

Pakistan, UN appeals for more quake aid

Donors pledge \$5.8b for quake victims

REUTERS, AFP, Islamabad

The United Nations joined devastated Pakistan yesterday in pleading with donors to give more money to help survivors of last month's huge earthquake, and were immediately answered with another \$1 billion.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged a world conference of donors in Islamabad to dig deeper, warning that a second calamity threatened as winter closed in on the mountainous quake zone.

"The pitiless Himalayan winter is almost upon us and growing more and more severe every week," Annan told delegates from about 50 donor countries gathered in response to the appeal for \$5.2 billion in recovery aid and longer-term reconstruction help.

"We must sustain our efforts to keep people as healthy and as strong as possible until we can rebuild."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said an international donors' conference yesterday had pledged roughly 5.8 billion dollars for quake assistance, more than the country said it needed.

"The rough total we have as of now is 5.8 billion dollars," Aziz said, wrapping up the conference of about 70 countries, international financial agencies and aid groups.

Pakistan had said it needed 5.2 billion dollars for reconstruction and ongoing relief after the October 8 quake that killed more than 73,000 people and made about three million homeless just before the onset of winter.

The World Bank and the Asian

Development Bank pledged one billion dollars each, mostly in the form of loans. The Islamic Development Bank said it would increase its assistance from 250.6 million dollars to 501.6 million dollars.

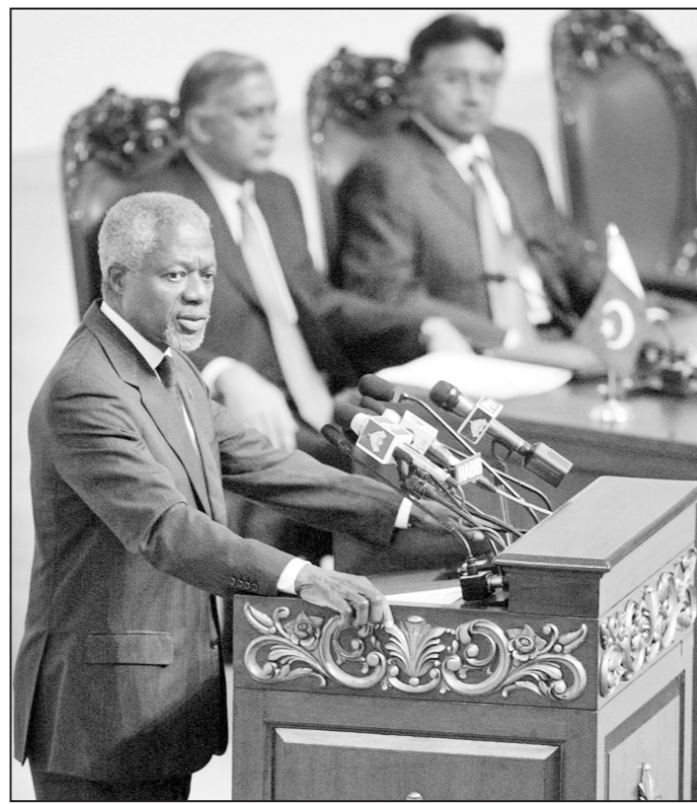
The single biggest donor country was the United States, which pledged 510 million dollars, including 156 million dollars already given. Pakistan is a key ally in the US "war on terror".

Saudi Arabia pledged a total of 391 million dollars, while Germany said it would contribute 111.6 million dollars.

The October 8 quake killed more than 73,000 people in Pakistan, left 500,000 homeless and affected 3.3 million, many living in remote Himalayan mountains, but the appeals for aid have only raised fractions of the sums targeted.

"They say a full generation has been lost," President Pervez Musharraf told the delegates, referring to how the quake ruined schools and entombed whole classrooms of children. About 17,000 children were killed in their schools, according to UN estimates.

