

Violence on
rise in Nepal,
UN warns

AFP, Kathmandu

UN chief Ban Ki-moon warned yesterday that violence is on the rise in Nepal and called on political parties to push on a peace process stalled after key elections were cancelled.

"The peace process is facing its most difficult challenges to date," said Ban in a statement from his office.

"The shortcomings and enduring strengths of the comprehensive peace agreement need to be assessed," the secretary general said.

Ban called for the squabbling parties to "take a hard look at their differences and the underlying weaknesses of the peace process."

"The overall situation has grown more worrying with increasing violence and instability in parts of the country."

"The police have mostly been unable to protect the civilian population and curtail the activities of the groups," he said.

Voters were to elect representatives on November 22 to rewrite Nepal's constitution and decide the fate of its embattled monarchy, following a landmark peace deal last year.

Blast kills 2 Pak
soldiers in
tribal area

AFP, Miranshah, Pakistan

Two Pakistani soldiers were killed yesterday in a roadside bomb blast near their convoy in a troubled tribal region close to the Afghan border, security officials said.

The remote-controlled bomb exploded when the convoy was travelling into Miranshah, the main town in the restive North Waziristan region, a security official said.

As well as the two soldiers killed, another two were wounded, the official said, requesting anonymity.

Al-Qaeda and pro-Taliban militants have been regrouping in the area, according to the United States, which counts Pakistan as a key ally in the so-called war on terror.

Fierce clashes in the area between the Pakistani military and militants earlier this month killed about 250 people including 47 dead.

Islamist violence has escalated in the deeply religious northwest, including the tribal regions, since a government-ordered army raid on an Al-Qaeda-linked mosque in Islamabad in July that left scores dead.

An Indian politician and his wife were convicted yesterday of killing the lawmaker's pregnant lover, the Press Trust of India said.

Uttar Pradesh state lawmaker Amarnath Tripathi and his wife, Madhumita, were sentenced to life in prison for murdering Madhumita Shukla, a 24-year-old poet, in 2003 in Lucknow.

Shukla was seven months pregnant when she was slain. DNA tests showed Tripathi was the father.

Tripathi's wife hatched the murder plot and he gave his assent, the state's Dehra Dun district court heard.

A total of five people were accused in the case, including a cousin, and two men said to be contract killers.

The cousin and one of the men accused of being the hired gun who killed Shukla were also sentenced to life in prison.

The remaining man was acquitted, the news agency said.

Tripathi's lawyer Vijay Vikram, said the couple would appeal the decision.

