



PHOTO: AFP

Greenpeace activists on their boats hold banners reading "G8 act now" after it was towed yesterday by the police near the beach of Kuehlungsborn, where is based the press centre of the G8 summit. Boats carrying activists from environmental group Greenpeace penetrated a cordoned-off part of the Baltic Sea where G8 leaders were holding their three-day summit.

MISSILE ROW

Bush seeks to ease tension with Russia

AFP, Heiligendamm

President George W Bush yesterday sought to ease tensions with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin as the world's wealthiest nations struggled to reach a deal on combating climate change.

Bush said a dispute with Russia over a proposed US missile defence system was nothing that either side should "hyperventilate" about in comments before a meeting with Putin that dominated the first full day of the Group of Eight summit.

German police meanwhile arrested 300 people as they confronted a new wave of anti-summit protests on land and sea.

US-Russia relations have hit a new post-Cold War low because of the US proposal to put a missile defence shield in central Europe.

The shield is "not something we should hyperventilate about," Bush

said after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Russia believes it is the sole target of the system and Putin has threatened to aim Russian missiles at European targets if the deployment goes ahead.

Bush said he was "looking forward" to meeting Putin despite the dispute.

"I will explain to him once again that a missile defence shield is aimed at a rogue regime that may try to hold Russia and or Europe hostage."

He added: "It is important for Russia and the Russians to understand that I believe the Cold War ended, that Russia is not an enemy of the United States, that there's a lot of areas where we can work together, for example on Iran, areas of proliferation. There's a lot of constructive work we can do."

Bush also said the United States

was ready to play a leading role in any new international initiative on climate change but insisted China and India must be part of any deal.

"The US will be actively involved, if not taking the lead, in a post-Kyoto framework, a post-Kyoto deal," Bush said, referring to the UN-backed treaty on cutting emissions that expires in 2012.

Bush said, however, that any global accord would have to include the major developing nations, which were quickly joining the ranks of top polluters.

"By 2008 the world's emitters of greenhouse gases should come together. Nothing is going to happen in terms of substantial reduction unless China and India participate."

Blair said there had been progress at the summit in the Baltic resort of Heiligendamm on agreeing goals against climate change.

Lanka cops force Tamils out of capital

AFP, Colombo

Armed Sri Lankan police forced hundreds of ethnic minority Tamils out of the capital Colombo yesterday as part of an effort to clear the city of feared Tamil Tiger cells, officials and witnesses said.

Police stormed Tamil-majority areas of the capital under the cover of darkness and forced guests at low-budget hostels to get into buses escorted by armed men, residents said.

Police had last week announced they would provide transport for minority Tamils to return to their homes in the island's embattled northern and eastern regions unless they could prove they were employed in Colombo.

The crackdown is part of efforts to stop the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) infiltrating the city of

600,000 people, police said. There was no immediate comment from the government.

"This operation is a very bad example," Tamil political leader Dharmalingam Sithadthan said.

"It is OK for the LTTE to indulge in this sort of ethnic cleaning because they have no moral responsibility, but a government can't behave like this," he said.

He said the police move reminded him of how the Tamil Tigers had evicted thousands of minority Muslims from the northern peninsula of Jaffna in 1990.

"Tamil people have been rounded up by the police and I believe they are being taken back to their villagers in the northeast," Sithadthan said.

Police sources said nearly 50 buses had been deployed for the pre-dawn operation.

Last week, police Inspector-General Victor Perera said Tamils from the embattled northern and eastern provinces were spending long periods of time in Colombo without any work and that they were a threat to national security.

"Those who are loitering in Colombo will be sent home. We will give them transport," Perera said. "We are doing this to protect the people and because of a threat to national security."

Thousands of Tamils from revolt-hit areas arrive in the capital monthly in the hope of obtaining passports to travel abroad for employment or secure political asylum overseas.

But Tamils are required to obtain permits from the police to travel to the rest of the country under a de facto visa system put in place to prevent Tiger rebels infiltrating the capital.

The guerrillas, who have been

fighting for a Tamil homeland for 35 years, were blamed for two bomb attacks that killed nine people and wounded 44 in and around the capital last month.