The Asian Development Bank was first on Saturday to announce its response to the appeals for more money, pledging \$1 billion in financial aid, mostly in soft loans, though the European Union had already signalled its willingness to give more on Friday. European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, told Reuters in Islamabad the EU was to pledge \$112 million in addition to about \$200 million pledged by the member countries individually.



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (L) addresses the donors' conference as Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz (C) and President Pervez Musharraf (R) look on in Islamabad yesterday.

MUSHARRAF TO INDIA Kashmir solution can be ideal donation

PTI, Islamabad

With India helping Pakistan in quake relief efforts, President Pervez Musharraf today said the tragedy has offered an "opportunity of lifetime" to resolve the Kashmir issue together "once for all" which, he remarked, could be New Delhi's "donation to Kashmir".

Making India-Pakistan ties an important component of his keynote address to the international donors' meet here to mobilise funds for reconstruction of quake-hit areas of Pakistan and PoK, Musharraf turned to Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmad, representing India at the conference, and made an emotional appeal for peace between the two countries.

"Knowing very well an Indian delegate is sitting here... The earthquake has created a unique feeling of togetherness, of an urge to help each other within people of Kashmir on both sides of LoC and more than that

within the people of India and Pakistan. Their urge to help each other on a country basis.

"Therefore, I sincerely and genuinely believe that the challenge of this earthquake can be converted into an opportunity of lifetime which was never available to India and Pakistan to improve relations," Musharraf said.

"(I) take this opportunity and forum to appeal to the President and Prime Minister of India, to the government of India, to entire opposition in India, to the people of India at large and business community of India and more than anybody else I appeal to the media in India and also Pakistan, the government of Indian-held Kashmir, APHC (Hurriyat Conference) and other Kashmiri groups, let us together solve the Kashmir dispute once for all," he said.

Musharraf said that "fleeting opportunities do not come everyday. If leaders fail to grasp fleeting opportunities, they fail their nations and fail their people."



Sri Lanka's newly elected President Mahinda Rajapakse is sworn in while his immediate family -- wife Shiranthi and a son, look on in Colombo yesterday. Rajapakse offered talks with Tamil Tiger rebels to end three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

New president offers talks to Tigers

Rajapakse takes oath of office

REUTERS, Colombo

New Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse was sworn in yesterday, saying that he would talk to Tamil Tiger rebels but that he wanted to review a three-year-old ceasefire agreement and that militant killings must stop.

Allied to hardline Marxist and Buddhist parties, Rajapakse narrowly beat main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe in a close-run poll on Thursday. Minority Tamil voters who had been expected to oppose him stayed away after an apparent boycott by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"I would like to reiterate my desire

to engage in direct talks with the LTTE," he said. "I want to achieve an honourable peace."

As soon as the Tigers were ready to resume the stalled peace talks, the government would listen, he said, but made it clear that he wanted to redraw the 2002 ceasefire that halted two decades of fighting after the deaths of more than 64,000.

"The government is ready to review the ceasefire agreement," he said in Sinhalese, although it was not in the English printed version of the speech. "This process can start as soon as the relevant parties are ready. Human rights violations, such as child abduction and murder, that are happening despite the ceasefire must

come to an end."

Before the election, the Tigers had said that any attempt to amend the ceasefire terms could cause it to collapse completely, although they said they would not restart the war. Monitors still expect the truce to hold, although redrawing the agreement may not be easy.

"It doesn't matter who is in power, the government is still bound by the ceasefire agreement," said Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission spokeswoman Helen Olafsdottir. "If you want to make any change to it, both sides would have to agree."

Observers said the Tiger poll boycott -- which saw burning barricades block checkpoints between

rebel and government territory -- had been aimed at stopping the more conciliatory Wickremesinghe gaining power and claiming a mandate from Tamil voters.

Rajapakse, prime minister under outgoing president Chandrika Kumaratunga, said the electorate had voted for a united country. Analysts say they doubt that the Tigers will ever compromise on their demand for a separate Tamil state.

