

'Iran to suspend nuke drive if incentives are guaranteed'

AFP, New York

Iran will suspend nuclear activities when it is guaranteed delivery of a package of incentives offered by the West, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said in an interview published Sunday.

Iran's leaders "appreciated" the incentives offered by western nations trying to woo Iran away from its nuclear programme, Gul told Newsweek magazine here last week.

"A good package has been given to Iran. During my visit to Iran in August, I met with all the leaders and they said they appreciated the package -- I learned this from (Iranian President Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad. He said that this package is different from the previ-

ous ones," Gul said.

"They said that when they are guaranteed delivery of all the things in the package, they will suspend. Both sides lack confidence," Gul said.

"With good intentions, I think there can be a solution," he added.

Ahmadinejad on Saturday vowed that the Islamic republic would not halt enriching uranium even for a short period, rejected a key Western demand over its nuclear programme.

The comments come just two days after talks between EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani on Tehran's atomic programme ended in Berlin without agreement.

The main stumbling block has

been EU and US demands that Iran suspend uranium enrichment, a process that can be used to make both nuclear fuel and the explosive core of a nuclear bomb.

EU diplomats are still hoping Iran will agree to some kind of suspension under a deal offered by the five permanent Security Council members plus Germany that offers Tehran a package of diplomatic and economic incentives.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful energy needs, vehemently rejecting US allegations it is seeking to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Tehran now faces a new deadline from world powers of early October for it to halt enriching uranium, diplomats said.

Nepal's isolated king comes out in support of peace

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's King Gyanendra called for the success of a fragile peace process in the Himalayan nation on Monday, his first public comments since being forced to cede political power in April.

The king, who has been reduced to a figurehead and is faced with the strong possibility of the monarchy being abolished, invoked the Hindu goddess of power to guide Nepal through what he called a difficult period.

"May Goddess Nava Durga Bhavani inspire us all to move ahead on the strength of national unity and reconciliation at this difficult juncture in our history," the 59-year-old king said in his traditional message for Dasain, the biggest festival in the Hindu nation.

The message was circulated by the state-run RSS news agency and excerpts were read on state radio.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of the Palestinian security forces patrol the streets in Gaza City yesterday following a deadly clash between rival forces loyal to Hamas and Fatah factions on Sunday. Palestinian police loyal to Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas clashed with interim forces loyal to the Hamas-led government while staging demonstration for salaries. Eight people were killed and 130 others were injured in the violence.

Indo-Pak talks may resume at month-end

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday that peace talks with India could resume in late October, and offered to take action if proof was given that Pakistani spies and militants were involved in bomb attacks in Mumbai last July.

Indian police on Saturday said Pakistan military's Inter-Services Intelligence and the Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group were behind the blasts that killed 186 people and wounded hundreds more on July 7.

"If India feels that it's not just propaganda, and it feels it has some information that suggests links with some people here or some kind of connection, then yes we will take action. We will help in investigations," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam told a weekly news conference in Islamabad.

Both Pakistan and Lashkar have rejected the accusations.



PHOTO: AFP

South African President Thabo Mbeki (R) welcomes Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2R) and his delegation upon their arrival in Pretoria yesterday. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrived in South Africa Saturday on a highly symbolic visit to honour Mahatma Gandhi, who helped free both countries through his "passive resistance" drive launched here 100 years ago.

Pakistan, US sign letter of acceptance for F-16s

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan and United States have signed a letter of acceptance for a multi-billion dollar package to supply the Pakistan Air Force with F-16 warplanes, an air force spokesman said yesterday.

A signing ceremony was held on Saturday in Rawalpindi, the northern Pakistani city where the military is headquartered, he said.

Both sides had expected to wrap up the deal a month earlier, but negotiations dragged on because of strings Washington wanted attached.

A statement issued by the Pakistan Air Force, however, did not mention what conditions were being set by the United States on use and maintenance of the planes.

It said that the United States will supply 18 new F-16 aircraft, as well as an unspecified number of upgraded second-hand F-16s. Previous reports have said the number of second hand aircraft Pakistan was considering buying was 26.

The United States will also sell Pakistan missile weaponry and other support infrastructure, and upgrade Pakistan's present fleet of 34 old-model F-16s.

