

# More cars torched in France overnight

## Police step up security after tips

AP, Paris

The number of cars torched overnight in France climbed slightly over the previous night to 502 in a 16th night of unrest that took its heaviest toll on the French provinces, police said yesterday.

Security was boosted in the capital with some 3,000 police officers fanning out around strategic points to counter feared weekend attacks targeting Paris. Gatherings were banned from Saturday morning until Sunday morning.

"We returned to an almost normal situation in Ile de France," said national

police chief Michel Gaudin, referring to the Paris region. Arson attacks were counted in 163 towns around France, he said. The count of those detained overnight stood at 206, bringing to 2,440 the number of suspects picked up in just over two weeks of unrest.

Two Molotov cocktails were tossed at a mosque Friday evening in the southern town of Carpentras, but it was not immediately clear whether the attack was linked to the unrest that has wracked the poor suburbs and small towns of France since Oct. 27. President Jacques Chirac

demanded that investigators quickly find out who was behind the attack.

Earlier authorities stepped up security Friday and placed restrictions on some public gatherings after tip-offs from Internet and text messages suggested "violent actions" over the weekend in the French capital.

But as France marked Armistice Day commemorating the end of World War I, calls for peace in the restive poor neighbourhoods of France rang out, from demonstrators in Paris to religious leaders at a Lyon-area mosque in the southeast.

# Nepal court refuses to block media law

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Supreme Court refused Friday to block a widely-criticised law that bans radio news programs and introduces large fines and jail terms for those who say bad things about the royal government.

Friday's ruling by a three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Dilip Kumar Poudel clears the way for the government to impose the controversial law, which has led to strikes and protests in the capital.

The Supreme Court was ruling on a petition brought by nine professional organisations including the Federation of Nepalese Journalists.

King Gyanendra seized power in February saying that politicians were incapable of stopping a Maoist insurgency, which has claimed more than 12,000 lives since 1996.

The new media law is seen by many observers as part of an attempt by the king to crack down on dissent in the Himalayan kingdom, and critics say it will impose severe restrictions on the freedom of the press.

Kantipur Publications, Nepal's largest private media company which filed a separate petition to the Supreme Court after police confiscated vital equipment during a raid last month, said it would now respect the law and end its news broadcasts.

"We had approached the honourable Supreme Court, requesting it to direct the government not to implement the recently promulgated media ordinance which aims to prevent airing of news," managing director Binod Raj Gyawali said.

"Since the special bench (ruling) ... we have taken the decision to suspend the Kantipur Diary (news programme) from today respecting the court's order," he said.

The United States, Britain and India suspended military supplies after King Gyanendra sacked the elected government on February 1 and cracked down on civil freedoms, saying the move was necessary to beat Maoist insurgents.

India has since eased its ban.

# Pakistan needs \$5.2b for quake aid: Donors

REUTERS, Islamabad

Multi-lateral donor agencies estimate that Pakistan needs \$5.2 billion for relief operations and reconstruction works in earthquake devastated areas, a government adviser said on Friday.

The October 8 quake killed more than 73,000 people in Pakistan, most of them in Pakistani Kashmir. Hundreds of thousands of people are still homeless and, with many mountain roads blocked by landslides, aid has yet to reach many in remote areas.

Pakistan is organizing a donors' conference on November 19, which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is due to attend.

But for now, the United Nations says it has received funds and solid commitments worth only 15 percent of the total \$550 million it is seeking for emergency relief operations.

Salman Shah, financial adviser to Pakistan's prime minister, said the World Bank and the Asian Development bank estimated that the country needs \$3.5 billion

for reconstruction of infrastructure.

"We also need more than \$90 million to revive livelihoods lost in the quake," Shah told a news conference in Islamabad. "These costs are in addition to the \$1.6 billion the UN has estimated will need to be spent on relief efforts."

So far \$2.4 billion has been pledged, most of it bilaterally, from around the world, but Shah said not all of these pledges have been realized into cash.

"Lots of these pledges are for goods and services and logistics purposes," he said. "The relief operation is also financed by part of these pledges and commitments."

The ADB and World Bank assessment report on damages and needs said the loss of public and private assets was estimated at \$2.3 billion. Private housing, with damages calculated at over \$1 billion, suffered the most extensive damage.

Damage and losses to the transport, education, agriculture and livestock sectors also amounted to close to \$1 billion.

# N Korea insists on end to US sanctions

AFP, Beijing

North Korea insisted yesterday that the United States lift sanctions against eight companies controlled by the Stalinist regime as South Korea voiced optimism the row would not sidetrack six-way nuclear talks.

"The lifting of sanctions is not something needed to keep negotiations alive, but something that should be implemented as promised," said Kim Gye-gwan, North Korea's chief delegate to the

talks.

Kim was speaking to reporters as he prepared to leave Beijing after three days of talks on his country's nuclear ambitions that also involving China, South Korea, the United States, Japan and Russia.

After the talks ended Friday, Kim said it would be impossible to make progress in negotiations on dismantling its nuclear program unless Washington lifted financial sanctions against the North Korean companies.

He was referring to an announcement

by the US government on October 21 that it had blacklisted eight North Korean entities as proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and frozen whatever assets they had under US jurisdiction.

The action also prohibited all transactions between US citizens and the entities, the Treasury Department said.

North Korea's position, which it has voiced since Friday, is that the sanctions violate a joint statement issued by the six parties at the end of the previous round of talks on September 19.