

Pakistan to build 2 more N-power plants

AFP, Chashma

Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) is to build two new nuclear power plants at Chashma in central Punjab province and the southern port city of Karachi, state-run media reported Tuesday.

The Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency quoted PAEC chairman Parvez Butt as saying the plants would be built "in the coming years" to meet Pakistan's growing energy needs.

He said the projects, named KANUPP-2 (Karachi) and CHASNUPP-2 (Chashma) would be constructed with a capacity of 600 megawatts and 300 megawatts respectively.

20 N Koreans enter German embassy in Beijing

REUTERS, Beijing

About 20 suspected North Korean asylum-seekers entered a German compound in Beijing on Tuesday in what appeared to be the latest of a string of attempted defections on Chinese soil, witnesses said.

Students at the German school in the compound said a senior teacher told them to leave class because the North Koreans were trying to get into the building.

"We were right in our classroom and the second head came in and said we had to leave because there were some North Korean people in our school area trying to come inside the building," said 17-year-old student Carsten Muehl.

"We were supposed to be careful when we got out of the building not to let them in."

8 al-Qaida suspects held in Holland

AFP, Rotterdam

Eight people suspected of belonging to a radical Islamic network supporting the al-Qaida organisation have been arrested and remanded in custody in the Netherlands, the state prosecutor's office said Monday.

The organisation to which the suspects belong was providing "logistical, material and financial support" to al-Qaeda, the network led by Osama bin Laden, blamed for the September 11 attacks in the United States, the office said in a statement.

'Farooq scuttling Kashmir peace'

PTI, New Delhi

Kashmiri separatist leader Shabir Shah has accused the BJP-led NDA government of succumbing to the "pressure" of the Farooq Abdullah regime in J&K to sabotage the peace process initiated by the Kashmir Committee.

"The Centre is acting under pressure of Abdullah and making repeated attempts to scuttle the peace process initiated by Kashmir Committee Chairman Ram Jethmalani," Shah, who had been in the Capital for the last six days, said on Tuesday before his return to Srinagar.

Mudslide kills 14 in Thai refugee camp

AFP, Chiang Mai

At least 14 people were killed and 20 were missing after a mudslide and floodwaters hit a refugee camp on the Thailand-Myanmar border, officials said Tuesday.

Witnesses at the Ban Sala camp in Mae Hong Son province, which is home to more than 15,000 mostly Karen and Karenni refugees, told AFP that some 300 wooden and bamboo buildings were swept away in the disaster.

Plane hijack bid turns out to be a hoax

AFP, Kolkata

A nine-year-old boy held up a flight of private operator Jet Airways in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata by threatening to hijack the plane and blow it up in mid air, a security official said Monday.

Deputy Commissioner of the bomb detection and disposal squad, A.K. Deb, said the Calcutta city office of Jet Airways received more than four threatening calls on Monday just ahead of the flight's take off in the evening.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian woman cries on her hospital bed as she takes care of her two injured children following the destruction of her home by Israeli troops in the Rafah refugee camp, near the border with Egypt. Ten Palestinians in the same family were injured when Israeli troops destroyed the house in Rafah during an incursion into the area in the southern Gaza Strip early in the morning.

Iraq braces for US strike

Baghdad ready to cooperate with UN, Blair to set out case for Iraq action

AFP, Johannesburg

Iraq is bracing for a US attack but is ready to cooperate with the UN Security Council in a hoped-for "magic solution" to the crisis, Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz told reporters here Tuesday.

Speaking after meeting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Johannesburg on the sidelines of the Earth Summit, Aziz said, "This is a crisis."

"We are taking the threat very seriously. It's our responsibility, and we are preparing ourselves to defend our country."

Aziz said that he and Annan "exchanged our legitimate concerns" and added that he told the UN chief that if "anybody can have a magic solution so that all the issues are being dealt with together equitably, reasonably ... we are ready to cooperate with the United Nations and explain our position in a reasonable manner."

He said that apart from a US-led demand for Iraq to allow UN weapons inspectors to return, issues included threats of aggression and moves to topple the government of Saddam Hussein.

Aziz accused Washington of double standards, saying that Baghdad had invited not only members of Congress but experts with instruments and equipment to inspect facilities but that the US administration did not respond.

"What do you conclude out of that?" he said. "You conclude that they are

not genuine in telling the US people and the international public opinion that they have concerns.

