INTERNÂTIONAL

India concerned over Deuba's arrest

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New

India expressed deep concern over the arrest of former Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba saying such actions were "contrary" to assurances given by Kathmandu and would "further complicate" efforts for a reconciliation between political parties and monarchy in the Himalayan Kingdom.

Government is "deeply concerned" at the arrest of Deuba, who is leader of the Nepali Congress (Democratic). ExternalAffairs Ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters here.

"We are also concerned that the arrest and detention of political leaders, student leaders and workers of politicalparties continue, as do the restrictions on travel andmove-ment of some academicians, human rights activists and students, contrary to assurances conveyed to us," he said.

"We believe that these developments would furthercomplicate efforts for a reconciliation between political parties and the Constitutional Monarchy in Nepal," Sarna



A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk walks past the wreck of a passenger bus which collided with a train near the town of Polgahawela, some 80 kilometres northeast of Colombo yesterday. At least 33 people were killed and 30 were wounded when a train ploughed into a bus at a level crossing in northern Sri Lanka, police and hospital officials said. The 45-seat, privately owned bus, travelling from the north-central town of Anuradhapura, may have been overcrowded, police said. They believed more than 60 people were on board. The bodies of 33 victims were brought to the region's main Kurunegala hospital while the injured had been taken to three hospitals in the area, a spokesman for

NATWAR-ANNAN TALKS

India pitches for UNSC seat

AFP, New Delhi

India made a determined pitch Wednesday for a coveted seat on the United Nations Security Council, the top UN body for international peace and security, an official said.

India's case was put forward by Foreign Minister Natwar Singh during talks with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who last month outlined ambitious proposals for overhauling the 191-member world body.

The meeting was the second between the two men in a week.

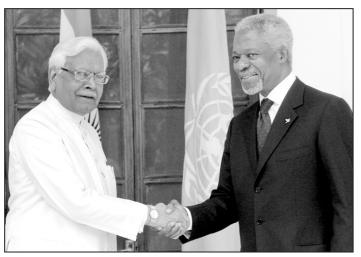
Singh and Annan exchanged views in Jakarta last Thursday where they had gathered for an Asia-Africa summit

Besides Singh, Annan was to hold a spate of meetings with India's President Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the leader of the opposition, Lal Krishna

Annan set the agenda for his four-day visit after his arrival Monday, saying he hoped to discuss UN reforms with Indian leaders.

"We believe there cannot be security without development and there cannot be development without security," he told reporters.

The expansion of the Security



Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh shakes hands with United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan prior to a meeting in New Delhi vesterday.

Council is by far the most sensitive reform Annan has outlined.

Annan has offered two models. with the first suggesting the addition of six new members to the existing five permanent powers: Britain China, France, Russia and the United States. The second proposes adding a third tier of semipermanent members to the council. Brazil, Germany, India and Japan have launched a joint bid to win prestigious permanent seats, whose veto-wielding privilege dates from World War II.

India says its one-billion-plus population, its role as the world's biggest democracy and surging place at the Security Council table with full veto powers and it has said the makeup of the Security Council "represents 1945 and not 2005."

Earlier this month, Annan said UN members should be ready to push through plans to expand the Security Council at a summit in September even without unanimous support.

"Ideally we should take that decision by consensus but if a consensus appears not to be possible, it should not be an excuse for inaction," Annan said.

Indian analysts described such talk "as music to India's ears."

"But the UN chief can only make these proposals, it's up to the member countries to decide how to proceed," said C. Uday Bhaskar, interim head of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses.

"My view is that India should stake its claim in a dispassionate manner and see how it goes," he

Recently, New Delhi sent special envoys to Asian and African countries to gamer support for its candidature, citing also its status as a founder member of the world body and its participation in UN peacekeeping efforts

Iraqi woman MP killed in Baghdad

BBC News Online

An Iraqi woman MP has been shot dead by suspected insurgents on the doorstep of her home in Baghdad. Lamiya Abed Khadawi, a member of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's coalition, is the first MP killed since elections at the end of

Police said gunmen knocked at her door and shot her when she answered it

The attack came as the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, Gen Richard Myers, warned that Irani militants remain as strong as a year

Gen Myers said that between 50 and 60 attacks are carried out across Iraq each day, the same number as during 2004.

A BBC correspondent at the Pentagon says US optimism in the wake of Iraq's elections has now disappeared.

