

INDIAN MINISTER SAYS

## Nepali army ineffective in containing Maoists

Rebels abduct 254 civilians in a week

AFP, New Delhi/Kathmandu

India's Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said yesterday he was concerned the situation in neighbouring Nepal could "go out of hand" because the Nepalese army's efforts to crush a Maoist rebellion are proving ineffective.

"The Royal Nepal Army is trying to contain the Maoists," Mukherjee was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency.

"But its efforts are not effective. We hope it successfully tackles them, otherwise, the situation will go out of hand," Mukherjee told reporters in the eastern city of Kolkata.

"We are trying to impress upon (the Nepalese) government to tackle the Maoists. But, unfortunately, certain recent developments in that country like the suppression of its constitution and the multi-party system had set back anti-Maoist

initiatives," he said. Mukherjee was referring to the seizure of power and suppression of civil liberties by Nepal's King Gyanendra after he dismissed a civilian government on February 1.

Gyanendra justified the power grab by citing the government's ineffective handling of the Maoist rebellion, which has cost some 12,000 lives since it began nine years ago.

India has strongly criticised the king and suspended military hardware supplies to Nepal.

Last month, however, New Delhi sent its first shipment of "non-lethal" army equipment across the border, according to news reports.

Mukherjee said the Nepalese Maoists had close links with many leftist rebel groups in India.

"Many of them have the fancy idea of setting up a liberated corridor starting right from the Terai region and going through parts of West

Bengal, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Karnataka and Maharashtra," Mukherjee said referring to a long east-west swathe of Indian territory bordering India's frontier with the Himalayan kingdom.

Meanwhile, Nepal's Maoists rebels have abducted another 223 civilians, including women and students, from three western districts to bring to 254 the number of people kidnapped in the past week, the army said Sunday.

"The Maoist terrorists abducted over 150 women from four villages in Bajura district and 70 civilians from several places in Achham district on July 31," an army statement said, reporting the abductions for the first time.

It added that three youths planning to head for the Middle East to seek jobs were kidnapped by rebels in the far-western Khunri area of Rolpa district on Saturday.

Police earlier reported that the

Maoists had kidnapped nine junior civil servants including a forestry official and 22 students in two south-western districts on August 2.

The rebels often round up students or officials and subject them to "reorientation" programmes, during which they try to recruit young people to their "people's army", before releasing them.

Two policemen who were guarding the Damak market centre in Jhapa in far southeastern Nepal were shot and wounded by rebels on Saturday, police said.

Their conditions are critical. The rebels have been fighting for a communist republic in Nepal since 1996 and the uprising has claimed nearly 12,000 lives.



Pakistani activists from the fundamentalist organisation Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) shout slogans yesterday against the ongoing police raids on Islamic seminaries and the deportation of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) leader Fazlur Rehman from Dubai during a demonstration in Peshawar.

## Tributes pour in for Cook

BBC ONLINE

Politicians from around the world have paid warm tribute to former Cabinet minister Robin Cook after his death, aged 59.

Cook died after collapsing while hill walking in north-west Scotland. Prime Minister Tony Blair called his former foreign secretary "an outstanding, extraordinary talent".

Tory leader Michael Howard praised his "immense" contribution to British politics, while Lib Dem leader Charles Kennedy said he was "deeply saddened".

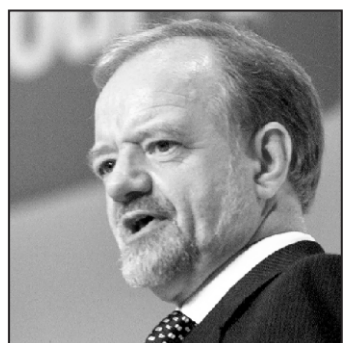
Cook, who had two adult sons, was with second wife Gaynor when he was suddenly taken ill near the summit of Ben Stack.

He was flown by coastguard helicopter to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness, where he was pronounced dead, said an NHS Highland spokesman.

Blair said: "This news will be received with immense sadness, not just in Britain but in many parts of the world."

"Robin was an outstanding, extraordinary talent - brilliant, incisive in debate, of incredible skill and persuasive power."

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw called Cook "the greatest Parliamentarian of his generation" and added: "I deeply mourn his



loss." He said they had been "good friends for nearly 30 years and that friendship survived our policy disagreements".