Lockheed Martin Corp builds the F-16, but Boeing Co., Raytheon Co., Northrop-Gumman Corp and General Electric Co., are other principal contractors involved in the deal.

The Bush administration formally notified Congress on June 28 of plans to sell Pakistan the "Fighting Falcon" warplanes.

FRESH SHELLING IN LANKA

Norway envoy moves to arrange crunch talks

REUTERS, Colombo

Norway's peace envoy began a fresh bid on Monday to arrange crunch talks between the Tamil Tigers and Sri Lanka's government to halt renewed violence, as sporadic shelling continued in the island's besieged north.

Jon Hanssen-Bauer met government officials in Colombo on Monday and is due to meet the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in their northern stronghold of Kilinochchi on Tuesday.

"It looks like he will come up with something," hopeful Chief Government Whip, Health Minister and peace negotiator Nimal Siripala

de Silva said after meeting Hanssen-Bauer.

"The government is ever ready and willing to start the peace process, so we want a communication from the LTTE whether they are ready."

While both parties say they are ready to resume talks after a five-month impasse, truce monitors see little will from either side to end the worst outbreak of violence since a 2002 truce and some say talks are still a long way off.

"There are still a lot of pieces that have to fall into place," said one diplomat, asking not to be named. "There's still a long way to go."

Emboldened by the capture of

strategic rebel territory south of the northeast harbour of Trincomalee, some military officials say they are keen to inflict as many casualties on the Tigers as possible before any talks.

Hundreds of civilians, troops and rebel fighters have been killed since violence flared in late July, tens of thousands of people have been displaced from their homes and many live in fear.

In the northern army-held Jaffna peninsula, which is cut off from the rest of the island by Tamil Tiger territory and where food and fuel are in short supply, residents living on rations are woken up each night by rockets and artillery fire.

17 killed as Myanmar troops, rebels clashes

AFP, Yangon

Seventeen ethnic minority villagers have been killed in Myanmar in clashes between the military and an insurgent group battling the junta, state-run media reported yesterday.

The fighting occurred in eastern Shan state on September 15, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said, killing elderly people, women and children in four villages.

The newspaper said that 73 houses were burnt down during clashes involving a Shan rebel group called the Shan State Army-South, one of 17 ethnic rebel groups that have fought against the military government for decades.

Lebanon deploys army on Israel border

Beirut ready to counter Tel Aviv

AFP, Labbouneh

The Lebanese army will confront any new Israeli "aggressions", Army Commander Brigadier General Michel Sleiman warned Monday as the military deployed along the southern borders for the first time in almost 40 years.

"I call on you to confront any Israeli aggressions and violations," Sleiman told conscripts during a ceremony in which the Lebanese flag was hoisted on a hilltop in the border village of Labbouneh for the first time since 1970.

The army deployment comes a day after Israel's near-complete withdrawal of several hundred soldiers who had remained in south Lebanon after the August 14 UN-

brokered ceasefire that put an end to a 34-day war against Hezbollah.

The "deployment in the south will help the military to carry out its duties in terms of defence, security and development, with the help of the UN forces," the army chief said.

The deployment "to monitor the southern borders and the maritime and territorial borders is meant to prevent aggressions as well as the smuggling of weapons and other prohibited items," he added.

UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which put an end to the war, called for Israel's complete pullout from Lebanon in tandem with the deployment of Lebanese army troops and additional UN peacekeepers, as well as the disarming of all militias.

Israel's Lebanon bombardment visible from space

AFP, Star City

Israel's recent bombardment of Lebanon was clearly visible with "the naked eye" from space, a Russian cosmonaut based at the time on the international space station said yesterday.

"Of course it was visible. You know, all negative human activities, in particular military operations, are immediately visible from space," said cosmonaut Pavel Vinogradov, during a press conference at the Star City space facility, just outside of Moscow. Vinogradov was speaking three days after returning to Earth following a six-month ISS mission.

"Of course we saw the fires, especially when it was a big city, it was very easily visible even without our instruments. You could see it with the naked eye," Vinogradov continued.

Battle for control of US Congress intensified

REUTERS, Washington

President George W. Bush's recent gains in approval ratings have improved Republican prospects in the November 7 fight for Congress, but analysts say Democrats still have the upper hand with a disaffected public in the mood for change.