The US has recently pressed lrag's newly sworn-in leaders to end weeks of political deadlock with an official announcement of a new

Pak suffering least in Kashmir: Musharraf

PTI, Islamabad

Refuting allegations of any U- turn in Pakistan's policy towards Kashmir during his recent visit to India, President Pervez Musharraf said on Tuesday night it was a complex issue with no timeframe fixed for its

He sought the support of all Pakistanis and Kashmiris for his initiatives to resolve it.

Speaking at an interactive programme on state-run PTV soon after attending a conference of top Pakistani army commanders, Musharraf said he was working for early resolution of Kashmir issue more to alleviate suffering of Kashmiris than of Pakistanis.

He said, of the three parties involved in Kashmir tangle, Kashmiris suffered the most followed by India and Pakistan, who suffered the least.

"What is the reason for me to take a U-turn? My intentions are clear. I want to bring some relief to Kashmiris from their sufferings," Musharraf said.

"The most sufferers in this problem are Kashmiris... They are the ones facing difficulties. Their lives are being lost and property is being destroyed. Their life is at stand still" he said in the programme excerpts of which were telecast by PTV.

He said no timeframe could be fixed to solve the Kashmir issue. "I want to say this to Pakistanis that this is such a complex issue that it requires a lot of application of mind and take it forward with great deal of thinking.

Iraqi govt formation faces new delay

Insurgency as strong as ever: US general

AGENCIES, Baghdad

The formation of a new Iraqi government has been delayed by a day because of disagreements over some of the names on the proposed cabinet list, a senior member of the

ruling alliance said Wednesday. After nearly three months of political haggling, officials had said that prime minister-designate Ibrahim Jaafari had finalised a deal late Tuesday on his proposed coali-

tion government. The latest delay in announcing the cabinet make-up illustrated the difficulties which Iraqi factions face in reaching agreement on a broadbased Shia, Sunni and Kurd alliance.

"Approval has been reached on the final list of names which will be submitted to the presidential board at 4 pm and on Thursday will be put before parliament to be ratified, Jawad Maliki, number two in Jaafari's Dawa party, told reporters.

"Some names which had been called into question were changed,"

he said, without giving details. Maliki had earlier said that parlia-

ment would be called on to approve the government list on Wednesday. The defence, interior and oil ministerial posts have proved to be

sticking points in putting together a new cabinet. Kurdish, Shia and Sunni factions have spent weeks arguing over how many seats their would hold in the cabinet and the number of portfolios

appears to have grown to take account of some of their demands. Meanwhile militants staging attacks in Iraq are as strong now as they were a year ago, America's top

soldier has said. Between 50 and 60 attacks are carried out each day, the same number as in 2004, according to Gen Richard Myers, chairman of the joint

But he added it was too early to say if a recent surge in violence amounted to a concerted campaign, and insisted that US-backed forces

The US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, said the key to winning the insurgency was ensuring that the political process in Iraq took

Speaking of the insurgents who have waged a campaign of violence since the invasion by coalition forces in 2003, Gen Myers said, "I think their capacity stays about the same. And where they are right now is where they were almost a year ago.'

The past week in Irag has seen a welter of attacks, with dozens dead in suicide bombs and a civilian helicopter brought down outside Baghdad.

"I think we're definitely winning - I think we've been winning for some time." he said.

The view from Washington is that success in Iraq now depends on the new government in Baghdad and whether or not it can entrench itself and become a cause that Iragis will deem worth fighting for, our corre-

Lebanese look to May elections

UN will examine Syria's claim on pullout

chiefs of staff.

With Syrian soldiers finally out of their country, the Lebanese are set to mark their new-found independence with elections next month but doubts linger over whether Damascus has truly relinquished

With Washington wary that Syria would leave "intelligence assets" behind, a UN team of experts is in Damascus on a mission to verify the historic pullout, which brought to an end Syria's 29-year military hold on its neighbor.

Lebanese danced in the streets and Syrians waved national flags as the last Syrian troops crossed the border back home Tuesday in the face of relentless international pressure on President Bashar al-Assad's regime "Lebanon enters new era with

Syrian pullout," said the Englishlanguage The Daily Star. "Lebanon is finally left to the

Lebanese," headlined the Frenchlanguage L'Orient-Le Jour. The country now faces "a new page, full of hope for the future... even if there are a lot of problems to resolve."

troops, who first moved into Lebanon as a buffer force a year after the start of the 1975-1990 civil war, was greeted warily by the United States, while the United Nations said it was awaiting verifica

Lebanon is now planning to hold elections by the end of May, most likely starting on May 29, which the country hopes will put a lid on weeks of turmoil triggered by the February killing of former prime minister Rafiq Syria's domination over the past

sive and so painful to the Lebanese that many remain wary that Damascus could ever end its interference. "If someone had told me two

three decades has been so perva-

months ago that all the Syrian soldiers would leave Lebanon, would have taken him for a fool, said a European diplomat.

