

# Donors want Nepal king to end emergency rule

FM holds talks with Delhi

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's international donors want King Gyanendra to end emergency rule in the aid-dependent kingdom before promising continued development support, the finance ministers said yesterday.

"The donors want the state of emergency to be lifted and political detainees released and human rights abuses in Nepal stopped," Finance Minister Madhukar Shumsher Rana told AFP in Kathmandu Monday.

Last month, Gyanendra dismissed the government of impoverished Nepal, imposed emergency rule and suspended civil liberties,

saying he was forced to act to tackle a nine-year Maoist revolt that has claimed over 11,000 lives.

His takeover has drawn widespread international condemnation.

Rana was speaking after returning from a Paris meeting of 127 countries and bilateral and multilateral donor organisations entitled "Enhancing the Effectiveness of DevelopmentAid."

"The donors put some preconditions before pledging their continued support to Nepal's development," state-run English daily the Rising Nepal quoted Rana as saying.

"They (the donors) have assured

us more support if the emergency is lifted and civil rights are restored," Rana said.

Meanwhile, Nepal's foreign minister met his Indian counterpart in New Delhi yesterday in the first ministerial contact between the neighbours since King Gyanendra seized power in the Himalayan kingdom.

Nepalese Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey arrived here early yesterday on a three-day working visit, a foreign ministry official said.

He held talks over lunch with Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh.

# ASIAN SCHOLAR SAYS US faces crossroads in ties with Islamic world

AFP, Washington

US policy towards the Middle East has unwittingly made Osama bin Laden nearly the most popular figure in the region, according to a respected Asian scholar whose new book has triggered debate on why Muslims hate America.

Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former two-term chief diplomat to the United Nations, warns that the level of anger in the Islamic world will become even stronger if the United States does not act swiftly to

enhance its image among Muslims.

"I think the moment to rectify the situation is now," he told a forum in Washington last week about his new book, "Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust between America and the World."

In the thought-provoking book, Mahbubani, now a Singapore university dean, describes positive US contributions to global society and how the superpower abruptly walked away from the world when the Cold War ended.

He also conveys his own anguish

over deepening distrust and resentment of the United States.

Even in East Asia, whose rise as an economic power would not have been possible without US political, military and financial support, "the tone of conversation about America, sadly speaking, has turned negative," he said.

Mahbubani recounted that when he asked his Muslim friends in private who was the single most revered figure in the Islamic world, "the answer almost inevitably is Osama bin Laden."



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese disabled activists shout slogans as they take part in a peace rally in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepali King Gyanendra dismissed the four-party government and enforced an emergency rule on February 1, in response to the government's failure to hold general elections and peace talks with the Maoist insurgents.

## Italy honours slain intelligence officer

AP, Rome

Hundreds of people flocked to a Rome church yesterday to pay their last respects to an Italian intelligence officer shot and killed by American troops in Iraq while escorting an ex-hostage to freedom.

The state funeral of Nicola Calipari in the Santa Maria degli Angeli church in downtown Rome was expected to draw the country's president, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, and other top officials. US Ambassador Mel Sembler and Mayor Walter Veltroni were among those attending, news reports said.

The funeral came after Calipari's body lay in state at Rome's Vittoriano monument, with tens of thousands of people streaming past the flag-draped coffin since the body returned from Iraq on Saturday night.

## Bolivian president quits

REUTERS, La Paz

Bolivian President Carlos Mesa said on Sunday he was resigning after 17 months in office as new protests spread through South America's poorest nation and threatened the important oil and gas sector.

Mesa, a political independent, announced his decision on radio and television on Sunday night and said he would tender his resignation to Congress on Monday.

"I have reached a limit in my work," Mesa told the Andean nation of 8 million, adding that his government had faced 820 protests since taking office in October 2003.

# Syria, Lebanon announce partial pullout date

AP, REUTERS, Damascus

The presidents of Syria and Lebanon announced yesterday that Syrian troops will pull back to Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley by March 31, but a complete troop withdrawal will be deferred until later negotiations.

The announcement, made after a meeting between Syrian President Bashar Assad and Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, said Syrian troops will pull back from northern and central Lebanon to the east, near Syria's border.

Then, military officials from both countries will decide within a month how many Syrian troops will remain in the Bekaa Valley and how long they will stay there.