Official sources said the government was further tightening up restrictions with the deployment of cameras to photograph anyone leaving the embattled north and east and travelling to the rest of the country.

The evictions reverberated in the national parliament, where ethnic Tamil lawmakers held up proceedings to protest, officials said.

"Tamil MPs were protesting against the police forcibly taking away the Tamils in buses," a parliamentary official said. "The MPs sat in the well of the House and the sittings were held up as a result."

Cyclone Gonu blamed for 15 deaths

AP, Muscat

Semi-trucks were trapped in flooded highways here Thursday after Cyclone Gonu battered Oman's coast on its path toward the world's most important crude oil tanker route. At least 15 storm-related deaths were reported.

But as the cyclone - a rarity in the Middle East - headed from Oman to the southeastern Iranian coast, it continued to lose steam, dropping off to tropical storm strength early Thursday, according to the US military's Joint Typhoon Warning Center.

The center predicted Gonu would make landfall on the south-eastern Iranian coast late Thursday. But it was likely to spare Iran's offshore oil installations that lie more than 120 miles to the west, the centre and oil officials said.

Abbas-Olmert summit cancelled

AP, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday cancelled a planned summit meeting this week with Ehud Olmert, saying the Israeli leader has failed to accept any of his suggestions for reducing tensions, such as renewing a cease-fire and releasing frozen tax revenues.

Even so, the Palestinian foreign minister said Abbas and Olmert are likely to meet later this month in Egypt under the auspices of the "Quartet" of Mideast peacemakers. The minister, Ziad Abu Amr, said the Palestinians want the Quartet - the US, European Union, United Nations and Russia - to try to break the deadlock.

Olmert and Abbas had been expected to meet Thursday in the West Bank town of Jericho in what would have been their first talks on Palestinian territory.

David Baker, an official in Olmert's office, said the meeting was postponed at the request of the Palestinians. "Prime Minister Olmert will be ready to meet with Abu Mazen at any time," he said, referring to Abbas.



German President Horst Kohler receives Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank, at his office in Bellevue Castle in Berlin on June 5.

Pakistan suspends new media curbs

AFP, AP, Islamabad

The Pakistani government has suspended the introduction of tight restrictions on broadcasters following an uproar at home and criticism abroad, officials said yesterday.

President Pervez Musharraf issued a decree on Monday giving the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) extra powers after the media criticised his suspension of the country's chief justice.

The move sparked pandemonium in parliament on Wednesday with scuffles between slogan-chanting journalists and government officials. There were also several protests around the country earlier in the week.

An official statement said that Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, after meeting with broadcasters and newspaper chiefs on Wednesday, had decided that the decree "would be reviewed in totality by a six-member committee."

The committee of three senior

media members and three government officials will submit its report to the prime minister "within the shortest possible time," it said.

"Till such time the proceedings under the PEMRA Amendment Ordinance, 2007 will not be initiated against electronic media," it added.

The regulator had been empowered to seal the premises or confiscate the equipment of broadcasters and suspend their licenses. The government earlier blocked transmissions of three private television stations.

More than 6,000 Pakistani lawyers and opposition activists protested Thursday against tough media curbs imposed by President Pervez Musharraf amid a tense judicial crisis.

Demonstrators chanted "Go, Musharraf, go" in the eastern political hub of Lahore and other key cities, even though the government suspended the introduction of the restrictions on broadcasters a day earlier.

Pak judge wanted to head govt: Spy chief

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top judge wanted President Pervez Musharraf to dissolve the government and make him head of an interim regime several months before his ouster, the country's military intelligence director said yesterday.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, whose suspension by Musharraf has sparked a political crisis, also wanted spy chiefs to feed him with information about other judges, Major General Nadeem Ijaz said in an affidavit.

The sworn statement was one of three filed in the Supreme Court on Thursday by officials who were present when military ruler Musharraf ousted Chaudhry from his position on March 9, alleging misconduct.

The statements are the government's response to Chaudhry's claim that he was intimidated by Musharraf and military generals who wanted him to resign, but that he refused.