But even with the troops gone, Syria's influence remains strong, with close allies in President Emile Lahoud and parliament speaker Nabih Berri as well as the powerful Shiite movements Amal and Hezbollah

New prime minister designate Nagib Miqati, regarded as a compromise candidate who formed a government only a week ago to pave the way for elections, is also a close friend of Assad's. US State Department spokes-

man Adam Ereli called the pullout "an important first step" towards compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559 which order foreign forces out of Lebanon. He also said Syria was obliged to

withdraw its intelligence officers and "I think there are some lingering concerns that not all Syrian intelligence assets are out of Lebanon.' Damascus formally notified the

United Nations on Tuesday of the "complete withdrawal" of its troops and intelligence agents in a letter to Secretary General Kofi Annan. The UN chief said in a report to

the Security Council that he had received assurances from both Lebanon and Syria that military intelligence agents had not stayed behind.

But Annan said he could not actually verify the pullout until a technical team which is due to visit both Damascus and Beirut, reported back to him.

Ethiopian flood survivors | Toll in Japan train in fear of crocodiles

Death toll climbs to 88

AFP. Addis Ababa

Swarms of hungry crocodiles are posing a new threat to some 60,000 villagers displaced by devastating floods in southeastern Ethiopia. where the death toll from the disaster has climbed to 88, an official said Wednesday.

At least two people have been devoured by the carnivorous reptiles in the Godie region of Ethiopia's remote Somali state 1,380 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa and survivors in other parts of the region are still clinging to trees in desperate attempts to avoid being eaten, the official said.

"In East and West Emi, people are still on top of trees waiting to be evacuated because there are crocodiles in the flood waters," regional disaster prevention chief Abdullahi Mahdi told AFP from the regional capital of Jigiga.

efforts in some areas," he said. "The affected and the rescuers are fighting the flood incident and the croco-

36,000 made homeless and more than 4,000 goats, 2,000 camels and several hundred cattle swept away in 36 villages in the two districts by raging waters from the Wabe Shebell river that burst its banks at the weekend after days of heavy rains, Abdullahi said.

the floods, he said.

'Crocodiles are hampering

At least 66 people were killed,

In the Kebri Dahra area, some 1,040 kilometers from Addis Ababa, where 15 villages were submerged, 16 people have been confirmed dead, 900 others displaced and 1,000 domestic animals missing in

Around Mustahil, 1,480 kilometers from Addis Ababa six people were killed, including the two eaten by crocodiles, several villages completely destroyed, some 20,000 people displaced and 317 head of cattle and 17 donkeys washed

> away, he said. Relief supplies began arriving on Tuesday but access to Somali state's most remote communities, like Mustahil, was still proving difficult, Abdullahi said, adding that 15 villages were still under water in

> The flooding, which began on Saturday, followed days of uninterrupted rain in the highlands to the north of the affected area and hit most villages at night, taking sleeping residents by surprise.

> Before the flooding the area had been repeatedly hit by drought.

crash rises

REUTERS, Amagasaki

The death toll in Japan's worst rail accident in four decades looked set to top 100 Wednesday as hopes of finding more survivors in the wreckage faded along with the light of the third day of rescue efforts.

As darkness fell, the official death toll stood at 94 and there was little hope for the 20 or so people still believed to be trapped inside the front carriage of the train, embedded in the groundfloor car park of an apartment building. No survivors have been found since early Tuesday when three

mass of metal. "The front carriage has been crushed to a fraction of its normal length, so we are continuing this work with very little hope," said a fire department official.

people were extracted from the twisted

Rescue teams used ultrasound equipment to check for heart beats in the crumpled carriage, but there was no sign of life.

Black-clad mourners sobbed at

funerals of relatives and friends while anxious families of the missing waited for news at a gymnasium that had been used as a makeshift morgue.

"I would like to apologise for this. My heart aches," Shojiro Nanya, chairman of train operator West Japan Railway Co. (JR West) told reporters

"I would really like to apologise for

this accident." Nanya is one of three company executives expected to resign to take

responsibility for the disaster. Police raided JR West's offices Tuesday looking for clues on the cause of the crash, which occurred as the packed commuter train rounded a tight curve just after the morning rush

Investigators have said one cause could have been excessive speed after the train's driver fell more than a minute behind schedule -- a significant delay in a country where commuters have grown to rely on train timetables almost to the second.