Bombs kill
8 near
Baghdad

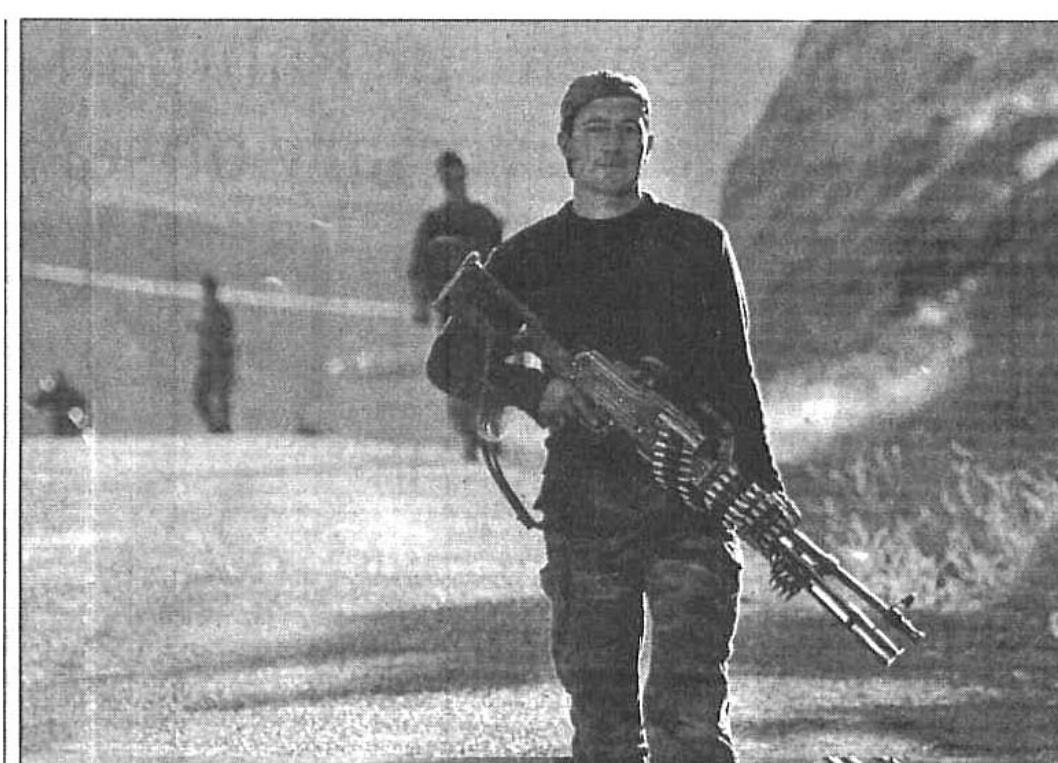
AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents in Iraq set off two coordinated roadside bombs yesterday on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, killing eight people, security officials and medics told AFP.

At least 22 people were also wounded in the explosions at around 7:00 am (0400 GMT) in Jisr Diyalah, a suburb on the southern outskirts of the capital, a security official said.

"The first bomb went off beside a crowd of daily labourers who had gathered to seek jobs, and the second one exploded a few minutes later when police arrived to investigate the earlier blast," the official said.

Medics at three hospitals in southern Baghdad confirmed receiving the bodies and admitting the wounded.



Turkish soldiers patrol a road in Uludere, province of Sırmak, on the Turkish-Iraqi border yesterday. Turkey's civilian and military leaders yesterday weighed their next move against Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq, as Baghdad scrambled to prevent a cross-border Turkish military strike.

EU urges Turkey to think twice before Iraq action

Baghdad to shut offices of Kurdish rebels

APP, Strasbourg

The EU's Portuguese presidency yesterday urged Turkey to think twice before launching military action in northern Iraq, following deadly attacks on Turkish troops from Kurdish rebels in the region.

"It's important that the international community supports Turkey in its efforts to counter terrorism, in respect of the law, without risking the stability of the region and the whole continent," Portuguese European Affairs Minister Manuel Lobo Antunes told the European parliament in Strasbourg.

"Turkey should think twice before launching a military intervention," added Antunes, whose country holds the EU rotating

presidency until the end of the year. His message was echoed by EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn who called on Ankara and Baghdad to work in cooperation and in accordance with international law when dealing with the attacks on Turkish troops by Iraqi Kurdish rebels.

The European Union "condemns all terrorist attacks and understands Turkey's need to protect its citizens," Rehn told the same session of the European parliament.

"But we also urge Turkey to seek a political solution in cooperation with Iraq, regional authorities and the international community and to show a sense of proportionality in its response to PKK terrorism," Rehn added.

Tensions between Baghdad and

Ankara have risen since Sunday's ambush on a Turkish military patrol along the tense northern Iraqi border in which 12 Turkish soldiers and 34 PKK rebels were killed, according to an official Turkish toll.

Turkish warplanes bombed Kurdish separatist camps in northern Iraq shortly after the attack, reports have since claimed.

Eight soldiers remain missing and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has said it is holding them hostage.

The Turkish government last week obtained parliamentary authorisation to carry out cross-border strikes into northern Iraq to hit the PKK rebels who have been waging a bloody separatist campaign since 1984.

The PKK is on the European list

of terrorist groups but is tolerated by the local Iraqi Kurdish authorities.

