



PHOTO: AFP
Women in traditional costumes dance during an Independence Day ceremony at the presidential palace in Jakarta yesterday. Indonesia celebrated its 58th Independence Day amid terrorist threats as Australia renewed warnings of a possible attack tied to Indonesia's national day.

Nepali peace talks opens amid alert

AFP, Nepalgunj

A much-delayed third round of talks between Nepal's government and Maoist rebels, who have been waging an insurgency for seven years, opened here amid tight security yesterday, officials said.

Negotiating teams from both sides sat down together at a heavily guarded venue in the southwestern town of Nepalgunj, they said.

The army patrolled the streets of Nepalgunj ahead of the negotiations, while banners expressing hope for the success of the talks were strung across many roads by civil groups and non-governmental organisations.

Residents of Nepalgunj gathered at a rally Sunday and chanted slogans for the success of the peace talks.

After a ceasefire was announced on January 29, talks were held in Kathmandu on April 27 and May 9.

But the third session had been stalled partially due to disagreement over what, if anything, was agreed to in the previous rounds.

Ohio line failure likely cause of big blackout

AP, Washington

A failure to contain problems with three transmission lines in northern Ohio just south of Cleveland was the likely trigger of the nation's biggest power blackout, a leading investigator said Saturday.

Alarm systems that might have alerted engineers to the failed lines were broken, according to FirstEnergy Corp., the Akron, Ohio-based utility that officials said owned at least two of the three lines.

It was not immediately clear whether that impeded efforts to isolate the local line disruptions, some of which occurred an hour before power system shutdowns cascaded Thursday from Michigan to New York City and into Canada.

"We are fairly certain at this time that the disturbance started in Ohio," Michael Gent, head of the North American Electric Reliability Council, said in a statement. "We are now trying to determine why the situation was not brought under control after three transmission

lines went out of service." Gent said the transmission system was designed to isolate such problems and suggested that human error might have been involved in not containing the situation.

"The system has been designed and rules have been created to prevent this escalation and cascading. It should have stopped," Gent said in a telephone conference call.

FirstEnergy, which officials said owns four of the first five lines that failed, said a system that is supposed to flash a red warning on computer monitors at the company's control centre was not operational when the lines began failing Thursday afternoon.

FirstEnergy was aware the alarm system was broken, said company spokesman Ralph DiNicola. A functioning backup alarm at the Midwest Independent System Operator, a non-profit power pool that oversees the region's electrical grid, was in place, DiNicola said.

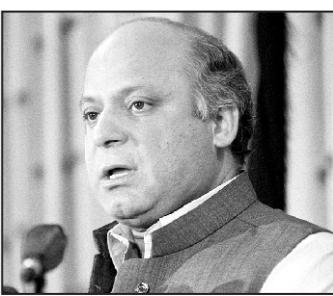
At the Midwest ISO, spokes-

woman Mary Lynn Webster said she did not know when workers noticed the FirstEnergy lines were disabled and what, if anything, they did about it.

Webster said the pool copes with "thousands of alarms every minute," and that the failed lines weren't in areas most prone to problems.

A failure in the monitoring system could be devastating because it prevents operators from isolating failures before they spread, said Thomas Stuart, a professor of electrical engineering at the University of Toledo.

Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, co-chair of a US-Canadian task force that will look into the cause of the blackout, said the group is putting together investigative teams that will include experts from the government's research laboratories as well as private resources. In addition to determining the cause, the task force will recommend actions to prevent a repeat.



'Over 4000 Pak troops, officials killed in Kargil'

PTI, Islamabad

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said that more than 4,000 Pakistani troops and officials were killed during the 1999 Kargil conflict with India, which also sabotaged the Indo-Pak normalisation process initiated by him and Prime Minister Vajpayee.

Accusing President Pervez Musharraf of masterminding the Kargil conflict, during which terrorists backed by Pakistani troops occupied the mountain peaks of Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir, Sharif said the entire operation was launched without the knowledge of his government.

Blast hits Baghdad water supply pipeline

REUTERS, Baghdad

A major water pipeline in northern Baghdad was breached yesterday, flooding nearby streets and cutting off the supply to parts of the Iraqi capital, after what locals said was a bomb attack.

