

MOVE TO STEM REBEL FLOW

India to double forces on Nepal, Bhutan borders

AFP, New Delhi

India will almost double the number of paramilitary forces at its northern borders with Nepal and Bhutan to stop the flow of rebels into the country, the government said yesterday.

Home Minister Shivraj Patil told members of the elite Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) border paramilitary force the government would deploy an additional 20,000 personnel along the two borders within two years.

India currently has 25,000 paramilitary members guarding the two borders including provincial police units.

"I am happy to announce that the

cabinet has approved raising of an additional 20 battalions for the SSB," Patil told the soldiers, adding New Delhi would also set up three frontier headquarters for better policing.

The SSB currently has 25 battalions along the 2,412 kilometre borders (1,508 miles) with insurgency-stricken Nepal and the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Patil said the two remote borders presented new challenges to India which fears a military crackdown in Nepal to halt a Maoist rebellion will lead to an exodus of militants to link with India's own Maoist insurgency.

"For long, the two unmanned borders have presented opportunity

to forces inimical to the country's interest to further their nefarious designs through subversion, militant and fundamentalist activities," Patil said.

The home minister also said India has hiked the SSB's annual spending by 47 percent to 5.32 billion rupees (115 million dollars) in the fiscal year beginning April 1 and added additional resources would help in modernising the paramilitary force.

Nepal has been fighting a Maoist rebellion since 1996 that has claimed more than 11,000 lives. On February 1, King Gyanendra sacked the four-party coalition government in Nepal and assumed

absolute power to stamp out the rebellion.

India, which has called for a return to multi-party democracy in Nepal, has also suspended the supply of military hardware to Kathmandu since Gyanendra's power grab.

In late 2003 at India's urging, the Bhutanese army launched an operation to evict separatist rebels, fighting for independence in India's northeast, from their territory. India honored Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck for his role in evicting the rebels by making him the chief guest at the 2005 Republic Day parade.

Maoists kidnap, kill 3 Nepalese soldiers

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels in central Nepal have kidnapped and killed three unarmed soldiers after torturing them, the army said yesterday.

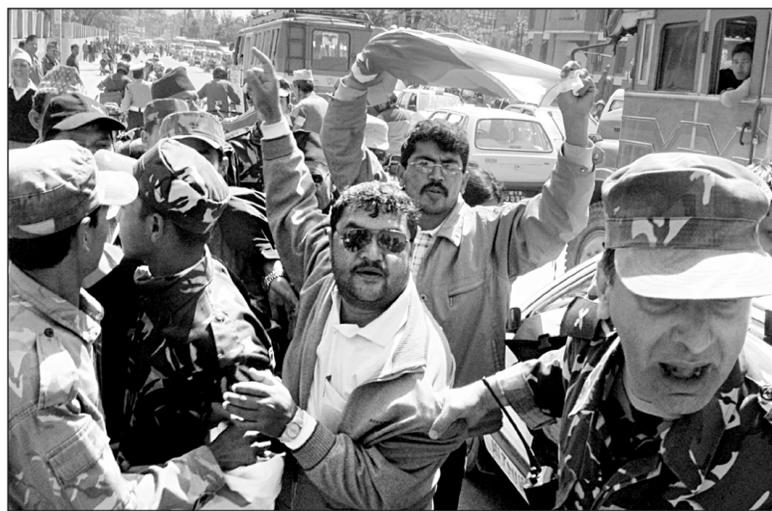
"The three unarmed security men were tied, severely beaten and stabbed on different parts of their bodies before they were shot dead at Jafe area in Ramechhap district on Saturday," the army said in a statement.

Ramechhap is 150km east of the capital.

"The security forces have strongly denounced the killing of the unarmed soldiers as a cowardly act of terrorists," the army said.

The rebels have been fighting for a communist republic since 1996 and the uprising has already claimed more than 11,000 lives.

Meanwhile, riot police yesterday arrested several dozen demonstrators outside Nepal's main government offices for breaking a ban on protesting the king's power grab last month, police said.



Nepali Congress activists holding party flags are arrested by the riot police during an anti-King protest near the Central Secretariat, the main government offices, in Kathmandu yesterday. At least 41 people were arrested by the riot police during the protest, held for the first time near government offices in defiance of a ban on public rallies, protesting against the King's power grab.