Rehn said the parliament's decision "should be seen as part of this overall political strategy."

Report from Baghdad adds: Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said Tuesday Baghdad will shut down the offices of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and not allow the "terrorist" group to operate on Iraqi soil.

"The PKK is a bad terrorist organisation and we have taken a decision to close its offices and not allow them to work on Iraqi soil," Maliki said in a statement issued after he met visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.

"We are putting all our efforts to restrict their terrorist activities that threaten Iraq and Turkey."

Nobel winners demand
Suu Kyi's release

APP, London

Six female Nobel Peace Prize winners called yesterday for more decisive international action to secure the release of their fellow laureate, the Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

As protests were held outside Chinese embassies across the world to pressure Beijing into influencing its ally, the women expressed their "grave disappointment" that Myanmar had ignored calls for Aung San Suu Kyi's release.

They also said they feared for the safety of other democracy activists after the military's bloody crackdown on peaceful demonstrations on the streets of Myanmar last month.

"The Burmese regime must not be allowed to continue in its perpetration of gross violations of human rights," the women wrote.

in a joint letter to The Guardian newspaper in Britain.

"The detention of Aung San Suu Kyi is the most visible manifestation of the regime's brutality but it is only the tip of the iceberg."

"As Aung San Suu Kyi's fellow

Nobel Peace Laureates... we will

work together to ensure that Burma does not slip from international view and ensure that real progress is made.

"The UN has a central role to play in our collective endeavour."

The six signatories of the letter were Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Northern Ireland (Nobel Peace Prize, 1976), Rigoberta Menchu Tum of Guatemala (1992), American Jody Williams (1997), Iranian Shirin Ebadi (2003) and Kenyan Wangari Maathai (2004).

They added: "Sixty-two years ago, the UN was established to

enable governments of the world to respond to grave crises of this kind."

"It must now do more to live up to its mandate and take decisive action to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow prisoners of conscience."

Twelve women have won the Nobel peace prize since its inception. Seven, including Aung San Suu Kyi, are still alive. The National League for Democracy leader, who won the award in 1991, is the only one imprisoned.

The letter comes as human rights activists campaigned outside Chinese embassies around the world to commemorate the 12 years in total Aung San Suu Kyi has spent incarcerated.

She has been in jail and under house arrest in Myanmar's biggest city, Yangon, since she led the NLD to election victory in 1990 but the junta did not recognise the result.

Nato should focus on training
Afghan forces: Karzai

APP, London

The Nato-led force in Afghanistan should focus on training Afghan security forces and strengthening domestic institutions, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said in an interview broadcast on Tuesday.

Karzai also told Channel 4 News he was concerned about reports that neighbouring Iran was helping to arm the Islamist Taliban militia and would discuss the issue with Iranian officials.

"The answer to the difficulty in Afghanistan is the strengthening of the Afghan institutions, not adding more troops, from any country to

the civil services.

"We need Nato to train more

Afghan forces, we need Nato to

train more Afghan police, we need

NATO to, or the countries of NATO, to concentrate on enhancing the abilities of the Afghan government,

the civil services.

The strengthening of Afghan institutions and for Afghans shouldering more of the responsibility is the way forward."

Thirty-seven nations are contributing around 40,000 troops to the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

But the US, Britain and Canada



PHOTO: AFP

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger observes fire in Lake Arrowhead, California, yesterday. More than 300,000 people were evacuated as wildfires raged across the state, prompting US President George W Bush to declare an emergency.

DR Congo clashes displace
33,000 people: UN

AFP, Kinshasa

The latest clashes in the Democratic Republic of Congo have driven 33,000 more people from villages in Nord-Kivu province and a cholera outbreak is suspected, UN agencies reported yesterday.

Some 25,000 people have been uprooted in the rugged Rutshuru highlands about 50 kilometres (30 miles) north of the provincial capital Goma and 8,000 others

have fled over the border into Uganda, UN officials estimated.

