

MOVE TO FORGE ANTI-KING FRONT

Nepali parties to talk with Maoists

AFP, REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's main political parties will hold talks with Maoists on forming a broad front against King Gyanendra provided the rebels keep to their promise to stop killing civilians, senior party officials said yesterday.

"We have decided to set up a committee representing the seven (main political) parties which will take the initiative to hold a dialogue with Maoists," Laxman Ghimire, a member of the central committee of the main Nepali Congress party, told AFP.

"But we have yet to decide the date, we have yet to decide the venue (for the talks)," he said, adding that the seven members of the committee had still to be

approved by the political parties.

Gopal Man Shrestha, chief of Nepal's third largest party, the Nepali Congress (Democratic) party, told AFP that rights groups and activists would be asked to monitor whether the rebels had ended their attacks on civilians before any dialogue is held.

The decision by the seven parties came after Maoist leader Prachanda agreed last month to key conditions set by them.

Prachanda promised that the rebels would not target unarmed civilians and would stop extortion and he urged the parties to name negotiators for talks on a united campaign against the king.

"The parties will set up a team for meeting the Maoists in due course,"

Gopal Man Shrestha, chief of the third biggest group, the Nepali Congress (Democratic) party, told Reuters.

Shrestha was speaking on behalf of the seven parties which held talks among themselves late on Monday and agreed to discuss joining hands with the rebels to restore democracy. Gyanendra dismissed the government in February and took absolute power.

The parties declined to say when talks with the Maoists could take place.

There was no immediate comment from the royalist government or the palace. In the past, the government has warned the parties not to move closer to the rebels whom it calls "terrorists".

"The Maoists have made some positive gestures. We'll first set up a panel of distinguished citizens to monitor whether those promises were translated into practice or not," Shrestha said, referring to Prachanda's offer.

Meanwhile, a land mine planted by suspected communist rebels killed at least four police officers and injured three others in southern Nepal on Monday, authorities said.

Police were on their way to a nearby college to provide security when their vehicle struck the mine near Maniram village in Rupandehi district, about 200km southwest of the capital, Katmandu. Reinforcements were searching for the attackers.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers storm a building where Jewish settlers and their supporters are entrenched yesterday in the West Bank settlement of Homesh. Israel security forces pushed through barbed wire and burning barricades to evacuate Jewish settlers from the northern West Bank.

Israel clears 2 West Bank settlements

Synaagogue stormed

AFP, Sanur Settlement

Troops stormed their way into a barricaded synagogue and an old fortress in the heart of Biblical Israel yesterday as they evacuated defiant settlers from the northern West Bank after the historic pullout of Jews from the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli flag was set alight by protestors holed up in the settlements of Sanur and Homesh to express their disgust at their one-time champion Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who is now overseeing the first ever pullout of Israeli citizens from the West Bank after 38 years of occupation.

While the northern West Bank evacuations represent only a tiny

fraction of the 120 settlements that dot the territory captured by Israel in 1967, the unprecedented operation has raised international hopes of a genuine breakthrough in the moribund peace process.

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas telephoned Sharon to congratulate him on the completion of the Gaza pullout and to express hopes for the opening of a new chapter in relations after five years of bloodshed.

Troops in the West Bank, bracing for violent confrontations, were confronted by screaming protestors who set burning barricades and pelted them with rotten eggs and ketchup.

"You should be ashamed," one

sobbing woman shrieked at a group of police in Sanur. "You've destroyed our lives but we will return here."

Troops used metal-cutters to break into a half-built synagogue in Sanur where dozens of protestors had taken refuge behind metal bars and razor wire and carried them out one-by-one after attempts at mediation failed.

The soldiers also sliced their way through the doors of a former British fortress in the settlement where they removed dozens of people inside.

A few diehards remained on the fortress's rooftop as a crane loomed over the top in apparent readiness to force the hardliners off.

Susilo calls for backing Aceh peace pact

AFP, Jakarta

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono yesterday called on Indonesia to support a peace pact signed with separatist rebels in Aceh, following some domestic opposition to the historic agreement.

Spurred on by last December's catastrophic tsunami, which battered the province on the northernmost tip of Sumatra island and killed 131,000 people, the deal paves the way for an end to three decades of unrest.

"I invite all layers of society to work together to safeguard a permanent peace in Aceh," Yudhoyono said in his first annual speech to the Regional Representatives' Council, a body set up after last October's elections to give the provinces a voice in development policy.

