

Nepali Maoists ready for talks with UN

REUTERS, AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels are ready for talks with the United Nations to establish peace and democracy, the militants' leader said on Monday. Comments by the elusive Maoist chief Prachanda came a day after UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special adviser, Lakhdar Brahimi, began a five-day visit to the kingdom to help find a solution to the conflict in the Himalayan nation. "Our party is ready for talks with anyone (in the international community) including the United Nations to meet the aspirations of the Nepali people for democracy, peace and prosperity," Prachanda said in a statement. Brahimi is expected to meet King Gyanendra, who fired the prime minister and seized power in February, and meet leaders of political parties before returning to New York on July 15. The rebels launched a rebellion in 1996 to set up a communist republic and topple the monarchy.

Gyanendra said he was forced to seize power in February to crush the rebellion that has killed at least 12,500 people. He said fighting by myriad political parties was also hampering peace efforts. But Gyanendra is no closer to talks with the guerrillas or to a deal with the seven squabbling parties. Since pulling out of peace talks in 2003 amid a row over the future of monarchy, the rebels had been demanding the involvement of the UN or any other international organisation in any future talks. They have refused negotiations with the government since Gyanendra assumed power and Prachanda said the king's power grab was the main problem. Prachanda also appealed the seven mainstream political parties to begin talks with the Maoists to put pressure on the monarch. "We can hold serious discussions on all political matters," he said. The seven parties, which held more than 195 seats in the 205-

member parliament dissolved in 2002, have refused to hold talks with the rebels unless they give up violence. Meanwhile, Nepal's Maoists have released a journalist they had held captive for 56 days for writing articles critical of the rebels, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) said yesterday. The rebels freed Som Sharma, editor of Nepali language weekly Ankha (Eyes), after several rounds of negotiations with the FNJ held over eight days, the federation's secretary general Mahendra Bista said. "Som Sharma was released by the Maoists from their captivity on Sunday in (far-eastern) Ilam district," Bista told AFP. The rebels also lifted a ban imposed on another journalist, Umesh Gurung, a correspondent for state-run Radio Nepal, which barred him from leaving his village of Jamuna in Ilam district, Bista said.

Israel looks for US, EU fund to bolster pullout

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel looked yesterday for international support for its pullout from the Gaza Strip, requesting a multi-billion dollar aid package from the United States and lobbying for EU backing from its visiting foreign policy chief Javier Solana. A senior aide to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that officials who have travelled to Washington would be seeking a package of aid amounting to some 2.2 billion dollars to help cushion the impact of next month's withdrawal. "This package, which will require approval from the American Congress, could take the form of a combination of grants, loans or bank guarantees," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Israel had been on track to extract 500 million dollars from Washington to help finance the pullout, but in initial talks, the Americans said they were prepared to grant Israel "generous aid," according to a report on public radio. The money will cover the cost of relocating military bases to Israel

and improve security on the Egyptian-Israeli border after the pullout. The rest will be used to develop the Galilee and Negev regions, where many of the settlers from Gaza are likely to be rehoused. Led by the director general of the prime minister's office and the finance ministry, Ilan Cohen and Yossi Bachar, and including various security officials, the delegation left Israel late last week. The officials are to meet a group of US officials including Elliott Abrams, deputy national security adviser. Washington's annual aid to Israel amounts to around three billion dollars, including two billion dollars in military outlay. Israel's operation to evacuate all 8,000 Jewish settlers living in Gaza, as well as the inhabitants of four small Jewish enclaves in the northern West Bank, is to begin in mid-August. While hugely contentious in Israel, the move has won widespread international backing, including from the European Union.



Two women sitting in a bus pass by a poster showing the picture of a missing woman following the bomb attacks in London yesterday. London Mayor Ken Livingstone rode the Underground train urging people to "carry on" the normal work yesterday, four days after bomb attacks on the capital's transit system.

PHOTO: AFP



Bosnian Muslim women wait as graves being prepared for burial of 1995 Srebrenica massacre victims at the Memorial cemetery in Potocari, near the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica yesterday. Serbian President Boris Tadic arrived here yesterday to attend ceremonies marking the 10th anniversary of the massacre of some 8,000 Muslims by Serb forces, becoming the first leader from his country to visit the site.

PHOTO: AFP

Thousands recall Srebrenica pain

BBC ONLINE

Tens of thousands of people are attending ceremonies marking the 10th anniversary of the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. About 8,000 men and boys were killed by Serbian forces in 1995, in Europe's worst atrocity since World War II. UK, French and Dutch ministers, and US officials have been taking part in a memorial at the Potocari cemetery, where many of the dead are buried. The remains of 610 newly identified dead will be buried at the same time. Security is tight after two unexploded bombs were found nearby last week. Over 1,500 policemen have been deployed to patrol the area. A Serbian delegation led by President Boris Tadic is at the memorial for the first time. Also attending Monday's cere-

monies are former US Balkans envoy Richard Holbrooke and the president of the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Theodor Meron. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw apologised on behalf of the international community for not doing enough to prevent what he described as one of the darkest chapters of European history since 1945. "For it is to the shame of the international community that this evil took place under our noses and we did nothing like enough. I bitterly regret this and I am deeply sorry for it," he said. He said that it was "sickening" that former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army commander Gen Radko Mladic, who are accused of the slaughter, had not yet been brought to justice. The tribunal's chief prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, has boycotted the occasion in protest against the failure to arrest the two.