"The overwhelming majority of the people said that the country should not be divided," he said.

He said he would send a new budget to parliament, rendering the previous budget announced last week as void.

US, China to cooperate more on terrorism

REUTERS, Beijing

The United States and China hope to strengthen shared efforts to fight terrorism and "pirate" copying of goods, Washington's top justice official said yesterday.

US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales told a news conference in Beijing he had discussed expanding cooperation with Chinese justice and police officials in talks before President George W. Bush arrives in Beijing later on Saturday for a three-day visit.

China says its biggest terrorist threat comes from separatist forces in its far-western region of Xinjiang, where most of the population is Muslim and belongs to the Uighur ethnic group. But international human rights groups and advocates of Xinjiang independence say China has exaggerated the threat in the region to suppress legitimate protest.

Iraqi leaders embark on reconciliation quest

15 killed in Baghdad market bombing

AFP, Cairo/Baghdad

Iraqi leaders from across the political and ethnic spectrum began a three-day meeting yesterday to discuss reconciliation in their strife-torn country at Arab League-sponsored talks in Cairo.

Arab League Secretary General Amr Mussa and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak gave opening speeches amid tight security outside the League's headquarters by the Nile.

Mubarak said the meetings were an "essential condition" for a progressive departure of the 170,000 US-led foreign troops in Iraq.

The talks are to prepare for a larger conference to take place in Iraq but officials are hoping they will provide an opportunity to start ironing out differences between the country's feuding communities.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari said on Friday that the meeting was "part of steps aimed at promoting the political process in Iraq" and called on all sides to demonstrate "goodwill towards achieving positive results."

"We support any step which might contribute to stability," Jaafari told reporters on arrival in Cairo.

The meetings gather representatives of the disenchanted Sunni former elite, as well as the newly empowered Shiite majority and the non-Arab Kurds.

The Sunni Arab minority, which dominated Saddam Hussein's regime and all previous Iraqi governments, has largely stood aloof from the political process since his overthrow, providing the backbone of the persistent insurgency.

Sunni leaders, for their part, charge that Kurdish and Shiite leaders are

seeking to marginalise their community and are bitter over a constitution that many Sunnis charge could hasten the break-up of Iraq.

Also due at the meeting are Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd, Vice President Ghazi al-Yawar, a Sunni, the head of the main Sunni clerics' association, Hareth al-Dari, and the head of the largest Sunni political faction, the Islamic Party, Tareq al-Hashemi.

Earlier fifteen people were killed when a car bomb exploded in a busy Baghdad market yesterday as the search resumed amid the rubble of two Shia mosques where at least 75 died in twin suicide bombings a day earlier.

The latest attack, which targeted a local market in the Jesir Diyala district of southern Baghdad, was followed 90 minutes later by another car bomb attack in the centre of the capital, an interior ministry official said.

Storm in Europe over CIA's airport use for prisoner transfer

AFP, Madrid/London

Reports that US intelligence officials have been using European airports secretly to transfer suspected Islamic extremists around the globe have unleashed a storm across Europe.

The Socialist government of Spain, one of the countries whose airports were allegedly used for the transit of suspects, said Friday it was promising "maximum transparency" on the affair, having already twice asked the US government for clarification with its own domestic credibility at stake.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero has, since coming to power last year, positioned himself as a champion of international legality and was quick to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq sent in by his conservative predecessor, despite the move souring relations with Washington.

