

## Nations grasp for response to N Korea nuclear test

AFP, Seoul

Japan urged the international community yesterday to retaliate with sanctions on North Korea as nations across Asia and the world considered what to do next after Pyongyang tested an atomic bomb. South Korea warned its military was remaining on high alert and even close ally China refused to rule out a harder line on the North after it carried out a nuclear test Monday despite calls to abandon its weapons programme.

But the secretive regime showed no sign of backing down, and an official warned it could fire a nuclear warhead unless it secured concessions from the United States, the nation it says is the reason for needing a nuclear weapon. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, all nuclear powers — were to meet later Tuesday to assess their options. Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged that his offi-

cially pacifist nation would not seek to develop the bomb itself after North Korea's test, but said the world had to take strong action. Tokyo called for a so-called Chapter VII resolution from the UN Security Council leaving all options open — including mandatory sanctions and, as a last resort, military action in the name of peace and security. "North Korea's latest announcement is a serious challenge to Japan's security," the government spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary

Yasuhiro Shiozaki, quoted Abe telling his cabinet. "It also is a grave threat against the peace and security of East Asia and the international community," he said. At an emergency Security Council session Monday, the United States proposed mandatory sanctions including inspections of all cargo in and out of North Korea, financial curbs and restrictions on goods that could have military uses.

## Iran blames world powers for N Korean N-test

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday pinned the blame for North Korea's nuclear test on the refusal of world powers to abandon their atomic weapons, as Tehran continues to face pressure over its own nuclear programme. "The major powers feel that they are entitled to use and produce nuclear weapons," government spokesman Gholam Hossein Elham told reporters. "This injustice, inequality and discrimination in international law has resulted in such threats to world

peace" as the North Korean test, he added. Iran has been under massive diplomatic pressure for the past four years to abandon its own atomic drive and has bitterly complained the world's existing nuclear powers do not want Tehran to master "peaceful nuclear technology." The Islamic republic has repeatedly insisted its own nuclear programme is solely for peaceful energy needs, vehemently rejecting Western allegations that it is seeking atomic weapons.

## 'Korean test shows failure of non-proliferation'

AFP, Paris

North Korea's nuclear test is an act of gross irresponsibility which proves the failure of the world's non-proliferation policies but could hasten the day when the two Koreas are re-united, European newspapers said yesterday. The nuclear explosion "is one of those events which mark a turning-point in the history of our planet," said the right-wing French newspaper Le Figaro, which warned that the repercussions would be felt well beyond the region of east Asia.

"Across all continents, countries which aspire to play a role of world power are watching what happens when the rules of non-proliferation are broken .... If the North Korean precedent is left unchallenged, Iran will be the next country to take the step — and others will follow," it said. In Italy the popular Corriere della Sera said that "with the threat of atomic nationalism, the North Korean regime is trying to extort major foreign aid so that its government can survive the tragic history of misery and famine."



PHOTO: AFP

South Korean conservative activists burn a mock North Korea's nuclear missile during an anti-North Korea rally in Seoul yesterday. North Korea announced it conducted a nuclear weapons test on Monday in defiance of worldwide appeals and threats of sanctions, sparking a furious reaction from Seoul, which called it an "unpardonable provocation".

## Nepal govt, Maoists agree on rewriting constitution

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's government and Maoist rebels agreed in talks yesterday to move forward on rewriting the Himalayan nation's constitution but failed to clinch a deal on power-sharing. The two sides decided that elections for a body that will hammer out a new constitution should be held by mid-2007. Further talks were also slated for Thursday on how to bring the communist insurgents into government. "Today's talks discussed several political issues but we couldn't conclude a final agreement apart from holding constituent assembly elections by mid-June," Maoist number-two Baburam Bhattarai told AFP.

The communist rebels have long demanded new polls to elect a constituent assembly that will decide on the fate of the impoverished country's monarchy. But the rebels, who insist they are committed to democracy after fighting for 10 years to install a communist republic, and the ruling coalition remain divided on a host of issues. They include how to disarm the rebels, the future of the monarchy and the make-up of a proposed interim government. "We still need agreement on several issues," said Ramesh

Lekhak, a member of the government's negotiating team. A ceasefire has been in effect for the past five months between the government and the rebels since massive street protests forced King Gyanendra to give up 14 months of absolute rule and restore parliament. The rebels have declared they will put their arms and soldiers in UN-supervised camps when they join a new government. But the ruling seven-party coalition wants the rebels to disarm first. "The main issue between the two sides now is the rebel arms," said a Western diplomat, who declined to be named. This is the third time the two sides have tried to hammer out a peace deal to end the insurgency that has claimed more than 12,500 lives. The other two attempts ended in a return to fighting. An analyst said the government would be unwise to push too hard on the issue of rebel weapons. "The government should not force the Maoists to disarm before joining the interim government, as the rebels have already promised to put their weapons under UN supervision," said veteran Nepal political analyst Lok Raj Baral. "It's going to take time for the two sides to sort out their differences," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair (L) greets Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at 10 Downing Street in London yesterday. Blair and his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh meet in London Tuesday to approve a joint bid to crack down on terrorism following recent attacks on both countries.

