

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.

Browne just returned from a

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.

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.

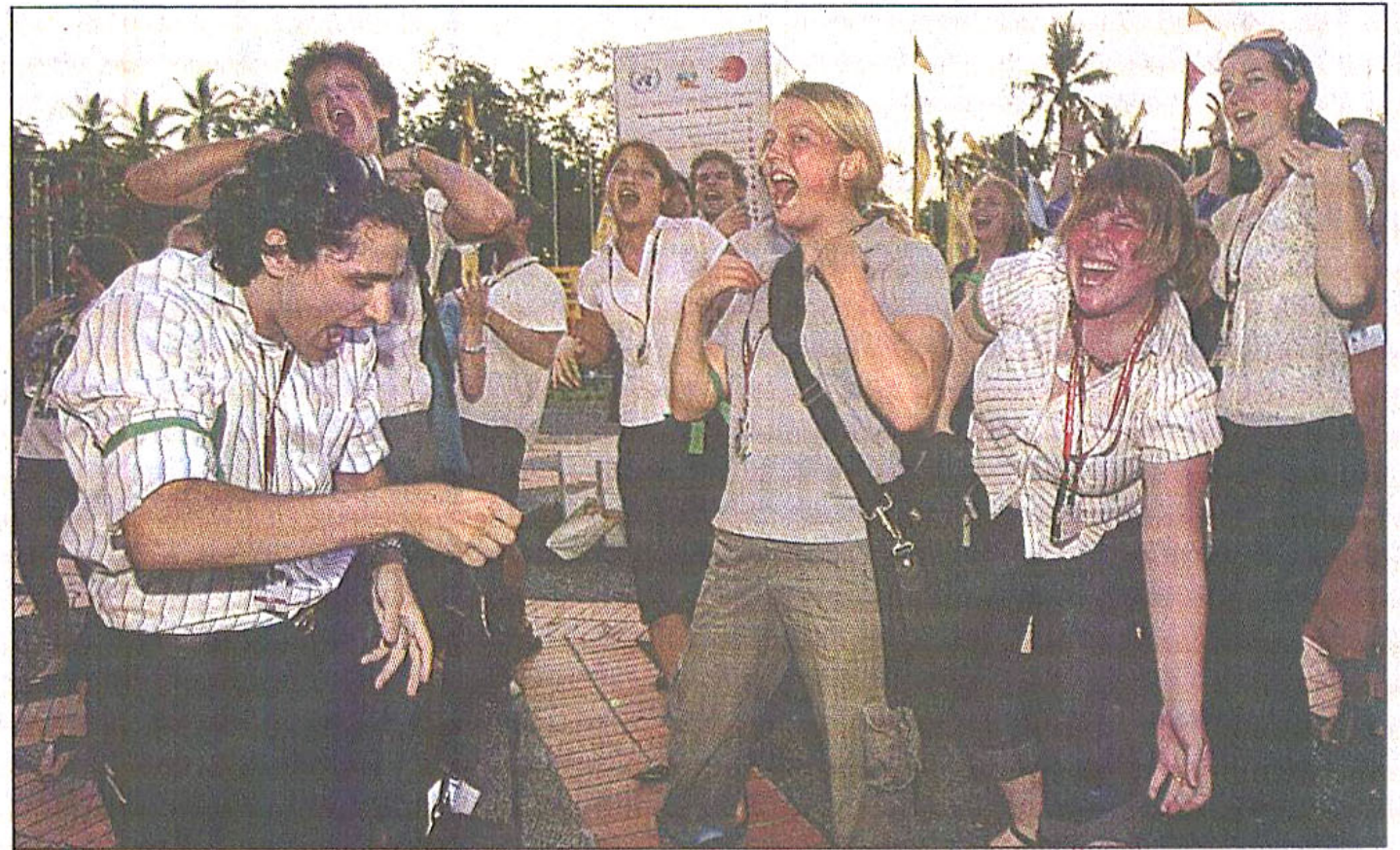


PHOTO: AFP

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 to 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.