In this image made available by the US Army yesterday shows soldiers detaining a suspected Iraqi national. Iraqi Army Soldiers with the 1st Brigade, 6th Division, arrested more than 100 suspects in a raid in Salman Pak, south of Baghdad.

Iraqi police colonel, 12 others killed

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen shot dead an Iraqi police colonel in Baghdad yesterday while at least 12 other people, many of them security force members, were killed in a string of attacks around the country.

Colonel Abdul Karim Fahid, chief of the Balaat al-Shuhada station in the capital's southern Dura district, was shot dead along with his driver at about 8:00 am (0500 GMT), a defence ministry source said.

The group of Iraq's al-Qaeda frontman, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for killing the colonel in a message on an Islamist website.

It said the Balaat al-Shuhada police chief "fought God and his prophet (and) displayed his non-belief and his immorality as he attacked Moslems in Dura."

It was not possible to establish the authenticity of the message.

In further violence targeting the security forces, a policeman and a road cleaner died when a roadside bomb planted in a garbage dump detonated in the path of a police patrol in Al-Amil neighborhood on the capital's southwest side, police

said.

A source at Yarmuk hospital said his facility received one dead policeman and seven wounded, including six policemen, from the attack.

The hospital also said it received the bodies of two Shia pilgrims gunned down south of the capital in Mahawil as they walked to the shrine city of Karbala to commemorate the end of the 40-day mourning period for revered Imam Hussein slain 14 centuries ago.

Police in nearby Mussayab said two of their comrades were killed and 10 wounded, most of them policemen, when a booby-trapped bicycle left on the side of the road exploded.

Two mortar rounds fell at about 12:30 am (0930 GMT) on the capital's fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, home to the government and the US embassy, without causing damage or casualties, said an interior ministry source.

North of the capital, an Iraqi soldier was killed as he tried to defuse a roadside bomb in Mushahda, said Captain Assad Sadat.

Schiavo nearing death in Florida

REUTERS, Pinellas Park

A bitter family fight over the fate of Terri Schiavo neared its end on Sunday as the brain-damaged Florida woman edged closer to death, and her parents gave up their seven-year legal battle to keep her alive.

Protesters knelt for Easter mass services on the lawn of the hospice where Schiavo is being cared for after lawyers for Bob and Mary Schindler ended the legal fight that made the case a cause for Christian conservatives and drew in the US Congress, President Bush and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

"I'm not saying we wouldn't be open to any idea that comes up. But at this point, it appears that time has finally run out," said David Gibbs, an attorney for the Schindlers, the St. Petersburg Times reported.

The tube feeding that sustained Schiavo for 15 years was halted on March 18 by state court order, spurring a flurry of efforts by the Schindlers to restore their daughter's feeding.

Knesset rejects Gaza referendum bill

Israeli forces raid Jenin, Sharon vows to keep big WB settlement

AFP, REUTERS, Jerusalem

The Israeli parliament yesterday rejected a bill calling for a referendum on the government's plans to pull out from the occupied Gaza Strip later this year, removing the final obstacle to the withdrawal.

A majority of MPs in the Knesset voted against the bill drawn up by opponents of plans to dismantle all 21 Jewish settlements in Gaza as well as four outposts in the northern West Bank, due to begin on July 20.

Earlier Israeli forces raided the Palestinian city of Jenin yesterday, arresting eight militants Israeli security sources said were involved in making crude rockets and mortars for attacks against Israeli

towns. The raid was a rare invasion into a West Bank city by the Israeli military since the army said it would carry out only essential operations after Israel and the Palestinian Authority declared a de facto truce in February.

An Israeli soldier was lightly wounded by an explosive device during the operation in which five Islamic Jihad militants were arrested in Jenin and three in a nearby village.

Israeli forces located a workshop last month on the outskirts of Jenin where they found components for crude rockets capable of being fired at the nearby Israeli city of Afula.

Israeli media said the militants arrested early Monday were con-

nected to the cell that had produced the rocket parts, adding the militants were trying to produce munitions similar to the Qassam rockets that militants in Gaza have regularly fired at the Israeli town of Sderot and Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has reiterated that Israel will keep its largest settlements in the occupied West Bank with US blessing under any permanent solution to the Middle East conflict.

