

Gates pushes allies on Afghan war help

AP, Edinburgh

Defence Secretary Robert Gates is asking European allies for more troops to help stabilise Afghanistan, where the government is weak, the insurgency is relentless and casualties are mounting.

He got encouragement Thursday from a reliable US ally Britain.

Success in Afghanistan will require a significant and concerted international effort, said British Defence Secretary Des Browne as Nato defence and foreign ministers from countries operating in the south of Afghanistan gathered in Edinburgh for a conference. In southern Afghanistan, Taliban insurgents have increased attacks in the 18 months since Nato took command of the war.

"We must give the Afghan authorities the support they need to deliver the kind of success that we all recognise is vital, not just for security in Afghanistan, but for security in the wider world," Browne said in a statement.

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visit to Afghanistan and praised the work of military forces there.

"But military power can only ever be part of the solution," he said. "We must build on our hard-won military gains and go further to help the people of Afghanistan to provide their own security, governance and economic development."

During talks with allied defence and diplomatic officials, Gates is seeking an overall strategy for Afghanistan that could be adopted by the leaders of Nato governments at a summit next April. But opinions differ within Nato about whether such a plan is needed. No final decisions on the way forward were expected in Edinburgh.

Gates has been trying to build a sense of urgency about the country's troubled south, push a strengthening of the central government in Kabul and foster economic development that does not revolve around the illicit drug trade.

Gates cautions that the gains achieved in Afghanistan over the past six years are at risk of being lost, unless the United States and

its Nato allies carry out comprehensive military, economic and diplomatic solutions.

Along with other US officials, he has expressed concern that much of Europe has lost sight of the purpose of fighting in Afghanistan, whose former Taliban rulers gave sanctuary to al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, in the years before they carried out the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Gates wants Nato to adopt and publish a short statement that would spell out briefly and plainly why the war is important, what US and allied troops are doing there and how they can help the Afghan government.

The United States has about 26,000 troops in Afghanistan; together, Nato members other than the US have a similar total. Britain is the largest non-US contributor, with about 7,800 troops. Gates wants the Europeans to provide more troops, about 3,500 trainers for the Afghan police, plus additional mentors for the Afghan army, 16 helicopters and at least three battalions of ground forces.

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Delhi may dump N-deal: Advani

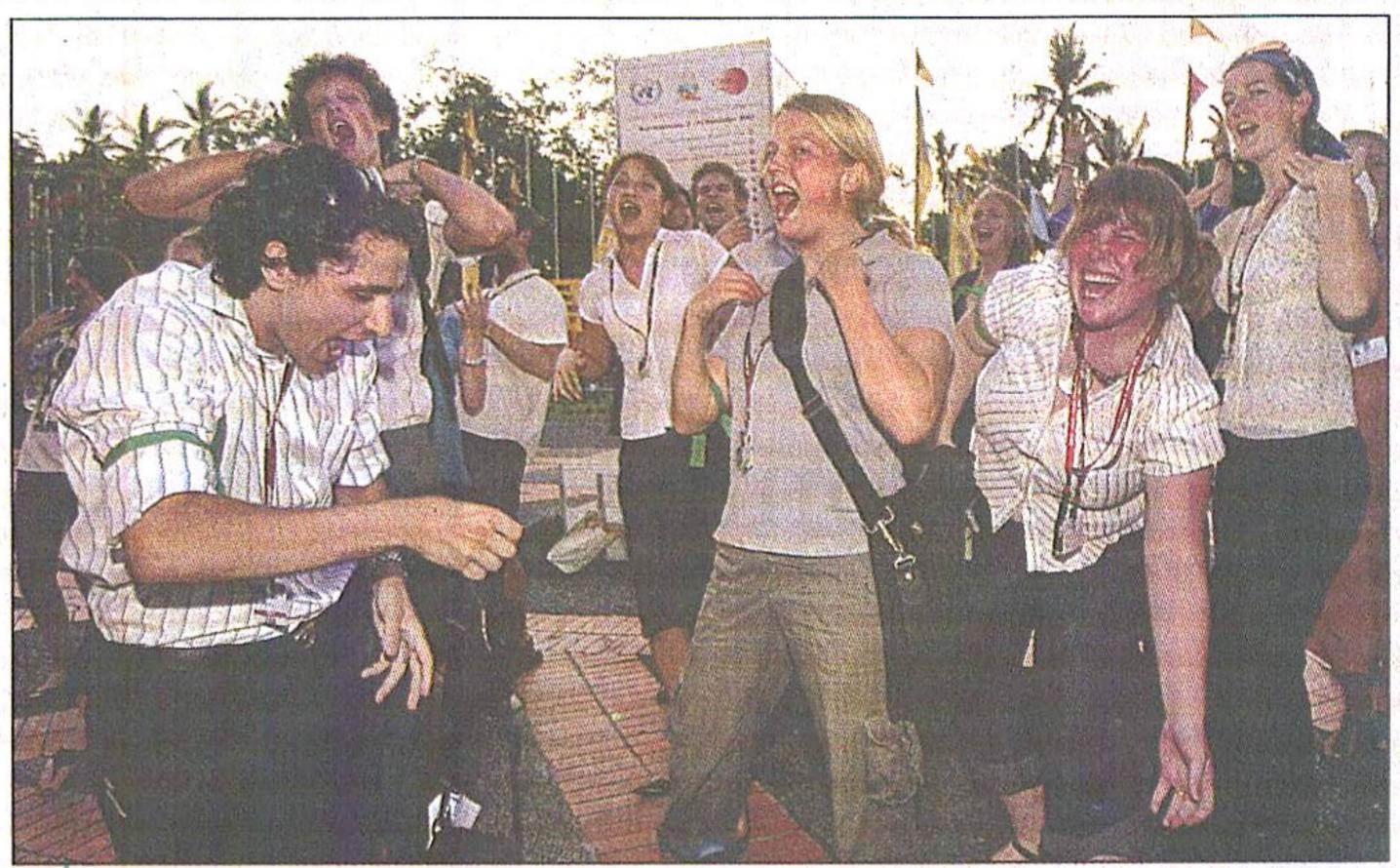
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Ahmedabad