## India edgy about US atomic deal after N Korean N-test

REUTERS, New Delhi

The aftershocks of North Korea's reported nuclear test have hit India, prompting concern that its nuclear cooperation deal with the United States could be undermined by a renewed focus on proliferation. India, keen to show itself as a responsible nuclear power, plans to counter those fears by turning the spotlight on rival Pakistan's alleged role in aiding North Korea's nuclear programme. "I wish to state the ... erosion of the non-proliferation regime is not in our interests, we do not support the emergence of another nuclear weapons state," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in London after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair. "The DPRK (North Korea) test highlights the danger of clandestine proliferation. In fact India's own security has suffered due to clandestine proliferation linkages." New Delhi is nervous about being clubbed with countries such as Pakistan, North Korea or Iran by

a vocal non-proliferation lobby in Washington opposed to a landmark India-US civilian nuclear cooperation pact, officials and analysts said. "We have to stress this distinction," said an Indian foreign ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It is a distinction the world has been aware of but the North Korean test could breathe life into those old ghosts and this is not a good time for that to happen," he told Reuters. The anxiety in New Delhi came a day after North Korea said it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test in defiance of global warnings, triggering a fresh debate over the effectiveness of non-proliferation agreements. The timing was particularly bad for India, with its nuclear cooperation deal stymied in the US Congress and now looking less likely to be passed this year. But the government tried to put on a brave face.

## Pakistan to back Nato in fighting Taliban

### Musharraf assures British general

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf Tuesday assured Nato's commander in Afghanistan that his country fully backs the fight against the Taliban, amid claims the alliance wants more action from Islamabad. British General David Richards, who commands 31,000 international troops from 37 countries in insurgency-hit Afghanistan, met Musharraf for an hour of talks on security and cooperation, officials here said. Musharraf told Richards that Pakistan was cooperating with Afghanistan in the "fight against terrorism and extremism," besides hosting over 2.5 million Afghan

refugees, a Pakistan military statement said. Musharraf also defended a controversial peace deal signed with tribal elders and insurgents in the restive tribal area of North Waziristan, saying it "was aimed at checking the activities of terrorists and militant Taliban." The statement said that Richards had praised Pakistan's efforts and the "excellent cooperation being extended in the fight against terrorism." It quoted Richards as saying that "Isaf fully appreciates that a vast majority of problems of Afghanistan are emanating from within the country having deep roots due to the

fact that the country had remained highly unstable for over two decades." Isaf, the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force, assumed command of foreign troops in Afghanistan last Thursday, taking charge of the east of the country from the US-led coalition that toppled the Taliban five years ago. Nato did not make any immediate comment following Richards' meeting with Musharraf at Army House, the Pakistani leader's official residence in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, which adjoins the capital.

## Thai interim PM vows to lift martial law

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's interim prime minister said yesterday his government will lift martial law "as soon as we can," noting the importance of repairing the country's image after last month's military coup. Western nations and human rights groups denounced the coup as a setback to democracy and have urged the new government to quickly lift restrictions imposed by the military, including curbs on press freedoms and limits on public gatherings and political assembly.

## Soft-spoken S Korean takes UN helm

AFP, Seoul

Ban Ki-Moon, whose nomination to be the next UN chief coincided with North Korea's unconfirmed nuclear test, is a mild-mannered career diplomat who rose to prominence talking tough on Pyongyang. The 62-year-old South Korean foreign minister, who dominated four informal straw polls, was the only candidate left standing for the coveted role of United Nations Secretary General after the six other contenders withdrew. With strong support in the 15-member UN Security Council, his official nomination for the job was little more than a formality when the world body met on Monday in New York. There is little doubt either that he will be approved as Kofi Annan's successor when his



nomination goes to the general assembly for consideration. The 192-member assembly is likely to schedule a vote later in October, and the United States called on Monday for rapid approval of the South Korean amid turmoil over Pyongyang's underground test of an atomic weapon. In Seoul, rather than expressing jubilation at his selection, Ban struck a sombre note.

## Lanka wants in-depth talks with Tigers

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka is tired of talks with Tamil Tiger rebels centring on the terms of a 2002 ceasefire, and wants a new round later this month to focus on core issues such as human rights and development, the government said on Tuesday. Talks between the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Geneva in February turned into a slanging match about truce violations. The rebels pulled out of a second round in April and there have been no meetings since. Hundreds of people have been killed since late July in the worst fighting since the tattered truce was brokered and many feel talks planned in Geneva on Oct. 28-29 are premature.