"If they are genuine, let them come and see for themselves," he said, adding that if their findings did not back up the claims Iraq would approach the UN Security Council "to take a decision to lift the sanctions" imposed on Baghdad.

Washington on Tuesday said Iraq had failed to live up to its promises of disarming after the Gulf War.

Aziz said Baghdad had had a bitter experience with weapons inspectors but that Iraq had "invited the Americans themselves, the British, to come for a special mission."

"But if they send people who drag their feet for years as they did for seven-and-a-half years, that's not going to solve any problem."

The secretary general did not emerge after the half-hour meeting, but his spokeswoman Hua Jiang said in a communique that the talks were aimed at finding a "comprehensive solution" to the crisis.

It said they "touched base on the present situation regarding Iraq's relations with the Security Council, in particular on the issue of the return of inspectors" as part of a "comprehensive solution including the lifting of sanctions."

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, just back from the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, was to set out the case Tuesday for possible military action against Iraq.

Israel spells out condition for Palestinian assembly

Israel set to deport militants to Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel Tuesday authorised the Palestinian parliament to hold a special session in the West Bank town of Ramallah, but said it would ban any deputies involved in "terrorism," a senior Israeli official told AFP.

The Palestinians said the condition was a ploy to dodge international pressure while disrupting the session, which Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has said he opposes.

Sharon authorised the meeting at the request of Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer, said the

official, who asked not to be identified.

The Palestinian parliament is set to meet on September 9 to officially approve the new cabinet unveiled by Yasser Arafat in June as part of reforms to the Palestinian Authority, which has been branded by Washington and Israel as corrupt.

The official said the Israeli coordinator of activities in the Palestinian territories, General Amos Gilad, "has been tasked with making sure that any members of the Legislative Council involved in terrorist activities will not be able to join the session."

"The coordinator is the Israeli

government representative to the Palestinians and is the only one who can give the necessary authorisation" to travel within the West Bank, reoccupied by Israeli forces for 10 weeks, or from the southern territory of the Gaza Strip.

Israel's policy of checkpoints and closures makes it virtually impossible for Palestinian deputies to travel to Ramallah from across the West Bank, while the Gaza Strip is sealed off by checkpoints and an electric fence.

The Palestinian leadership was meeting in Ramallah on Tuesday and was expected to reject the Israeli proposal, the head of the

political committee of the Palestine Legislative Council (PLC), Ziad Abu Amr, told AFP.

Reuters adds: Israel's highest court on Tuesday approved the expulsion from the West Bank of two Palestinians accused of helping their brother with a suicide bombing, but it rejected the deportation of a third Palestinian.

They were the first such cases brought to the Supreme Court since the Israeli government recently adopted the expulsion policy as part of its response to a wave of Palestinian suicide attacks in the 23-month-old uprising against Israeli occupation.

Chandrika opts for showdown

Monks join chorus against revoking ban on Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga on Monday vowed to overturn moves by her cohabitation government to concede a key rebel demand and lift a ban on them before crucial peace talks in Thailand.

President Kumaratunga assured hundreds of Buddhists monks that she will prevent the government of her arch rival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe deprecating the Tiger rebels, her office said in a two-page statement.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had said they will enter peace talks brokered by Norway only after the 1998 ban on them was lifted. The talks are scheduled to open in Thailand on September 16.

"There are legal avenues available to stop the government lifting the ban on the LTTE," Kumaratunga's office said quoting her during a meeting with hard-line nationalist Buddhist monks. She did not elaborate on how she would do it.

Kumaratunga stressed that she

was "strongly opposed" to de-banning the Tiger guerrillas who have been leading a drawn out campaign for an independent homeland for the island's Tamil minority.

"I am strongly opposed to the lifting of the ban on an LTTE which has not given up its terrorism, not given up its demand for a separate state and not entered the democratic mainstream."

"There should be an interim administration (for the embattled north-east) only after all issues have been discussed and a settlement reached."

"The Prime Minister has neither informed me nor the country on how he is going to negotiate with the LTTE," Kumaratunga told the Buddhist monks who earlier in the day held a meeting denouncing peace broker Norway.

The monks also demanded that the ban on the Tigers should not be lifted and urged Kumaratunga to take the defence portfolio and stop her cohabitation government in its attempts to deal with the Tiger rebels.