The Manmohan Singh government could altogether dump the India-US nuclear deal due to the pressure from its Left allies, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader LK Advani said in Ahmedabad on Friday.

"I will not be surprised if they dump the deal or say that we will not go further with it," he told reporters here.

The Left parties supporting the government from outside have issued a fresh ultimatum, which is more categorical than ever before. If Prime Minister Manmohan Singh defies the threat and if the Left parties indeed carry it out, then mid-term elections to the Lok Sabha in early 2008 are certain," said Advani, who was here to campaign for the BJP ahead of the second round of the Gujarat assembly elections on Sunday.

He said, "the allies of the Congress in the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) have indicated that they do not want early elections", leaving little choice for the government but to drop the nuclear deal.



Environmental activists dance and sing as they demonstrate at the venue of the UN Climate Change Conference 2007 in Nusa Dua in Bali yesterday. Global talks on stepping up the fight against climate change headed into extra time with the United States and Europe squabbling over commitments for reining in greenhouse gases.

EU leaders seek unity over Kosovo

AFP, Brussels

EU leaders, fresh from signing a treaty that overhauls the way the bloc runs, will strive Friday to present a united front on Kosovo as the Serbian province prepares to move for independence.

At a summit in Brussels, starting at 0900 GMT, the media spotlight will also fall on British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, after he failed to attend a ceremony with his counterparts to sign the EU's reform-laden Treaty of Lisbon.

It was the second major European rendezvous in Lisbon that Brown missed in a week - after a landmark EU-Africa summit -- and the meeting, his first in Brussels as premier, comes amid doubts about his commitment to Europe.

The future of Kosovo, and Iran's nuclear programme, will be thrashed out at a working lunch, with the 27 heads of state and government being joined by foreign ministers and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

Officials and experts expect the ethnic Albanian majority to announce next month its intention to declare independence, and then break away by May in "coordination" with its main allies, EU nations and the United States.

(L to R) Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, France's President Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown chat before the European Summit at the headquarters of the European Council yesterday in Brussels. EU leaders, fresh from signing a treaty that overhauls the way the bloc runs, will strive to present a united front on Kosovo as the Serbian province prepares to move for independence.

EU chief, Australian PM back E Timor's nation-building

AFP, Dili

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd jetted into East Timor Friday to lend support to the fledgling nation's efforts to stabilise and rebuild after violence last year.

More than 2,000 Australian-led international forces and UN police remain on patrol in the former Indonesian province, deployed to restore and maintain calm after bloody unrest flared on Dili's streets in April and May 2006.

"I'm here to reaffirm UN support as well as international community support in general for the efforts of the Timor Leste government to ensure peace and stability, social and economic development, and good governance and institution building," Ban Ki-Moon said.

Timor Leste became the former Portuguese colony's formal name after it became independent in 2002. Indonesia, which had invaded in 1975, withdrew after a UN-backed referendum saw the East Timorese vote overwhelmingly for self-rule, and the UN took charge for the transitional period.

Addressing the national parliament, Ban said that he knew East Timor faced "enormous" challenges, such as reforming the security forces and justice system and improving governance, but he was confident the nation could be a success.

"You have many advantages: the energy and potential of your youth, the demonstrated commitment of your citizens to the democratic process, the dedication of your leaders to promote the interests of the people," he said.

The bus, which was plying between Jagraon and Lopoli village in this district, was dragged up to a distance of at least 20 metres by the train.

As a thick blanket of fog had enveloped the area, the driver of the bus carrying around 30 passengers apparently could not gauge the distance of the approaching Ferozepur-Ludhiana Satluj Express, eyewitnesses and police said.

The bus, which was plying between Jagraon and Lopoli village in this district, was dragged up to a distance of at least 20 metres by the train.

Eighteen people were today killed and 14 injured when the Satluj Express tore into a private minibus carrying mostly students and teachers at a manned railway crossing in the district.

The mishap took place at 8:22 am when bus driver Iqbal Singh forcibly got the railway crossing open, Moga Deputy Commissioner Satwant Singh Johar and DIG of Police Ferozepur Range Ishwar Chands said.

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