The giant double-decker Airbus A380, the world's largest commercial airliner, takes off on its maiden flight,

launching a new era in civil aviation yesterday from the Toulouse-Blagnac airport.

Superjumbo makes historic maiden flight

AP, Blagnac

The world's largest passenger plane, the Airbus A380, successfully took off on its maiden flight Wednesday, a milestone for aviation and for the European aircraft-maker's battle with

American rival Boeing Co.

The giant plane's four engines hauled its double-decked, 280metric ton 308-ton fuselage aloft at 10:29 a.m., an achievement watched by thousands of spectators 101 years after the Wright brothers first mastered controlled, sustained flight.

The plane was carrying a crew of six and 22 tons of on-board test instruments. Its first flight was expected to last about four hours.

Alain Garcia, an Airbus engineering executive, said on LCI televi-

The plane was likely to stay

back real-time measurements to Airbus headquarters at Blagnac. There were cheers and

applause as the white jet with a blue tail its engines surprisingly quiet picked up speed down the runway and lifted smoothly into the blue skies. Fire trucks were stationed alongside the runway as a

precaution. Airbus chief test pilot Jacques Rosay, flight captain Claude Lelaie and four crew members who all wore orange flight suits were taking no chances. Airbus had said they would be wearing parachutes during the first flight, in accordance with company policy. A handrail leads from the cockpit to an escape door that can be jettisoned if the pilots lose control

"We don't have the same

Polling card to 8 months old British voter!

AFP, London

week's British general election, she had no idea who to vote for, or even what policies the parties support, because she is only eight months old. St Edmundsbury District Council in Suffolk, eastern England, said Wednesday that there had been

Although Kiera Spear has already

received her polling card for next

to vote on May 5. "There must have been some mix-up. I'm sure I filled in the form properly. I thought it was hilarious,

some confusion over Keira's age,

after it sent her the card entitling her

Keira's mother, Glenda Spear, said. "Kiera's chewed it a bit but I'm going to keep it as a souvenir," she



Russian President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with his Egyptian counterpart Hosni Mubarak during their meeting in Cairo yesterday. President Vladimir Putin arrived in Egypt yesterday on the first visit by a Russian head of state in more than 40 years, in an effort to reinforce Moscow's political and economic ties with the Arab world.

Putin kicks off **ME** tour **BBC News Online** He adds that in Israel, President

Russian President Vladimir Putin has begun his two-day visit to Egypt the first by any Russian or Soviet head of state in 40 years. He met Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. and further talks are set to focus on the Middle East peace process.

On Wednesday, Mr Putin became the first Russian leader to visit Israel and the Palestinian territories. Russia is one of the four sponsors of the Middle East peace plan, known as the roadmap. However, Moscow has not wielded_significant_power_in_the

Cold War, the BBC's Damian Grammaticas in Moscow says. With this Middle East tour it seems President Putin is hoping to revive some of Russia's lost prestige, our correspondent says.

Putin is likely to face some tough questioning about Russia's support for regimes in Syria and Iran. President Putin was received by Mr Mubarak at his Abdeen palace in central

Cairo, where the two leaders held talks, followed by an official dinner. Further talks are scheduled on Wednesday "The Palestinian issue will be

central during the discussions on

regional Middle East issues,"

Egyptian presidential spokesman

Sulieman Awad told reporters. Mr Putin also wants to bolster Russia's political and economic relations with Egypt. The two countries enjoyed close

ties until the 1970s when Egypt within 100 miles of the airport in Blagnac, a suburb of Toulouse in turned to the US which has since southwest France. It was beaming become its most strategic foreign partner, analysts say.

'The takeoff went perfectly," of the plane.

The flight capped 11 years of preparation and \$13 billion in spending. Spectators camped out by the airport to be there for what some said was Europe's biggest

aviation event since the first flight of

the supersonic Concorde in 1969

to focus so much time and money on its superiumbo. The president of Boeing's French subsidiary, Yves Galland, said he watched the televised takeoff and "shared the emotion of the people of Airbus. But, speaking on LCI televi-

The A380, with a catalogue

price of \$282 million, represents a

huge bet by Airbus that interna-

tional airlines will need bigger

aircraft to transport passengers

between ever-busier hub airports.

a boom in the market for smaller

wide-body planes, such as

Boeing's long-range 787 "Dream-

liner." show that Airbus was wrong

But some analysts say signs of

sion, he also reiterated Boeing's argument that Airbus has overestimated the market for jumbo jets, which he called "quite weak."

analysis of the market as Airbus,'