

## Japan eyes overhaul of constitution

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's ruling party is eyeing an overhaul of the post-war constitution to allow the military to use force in international missions and let a woman ascend the throne, reports said Wednesday.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party plans to decide on the changes next month and announce a final draft in November 2005, the Yomiuri Shimbun said, citing party sources.

It would mark the first revision of the pacifist 1947 constitution imposed by the United States at the end of World War II, in which Japan renounced war and the right to maintain a military.

With some 550 Japanese troops in Iraq and Japan facing threats from North Korea, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has said the founding document should be revised "in the light of common sense."

But debate over the change could get heated and Japan could face criticism from neighboring Asian nations who were victims of Japan's wartime aggression worried about Tokyo's expanding military role, analysts said.



Indian soldiers walk towards truck carrying their belongings as they pull out of the northern Kashmiri town of Anantnag, some 50km from Srinagar yesterday. A battalion of paratroopers pulled out of this northern Kashmir town, the first Indian soldiers to leave the volatile state as part of a peace process with Pakistan, officials said.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'All parties must change thinking on Kashmir'

AFP, Srinagar

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has risen above his country's traditional position on Kashmir and other parties now need to ditch their own long-held stances, a leading Kashmiri separatist said.

"We have to be ready to look into all different possibilities and different scenarios," Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, 31, told AFP in an interview in this summer capital of Indian Kashmir.

"The time has come when we need to rise above traditional positions."

Farooq, head of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, Kashmir's main separatist conglomerate, had a chance meeting with Musharraf in Amsterdam before the Pakistani leader went public on October 25 with a raft of new proposals for the resolution of the decades-old dispute over Kashmir.

Included in what Musharraf said were mere suggestions to be debated

was one to demilitarise Kashmir, which is currently divided between Pakistan and India, and place sections off under United Nations mandate or under joint control.

He also departed from Pakistan's insistence that a plebiscite be held in the Himalayan region for Kashmiris to determine their own future, saying that because India opposed such a poll other alternatives should be looked at.

"I had very frank and honest discussion with (Musharraf) and I was very impressed with the clarity and positive attitude he has towards Kashmir," said Farooq.

"We are having a leader for the first time in Pakistan who really cares about the pain and suffering of the people of Kashmir and he wants to end it."

"That is why ... it's a very bold decision on his part to start something which is above the position taken by Pakistan for the past 55 years," he said.

## Suspension of nuke plan subject to progress in talks with EU: Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran warned yesterday that its agreement to suspend sensitive nuclear activities was subject to rapid progress being made in a new round of negotiations due to begin next month.

Tehran agreed Sunday to suspend its controversial uranium enrichment programme during talks with three European Union states, Britain France and Germany.

The next round of negotiations, due to commence in mid-December, is aimed at building guarantees on Iran's peaceful nuclear intentions as well as drawing up a package of incentives.

"They will give the results of their work three months later. If the results are positive, if (the enrichment suspension) would continue,"

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

"It is a positive accord that respects the national interests of Iran," he said, but warned that "if the other side does not respect its commitments, we will not have any obligations either."

The deal struck late on Sunday came just ahead of a November 25 meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is to examine whether Iran's cooperation with an ongoing investigation has been adequate.

The United States, which accuses the clerical regime here of seeking nuclear weapons, want the IAEA board to refer Iran to the UN Security Council where sanctions could be imposed.

## Blast kills 2 in Pak cinema house

AFP, Peshawar

Two people were killed and 29 injured when a bomb exploded during a midnight film session in a cinema in northwestern Pakistan, police said yesterday.

The explosion ripped through the Palwasha movie theatre just after midnight in Mingora city in the lower Swat valley, a picturesque river valley popular with holidaymakers some 100km north of provincial capital Peshawar.

"The bomb was placed in a plastic bag which exploded a moment before the end of the last show of the movie in Palwasha cinema," district police officer Syed Akhtar Ali Shah told AFP by telephone.