He said the pact is in line with the wishes of the Acehnese.

Brazilian team joins London shooting probe

REUTERS, London

Two senior Brazilian diplomats joined the investigation on Monday into the shooting to death last month by British police of a Brazilian man they had mistaken for a would-be suicide bomber.

The killing of Jean Charles de Menezes, 27, in a London underground train as police hunted for men who a day earlier had left bombs that failed to explode on three trains and a bus has prompted calls for London police chief Ian Blair to resign.

"We are here to see how the investigation works," Marcio Pereira Pinto Garcia of the Ministry of Justice told reporters as he and Wagner Goncalves of the Federal Prosecutor's Office arrived at London's Heathrow airport from Brazil.

Ilulissat glacier melting away

AFP, Ilulissat, Greenland

The Ilulissat glacier in Greenland, a UN heritage site considered one of the wonders of the world, has shrunk by over 10km in just a few years, in one of the most alarming examples of global warming in the Arctic region.

"We are witnesses to one of the most striking examples of climate change in the Arctic," US expert Robert Corell said during a recent helicopter flight over the glacier.

The lower extremity of the glacier "has receded by more than 10km in two or three years after having been relatively stable since the 1960s," he said.

Corell was in charge of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, a 1,400-page report written by more than 250 scientists and published in November 2004, which sounded alarm bells for the region.

Mumbai bldg collapse kills 11

AP, AFP, Mumbai

An apartment building collapse in downtown Mumbai yesterday, killed 11 people, injured 17 and left more than a dozen trapped under the rubble, a top city administrator said.

The dilapidated four-story structure, which was more than 100 years old, was home to 16 families, said Johnny Joseph, Mumbai's municipal commissioner. The building caved in while most residents were sleeping, he said.

The Sadaf building, located in a densely populated middle-class area of Nagpada and which had been notified dangerous by the civic authorities, collapsed around 1.10 am when most residents of its 16 flats were asleep, officials said.

Authorities say at least 50 people have been rescued and many more were feared buried under the rubble. Mumbai Police and civic agencies launched rescue operations.

"All authorities swung into action as soon as we got the news," said Johnny Joseph, Commissioner of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

"Initially we faced some difficulty in conducting rescue because the lanes that lead to the building are very narrow. The youths in the area came forward to help those trapped under the debris," Joseph told reporters.



PHOTO: AFP

A crowd gather at the site of a collapsed building in Mumbai early yesterday. Eleven people were killed and another 25 were believed trapped under rubble after a four-storey building in India's flood-hit city of Mumbai collapsed early Tuesday.

'Japan to press on with quest for UNSC berth'

AFP, United Nations

Japan's drive to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is still alive, a Japanese UN delegate said Monday, dismissing press reports that Tokyo planned to give up its bid for the time being after failing to win enough backing.

The Sankei Shimbun daily reported Sunday that Tokyo's new stance was dictated by the fact that Japan's joint bid with fellow G4 members Brazil, Germany and India had received the backing of only 90 nations.

"I have no idea (of where the report comes from)," said Shinichi Iida, a first secretary at Japan's mission who is handling the Security Council reform issue.

Naga leaders hold talks to save truce

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian officials and rebel Naga leaders have held talks to preserve a four-year ceasefire.

The talks, held late on Monday, were the first formal dialogue between the government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (SS Khaplang), which has observed a truce with Indian forces since 2001.

"They discussed the ceasefire and how to continue talks," an Indian home ministry official said. "The Nagas had some demands about the ceasefire monitoring group and they will be examined."

The two sides would meet again but no dates were set, he added.

The Naga rebellion is India's oldest insurgency, and security analysts say peace with the Nagas is crucial to a broader peace in the

northeast -- seven states connected to the rest of India by a thin strip of land and home to dozens of insurgent groups.

The Khaplang faction of the NSCN is the second most powerful separatist group in Nagaland.

A more powerful group, the NSCN (Issac-Muivah) has held repeated talks with the Indian government since it started a ceasefire in 1997.

But there has been little progress over the rebels' central demands -- the unification of Naga-dominated areas in northeast India and ultimately independence.

Both NSCN factions, which split in the late 1980s, have thousands of fighters, and raise money mainly through "taxes".

More than 20,000 people have died in the over five-decades-old Naga insurgency.

