

Howard's 'no' to India's plea for uranium

But signals change in policy ahead

AFP, Sydney

Australia will not sell uranium to nuclear-armed India for the moment, Prime Minister John Howard said yesterday, as India reportedly pressed for a change in Canberra's policy.

Howard said nothing had happened to make it abandon its stand against selling uranium to countries that refuse to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT).

"Certainly our policy to date has been to prohibit sales to countries which are not signatories to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty," Howard told Australian Associated

Press news agency.

"And that's why at the moment we couldn't, without changing policy, sell to India, but we can to China."

However, he said the government was open to change, the prime minister signalled.

"As time goes by, if India were to meet safeguard obligations, some Australians would see it as anomalous that we would sell uranium to China, but not India," Howard said.

The Fairfax newspaper group reported Monday that India is urging the Australian government to change its policy and supply uranium for the country's nuclear

reactors.

But the government is divided on the issue, with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile opposed to abandoning the policy, according to Fairfax.

Australia, which has the world's largest known reserves of the nuclear fuel, prohibits the sale of uranium to countries that have not signed the NPT.

The national security adviser to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, M K Narayanan, and Singh's spokesman Sanjay Baru told Fairfax they wanted Australia to reconsider,

but insisted that a refusal would not hurt the relationship between the two countries.

India first requested the policy shift in March that it be permitted to import Australian uranium, and the request was still being considered by the government, Howard told AAP.

The moves came as the US Senate prepared to consider a controversial civilian nuclear energy deal, already passed by the House of Representatives, that would reverse three decades of US policy restricting India's access to nuclear technology.

Top women's affairs official shot dead in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

Two gunmen on motorbikes shot dead yesterday the top women's affairs official for Afghanistan's southern province of Kandahar as she was going to work, officials said.

The turbanned men used Kalashnikovs to shoot into the car of Safia Hama Jan as she was about 150 metres (yards) from her home in Kandahar city, witnesses said.

Around four bullets struck her head, an AFP correspondent who saw the body said.

"She was heading down to her office when she was shot," police officer Abdul Ali told AFP at the scene of the murder. Her driver was wounded in the attack.

Ali was unable to say who might have been behind the killing but similar assassinations of government officials have been carried out by the extremist Taliban movement that is waging a growing insurgency.



Thai Muslim women parade streets during a local festival of fruits on the first day of the fasting month of Ramadan in restive southern Narathiwat province on Sunday.