Mingora is close to the Afghan border and is a stronghold of Islamic fundamentalists.

Shah said it was too early to speculate who could be behind the attack.

"We are analyzing it," he said.

## Russia working on new nuke systems: Putin

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia is working on new nuclear missile systems that other powers do not have in order to protect itself against future security challenges, President Vladimir Putin said yesterday.

Putin, speaking to armed forces chiefs, said although international terrorism was one of Russia's main security threats the country had also to keep its nuclear defenses in sound condition.

"We know that we have only to weaken our attention to such components of our defenses as the nuclear-missile shield, and new threats to us could appear," Itar-Tass news agency quoted him as saying.

He said research and successful testing of new nuclear-missile systems technology was being conducted.

"I am sure that in the near future weapons will appear... which other nuclear powers do not and will not possess," he said.

# Tigers get 2 weeks to decide on talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president has asked Tamil Tiger rebels to decide within two weeks whether they wish to resume talks which have remained deadlocked for 19 months, state-run media reported yesterday.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga asked the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to return to the negotiating table they left in April last year.

"The necessary environment needed for the resumption of talks has been created," Kumaratunga said over national television and in state-controlled newspapers.

"Therefore, I request the LTTE to inform the government, within this month, if they are ready to commence peace talks. At present, the LTTE is finding various excuses not to come to peace talks."

She did not say what action her government would take if the Tigers failed to rejoin the Norwegian-led

initiative aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

Kumaratunga dismissed the previous government which entered into a ceasefire with the Tamil Tigers in February 2002.

Her party narrowly won the April parliamentary elections, but continued the same peace initiative.

Kumaratunga said in an interview broadcast overnight that the Tamil Tigers had been changing their stance on the talks.

She said they had said there would be no point negotiating with her because her term was due to end soon, but pointed out: "You are dealing with a government, not an individual."

Norway's attempts last week to restart the talks failed despite a high-level visit by Foreign Minister Jan Petersen.

Despite the failure to revive negotiations, both sides pledged in talks with the Norwegians that they

would abide by the ceasefire agreement.

Kumaratunga said the Tigers had also argued that her Marxist-backed coalition was not speaking with one voice.

"That is not true," Kumaratunga said adding that her main Marxist ally, the JVP, or People's Liberation Front was willing to go along with a consensus that would emerge from the discussions with the rebels.

The JVP is opposed to devolution of power advocated by Kumaratunga and instead want "decentralisation" of the administration to smaller territorial units than what is demanded by the Tigers.

The Tigers made it clear to the Norwegians last week that they wanted their proposal for self rule taken up at talks and rejected Kumaratunga's suggestion to link the self-rule proposals to a final settlement.

# Talks only if sovereignty is discussed: Ulfa

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Guwahati

An influential separatist group in Assam said that it was ready to hold peace talks with New Delhi only if the government agrees to discuss its main demand of sovereignty or independence.

"We are ready to hold talks with the Indian government only if our core demand of sovereignty is discussed," Paresw Baruah, commander-in-chief of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), was quoted as saying by the local media in Assam yesterday.

The Ulfa leader was reacting to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's desire to hold talks with the outfit to solve 25-years of violent militancy in the state.

Manmohan Singh had met Ulfa's emissary and noted Assamese writer Indira Goswami in New Delhi Tuesday for initiating measures to hold negotiations with the outfit.

"We want a written assurance from the government of India mentioning that the issue of sovereignty will be discussed if any talks are to be held," Baruah said.

The Ulfa has scaled down its earlier preconditions for holding peace talks with the government the outfit had earlier insisted that negotiations be held in a third country and under the supervision of the UN with the main topic of discussion being the issue of sovereignty.

"Now the Ulfa has given up two of their three preconditions and

simply insisting that the issue of sovereignty be discussed," Goswami said.

"During my meeting with the Prime Minister I stressed on the fact that agreeing to talk with the Ulfa on their demand for sovereignty does not necessarily mean the government will have to grant independence."

