

India now counting cost of troop deployment

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's huge and costly deployment of troops and heavy armour on the border with Pakistan is in its second month and there are no signs of a lowering in tension with its nuclear-armed neighbor.

Several defence experts say the 45-day-old build-up has served its limited purpose and could start telling on the troops so that government leaders and top military brass will have to review it.

"In strategic and operational terms, the development has brought about the military persuasion expected of it," said retired lieutenant-general VR Raghavan.

"No more gains can be expected to accrue in its continuance," he said, adding that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf would be held to a pledge to fight terrorism.

An estimated million troops face each other across the border in a crisis triggered by an attack on the Indian parliament on December 13 which New Delhi blamed on Pakistani-based guerrillas operating in disputed Kashmir.

Stalemate could be more quickly ended if Pakistan honors their second demand, that it hand over 20 men accused of criminal and terrorist acts in India.

"Handing over these people, at least the 14 Indian nationals, would be a visible demonstration of Pakistan's declared commitment to fight terrorism," said a minister, adding that such the move could help start the de-escalation process.

Pakistan, which detained hundreds of religious extremists, and shut down their offices just before and after a landmark speech by President Pervez Musharraf last month, has made no move to hand over any of the wanted men.

Instead the two sides have stepped up the war of words, with Islamabad accusing New Delhi of involvement in the kidnapping of US reporter Daniel Pearl in Pakistan, and plans for a nuclear test.

Indian leaders privately say the



Police and bomb disposal squad inspect the damaged office of Land Revenue in Kathmandu on Friday. Maoist rebels planted the bomb injuring four people.

Iraq seeks UN intervention to head off US strike

AFP, Baghdad

officials have in recent days toughened their line toward Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, raising concern among many US allies in the Middle East and Europe.

On Friday, Iraq said it would carry out a "routine test" of its warning sirens, which usually signal an air raid, in the capital Baghdad.

"Warning sirens will sound in some parts of Baghdad today (Friday) as part of a routine test," said an official of the civil defence department, cited by Ath-Thawra.

"This will be done in the framework of regular maintenance work ... by civil defence bodies to ensure that the sirens are working after some of them stopped functioning as a result of the bad weather conditions which recently hit the country," the official said.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Thursday Washington was determined to topple Saddam and would act alone if necessary to change the regime in Baghdad.

President George W. Bush has branded Iraq part of an "axis of evil," along with Iran and North Korea, that must forcibly be prevented from acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq has so far rejected the return of UN arms inspectors, who pulled out of the country in December 1998, and says it does not have mass destruction weapons.

Attack on Israeli tank: 3 soldiers killed

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli army spokesman said Friday that three Israelis killed Thursday were members of the crew of a Merkava tank, the first to be destroyed in a Palestinian attack.

"All three were soldiers, and the attack also slightly wounded another member of the five-man crew of the tank," the spokesman said.

The tank was hit by a roadside bomb in the Gaza Strip as it arrived on the scene of an earlier blast aimed at a settler convoy near the settlement of Netzarim.

The deaths brought to 1,205 the number of people killed in the intifada, or Palestinian uprising, which broke out on September 28, 2000, including 922 Palestinians and 261 Israelis.

Israeli public radio said the attack was claimed jointly by the radical Islamic movement Hamas and an armed group linked to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

Meanwhile, Israeli tanks, armoured bulldozers and jeeps rolled into a civilian area south of Gaza City Friday destroying several houses, a police position and at least 100 hectares (247 acres) of farmland, Palestinian security sources said.

At least six tanks, three armoured bulldozers and several military jeeps were spotted in the area, according to the same sources.

The incursion started at dawn and was continuing at mid-day between the Karmi border crossing, in the northern Gaza Strip, and the settlement of Netzarim, just to the south.

The operation took place close to where an Israeli tank was blown up by a Palestinian group Thursday night, leaving three crewmen dead and a fourth lightly injured.

US, UK conduct joint nuclear experiment

REUTERS, Washington

The United States and Britain on Thursday conducted deep underneath the Nevada desert their first joint nuclear experiment allowed under the global Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, officials said.

Officials said the subcritical nuclear experiment was aimed at maintaining the safety and reliability of both nations' atomic weapons without resorting to underground nuclear blasts.

The US National Nuclear Security Administration said the subcritical nuclear experiment took place about 960 feet (293 metres) beneath the earth's surface at 1:30 pm Pacific Standard Time (4:30 pm EST/2130 GMT) at the Nevada Test Site, 85 miles (137 km) northwest of Las Vegas.

In a subcritical nuclear test, there is no nuclear explosion, but scientists can use the experiments to draw conclusions about nuclear materials such as plutonium.

Blaze at British migrant detention centre

AFP, London

centre suffered slight injuries and needed hospital treatment, police said.

Officers believe some asylum seekers were able to escape during the chaos but are unsure of the exact number.

A Bedford police spokesman earlier told AFP: "It is a very strong possibility that the fires were started deliberately."

Mark Littlewood, from human rights group Liberty, said he had heard the disturbance was started after a woman detainee was badly treated.

An unknown number of detainees escaped from the centre, said to be Europe's largest detention facility for asylum seekers, and six people were injured, the reports said.

Some 50 firefighters were at the scene early Friday and said the fire, which destroyed part of the centre, was under control. It had broken out Thursday evening.

Police, who have not yet given a cause for the blaze, said they had evacuated between 250 and 300 people from the building.

Three detainees, two police officers and a member of staff at the

PHOTO: AFP