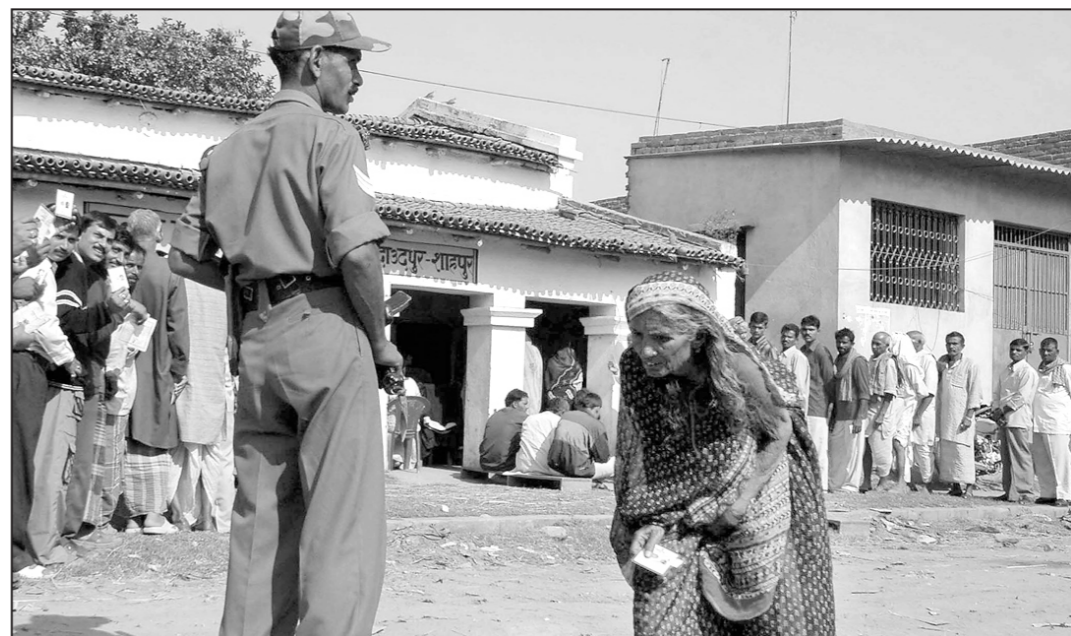
The Spanish leader will face questioning in parliament over the flights

issue on Wednesday.

Spanish judicial authorities are investigating reports that up to 10 flights operated by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) landed in the Balearic Islands between January 2004 and 2005 while media reports say a similar number landed between January and October of this year in the Canary Islands.

Human rights organisation Amnesty International on Friday demanded that the European Union investigate whether the United States has run illegal prison camps in Poland.

Referring to reports of camps in Poland, Irene Khan, Amnesty's secretary-general, said: "We should not be sitting here trying to speculate whether it is Poland and whether the Polish government will do something about it."



An elderly Indian woman (R) walks past a paramilitary soldier after casting her vote in state assembly elections in Manehar, some 40km east of Patna yesterday. The last phase of provincial polling have begun in India's troubled eastern state of Bihar, with 70,000 security personnel on alert to maintain law and order.

West warns of possible attacks in Indonesia

REUTERS, Jakarta

The United States, Australia and Britain have issued fresh warnings about possible terrorist attacks in Indonesia after a militant Web site showed how and where to kill foreigners in Jakarta.

Australia warned travellers on Saturday that attacks could be staged against Western interests before the end of the year.

The Web site, called Anshar El Muslimin (www.anshar.net) and purportedly set up under orders from a key Asian militant, shows in diagrams how to shoot foreigners in Jakarta or throw grenades at motorists stuck in the city's notorious traffic jams.

Police have called the Web site a "work of terror."

"We continue to receive reports suggesting that terrorists are in the advanced stages of planning attacks against Western interests in Indonesia," Australia said in its Web site www.smarttraveller.gov.au.

"Recent new information suggests that terrorists may be planning attacks to occur before the end of 2005."

The militant Web site, written in Indonesian, has suggested assassinations could be staged in Jakarta's Kuningan area on streets or pedestrian

overpasses. The area includes the Australian Embassy, the Ambassador Mall and JW Marriott Hotel.

Islamic militants linked to al-Qaeda launched suicide car bombs on the Marriott Hotel in 2003 and outside the Australian embassy last year. Those attacks killed 22 people combined.