"Large Israeli settlement blocs will remain in Israeli hands in any future settlement with the Palestinians," Sharon told his weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday, according to a statement published by his office.

Kyrgyz House confirms Bakiyev as acting president

AFP, Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan's parliament on Monday confirmed Kurmanbek Bakiyev as acting leader of the Central Asian nation following last week's ouster of its regime and pending a new presidential election.

Deputies endorsed Bakiyev as acting president and prime minister of the impoverished nation, a post that he had been appointed to by the outgoing legislature last Thursday, after President Askar Akayev fled following mass opposition demonstrations. The outgoing chamber voted to dissolve itself earlier Monday in favor of deputies victorious in March 13 elections.

New presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan have been set for June 26. Bakiyev has declared he will stand as a candidate.

Pill that can add 30-yr to anyone's lifespan!

INDO-ASIAN NEW SERVICE, London

It has been the ultimate goal of alchemists and sorcerers for centuries - the ability to increase one's lifespan. Now Scottish scientists say they have unlocked the secret to an elixir of life.

According to Scottish daily Scotsman, a pill by Aberdeen University Professor John Speakman, if taken once a day, would keep a person healthier, able to work longer and would also extend age limit by up to 30 years.

Medieval alchemists had earlier tried in vain to make an elixir of life by dissolving gold in different liquids, while ancient Egyptians believed they could harness the power of the earth to create the Aqua Vitae.

But Speakman has identified a more realistic candidate - a hormone called thyroxine.

According to him, by altering the crucial biological process called metabolism, it is possible to reduce damage linked to ageing inside animal cells.

"If you increase the metabolic

rate of a mouse then it increases its lifespan," he said.

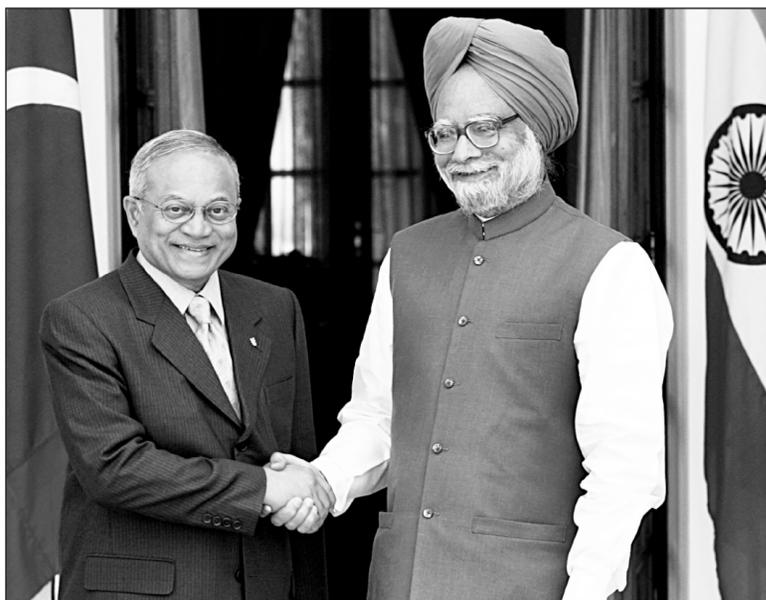
This idea of metabolising fast and dying old turns traditional scientific thinking - which assumes an animal's lifespan depended on the amount of energy it burned up - on its head.

Speakman claims the normal metabolic cycle that occurs every time we breathe results in highly reactive, toxic molecules of oxygen called free radicals that damages the DNA and other essential building blocks - resulting in the ageing of body tissues.

According to him, animals with faster metabolic rates actually produce fewer harmful free radicals.

By creating drugs to replicate the effect, it would take longer for the damage caused by free radicals to occur, he said.

"Because free radicals also play a role in causing cancer and other diseases, reducing the number produced can not only increase the length of time someone lives but increase their healthy lifespan," Speakman said.



President of the Republic of Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (L) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Gayoom is on a six day visit to India till April 1, during which he will meet Indian leaders and visit the southern cities of Chennai and Trivandrum.