Applications for asylum in Britain fall

AFP, London

Application for asylum to Britain between April and June fell 11 percent from the previous quarter thanks to a range of government measures, the Home Office said yesterday.

Home Office figures showed the number of applications -- 6,220 excluding dependants -- was down 21 percent compared to the same period in 2004.

The removal of failed asylum seekers rose by three percent on the last quarter but was down two percent on the same April-to-June period a year ago.

Officials stressed, however, the 2005 trend was for removals to increase.

Lanka tightens security for PM after FM killing

AFP, Colombo

Top Sri Lankan politicians, including the prime minister, have had their security stepped up and public appearances curtailed after the assassination of the foreign minister, officials said yesterday.

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse skipped a press conference in the capital Colombo Tuesday and stayed away from a series of public meetings in central province over the weekend because of a security threat, an official in his office said.

"Where an advance party is unable to clear the area and declare it sterile, the prime minister will not go," the official said. "We cancelled several small public meetings over the weekend because of this."

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday he was confident that parliament would pass a bill to set aside a third of federal and state legislature seats for women despite a storm of opposition.

His comments came a day after MPs fought tooth-and-nail in parliament to oppose the draft legislation.

"We are building consensus on the issue of reserving 33 percent of seats in parliament and state legislatures for women and I am confident

that we will succeed," Singh told a national women's conference in New Delhi.

Successive Indian governments have failed to make the Women's Reservation Bill law since it was first put forward in 1996 because of stiff opposition from politicians. But Singh said he was confident of ending the logjam.

He said increasing female representation on village bodies was a signal to the political establishment to make way for women in state legislatures and parliament,

"A new army of empowered women has come forward to participate in governance at the community level and the time has come for us to scale this experiment up to the national level," he said.

"This large-scale mobilisation of women in the public life in our country is an unprecedented event. It is the most important intervention aimed at the empowerment of women anywhere in the world," Singh said.

'US must finish Iraq job'

REUTERS, Salt Lake City

President George W. Bush, speaking amid protests and growing public unease over Iraq, said on Monday America owed it to the more than 1,800 US soldiers killed there to complete the mission, which he linked with the campaign against terrorism.

He also voiced confidence in Iraqi efforts to draft a new constitution, saying it would be a landmark event for the country and the region. He was speaking shortly before news emerged that Iraq's parliament had received a draft of the constitution but no vote was expected for a few days.

In a speech to a convention of Veterans of Foreign Wars, Bush again linked the Iraq war with efforts to protect the United States from another September 11-style attack -- a link critics say is an attempt to shift the justification for war.

"Iraq is a central front in the war on terror," Bush said. "It is a vital part of our mission."

Bush has spent August at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and the standing ovations he received from the veterans group contrasted with anti-war protests outside the ranch begun by Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq.

Asians, Americans see the world differently

AP, Washington

Asians and North Americans really do see the world differently. Shown a photograph, North American students of European background paid more attention to the object in the foreground of a scene, while students from China spent more time studying the background and taking in the whole scene, according to University of Michigan researchers.

The researchers, led by Hannah-Faye Chua and Richard Nisbett, tracked the eye movements of the students. 25 European Americans and 27 native Chinese to determine where they were looking in a picture and how long they focused on a particular area.

"They literally are seeing the world differently," said Nisbett, who believes the differences are cultural.

"Asians live in a more socially complicated world than we do," he said in a telephone interview. "They have to pay more attention to others

than we do. We are individualists. We can be bulls in a china shop, they can't afford it."

The findings are reported in Tuesday's issue of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The key thing in Chinese culture is harmony, Nisbett said, while in the West the key is finding ways to get things done, paying less attention to others.

And that, he said, goes back to the ecology and economy of times thousands of years ago.

In ancient China, farmers developed a system of irrigated agriculture, Nisbett said. Rice farmers had to get along with each other to share water and make sure no one cheated.

Western attitudes, on the other hand, developed in ancient Greece where there were more people running individual farms, raising grapes and olives, and operating like individual businessmen.



PHOTO: AFP

(L to R) Iktimal Hage-Ali, Hajji Abdul Rahman Deen and Sheikh Fehmi Naji El-Imam attend Australian Prime Minister John Howard's anti-terrorism summit of moderate Islamic leaders at Parliament House in an attempt to isolate home-grown Muslim extremists in Canberra yesterday. Howard called the conference in the wake of the July London bombings by British-born Muslims, fearing that Australia could face similar violence from disaffected members of its small Islamic community.