London gets back to business after blasts

4 mosques hit by arson attacks

AP, AFP, London

Commuters returned to work in London yesterday, the start of the first full week since bombers killed at least 49 people on a bus and subway trains. Many travellers said they would defy the attackers by using public transportation as normal, but some were too afraid and took taxis instead. "I... will not let the attacks put me off," said computer consultant Paul Williams, 42, as he prepared to board an underground train in central London. "As far as I am concerned, it is just a normal day at work." But Ted Wright, chairman of the British Poultry Council, said he was taking a taxi to avoid the subway system. "In light of what has happened, I have decided to take a taxi. It will probably cost an extra six

pounds (\$10.70), but should hopefully put my wife's mind at rest," he said. Three bombs that exploded on subway cars and one that ripped apart a bus killed at least 49 people and injured 700 last Thursday. Scotland Yard said Monday it had identified the first of the victims Susan Levy, 53, of Hertfordshire, outside London. Forensics experts have warned that it could take days or weeks to put names to the bodies, many of which were mangled in the blasts. Transit officials said the number of passengers using the system Monday morning was back to normal. However, a few sections of the underground rail system affected by the attacks remained closed, and the number of shoppers in central London has fallen by

about 25 percent since the attacks, the British media reported. Mayor Ken Livingstone took the subway to work Monday to send the message that Londoners should "carry on." "We are going to work. We carry on our lives," he said. "We don't let a small group of terrorists change the way we live." Meanwhile, four mosques in separate English cities have been damaged slightly by fires set deliberately since London was hit by terrorist bombings, police said Sunday. Incidents reported by individual police forces included arson attacks on mosques in Leeds, Belvedere, Telford and Birkenhead, which caused "little damage," said Chris Fox, the president of Association of Police Chief Officers.

Bakiyev calls for review of US presence after Kyrgyz polls win

AFP, Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan intends to review the presence of a US base on its territory, president-elect Kurmanbek Bakiyev said on Monday at his first news conference since he was elected president of the strategic central Asian state. "The question of the departure of the American base was raised at the last summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation because the situation in Afghanistan has changed," Bakiyev said, referring to a meeting of the regional security grouping earlier this month. "We can therefore review the usefulness of the presence of American forces in Kyrgyzstan," Bakiyev told reporters.

The Western base at Kyrgyzstan's main international airport is known as Manas by Kyrgyzstan and by the United States as Ganci - the name of a firefighter who died in the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. It was set up to help overthrow Afghanistan's Taliban administration in 2001 and initially hosted forces from several countries in the US-led coalition. More recently however it has hosted only US forces, numbering about 1,000 in all. Bakiyev was speaking after gaining a landslide victory at an election Sunday to choose a successor to ousted leader Askar Akayev.

9 Iraqi soldiers killed in rebel attacks

9 Iraqis suffocated to death in police van

AFP, Baghdad

Nine Iraqi soldiers were killed yesterday when rebels launched a carefully-planned dawn raid on a road checkpoint in central Iraq, a day after nearly 50 died in a string of nationwide attacks mostly triggered by suicide bombers. Meanwhile, the Iraqi authorities said they were investigating the deaths of nine bricklayers, arrested Sunday on suspicion of links to insurgents, who suffocated to death while held in a police van in Baghdad. Three other suspects, who survived the ordeal of being locked up in the metallic van in the burning sun, were taken to hospital Monday morning where they were to be interviewed by authorities who are investigating

the case, the official said. The incident started Sunday in the Ameriyah district of western Baghdad when one of 12 bricklayers sustained gunshots during a firefight between insurgents and police. His colleagues rushed him to a hospital in the Shuala district where he was pronounced dead. Monday's dawn raid by insurgents targeted a checkpoint outside Khales, some 80km northeast of Baghdad, police said. Gunmen opened fire on the checkpoint at around 5:50 am and when Iraqi army reinforcements rushed to the scene triggered a bomb hidden in a pickup truck carrying melons which had been parked nearby.

Blast kills 16 at shopping centre in Russia

AFP, Moscow

Sixteen people were killed yesterday in an explosion in a shopping centre in the north-western Russian city of Ukhta, the emergency situations ministry said. There was no immediate indication of the cause of the blast. "An explosion whose cause is unknown took place at 1:58 p.m. Moscow time (0958 GMT) in a shopping centre housed in a two-storey brick building and caused 16 deaths, according to preliminary information," a spokesman for the ministry told AFP by telephone. Ukhta, which has a population of about 100,000 is in the oil-rich Komi region of Russia.

Delhi, Naga rebels to hold truce talks outside India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kohima

Central government negotiators and leaders of the separatist National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) are expected to meet outside the country to discuss extension of a ceasefire aimed at ending nearly six decades of insurgency in Nagaland. The NSCN-IM, led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, has been engaged in peace talks after entering into a ceasefire with the Government in 1997. The ceasefire ends on July 31.