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said: "He made an enormous contribution to British politics in opposition and in government."

And Chancellor Gordon Brown said: "I admired and valued Robin as a colleague and friend and as one of the greatest parliamentarians of our time. His wife Gaynor and his two sons are in our thoughts and prayers."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also paid tribute to the former foreign secretary as a "partner on a wide range of issues".



A part of the fuselage of the Tunisian plane that crashed-landed in the sea near the Sicily island Saturday is carried by boat in Palermo harbour from the place of the accident yesterday. Thirteen people were killed, three went missing and 23 of the 39 people aboard survived the plane crash.

## 13 die as plane crashes off Sicily

REUTERS, Palermo

At least 13 people were killed and 23 injured when their Tunisian charter flight crashed into the sea near Sicily on Saturday after reporting a technical fault, emergency services said.

The plane was carrying 34 Italians and five crew from Bari, in southeastern Italy, to the popular Tunisian resort island of Djerba when it encountered a "lack of engine power," according to Tuninter, the charter arm of the Tunisian airline that operated the flight.

The pilot made a distress call to Palermo airport at 3:24 p.m. (1324 GMT) and said he wanted to make an emergency landing.

"They (the pilots) asked to land at Punta Raisi (Palermo airport), but they didn't make it," said Vito Riggio, head of civil aviation authority ENAC. "The pilot said he would try a sea landing but was unable to."

## Israel cabinet okays Gaza evacuations

Netanyahu quits, extremists may torpedo pullout

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli cabinet yesterday gave the final go-ahead for the evacuation of a first batch of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, 10 days before the pullout is to begin, official sources said.

The vote came moments after Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tendered his resignation from the government over his opposition to the pullout plan, due to kick off on August 17.

Ministers at the weekly cabinet meeting nevertheless voted in favour of dismantling Kfar Darom, Netzarim and Morag, the three most isolated settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Security officials fear that outlawed Jewish extremists operating underground in Israel and the West Bank are

plotting an attack destined to unleash mayhem and torpedo the looming Gaza pullout.

Long-since dreaded, such fears have risen to the fore since a teenage religious Jew shot dead four Arab Israelis on a bus on Thursday in an argument over the impending pullout. The killer was later lynched and killed.

Investigators know the 19-year-old army deserter belonged to the outlawed, anti-Arab racist movement Kach and that he was in contact with settlers in Tapuah, one of the most radical Jewish enclaves in the occupied West Bank.

Like thousands of other settlers and right-wing supporters, he fervently opposed the impending uprooting of all soldiers and more than 8,000 settlers from the Gaza Strip and four isolated northern West Bank

enclaves.

The arrest of three settlers from Tapuah, who were apparently aware of what Eden Nathan Zada was up to, have given rise to the possibility that other extremist Jewish outfits are planning similar crimes.

"We are concentrating on the possibility that one or several underground Jewish groups will decide to carry out an attack just before the pullout or during the evacuation of settlers from Gaza," a senior military official said.

Israeli intelligence has warned that extremists could try to wreck the pullout with a spectacular attack, such as assassinating the prime minister or striking at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Islam's third-holiest shrine.

## Discovery crew checks shuttle before landing

REUTERS, Houston

Discovery astronauts tested shuttle flight systems and used a laptop computer to practice landing yesterday as they prepared to return to Earth in the first shuttle flight since the 2003 Columbia disaster.

They fired steering jets, checked out flight controls and remotely jiggled the spacecraft's rudder in an inspection before a planned landing Monday in Florida that will have NASA holding its breath.

Discovery passed Sunday's tests with flying colours.

"The crew has completed checks of flight controls and steering jets done as pre-landing checks - all of that going very well, very smoothly, all on track for landing," NASA flight commentator James Hartsfield said.

Shuttle commander Eileen Collins, pilot Jim Kelly and flight engineer Steve Robinson hooked a laptop to Discovery's control sticks and practised landing with a flight simulator software.

## Iran vows no way back from nuclear move

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday insisted there was no going back from its decision to resume uranium conversion in defiance of the European Union, despite an upcoming meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog and warnings of an international crisis.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said the ultra-sensitive nuclear activity would start once inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency had put surveillance equipment in place, putting Tehran on a collision course with Europe and the United States.