Kumaratunga was quoted as

saying that she supported peace moves and recognised that minority Tamils had "reasonable grievances" but she was "not willing to betray everything."

"I am not ready to sacrifice everything and betray everything in the name of peace," Kumaratunga was quoted by her office as saying.

Meanwhile, Buddhist monks joined Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga Monday in demanding that the cohabitation government abandon plans to deprecate Tamil Tiger rebels ahead of crucial talks.

President Kumaratunga, who is in an uneasy cohabitation, vowed to overturn moves by the government to lift a 1998 ban on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) before starting talks in Thailand on September 16.

Hundreds of saffron-robed clergy who went in procession to Kumaratunga's tightly-guarded home here were assured that she, as the head of state, will not allow the ban to be lifted, Kumaratunga's office said in a statement.

S Korean typhoon toll reaches 113

REUTERS, Kangnung

The death toll from South Korea's worst typhoon in 40 years rose to 113 on Tuesday as soldiers led a desperate search for 71 people still missing after the weekend devastation.

Authorities said it would take a month to clean up after Typhoon Rusa unleashed gusts of up to 127 mph across South Korea's east and south coasts, leaving a swathe of devastation before turning back to sea on Sunday.

Rescue workers in the eastern resort city of Kangnung, which bore the brunt of Rusa, toiled to reach cars buried under a landslide as hopes of finding survivors faded.

North Korea, where rainfall in some mountainous areas exceeded 27.5 inches, also reported scores of dead and many missing. Heavy showers and thunderstorms were forecast for the peninsula on Wednesday as another storm, Typhoon Sinlaku, churned its way toward Okinawa and Taiwan.

South Korean ferry tours to the communist North and a North-South Red Cross meeting were postponed due to the disaster.

In the South, at least 16,000 people in remote villages had been cut off by landslides that buried and buckled roads, the National Disaster Prevention Headquarters said.

"Those who were buried by the landslide are all dead," fireman Park Myung-sik, head of a rescue team in Kangnung, told Reuters.

"We expected that there would be no survivors... but we tried anyway to dig out the buried cars and passengers in them," he said.

Hampered by thick fog, troops joined a frantic search for survivors after landslides and floods in coastal areas buried vehicles and destroyed 1,300 homes and other buildings. Workers used electronic sensors to search for survivors in the deep mud.

Kangnung, home to 230,000 people, was doused by a record 34 inches of rain on Saturday.

"Just 20 minutes after the rains began, my house was completely flooded," said Kim Choong-sup, 43, a disabled, unemployed resident.

"I managed to escape with my mother and child, but nothing else," he said, standing in his muddy yard amid soaked clothing, blankets and destroyed household appliances.

Rubbish was piled high in the streets of Kangnung and residents complained of water shortages and foul odors.

In the village of Sangju, in the centre of this country of 48 million people, police detained a farmer after he tried to set fire to an official building to protest at slow aid efforts for farmers who lost crops just before harvest.