Goswami said that the Prime Minister told her he would discuss the Ulfa's precondition with experts before taking any decision in inviting the rebels for talks.

The Ulfa, founded in 1979, is fighting for an independent homeland in Assam.

Intelligence officials say the Ulfa has about 3,000 fighters and is among one of the powerful rebel armies in the northeast.

## 10 Afghan cops killed in Taliban attack

AFP, Kabul

Ten policemen and a suspected Taliban fighter have been killed in clashes between government forces and militants in southern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

Six policemen and a militant were killed Tuesday night in Helmand province in a Taliban attack, bringing the death toll in the troubled south to 11 over the last day.

Taliban insurgents attacked a police post in Helmand's Kajaki district some 460km south of Kabul, provincial deputy governor Haji Mawin told AFP.

"Six police were killed and the Taliban left one dead body as they fled. The Taliban have fled to the mountains and we are chasing them," he added.

In a separate attack earlier Tuesday, four Afghan policemen were killed and five others, including a district police chief, were injured when their vehicle struck a home-made bomb in Uruzgan province in south-central Afghanistan.

"A remote-controlled explosion killed four police and injured five other policemen including the Shora district police chief," Uruzgan

police chief, Rozi Khan told AFP.

Militants have been waging a guerrilla campaign from strongholds in the mountainous terrain of Helmand and the neighboring provinces of Uruzgan, Kandahar and Zabul.

Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul share long mountainous borders with Pakistani tribal areas where the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies are believed to be taking refuge.

Meanwhile, a murky Taliban splinter group holding three UN hostages in Afghanistan for three weeks was silent Wednesday after the hostages' families plead for their freedom, but the US military was hopeful they were alive and would be safely released.

"We continue to remain hopeful that Annetta Flanigan, Sheqipe Hebihi and Angelito Nayan, the three UN workers abducted in Kabul on the 28th will be released unharmed," US military spokesman Major Scott Nelson told a press briefing.

The three, who were snatched from busy lunchtime traffic in downtown Kabul had been in Afghanistan working on the country's first presidential election won by President Hamid Karzai.

# Scores of Maoists killed in Nepali clashes

## 11 soldiers die in fighting, rebels urge donors to stop aid

AFP, Kathmandu

Eleven soldiers were killed in Nepal, five in a landmine blast near a blocked road close to the capital, while battles with Maoists elsewhere left scores of rebels dead, an army official said Tuesday.

The army officer, who declined to be identified, said in the past two days skirmishes and air strikes had killed at least 35 rebels while the army lost 11 soldiers and seven injured in the fighting.

Five soldiers were killed in the landmine blast and six during engagements in far southwest jungle areas.

"Our securitymen were moving near Bhagwanpur jungle area in Kailali district, when a fairly large number of Maoists attacked one of the four army units in which six soldiers were killed while seven others were injured," the official said.

The soldiers were searching for seven soldiers abducted by the rebels at a village in Kailali district

Monday night, the army official said.

The landmine blast on the Prithvi Highway west of Kathmandu is the site of a two-day Maoist blockade of traffic to and from the capital to protest the killing of four rebels last week.

The Maoists are fighting to topple the constitutional monarchy established in 1990. The conflict has claimed more than 10,000 lives since 1996.

Earlier the leader of Nepal's Maoist rebels urged Tuesday a halt to international aid for one of the world's poorest nations to pressure the government into peace talks leading to a new constitution.

The Maoists are fighting to topple the constitutional monarchy established in 1990 in a conflict that has claimed more than 10,000 lives since 1996.

"We appeal to the international community to help realize the aspirations of peace and democracy of the Nepalese people by halting all economic, political, military and

diplomatic assistance to Nepal," Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda (Fiery One), said in an e-mailed statement.

In 2004 Nepal received nearly 280 million dollars in economic aid, about 60 percent of its development budget, from donors including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and the United States, according to the country's National Planning Commission.

Japan is one of Nepal's biggest aid donors followed by Britain and Germany, but Tokyo's embassy was not aware of any appeal to halt aid.