However, the battlefronts have calmed down and relief agencies plan to try to distribute drinking water on Thursday to people in the Rutshuru area, Louis Vigneault, the Goma spokesman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told AFP.

Relief work on the Ugandan side of the border has started and the local authorities and UN High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) urged displaced people to gather at the Nyakabanda centre, 15 kilometres from the border, the UNHCR said in a statement.

At Bunagana, a settlement on the border, officials had noted two cases of suspected cholera, a fast-spreading water-borne disease, leading the HCR to urge people to move out of the zone to the "transit centre with adequate health facilities."

Fighting kills
10 more
in Lanka

APP, Colombo

At least nine Tamil Tiger guerrillas and a government soldier have died in fighting in northern Sri Lanka, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Troops killed the nine men from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in three clashes on Tuesday along the de facto border of the mini-state run by the guerrillas, the ministry said.

It said a government soldier died in a rebel mortar bomb attack.

The casualties came a day after the Tigers infiltrated a key air base south of their front lines and destroyed a fleet of military aircraft, including at least five spy planes.

The guerrillas lost 21 members of their elite suicide squad while the military said 14 security personnel died defending the Anuradhapura base.

Fighting between security forces and the Tiger rebels, escalated with the unravelling of a Norwegian-brokered truce from late 2005. More than 5,400 people have since been reported to have been killed.

30 women
separatists
detained in
Kashmir

APP, Srinagar

Police yesterday detained dozens of veiled women separatists protesting alongside many more over alleged human rights abuses by troops in Indian Kashmir, officials said.

"We have detained about 30 women for taking out a procession and disrupting normal life," police officer Pervaiz Ahmed told AFP.

The 30 were among more than 100 Muslim women, all dressed head-to-toe in black, who demonstrated in the heart of summer capital Srinagar, shouting pro-Islamic and pro-freedom slogans.

Kashmir has seen a series of protests since soldiers shot dead a 27-year-old Muslim teacher in northern Kupwara district last week.

The army expressed regret over the death and ordered an inquiry into what it called an "unfortunate incident."

The army arrested one of the soldiers involved but insists the male teacher was killed accidentally after refusing to cooperate at a security check.

Pakistan deploys
2,000 troops
in troubled
northwest

APP, Islamabad

Pakistan has deployed more than 2,000 troops to a troubled northwestern district to bolster efforts to stem rising violence linked to pro-Taliban militants, a senior official said yesterday.

Paramilitary troops erected barricades and checkpoints in the scenic Swat valley, where a pro-Taliban militant group has been blamed for a series of recent bloody attacks on police and government leaders, the official said.

"We have deployed a little over 2,000 troops to assist police and civil administration in the district," top military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad told AFP.

The district in the conservative North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan has become a stronghold of banned radical group Tahreek Nifaz-e-Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM), which has close ties to Taliban militants.



Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands (R), Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (L), the Prince of Orange (2R) and his spouse Princess Maxima (2L) pose during a welcoming ceremony in New Delhi yesterday. Queen Beatrix is in India on a four-day state visit.

China supports
UN envoy on
Myanmar

APP, Beijing

China yesterday told the visiting UN envoy on Myanmar it would fully support his efforts to resolve the ongoing crisis in the Southeast Asian nation, state press reported.

"China has made a remarkable contribution to the mediation on the Myanmar issue in the past two weeks, which we appreciate," Chinese assistant foreign minister He Yafei told Ibrahim Gambari.

"China will continue to give all-out support to your work."

Gambari arrived in Beijing on Wednesday for a two-day visit as activists held protests outside Chinese embassies in Bangkok, Sydney and elsewhere around the world in an effort to pressure China over its support of Myanmar's junta.

"We want China to exercise its influence over the Burmese generals," said protester Ko Htwe outside the Chinese mission in Bangkok, holding a banner calling for democracy in the country formerly known as Burma.

"The Chinese have actually been quite helpful," Gambari said in India on Tuesday.

Gambari said then his visit to China would