

Asean urges N Korea to desist from further nuclear tests

AFP, Cebu, Philippines

Southeast Asian nations urged North Korea yesterday to cancel any plans for a second nuclear test and to address the world's humanitarian concerns about the secretive country.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations urged North Korea to "desist from conducting further nuclear tests," implement a de-nuclearisation deal it agreed in 2005 and rejoin the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"We emphasised that DPRK (North Korea) must effectively address the humanitarian concerns of the international community," they said in a statement

after their annual summit.

Leaders of the 10-nation group backed six-party talks on North Korea and said the international community "must convey in clear terms to the DPRK that the latter must denuclearise in a verifiable manner."

The leaders reaffirmed support for UN sanctions imposed after the North's missile tests in July and its nuclear test on October 9.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, in comments at ASEAN's summit with South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun, called for unanimity in urging the North to respond to humanitarian concerns, including the plight of abductees.

Japan has pushed North

Korea to account for citizens who were abducted in the 1970s and 1980s to train the North's spies in language and customs.

South Korea says 485 of its citizens have been kidnapped since the end of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Amid recent reports that North Korea is preparing for a possible second nuclear test, Arroyo expressed "great concern" at developments.

Analysts believe any repeat test depends on the outcome of the six-nation negotiations as well as of separate talks on lifting US financial sanctions.

At a six-party session in September 2005, the North agreed in principle to scrap its atomic programmes in exchange

for economic and energy benefits and security guarantees.

But it boycotted the forum two months later in protest at the US financial sanctions, which were imposed for alleged money-laundering and counterfeiting.

The talks resumed in Beijing last month, but ended without apparent progress or a date to meet again.

The nuclear issue is set to be a major topic when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, South Korea's Roh and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao meet on Sunday.

It will be the first three-way summit between the countries in two years.

Hillary Clinton in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

US Senator Hillary Clinton was in Afghanistan yesterday for talks with President Hamid Karzai including discussions on whether more US troops should be sent to fight the Taliban insurgency, officials said.

Clinton, a likely candidate for the 2008 presidential elections, was accompanied by Democratic Senator Evan Bayh and Republican Representative John McHugh, US embassy and Afghan government officials said.

They were due to meet Karzai to "discuss matters of mutual interest including putting more troops in Afghanistan, the rising tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, reconstruction and women's rights," a top Afghan official said.

The United States has around 20,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan to fight a growing Taliban-led militancy.

Some are in an under-strength 33,000-strong NATO-led force that is looking for more soldiers and equipment, and around 8,000 are in a US-led counter-terrorism coalition.

Clinton is against President George W. Bush's decision to send 21,500 more troops to Iraq.

Clinton, who was last in Afghanistan in 2003, arrived from Baghdad where she said she doubted the United States or Iraqi government could pacify the country.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee looks at stone carving from the Sixth Century B.C Gandhara civilization at Taxila some 30 km west of Islamabad yesterday. Mukherjee is in Pakistan to extend an invitation to Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz for the three-day 14th Saarc Summit to be held in New Delhi from 02-04 April, 2007.

THREE ASIAN POWERS HOLD SUMMIT

China, Japan , S Korea find common ground on N Korea, mending ties

AFP, Cebu, Philippines

China, Japan and South Korea yesterday held their first summit together in two years, finding common ground on North Korea and on mending their own fractured relations.

In an unusual joint statement, the three appeared to have shored up a relationship that was strained by complaints over the previous Japanese government's attitude to the country's notorious World War II past.

But new Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made better relations a priority since taking office in September, and his talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun were hailed by all sides.



PHOTO: AFP

Three Asian leaders, President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea (L), Premier Wen Jiabao of China (C), and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan (R) join hands before the start of the 7th summit meeting of China, Japan and South Korea at a hotel in the Philippine city of Cebu yesterday on the sidelines of the 12th Asean summit.

raised the abductions issue," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"The leaders expressed their concern about the situation caused by the DPRK's recent missile launches and nuclear test," the statement said.

It was the first summit between the three Asian powers in two years, after strains emerged over the visits of former Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi to a controversial Tokyo war shrine.

The visits stirred up anger in China and South Korea, but Abe visited both Beijing and Seoul after he took office last year and announced that he would work hard to mend relations.