"Our embassy has so far not received any appeals from the Maoists to halt all sorts of aid to Nepal," an embassy official said.

Prachanda also accused the government of failing to hold serious talks for a political settlement. Two rounds of peace talks in the past year have failed with the latest cease-fire ending in October and the government rejecting a rebel demand for UN mediation.

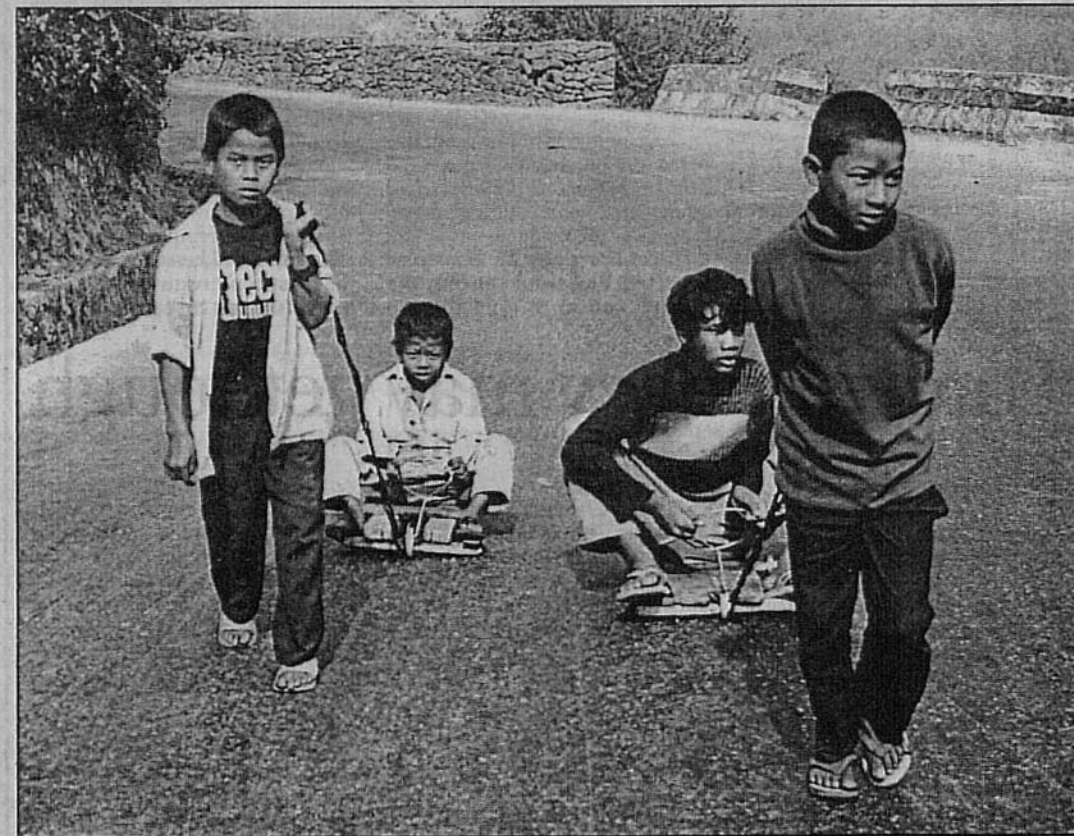


PHOTO: AFP

Nepali children play on the deserted Prithvi Highway, the main highway link with India, during a two day traffic strike called by Maoist rebels at Dhading district, west of Kathmandu yesterday. At least five security personnel and a Maoist rebel were killed in Krishnabhir some 75km west of the Nepalese capital during the traffic blockade called by the Maoists in Dhading district.

## Parliament extends Aceh emergency

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's parliament supports a government plan to extend a state of civil emergency in Aceh province where thousands have died in an 18-month-old military offensive against separatists, a news report said yesterday.

"We have no objection to the plan... The extension is necessary as we have to maintain the security situation in the province," House Speaker Agung Laksono said, according to the Jakarta Post newspaper.