Sabotage of fuel pipelines, power cables and water pipes has dogged attempts by the US-led administration to rebuild Iraq's decrepit oil industry and restore basic services.

The main oil export pipeline to Turkey a crucial economic lifeline for Iraq was shut down last week just days after reopening, following technical hitches and a bomb attack that sparked a fire.

Paul Bremer, the US governor of Iraq, said the closure of that pipeline was costing the country \$7 million a day.

Washington blames die-hard

supporters of deposed leader Saddam Hussein and foreign militant groups for sabotage of infrastructure and attacks on US forces that have killed 60 American troops since the United States declared major combat over on May 1.

In the latest ambush in Baghdad, two US soldiers were shot and wounded as they left a restaurant on Saturday, the military said. Both were in a stable condition in hospital.

Iraqi police and security guards have also come under attack from anti-US fighters who accuse them of collaborating with occupying troops.

In the northern city of Mosul, the headquarters of an Iraqi civilian security force was attacked with machinegun fire and a rocket-propelled grenade on Saturday afternoon.

One of the security guards was killed and four were wounded, their

colleagues told Reuters. The security force was set up to help guard hospitals, schools and other facilities.

Earlier on Saturday, Mosul's police chief was wounded in a gun attack on a police convoy.

Officials at the holed water pipeline in Baghdad said it would take at least eight hours to repair the damage. Water cascaded out of the breach in the elevated pipeline and poured out onto the road below.

Locals said they had been woken by a loud blast and had seen a car speeding away from the scene.

Thamir Ghadban, US-appointed de facto oil minister, told a news conference in Baghdad on Saturday the fire at the oil export pipeline to Turkey was caused by a bomb attack north of the town of Baiji.

Blair aides face grilling over Kelly's death

AFP, London

A probe into the death of a British government scientist will this week turn the spotlight on the role of Prime Minister Tony Blair's office, with the careers of several officials hanging in the balance.

The forthcoming appearance before the inquiry of some of Blair's closest aides threatens to inflict yet more damage on the Labour leader, whose popularity has tumbled in opinion polls since the death of former United Nations weapons expert David Kelly.

Kelly, who apparently committed suicide in July days after being grilled by two parliamentary committees, was caught up in a row between Downing Street and the BBC over a report that the government embellished the case for war on Iraq.

This week the judicial inquiry

by senior judge Brian Hutton looks set to shed some light on the murky world of government "spinning" -- the practice honed by the ruling Labour Party of giving news a favourable slant.

Among those taking the stand is the "sultan of spin", Blair's director of communications, Alastair Campbell.

The pugnacious former tabloid journalist was accused by a BBC radio journalist of inserting a sensational claim into a government dossier published last September that Iraq could deploy chemical or biological weapons in just 45 minutes.

Campbell, who has resisted calls to resign, is likely to face questions over whether his relentless pursuit of a complaint against the BBC story led to Kelly being exposed as the BBC's source for the controversial report.



Uganda debates legacy of Idi Amin

AP, Kampala

For many Ugandans, the death of former dictator Idi Amin on Saturday severed the last link to an era best forgotten: eight years of brutal rule defined by the deaths of up to 300,000 people and the memory of thousands of hastily disposed bodies collecting in Lake Victoria.

But 25 years after he went into exile, some found it galling that Amin was never punished for bringing so much misery to what had been a prosperous country. He never expressed remorse and whiled away his later years fishing and taking strolls on the beach in Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan accuses India of mobilising troops

PTI, ANI, Islamabad

However, Pakistan's defence officials were not immediately available for comment.

ANI says close on the heels of the visit by an Indian peace delegation, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said on Saturday that though Pakistan was not involved in any arms race it would maintain a minimum credible deterrence.

While on a visit to the Air Headquarters at Chaklala, Musharraf and Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali said that the deterrence had been quantified in terms of comparative strength, weaponry and force levels, a report in The News said.

Stating the importance of air power as a vital component of the country's armed forces, they welcomed the measures being taken for self-reliance and the indigenous development of Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) assets.