As Congress adjourned for a final five-week campaign blitz, polls show voters are unhappy with the direction of the country, dissatisfied with the Republican-led Congress and more likely to favour Democrats in their local House races.

In the past week, Democrats turned public attention back to the unpopular war in Iraq and put the

White House on the defensive in a heated debate over a National Intelligence Estimate that said the conflict had fuelled Islamic extremism.

But Bush's slight rise in approval ratings in the last month, a big drop in gas prices and renewed voter attention to the fight against terrorism, usually a party strength, encouraged Republicans and improved their position in some tight races, analysts said.

"For Republicans, the outlook remains bad but is no longer horrific," said political handicapper Charlie Cook, publisher of the nonpartisan Cook Political Report.

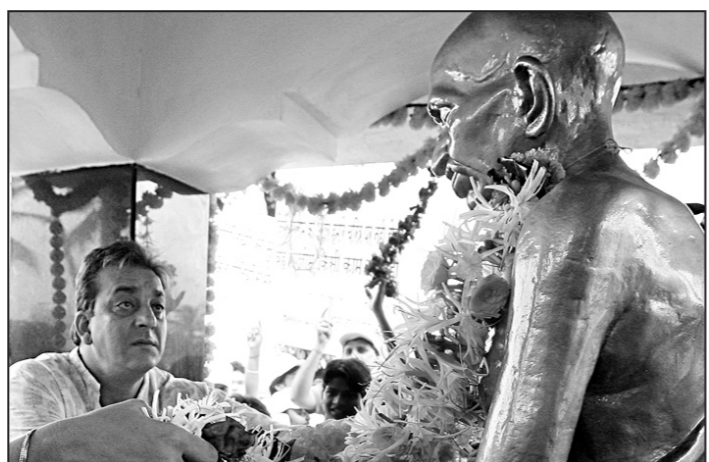


PHOTO: AFP

Indian film actor Sanjay Dutt offers flowers to a statue of the 'father of the nation' Mahatma Gandhi to pay homage on the occasion of Gandhi's 137th birth anniversary in Mumbai yesterday. One hundred years after Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi launched his non-violence movement, a new runaway hit comedy film is helping to bring his teachings to a whole new audience.

50 bodies found in Iraq

3 Marines killed in attacks, 26 workers kidnapped

AFP, Baghdad

At least 50 corpses were discovered scattered around Baghdad overnight while three marines died in separate incidents in Iraq's restive western province of Anbar, police said yesterday.

The bodies all bore bullet wounds and are most likely the victims of the sectarian dirty war raging in the capital between rival Sunni and Shia armed groups, a police official said.

The daily count of corpses showed a brief lull during a total curfew imposed on Baghdad on Saturday, but since it was lifted early Sunday levels of violence, including bombings, have returned to their previous levels.

On Sunday, police reported a mass kidnapping when armed men, some of them wearing security-style uniforms, stormed a food processing plant and kidnapped 26 people, four of whom subsequently escaped.

Gunmen, all wearing civilian clothes in three vehicles, raided the factory and rounded up all workers, known for making kibbeh, a kind of meatball, in Baghdad's lower income Amil neighbourhood.

In other violence, three soldiers from the Iraqi army's quick reaction force were killed in an ambush by gunmen early Monday near Kut city, southeast of Baghdad.

In the comparatively more secure south, Safa al-Ameed, director of the Sadr hospital was shot dead with his

driver Sunday night in the Shia shrine city of Najaf.

Three marines died in separate incidents in Iraq's restive western province of Anbar, the US military reported on Monday.

Two of the marines were killed Sunday in enemy action while a third died in a "non-combat related" vehicle accident.

Iraq's vast, mostly desert, province of Anbar sees the majority of US casualties in Iraq.

The latest fatalities bring the number of US servicemen killed since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq by US-led forces to 2,712 according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

Brazil's Lula faces run-off in shadow of scandals

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Battered by a string of political scandals, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva squandered what seemed to be a sure first-round election victory and now must face a run-off vote against an energized opposition candidate.

Lula, Brazil's first working-class president, fell just short of the 50 percent of votes he needed to win another four-year term outright in Sunday's election, setting up a showdown with his main rival Geraldo Alckmin on October 29.