After a negotiated timeframe, the two governments will "agree to complete the withdrawal of the remaining forces," the statement said.

The Syrian and Lebanese presidents met yesterday to work out a Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon demanded by the United Nations, and Syrian soldiers in the mountains east of Beirut began packing their gear.

Lebanon's defense minister said the two-phase withdrawal would start immediately after the end of the talks in Damascus between Syria's Bashar al-Assad and Lebanon's Emile Lahoud.

Syrian soldiers based in the Lebanese mountain towns of Mdairji, Soufar and Alei were dismantling communications equipment or loading personal belongings and light military gear on military trucks, witnesses said.

Lebanese officials said Assad and Lahoud were expected to approve the withdrawal plan. A joint military committee would then meet



PHOTO: AFP

A Lebanese youth carries a banner that reads: "Syria out now" amid a sea of national flags during a demonstration in Martyrs Square in the heart of Beirut yesterday to mark three weeks since the killing of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri (portraits). Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Lebanese counterpart Emile Lahoud are meeting in Damascus today to pave the way for an expected pullback of Syrian troops in its tiny neighbour.

and begin implementing the first stage, involving a military pullback to the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon.

Assad and Lahoud were also set to fix a timeline, at least for the first stage of the pullout, officials in Beirut said.

Facing intense international pressure, Assad announced plans on Saturday for a complete withdrawal of troops from Lebanon but said Damascus would still play a role in its smaller neighbor.

The United States has been wary

of Assad's plans. The White House promised on Sunday to step up pressure for a complete and immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops and security services.

"The international community is not going to stand by and let Assad continue to have these kind of half-measures," said White House counselor Dan Bartlett.

But Lebanon's most powerful and only armed party, Hizbollah, called for peaceful protests on Tuesday in support of Syria and warned of mayhem if Syrian troops

were to leave.

"The aim of America and Israel is to spread chaos in Lebanon and ... to find excuses for foreign intervention," Hizbollah chief Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah told a news conference on Sunday.

Set up by Iran's Revolutionary Guard in 1982, Shia Muslim Hizbollah is the only Lebanese faction to keep its guns. It gained wide popularity after helping drive Israeli troops from south Lebanon in 2000. Washington says it is a terrorist group.

# RIGHTS GROUP SAYS Tens of thousands raped in Congo

REUTERS, Bunia

Government soldiers and rebels have raped tens of thousands of women and children in eastern Congo and are going unpunished as conflict simmers in the lawless region, a leading rights group said yesterday.

Fighters on all sides of Congo's war have raped civilians on a massive scale since the conflict broke out in 1998 but only a handful have ever been tried, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said.

"Sexual violence has shattered tens of thousands of lives in Congo, but fewer than a dozen victims have seen their assailants prosecuted," Alison Des Forges, senior advisor to HRW's Africa division, said in a report.

Sheltering in a refugee camp protected by United Nations peacekeepers with tanks and machine guns, Therese Yeda, 32, described how a militia group gang raped her last week as she walked between two villages.

"One was at the checkpoint and the others were hiding in the bushes before they jumped out and pointed their weapons at me," she said. The people she was with ran away terrified but Yeda was unable to because of all the things she was carrying.

"Ten of them had guns, the other

two had machetes. All 12 of them raped me ... I am eight months pregnant but the baby doesn't seem to be moving any more," she said. Her five children were also beaten by the gunmen.

An upsurge in clashes since January has displaced 70,000 civilians in Democratic Republic of Congo's remote northeastern Ituri district, and reports of rape are frequent.

Ethnic warfare has killed more than 50,000 people in Ituri since 1999. Children as young as eight have taken part in the most recent fighting, refugees say.

STIGMA Medecins Sans Frontieres says it has treated over 2,500 rape victims, from 4-months old to 80 years, at its hospital in the regional capital Bunia since June 2003. The true number could be 50 times higher as victims are afraid to speak out, it says.

"We have been here for two years and we have not seen any improvement. It is so systematic -- whenever there are attacks by armed groups, there is rape," said Patrick Barbier, head of the MSF mission in the region.

"Sexual violence is so stigmatised. The victims don't come and seek medical care ... It is not taken seriously by the authorities so there is complete impunity," he said.