliban bodies are

still at the site of the clash from the overnight battle. Four Taliban were also wounded," said Aka.

No soldiers or police were hurt in either encounter, he said.

Helmand has been hard hit by a wave of violence launched by the Taliban, whose government was toppled by a US-led offensive in late 2001. The Taliban seized Garmser district for two days last month.

In neighbouring Kandahar province on Sunday a suspected suicide bomber struck a coalition convoy and at least one US soldier was wounded, said Mohammad Anwar, an Afghan highway police official at the site.

The growing insurgency in the

south has cost over 1,000 lives so far this year, most of them insurgents. Afghan and foreign forces come under regular attack.

Meanwhile, French General Franck Le Bot, who took command yesterday of Nato forces in Kabul province, said he has the means to ensure "maximum security" in the capital hit recently by riots and several attacks.

France will for the next eight months command the Regional Command Capital covering the city and surrounding areas, followed by Turkey and then Italy.

Riots in the city on May 29 left 17 dead and there have been a series of attacks since the start of July. Bot said these showed that "as far as my military mission is concerned, I have work to do in cooperation with the Afghans."

"One can't say that as far as Kabul is concerned, nothing will happen. It has happened. Now the means which have been put in place can allow us to ensure maximum security," he told AFP.

Nepal to seize royal lands, king to be 'normal citizen'

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal plans to seize lands owned by King Gyanendra and other royal family members and distribute them to the poor as it moves toward treating the monarch like a "normal citizen," a minister said Saturday.

Legislation limiting the amount of property the king can hold will be drafted once an inventory of royal properties is completed. Land Reforms Minister Prabhur Narayan Chaudhary said in Kathmandu, the capital of the impoverished Himalayan nation.

"The seized royal property will be nationalized and handed over to poor farmers and landless people," the minister told AFP, without giving a timeframe for the policy's implementation.

"The king and the royal family members will be treated just like normal citizens," he added.

Under the law, Nepalese people are allowed to own 7.45 hectares (18.4 acres) of land, the minister said.

But according to a preliminary land reform ministry report, the king and royal family members own 1,729 hectares (4,274 acres) of land, including palaces and forests, the

minister said.

"In addition to this, we believe the king and his family members possess other land in the country. The government has directed all land revenue offices to furnish details within the next eight days," Chaudhary said.

News of the plan to strip the king of his land was praised in Kathmandu's streets, where there were massive street protests earlier this year that forced Gyanendra to give up absolute rule in April.

"The king has been enjoying a lavish life while we've been suffering. He should own property equivalent to that owned by a normal citizen," said 30-year-old school teacher Tek Narayan Jha.

"The move will show there is equal justice for all," Jha said.

The development was welcomed elsewhere too.

"The monarch's property is not his personal asset, it's provided by the state. It's good the government is taking a pro-people move by bringing the king under the law," said Rabintra Khanal, who teaches politics at Tribhuvan University.

'India knew about Pak Kargil plans'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

A 'White Paper' released by the opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has stated that India knew about the Kargil operation plan "11 months before its launch".

A lengthy report in The News, based on the 100-page document, however, does not indicate how India got to know of the plan, except saying New Delhi had made all necessary preparations "to turn this battlefield into a deadly trap for Kashmiri freedom fighters and Pakistan".

The PML-N is headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and hopes to use this document against President Pervez Musharraf in the run-up to the parliamentary elections next year.

Musharraf, on his part, has already responded to Sharif's claim of being kept in the dark about the operations in an Urdu book, Gaddar Kaun?

His English language book, In

the Line of fire, is due for release shortly.

The White Paper, 'Kargil adventure another huge defeat after Dhaka fall, who is responsible?' was released in Karachi on Saturday.

Pakistan's dismemberment as a result of Bangladesh's separation in 1971 remains a dominant debate on the role of the military and the Kargil operation was seen as a way of avenging it.

The White Paper alleges that Musharraf forcibly removed Sharif in 1999 as he feared being court-martialled for the Kargil defeat.

It repeats the demand for a high-powered commission on the Kargil debacle at the earliest.

If the Indian government, despite winning in Kargil, had constituted a commission highlighting the pluses and minuses of the operation, what prevented Musharraf from constituting a commission in this regard, PML (N) leader Siddiqui Farooq, who released the report, asked.

Floods make half a million Indians homeless

REUTERS, Hyderabad

Rescuers in India stepped up efforts yesterday to help hundreds of thousands of people forced from their homes by floods in a southern state as torrential rain hit the country's financial capital.

In southern Andhra Pradesh the death toll from three days of monsoon storms rose to 80, officials said, as 18 people drowned, were electrocuted or killed as houses collapsed overnight.

A jeep carrying 12 people was washed away by a swollen stream in Araku village, 540km northeast of state capital, Hyderabad, late on Saturday.

But relief and rescue operations picked up as rains subsided in most

parts of the state. Two air force helicopters and a dozen speedboats were taking food to nearly 1,000 villages and parts of some towns cut off by the floods.

"Rains are receding. Except in some parts of Telengana, rains are almost over in the state," said M. Satyakumar, director of the Hyderabad Meteorological Centre.

"Over half a million people living in low-lying areas of 12 river front districts have been displaced due to the three-day downpour and flooding," Ponnala Lakshmaiah, the state's irrigation minister, told Reuters.

Naval helicopters and coast guard boats were searching for 150 missing fishermen who went to sea last week despite warnings, officials added. Earlier they had said 60

fishermen were missing.

In western Maharashtra, thousands of people were being evacuated from Nanded district, about 650 km (400 miles) east of the state capital, Mumbai, after 25 villages were cut off by heavy rains.

Relief officials said rescuers were using boats to rescue those who had climbed up trees or on rooftops.

In Mumbai, traffic crawled in the city's western and northern suburbs which were under two feet of water.

Officials said the city's suburban trains were running about 15 minutes late and some services had been suspended. Flights were being delayed by up to half an hour.

'Expulsions of diplomats bad omen for Indo-Pak peace process'

AFP, Islamabad

India and Pakistan's tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats is a bad omen for their already troubled peace process, analysts said yesterday.

Pakistan on Saturday ordered Indian diplomat Deepak Kaul to leave the country for suspected spying and India reciprocated within hours by expelling an official from Islamabad's embassy in New Delhi.

Pakistani foreign office spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said Kaul, councillor at the Indian High Commission (embassy) in

Islamabad, was "caught indulging in practices incompatible to his status."

He was declared persona non grata, or an unwanted person in diplomatic language, and told to leave the country within 48 hours.

India lodged a protest and within hours announced the expulsion of Pakistani diplomat Sayed Mohammed Rafiq Ahmed, who held the rank of councillor at the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi.

India gave no reason for Ahmed's expulsion. The rivals last

expelled diplomats in February 2003.

Analysts said the developments were a bad sign for the fledgling peace process started in 2004 between the nuclear-armed South Asian rivals who have fought three wars and returned from the brink of a nuclear conflict in 2002.

"Expulsions of diplomats after nearly three-and-a-half years is definitely a setback," political analyst Mohammed Afzal Niazi told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani rescuers search for missing people after a bridge collapsed in Mardan, some 50km northeast of Peshawar Saturday. At least 40 people died and many more are missing after the bridge collapsed in northwestern Pakistan as torrential rains battered the area.