The US embassy in Jakarta in a message to Americans said the Web site indicated militants were changing tactics.

"In addition to past information which indicated that terrorists would target specific businesses or buildings, the new information shows that terrorists are likely now planning to attack Westerners riding in cars or walking on streets, sidewalks or pedestrian overpasses in Jakarta," it said.

"The embassy considers that the information on the Web site was developed by persons with serious terrorist intent." Great Britain issued a similar warning.

Indonesian police said the Web site was set up by one of three men named as suspects this week over the October 1 restaurant bombings on Bali that killed 20 people.

Iran hands over atom bomb blueprint: IAEA

AFP, Vienna

Iran has handed over a document which describes how to make what could be the explosive core of an atom bomb, the UN atomic agency said in a report Friday, adding that its inspectors were being blocked from crucial military sites.

The document -- which Iran said came from a black market offer in 1987 that it never acted upon -- gives "procedural requirements for ... the casting and machining of enriched, natural and depleted uranium metal into hemispherical forms," the International Atomic Energy Agency report said.

Its disclosure raised concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, which Tehran says is a peaceful drive to produce electricity but the United States and Europe fears could be hiding the development of atomic weapons.

Gregory Schulte, US ambassador to the IAEA, told reporters: "Iran owes the (IAEA) board an explanation why it had these documents, what it has done with them, and why it didn't disclose them in the past."

He said the "documents open new concern about weaponisation that Iran has failed to address."

Apec leaders vow to eliminate WMD

AFP, Busan

Asia-Pacific leaders vowed yesterday to eliminate weapons of mass destruction and dismantle the "terrorist" groups that have carried out a series of deadly attacks in the region.

"We condemned terrorist acts in the region that took thousands of lives and aimed to destabilise economic prosperity and security in the Asia-Pacific region," the 21 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders said.

Terror attacks "constitute a clear challenge", the leaders said in a statement released at the end of their two-day annual summit in the South Korean city of Busan.

"To confront these ongoing threats, we reaffirmed our commitment... to review progress on our efforts to dismantle trans-boundary terrorist groups, eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery," the leaders said.

They demanded "substantive progress" yesterday in stalled North Korean disarmament talks following Pyongyang's pledge to scrap its nuclear programmes.

The 21 leaders agreed that "posi-

tive steps" had been achieved in a September round of six-party talks when the Stalinist state conditionally agreed to give up its atomic ambitions.

But they called for more concrete action after the talks deadlocked earlier this month in a follow-up meeting, according to South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun.

He was speaking on behalf of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders at the close of their annual two-day summit here.

Roh said in a chairman's verbal statement that the leaders, including US President George W. Bush, China's Hu Jintao, Russia's Vladimir Putin and Japan's Junichiro Koizumi, were pleased with "the positive steps that have recently been made" in the six-party talks.

US President George W. Bush, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao agreed to the statement that also stressed that any new counter-terrorism measures must comply with laws on human rights.

Several Apec members such as the United States, Indonesia, Russia and the Philippines have been victims of attacks.

Karzai chosen for Indira Gandhi Prize 2005

UNI, New Delhi

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai has been chosen for the prestigious Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2005.

The nomination of the first popularly-elected President of Afghanistan was announced in New Delhi on Saturday in the presence of President APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress President and Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust Chairperson Sonia Gandhi at Rashtrapati Bhavan where the 18th Indira Gandhi Prize was presented to Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand.

Announcing the name of the 47-year-old Karzai, Delhi Chief Minister and Trust Secretary Sheila Dikshit said the International Jury of the Trust unanimously named Karzai as the recipient of the 19th Indira Gandhi Prize.

"I am glad to announce that the first democratically-elected President of Afghanistan Humid Karzai has been elected for the next Indira Gandhi Prize," Dikshit said, amid clapping of hands from the audience, at the end of today's 45-minute-long function at the historic Durbar Hall.