"The IAEA inspectors will be in Iran by today (Monday) and by tomorrow we will be in a position to give information" on the restart of the uranium conversion plant in Isfahan in central Iran, Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

"They need to install additional surveillance cameras and the work will resume once they have been installed," he said.

The IAEA, which has placed

metal seals at the plant, has said that its inspection team will put in place the equipment by the middle of the week. Iran has always emphasised it wants to break the seals in concert with the IAEA.

Iran's decision to resume uranium conversion and its rejection of a deal on nuclear cooperation with the European Union sparked warnings that talks with the bloc could be over and cause UN Security Council intervention.

"If one day, Iran's case is referred to the UN Security Council, we are not worried. If the Europeans choose this way, it's up to them to see if it is to their benefit or not," said Asefi.

The escalating tensions come as new President Mahmood Ahmadinejad takes office, with some diplomats worried the ultra-conservative will take an even tougher stance on nuclear issues.

Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi reaffirmed Tehran's position that the offer from the Europeans of nuclear assistance in exchange for guaran-

tees its nuclear programme is peaceful was unacceptable.

"The main elements that we wanted to see in these proposals, like (the right to) enrichment are not there and thus these proposals are for us without value," he told state television.

The latest comments from Iran come ahead of a meeting of the IAEA board of governors tomorrow, the first step in a process that could see Iran sent to the UN Security Council and then slapped with punishing international sanctions.

Diplomats said it was not expected the body would immediately send Iran to the Security Council at this meeting but would most likely make a renewed appeal to the Islamic republic.

One crucial issue yet to be resolved is whether Tehran will make the fateful move of resuming conversion activities - the precursor to the uranium enrichment that can be used for a nuclear weapon - before this meeting.

## Ulfa rebels blow up oil pipeline in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Rebels in India's northeastern state of Assam blasted an oil pipeline yesterday while a militant was killed amid increasing violence before the country's Independence Day celebrations, police said.

The pipeline of state-owned Oil India Limited was blown up early Sunday by suspected militants of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) in Assam's Sivasagar district, a police official said.

The 1,150 kilometre (713 mile) pipeline supplies crude to a refinery at Barauni in the eastern state of Bihar.

The police official, who did not wish to be named, told AFP by telephone that around 15 militants arrived at an area where the underground pipeline is exposed around 30 minutes past midnight on Sunday and overpowered four security guards.

"The militants tied the guards to a lamppost and planted explosives beneath the pipeline before detonating them," he said.



A crew member of the Russian mini-submarine AS-28 "Priz" arrives at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky port yesterday. Seven Russian sailors trapped for three days on the ocean floor in a small submarine off Russia's Pacific coast were rescued alive and well after a British undersea robot cut the vessel free of debris, Russian naval officials said.

## British MP Galloway hails 'heroic' Iraqi insurgents

AFP, London

Firebrand British lawmaker George Galloway sparked further controversy yesterday, saying that insurgents fighting British and US troops in Iraq were making a "heroic decision".

The Scottish deputy, a fierce critic of the 2003 Iraq war who made headlines in May by facing down US senators who accused him of receiving oil kickbacks from Iraq, said not all were heroic, but some were.

"I think the decision the Iraqis have made to resist foreign occupation is a heroic decision," he told Scotland's Sunday Herald newspaper. "The individual acts carried out by people in the name of resistance may or may not be heroic. Some are undoubtedly heroic."

"The storming of a military barracks of a more powerful adversary in a classic guerrilla warfare operation is undoubtedly heroic. The bombing of children taking sweets from an American soldier is clearly

not heroic." Critics accused the 50-year-old of endangering British troops last week after he went on television in the Middle East to hail the Iraqi "resistance" for "defending all the people of the world against American hegemony".

Galloway was expelled in 2003 from Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party, which he had represented in parliament since 1987. He subsequently set up his own party, Respect, on whose ticket he was elected in May ballots.

The maverick lawmaker also defended remarks he made in parliament on July 7, the day of the deadly terror bombs in London that killed 56 people and left 700 injured.

Galloway told lawmakers on July 7 that Londoners had paid the price for Britain sending soldiers into Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I didn't have any choice," he told the Sunday Herald. "I knew that nobody else would say it, so I had to say it."