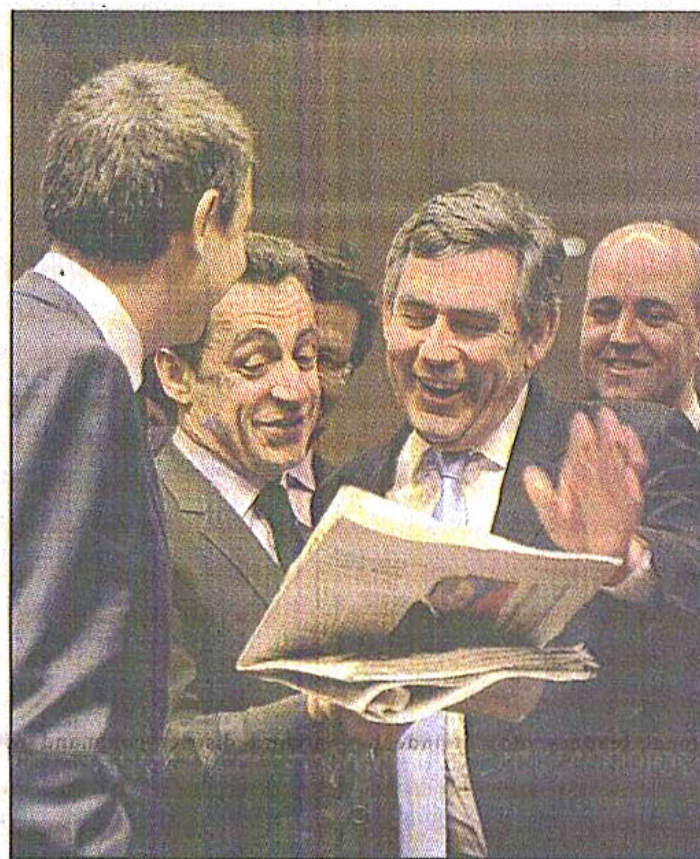


PHOTO: AFP

(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.

UN 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 successful.

"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.

18 killed as bus rams into train in India

PTI, MOGA, Punjab

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 opened. Moga Deputy Commissioner Satwant Singh Johar and DIG of Police Ferozepur Range Ishwar Chand said.

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 Lopo village in this district, was dragged up to a distance of at least 20 metres by the train.

Poor nations demand green technology

AP, Bali

Uganda gets plenty of sun, making it a great spot for solar energy. There's only one problem: In one of the world's most impoverished nations, few people can afford an imported solar panel.

Poorer countries accuse the rich of pressuring them to control emissions of greenhouse gases blamed for global warming, while refusing to provide them with technology needed to do so without hurting their economies.

They have made their demands that rich nations provide cheap access to green know-how a cen-

terpiece of the UN climate change conference in Bali, Indonesia.

"We know the challenges are there, but we cannot respond to the challenges because we don't have the capacity," said Maria Mutagamba, Uganda's environment minister.

Wealthy countries say they must consider demands of private companies for protection of their intellectual property rights, assurances they will have the opportunity to profit from their investments, and better regulation and laws in host nations.

Industrialised countries deny they are unfairly withholding know-how from poorer nations.

Peace talks intensified to settle Nepali crisis

AFP, Kathmandu

Negotiations in Nepal between former Maoist rebels and mainstream parties on resuscitating the Himalayan nation's stalled peace process have intensified, officials said yesterday.

Politicians said they were hopeful that the latest round of talks would lead to a breakthrough in resolving differences over a year-old peace pact, but the Maoists cautioned that key hurdles had yet to be overcome.

A leading member of Nepal's main communist party, Amrit Bohara, told AFP that meetings were in progress between Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Maoist leader Prachanda and other top leaders.

"We are hopeful that there will be some kind of breakthrough," he said.

But a Maoist official said there was still deep disagreement over demands by the former rebels for sweeping electoral reforms as well as the integration of their fighters into the pro-royal Nepal army.

Pakistan insists nuke arsenal secure

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan yesterday again rejected concerns about the security of its nuclear weapons and said the safety of its atomic arsenal was "foolproof".

The security of Pakistan's estimated 50 nuclear warheads has been under global scrutiny since President Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency on November 3 citing Islamist violence and political turmoil.

Advances by Taliban militants in the country's northwestern

regions bordering Afghanistan have fuelled fears abroad that hardliners could threaten Pakistan's nuclear weapons, or even stage a takeover.

The military said Friday the security of the country's nuclear weapons had been underlined at a meeting of the National Command Authority (NCA) led by Musharraf.

"The NCA took note of the hostile campaign in a section of the international media with regard to Pakistan's nuclear assets," it said in a statement.

"While reiterating that the security of Pakistan's nuclear

assets was foolproof, it advised against creating irresponsible alarm," it said.

Pakistan confirmed last month that the United States was helping ensure the security of its atomic weapons and shrugged off reports of a secret programme with Washington as nothing new.

The reports drew heavy criticism within Pakistan over perceived US interference in a vital national security asset.