Laksono said local council members had told him of their support for the extension, due to be reviewed on Friday, and legislators from Aceh deemed the move necessary as there were still threats from Free Aceh Movement guerrillas.

The rebels have been fighting for independence in the resource-rich but impoverished province since 1976.

Indonesia's top security minister, Widodo Adi Sucipto, has said the six-month old state of civil emergency -- which replaced martial law imposed at the May 2003 start of the military campaign -- is likely to continue.



PHOTO: AFP

Shia Muslims take part in a protest in Baghdad yesterday. Some 1500 men and women supporters of Shia cleric Mahmud al-Hassani (poster) took to the streets marching towards the US heavily fortified Green Zone in the center of the capital calling for the release of Iraqi held prisoners.

## Sudan's main foes say peace deal imminent

AFP, Nairobi

Sudan's government and main rebel group are ready to clinch a final deal to end more than 20 years of war within days of talks resuming next week, spokesman for both sides said Wednesday, a day before the UN Security Council opens a rare meeting in Nairobi on the country's peace process.

In a phone conversation Tuesday, Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army leader John Garang "told (US President George W.) Bush it is a matter of days (after talks resume on November 26) before we reach a final peace agreement," rebel spokesman Yasser Arman told AFP, speaking by satellite phone from south Sudan's Equatoria state.

"I do concur. I don't think that we have a kind of problem that we cannot solve in a matter of days or a week," Said al-Khatib, the spokesman for Khartoum's delegation in the two-year-old peace talks, told AFP in Nairobi.

On Tuesday, the White House announced that Bush had called both Garang and Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir to urge them to conclude their marathon peace talks.

# 'Pak scientist gave Iran bomb-grade uranium'

REUTERS, Vienna

Iran obtained weapons-grade uranium and a design for a nuclear bomb from a Pakistani scientist who has admitted to selling nuclear secrets abroad, an exiled Iranian opposition group said yesterday.

The group, that has given accurate information before, also said Iran is secretly enriching uranium at a military site previously unknown to the UN, despite promising France, Britain and Germany that it would halt all such work.

"(Abdul Qadeer) Khan gave Iran a quantity of HEU (highly enriched uranium) in 2001, so they already have some," Farid Soleiman, a senior spokesman for the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), told reporters.

"I would doubt it was given enough for a weapon," he added.

Soleiman said Khan, who ran a global nuclear black market that supplied Libya and Iran with uranium-enrichment technology until it was shut down earlier this year, also gave Iran a Chinese-developed

warhead design sometime between 1994 and 1996.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has said that Khan's network gave Libya the bomb design. It has been trying to find out whether Iran got the design as well, but has no proof that Tehran acquired it.

Diplomats in Vienna who follow the IAEA, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, say the NCRI has been the best source of information on Tehran's previously undeclared nuclear program.

"The NCRI is the political wing of the exiled group known as the People's Mujahideen Organization. Both are listed by the State Department as terrorist organizations."

Soleiman said that Iran was enriching uranium, a process of purifying it for use as fuel for power plants or bombs, at a site in north-eastern Tehran as part of a continuing covert program to develop nuclear weapons.

"It continues to enrich uranium as we speak," Soleiman said.

Iran first pledged in October last year to suspend all uranium enrichment activities in a bid to allay fears it is seeking a bomb. It promised on Sunday to extend the scope of the freeze, sparing it a referral to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions.

Soleiman said the enrichment site, called the Center for the Development of Advanced Defense Technology, was run by the defense ministry and located in Lavizan, near a site where the United States suspects Iran conducted secret nuclear work before demolishing all the buildings and carting off the rubble.

He said the NCRI sent the IAEA a letter about the new site a few days ago.

Iran told France, Britain and Germany on Sunday it would freeze all activities related to enrichment while the two sides negotiate a permanent deal on Iran's nuclear program. This will protect Iran from being referred to the UN Security Council when the IAEA board of governors meets on Nov. 25.