Anti-war veterans march Saturday on a road leading to the ranch of US President George W. Bush in Crawford, Texas. Some 50 anti-war protesters were stopped by police from nearing the ranch.

## Bush aides meet Iraq war protesters

REUTERS, Crawford

About 70 anti-war protesters shouted "bring the troops home" from Iraq near President Bush's ranch on Saturday, prompting two White House officials to come out to meet with mothers who lost children in combat in Iraq.

National Security Adviser Steven Hadley and Deputy White House chief of staff Joe Hagin listened to the concerns of Cindy Sheehan and five or six other mothers in a meeting that lasted about 45 minutes, White House spokesman Trent Duffy said. Duffy said Sheehan told the two officials she appreciated the meeting.

"I want to ask the president, why did you kill my son? What did my son die for?" Sheehan, 48, Vacaville, California, told reporters before meeting with Hadley and Hagin. Sheehan blames Bush for the death of her son, Army Specialist Casey Sheehan, 24, killed on April 4, 2004, in Sadr City, Baghdad.

## Glaciers face threat of disappearing: UN

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Dramatic scenarios from man-made global warming can no longer be excluded, including the complete disappearance of glaciers from entire mountain ranges, states a new UN report.

Global warming is leading to processes "without precedent in the history of the earth", says a latest update of the 1995-2000 edition of the UN-supported World Glacier Monitoring Service's (WGMS) 'Fluctuations of Glaciers'.

"The last five years of the 20th century have been characterised by an overall tendency of continuous if not accelerated glacier melting," says the report compiled with the support of the UN Environment Programme (Unep).

"The period 1980-2000 shows a trend of increasingly negative balances with average annual ice thickness

losses of a few decimetres," it adds. "The observed trend of increasingly negative mass balances is consistent with accelerated global warming."

Analysis of repeated inventories shows that glaciers in the European Alps have lost more than 50 per cent of their volume since the middle of the 19th century.

A further loss of one-fourth the remaining volume is estimated to have occurred since the 1970s, the report states.

"With a realistic scenario of future atmospheric warming, almost complete deglaciation of many mountain ranges could occur within decades, leaving only some ice on the very highest peaks," the report warns.

The worldwide programme for collecting standardised information on glacier changes was initiated in 1894.

"Due to the human impacts on the climate system (enhanced green-

house effect), dramatic scenarios of future developments - including complete deglaciation of entire mountain ranges - must be taken into consideration," the reports says.

"Such scenarios may lead far beyond the range of historical/holocene variability and most likely introduce processes (extent and rate of glacier vanishing, distance to equilibrium conditions) without precedence in the history of the earth." The report finds echo in several other global studies including that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has been urging developed and developing countries to undertake steps to reduce greenhouse gas emission.

## Six parties recess Korean crisis talks

REUTERS, AFP, Beijing

The six parties at North Korea nuclear crisis talks agreed yesterday to take a three-week recess and plan to return to the table in the week of August 29, Chinese chief negotiator Wu Dawei told a news conference.

Wu said the break was taken to give negotiators a chance to return to their capitals for consultations. The talks failed to reach accord on a joint statement, with Pyongyang clinging fast to its demand to keep nuclear programs for peaceful use.

"I cannot say for sure when we can reach agreement on a joint statement and I cannot say for sure that we will reach agreement after the recess," Wu said.

"But I believe we will reach agreement one day," he said. He added: "We have already won a very big victory on our Long March." North Korea announced in February it had built nuclear weapons, saying it had taken the step to provide a deterrent to what it called

US hostility. Intelligence experts estimate it has stockpiled enough plutonium for up to nine nuclear weapons.

The two Koreas, the United States, Japan, Russia and China struggled for 13 days but failed to reach agreement on a communiqué that would lay down the principle of North Korea dismantling its nuclear programmes in return for energy aid and security guarantees.

"If we can compare our work to climbing a hill, the top of the hill has already been in sight. The purpose of us having this break is to get to the top more smoothly."

In the end, Wu issued a chairman's statement summarising the progress at the talks but not signed by the parties.

Wu dismissed suggestions that the recess would sap the momentum of the talks, and said the negotiators reached more consensus during the fourth round than during the previous three rounds since 2003.