The military on Tuesday vowed a strong response to any international attempt to seize its atomic arsenal.

Palestinians count on donors' billions for statehood

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinians are relying on world donors to pledge almost six billion dollars in Paris on Monday to bankroll an ambitious three-year development project underwriting their promised state.

While asking the world's richest nations to get out their cheque books, the Palestinian Authority will also emphasise that their plans will come to nothing unless Israel eases restriction on movement in

the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In essence, the Palestinians will use the donors' conference, to be attended by 90 delegations, as a chance to widen international involvement in the peace process with Israel that both sides resumed in the US city of Annapolis.

"The Paris conference is part of the continuity from Annapolis. We are not asking the world's countries to only give us economic support. They should also have a political role," Palestinian presi-

dent Mahmud Abbas told AFP.

"To help the Palestinian economy function and develop, Israel should dismantle the checkpoints between towns and villages in the West Bank. On our side, we will continue to work to strengthen security," he said.

According to the United Nations, Israel operates more than 550 military checkpoints in the occupied West Bank, considerably limiting movement between different Palestinian towns and villages.

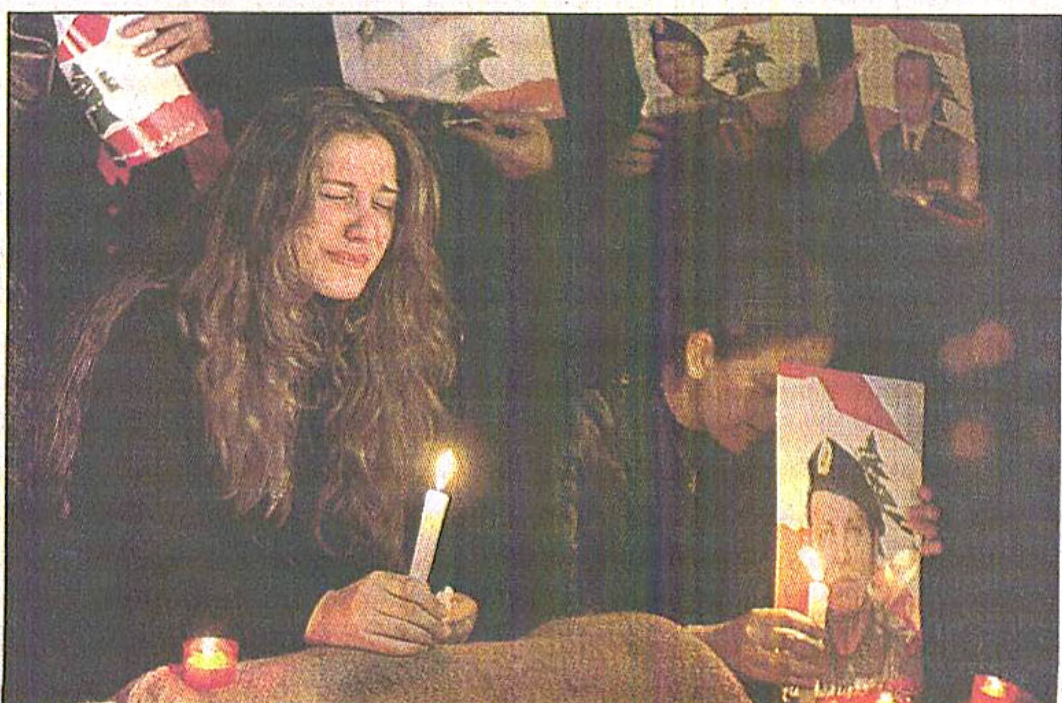


PHOTO: AFP

Relatives and friends of slain Lebanese army Brigadier General and head of army operations Francois El Hajj (picture), hold a candle vigil at the site of his assassination in Baabda, near Beirut on Thursday. Lebanon was preparing plans to ask for United Nations help in its hunt for the still-unknown assassins of the senior army general, whose killing has worsened a festering political crisis.

SAMSUNG

50" Samsung Plasma TV FREE!

SAMSUNG BIG BANG OFFER

@Singer Plus

0% Interest in 90* Days

Buy any Samsung product and win 15 attractive prizes through lucky draw including Plasma TV, Refrigerator, Slim fit TV, Home Theater and many more...

FREE music CD with every purchase

Easy Installation Always

HELLO! SINGER CALL CENTER

0152205160-6

Please visit today at your nearest SINGER Plus store

This offer is valid upto 31 December 2007

SINGER Plus

Modern Life Begins Here