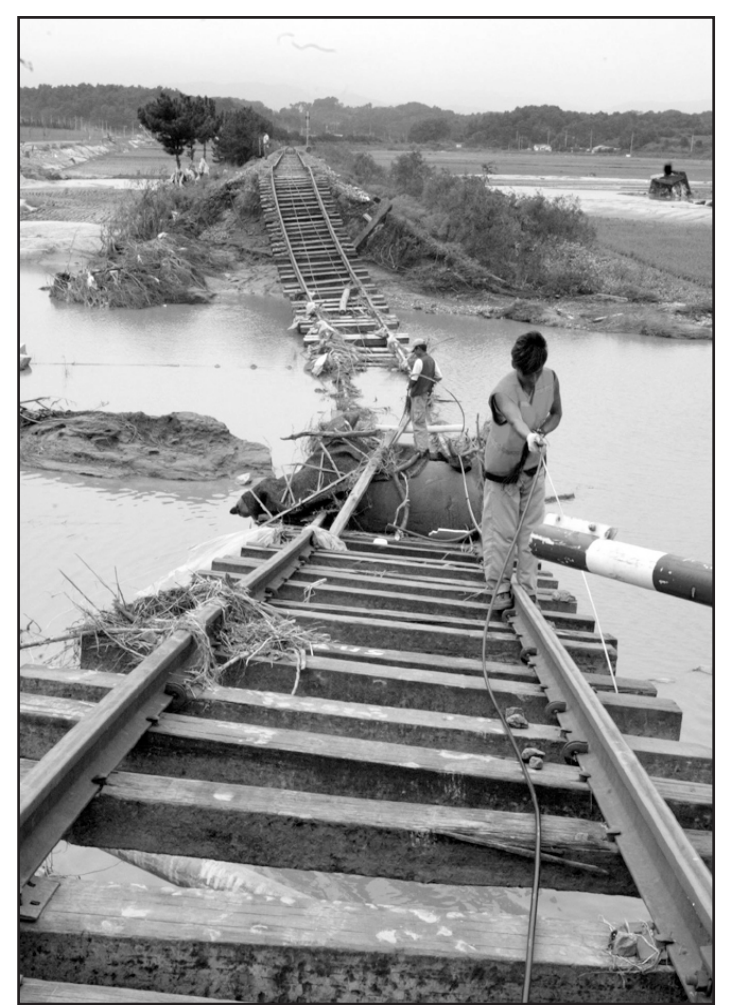


PHOTO: AFP

Repairmen work on a flood-damaged railroad to restore power and telecommunications lines in the South Korean city of Gangneung on Monday. Typhoon Rusa, the worst in more than four decades, left some 200 people dead or missing.



PHOTO: AFP

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (R) waves to residents on Monday as he visits Somoho (Mountain of Hope), a Soweto Community Centre. Kofi Annan led a call by world leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg on Monday for an alternative development plan, saying the present model was ravaging the environment and condemning most of humanity to poverty.

Japan pledges to help developing nations attain self-reliance

AFP, Johannesburg

Japan is committed to help developing nations achieve self-reliance through trade promotion and other programs despite financial constraints back home, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Monday.

"The key to self-reliance is earning for oneself. Promotion of trade is crucial for developing countries. Japan shall step up its assistance for trade-related capacity building," he told the Earth Summit in Johannesburg.

Japan would also examine the possibility of revising its tariff laws in the next fiscal year to expand imports of "duty-free and quota-free" products from least developed countries, he said.

Koizumi said Japan has proposed that the United Nations declare a "decade of education for sustainable development" and would provide no less than 250 billion yen (2.1 billion dollars) in education assistance over a five-year period.

"Our world is filled with harsh realities. Conflicts continue incessantly on the Earth. Still we must determine the key factors in ensuring sustainable development once peace is achieved. I believe that the answer is people," he said.

Koizumi said Japan had also promised to provide 30 million dollars in food aid to seven drought-stricken southern African countries to save millions of people threatened by famine.

The beneficiaries are Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, officials said.

Koizumi offered to share Japan's experience in battling a period of serious pollution in the process of achieving economic growth "so that our friends will not repeat the grim experience."

"I eagerly await the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol (on climate-warming) ... let us see to it that our children and their children are able to inherit a beautiful earth, preserved by a common rule for all," he said.

Nepal mulls reimposing state of emergency

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said on Tuesday he wanted to discuss whether to reimpose a state of emergency -- which was lifted last week for the first time in 10 months -- following a series of bomb attacks by suspected Maoist rebels.

The emergency was first introduced in November last year to combat the increasingly violent guerrillas and extended twice, despite protests from opposition parties and rights groups that it was draconian.

But last week Deuba, during a visit to Belgium, said the emergency would be allowed to lapse because parliamentary elections are due to be held on November 13. It expired on August 28.

Deuba returned from his trip to Belgium, Britain and Thailand on Tuesday and spoke to journalists at the airport.

"I cannot say anything right now. I will have to discuss the matter with concerned persons

before any decisions can be made," he said in response to questions on the emergency.

"Even if there is an emergency, it will be lifted during the elections," he added.

"As soon as the candidates submit their candidacy for the elections, the emergency would cease to exist," he said.

On Sunday minister without portfolio Rishikesh Gautam said the emergency could be reimposed if the law and order situation continued to deteriorate.

The Maoists have stepped up their attacks in and around Kathmandu in the past week with bombs going off or being defused virtually every day.

On Tuesday the army defused two bombs in the capital, while late Monday two went off on the outskirts of the city causing damage to buildings.

The emergency gave local authorities and security forces wide powers to detain and interrogate suspected rebels and impose curfews.