Crashed copter found in Nepal, no survivors

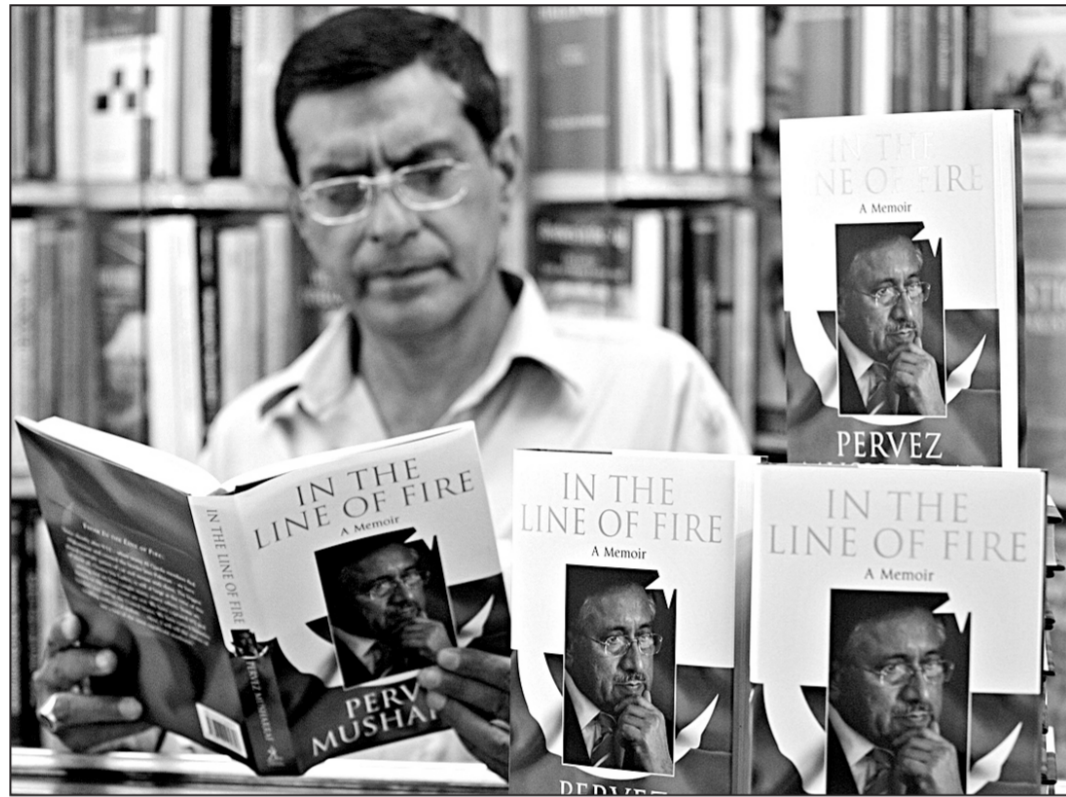
AFP, Kathmandu

A search team has found the wreckage of a helicopter that disappeared in Nepal at the weekend and all 24 people on board, including a government minister, are believed dead, officials yesterday.

"The seven member rescue team found the crashed helicopter and called us. They said there were no survivors," said Himesh Lal Karna, an air traffic official from Kathmandu's Tribhuvan airport.

"The helicopter was found at the bottom of a deep gorge around two kilometres southwest from where the helicopter took off," Karna told AFP. He said that "only one body could be identified".

On board were Nepal's Forest Minister Gopal Rai, a Finnish diplomat, top World Wildlife Fund officials from Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States, as well as Margaret Alexander, the deputy director in Nepal of the US government's international aid arm, USAID.



A man reads a copy of a book written by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf titled "In The Line of Fire: A Memoir" after it hit the stalls in Islamabad yesterday.

Indian student killed in Saint Petersburg

AFP, Moscow

An Indian medical student has died in the latest in a series of attacks on foreigners in Saint Petersburg, law enforcement officials said yesterday, following a rise in ethnic tensions across Russia.

The attack on Sunday evening came hours after an anti-immigration rally in the city attended by about 300 people.

In a separate incident a Sudanese man was beaten and robbed in the city, the ITAR-TASS news agency quoted an unnamed police official as saying.

The Indian student, 27-year-old Nitesh Kumar Singh, was set upon in a street near the medical academy and was stabbed seven times in the spine, said Indian embassy spokesman, Ramesh Chandra.

Police spokesman Sergei Sinityn said that Singh had not been able to describe what happened.

"He died in hospital... The circumstances are being investigated," Sinityn told AFP.

Brown to tow Blair's line if chosen as next PM

AFP, London

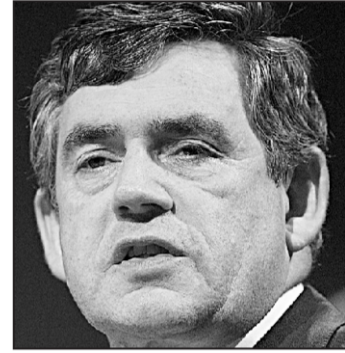
Finance minister Gordon Brown yesterday put Britain's battle against terrorism and capacity to compete in a global economy at the heart of his drive to become the next prime minister.

Preparing for a make-or-break speech to the governing Labour Party's annual conference, Brown stuck close to Prime Minister Tony Blair's centrist line and said his experience put him in the best position to meet the challenges ahead.

In an interview with BBC radio, Brown denied suggestions he had serious personal doubts over the Blair government's decision to join the US-led invasion of Iraq, a move that has divided the party and the nation.

"No, but after the liberation of Iraq... we could have done things better," Brown replied.

He also dismissed a report leaked to the media in which US spy agencies concluded that the war in



Gordon Brown

separate international Muslim state. However, Brown stressed the war on terrorism would not be won with military and security measures alone.

"We've got to win the battles of hearts and minds here," Brown said. "What we've got to do is isolate the extremists from the moderates."

Brown -- seen by many as an uncharismatic, dour Scot with a reputation for hard work and prudence in all things -- also stressed the challenges of global competition in media interviews.

Although the favourite of betting houses to succeed Blair within the next year, doubts persist about Brown's fitness to govern and the speech is bound to be picked over as much for its content as how he is welcomed by delegates.

Earlier this month, Brown was alleged to have given his blessing to a damaging campaign by some of his supporters in the Labour parliamentary ranks to force Blair into giving a date for his departure from office.

Saddam thrown out of court again

AFP, Baghdad

The newly-appointed judge in Saddam Hussein's genocide trial threw Iraq's former leader out of court yesterday, imposing his authority on a legal process marred by political controversy.

The defendant waved a sheet of yellow legal paper from the dock, declaring: "I have a request here that I don't want to be in this cage anymore".