"Last year you paid an important visit to China and due to the common efforts between our countries, we have found a solution to eradicate the obstacles in our relationship," Wen told Abe in a one-to-one meeting earlier Sunday.

"We are happy to see that China-Japan relations are moving

forward. This is in the interest of the people in our two countries, Asia and the whole world," he said.

The statement said the three had agreed to improve "coordination on major political and diplomatic issues involving the three countries as well as international and regional issues".

10 ex-Nazis convicted in Italy

AFP, Rome

An Italian military court Saturday convicted 10 former Nazi SS officers and soldiers for the massacre of 955 people in a northern Italian town during World War II.

The accused were sentenced in absentia to life in prison for the killings in Marzabotto in 1944, the worst massacre on Italian soil during the war, the ANSA news agency reported.

In all some 17 former Nazis, now aged from 81 to 88, were accused in the case, but the court acquitted seven.

"This judgment has been reached in the name of the Italian people and in accordance with the law after a very difficult trial," said the head of the military court, Vincenzo Santoro.

The main officer accused, Marshall Walter Reder, had already been sentenced to life by a military court in Bologna in 1951 but was freed in 1985.

The residents of Marzabotto, a town near Bologna, and two neighboring villages, Grizzana and Monzuno, were killed from September 29 to October 5, 1944.

The victims included some 300 women and 40 children under the age of two as well as five priests.

In court this week the Italian prosecutor Marco De Paolis said: "The members of the SS were not ordinary soldiers. They were like Al-Qaeda today, terrorists."

11 killed in Sri Lanka as Tigers, troops trade fire

Commandos capture 3 more rebel bases

AFP, Colombo

At least five soldiers and six civilians were killed in Sri Lanka as Tamil Tiger rebels and government troops traded long-range artillery fire in the island's restive east, officials said yesterday.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fired artillery at army positions in Mankerni in the district of Batticaloa on Saturday killing five soldiers in two attacks, the defence ministry said in a statement.

"Four soldiers were reported killed and two injured soldiers were admitted to hospital," the ministry said, adding another soldier was killed and one more wounded in the second attack in the same area.

The rebels said five civilians were injured yesterday in the mili-

tary artillery attacks.

Police said six civilians were also found shot dead in five places in the island's northern and eastern regions as well as elsewhere yesterday.

Investigations were underway to identify the victims and track down the killers, police said.

The killings came as Sri Lankan police commandos captured three more Tamil Tiger rebel bases in the island's east, raising to 11 the number seized from the guerrillas, an official said yesterday.

The elite Special Task Force commandos took control of the three bases of the LTTE in the district of Ampara late Saturday following a weekend offensive, a local official said.

"One commando was wounded when he stepped on an anti-

personnel mine (during the offensive in Ampara)," the police official told AFP.

He said the separatist rebels withdrew in the face of the military advance. There was no immediate comment from the Tamil Tigers.

Following a three-day offensive earlier in the week, police commandos captured eight rebel bases in the region.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's Tamil separatist conflict during the past 35 years. International diplomacy has so far failed to put an end to the fighting.

Government troops and guerrillas have been trading attacks throughout the island's embattled northern and eastern regions.

Troops raid Somali rebel hideouts, seize arms

AFP, Mogadishu

Troops carried out fresh raids on suspected rebel hideouts in Somalia's capital Mogadishu yesterday after the transitional government was handed the power to impose martial law.

Government forces back by allies from the Ethiopian army raided several houses in the southern Towfiq neighbourhood where they seized caches of AK-47 rifles as well as a private hospital where they disarmed the guards, witnesses and govern-

ment sources said.

"The government forces have started security operations in the capital and today's raids were part of that," a senior security official said.

"They have been given orders to collect any illegal weapon and also those conducting violent operations in the capital," he added on condition of anonymity.

The operation came a day after the Somali parliament passed a bill which effectively gives the government the right to impose martial law in a

country which has been a byword for anarchy for much of the last two decades.

The vote by lawmakers gives President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed's administration added authority in its quest to rein in the country's warlords and their militias after the Islamists, which had ruled Mogadishu since June, fled the capital late last month.

The law allows the president to issue decrees on national security, ban unlawful demonstrations and outlaw the spreading of propaganda.