Ijaz, whose organisation is one of Pakistan's three main spy agencies, said that Chaudhry asked him to

come for a meeting a few months ago at which he started discussing the internal political situation.

"He was of the view that the president should dissolve the assemblies as they were becoming a nuisance and hold elections under the CJP (Chief Justice of Pakistan)," Ijaz said in the affidavit, a copy of which AFP has seen.

In Pakistan the president must dissolve parliament and the senate before calling elections, which are held under an interim administration.

"He wanted me to assure all concerned that he will make things very smooth" once he was put in power, Ijaz said.

He said Chaudhry "used to task him on a regular basis to provide information on judges ... so he could build a database for his own reference."

Musharraf's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Hamid Javed, and Intelligence Bureau director retired Brigadier Ijaz Shah also filed statements on Thursday.

'Indian rebels shifting camps to Nepal'

AFP, Guwahati

One of the main guerrilla groups fighting Indian rule in the remote northeast is shifting its camps to Nepal following crackdowns in other neighbouring countries, an ex-rebel said Wednesday.

The United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), blamed for ethnic massacres and a bombing campaign in oil and timber-rich Assam state, has also gained support from Nepal's Maoists, the defector said in claims that were quickly denied in Nepal.

"We were in touch with Maoist groups in Nepal and procuring arms, ammunition and explosives for Ulfa," said Ghanakanta Bora, a senior Ulfa rebel who along with his wife surrendered to Indian troops in

Assam on Tuesday.

"With both the military junta in Myanmar and the caretaker government in Bangladesh deciding to crackdown on groups like Ulfa, the top leadership decided to look for safer sanctuaries," he told reporters.

"Nepal was considered the safest location," Bora said at a ceremony marking his surrender also attended by senior army officials.

The Ulfa, which wants an independent homeland in Assam, had previously also been based in camps in neighbouring Bhutan, but the Himalayan kingdom also cracked down on their presence there in 2003.

Earlier this year Myanmar also

promised to step up military action against Indian rebel groups including the Ulfa, regarded as the most powerful among the 30-odd separatist groups in India's northeast.

But the latest claims are likely to increase concern over the conduct of Nepal's Maoists, who late last year agreed to end a decade-old insurgency against Kathmandu and enter the political mainstream.

Although the Maoist peace has been widely hailed, including in New Delhi, the United States continues to class them as a foreign terrorist organisation.

"Ulfa have set up some bases in Nepal with the active support of Maoist guerrillas," a senior Indian army official told AFP on condition that he not be named.

39 still detained in CIA secret prisons

AP, London

A coalition of human rights groups has drawn up a list of 39 terror suspects it believes are being secretly imprisoned by US authorities and published their names in a report released yesterday.

Information about the so-called "ghost detainees" was gleaned from interviews with former prisoners and officials in the US, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen, according to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and four other groups.

"What we're asking is where are these 39 people now, and what's happened to them since they 'disappeared'?" Joanne Mariner of Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

N Korea test-fired missiles: Seoul

AFP, Seoul

North Korea on Thursday test-fired short-range missiles, less than two weeks after its previous launch, the South Korean defence ministry said.

"It is true that North Korea tested short-range missiles today," a spokesman told AFP. He declined to give details.

An intelligence source told Yonhap news agency the communist state fired two missiles into the Yellow Sea, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

They are believed to be ground-to-ship or ship-to-ship missiles with a range of some 100 kilometres (62.5 miles). All landed in North Korean waters, the source said.

30 Taliban killed or wounded in battle

AFP, Kabul

Afghan and international troops killed or wounded more than 30 Taliban militants in the past 24 hours, while an Afghan soldier and a policeman were killed separately, officials said yesterday.

The military operation focused on a district in the southern province of Helmand and involved warplanes from Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf), the defence ministry said in a statement.

"More than 30 enemy elements were killed and wounded in the past 24 hours as a result of military operations and aerial poundings on enemy positions," it said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Sri Lankan Tamil family evicted from their low-budget hostel awaits a bus to return to their village in the island's east from Colombo yesterday. Armed Sri Lankan police forced hundreds of ethnic minority Tamils out of the capital Colombo Thursday as part of an effort to clear the city of feared Tamil Tiger cells.