But Judge Mohammed al-Oreibi al-Khalifah fired back: "I am the presiding judge. I decide about your presence here. Get him out."

Bailiffs took Saddam out of the courtroom and the hearing at the Iraqi High Tribunal in Baghdad -- where Saddam is facing charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity -- continued.

Khalifah took over as the trial's new chief judge last week after his predecessor Abdullah al-Ameri was accused of showing leniency and sacked by the Iraqi government.

"You need to show respect to the court and the case, and to those who don't show it, I am sorry, but I have to apply the law," Khalifah told another defendant, Sabir al-Duri, who was questioning the day's first witness.

Saddam's defence team was not in court. The Sunni strongman's counsel are boycotting the trial and accuse the government of interfering with the court proceedings.

Last week, the Iraqi government sacked Ameri after he told Saddam in open court that he had not been a dictator. He was quickly replaced with his deputy, Khalifah, a Shiite.

Nakagawa picked to lead Japan's ruling party

AFP, Tokyo

Hidenao Nakagawa, who was picked yesterday for a top post in Japan's ruling party, is a committed free-market economist who survived a politically bruising sex scandal.

The burly 62-year-old conservative was a close aide to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and a mentor to Shinzo Abe, who on Tuesday becomes Japan's youngest prime minister.

Nakagawa was a key brain behind Koizumi's signature reform of breaking up the massive post office monopoly.

He has held conservative views on foreign policy but maintained friendships with Chinese officials which will come in handy as Abe seeks to repair strained bilateral relations.

Nakagawa began his career as a reporter for Japan's leading business newspaper, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, and in recent years has become passionate about the Internet, never missing a day to update his blog.

He was forced to resign from the job of chief cabinet secretary -- the



Hidenao Nakagawa

right-hand man to then prime minister Yoshiro Mori -- when a tabloid published lurid details of an alleged extramarital affair.

Focus magazine had said Nakagawa leaked a police investigation into his alleged mistress's drug abuse and separately reported that he had contacts with an extreme right-wing group. Nakagawa denied the allegations.

His career rebounded through his friendship with Koizumi and Abe, whose rise he reportedly helped plot

during a vacation to Hawaii early last year.

By appointing him secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Abe has handed Nakagawa wide clout in shaping policy.

He champions slashing lavish expenditure to cut Japan's bloated public debt and has helped craft Abe's economic ideas.

He has stood by Koizumi on his visits to the Yasukuni shrine, which honors war dead and war criminals. China and South Korea have refused to talk to Koizumi due to the row.

Nakagawa has said the premier "should not give in to opinions of bureaucrats or foreign countries".

He also strongly favors rewriting the US-imposed 1947 constitution, which bars Japan from maintaining a military.

However, Nakagawa has also maintained ties with China and last year was quoted criticizing Koizumi for "giving the impression he is honoring war criminals".

He visited China in February and called for the "realization of common interests" between the top trading partners.

History will prove me right on Asia ties: Koizumi

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's outgoing Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, whose five-year tenure was marked by sour relations with neighboring countries, said yesterday that history would prove him right.

Koizumi, Japan's longest-serving premier in three decades, said it was China and South Korea which had sowed controversy over his repeated visits to a war shrine, not him.

"When it comes to China and South Korea, I think it's necessary for there to be times like this," Koizumi told his last news conference before Shinzo Abe succeeds him Tuesday.

"I think it will become clear in hindsight that they were wrong," he said.

China and South Korea have refused summits with Koizumi due to his annual pilgrimages to the Yasukuni shrine, which honors 2.5 million war dead and 14 top war criminals.



Junichiro Koizumi

The neighboring countries, which suffered from Japanese aggression, consider the Shinto shrine a symbol of Japan's imperialist past.

"Japanese nationals understand that I visit the shrine to mourn the war dead, not to justify the past war," Koizumi said. "Is it good to deny a summit because of one difference between two countries? The answer will be clearer later."

"Foreign leaders, when they listen

to my explanation, say this is strange" to refuse summits, said Koizumi, one of US President George W. Bush's closest foreign allies.

Abe, who will be Japan's first prime minister born after World War II, has strongly supported Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni shrine. He has shown ideas to the right of Koizumi on history, such as questioning the legitimacy of post-war trials of war criminals.

He has hinted he will go to the shrine as premier in secret, a sharp contrast to Koizumi whose last visit on August 15 was covered live on Japanese television networks.

In a message to Chinese leaders released Monday, Abe said he would "spare no effort" to improve sour ties.

Despite the tensions with neighbors, Koizumi has been one of Japan's most popular prime ministers, employing an offbeat charisma that has endeared him to the public even as he slashed public spending.