

## West threatens new Iran sanctions

Russia says it's too early for such moves

AFP, Paris

Western powers on Tuesday warned Iran that it risked further sanctions over its latest work to develop its nuclear programme, while Russia said it was too early for such moves and called for more talks.

White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said Iran continued "to be in violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions and with each step it takes it continues to isolate its people and risk further international financial and diplomatic sanctions."

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner issued a similar warning, saying the international community must consider "reinforced" sanctions if Iran does not respond to concerns about its nuclear work.

"I fear that we will have to continue on the road of sanctions if there is no response from the

Iranians," he told reporters.

Their comments came after Iran said on Tuesday that it had started work to install thousands of new centrifuges to enrich uranium at its main nuclear plant.

The West fears Iran could use enriched uranium to make a nuclear weapon, and Tehran's refusal to suspend the process has been punished with three sets of UN Security Council sanctions and US pressure on its banking system.

But while Western powers raised the possibility of further sanctions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said such moves were not "on the agenda."

"The (latest) resolution gives Iran 90 days to respond in detail and that has yet to expire. We have to wait for a response from Iran. I do not think that this response will please everyone," he said.

Russia, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, has close ties to Tehran and is completing work on Iran's

first nuclear power station at Bushehr.

The United States and its European allies have led efforts to pressure Iran into freezing its disputed uranium enrichment work.

Tehran has repeatedly insisted that it has no intention of making concessions over calls for it to freeze enrichment, leading to deadlock in the standoff with the international community.

It insists that its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful and solely aimed at generating energy for a growing population whose supply of fossil fuels will eventually run out.

Despite Iran's latest defiance, White House press secretary Dana Perino said global pressure has had an impact on the Islamic regime.

"We do know that it does have an impact when we speak with one voice in the international community to put sanctions on a country like Iran," she told reporters.

## Gunbattles kill 11 Tigers in volatile north

AP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops killed 11 Tamil separatists in several gunbattles across the volatile northern region, the military said yesterday.

Reports of fighting have increased in recent months amid government promises to capture the rebels' de facto state in the north and crush the group by the end of the year. But diplomats and other observers say the army is facing more resistance than it had expected.

A defence ministry official said the latest fighting took place Tuesday along the front lines that separate government-controlled territory and rebel territory in the north. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Army troops killed six guerrillas in the Vavuniya district, just south of rebel-held territory, and in the nearby Mannar district, another five rebels died, the official said. He said the clashes wounded four soldiers.

Another two battles wounded 16 rebels and one soldier, he said. Rebel spokesman Rasiah Ilangthirayan could not immediately be reached for comment.

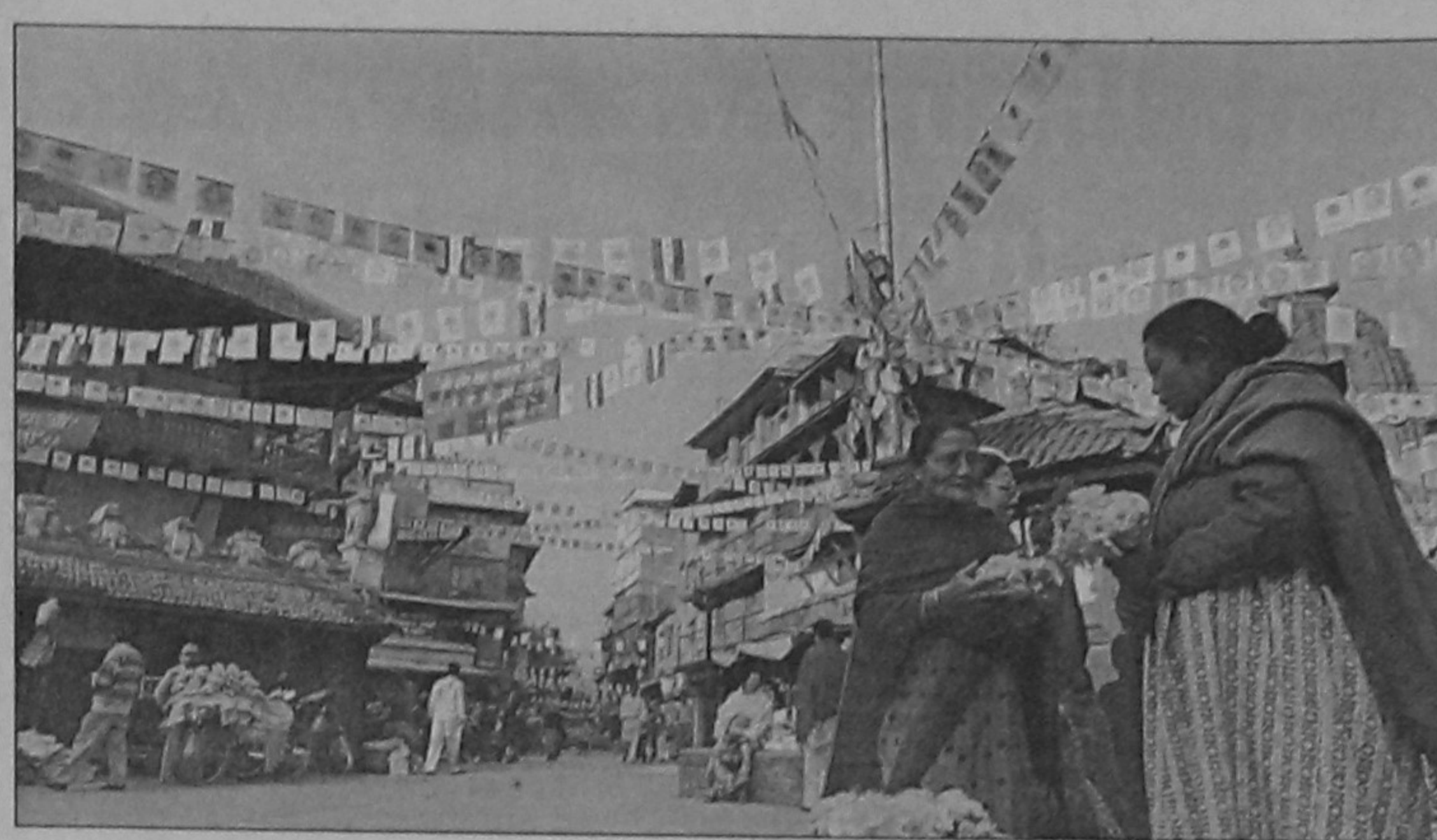
## Gas leakage at Pak nuke facility leaves 2 dead

THE DAWN, Islamabad

A gas leakage at a nuclear facility in Khushab on Tuesday left two workers dead before the situation was brought under control.

An unsigned statement apparently issued by or on behalf of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) said that at 2.30pm on Tuesday an incident of hydrogen sulphide gas leakage occurred when the Khushab heavy water plant was under annual maintenance and was in a shut-down status.

The Khushab Nuclear Complex, some 250km from Islamabad, used to produce plutonium, a preferred material for building light and sophisticated nuclear weapons. It comprises two units: heavy water production plant and weapon grade plutonium production plant. The incident occurred at the heavy water plant.



A Nepalese woman buys flowers from vendor on a street festooned with electoral flags and banners at Basantapur in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal has been hit by fresh killings on the eve of a tense and uncertain vote on the country's future following a peace deal with Maoist rebels.

## Nepal's king breaks silence

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's embattled monarch appealed for public sympathy Wednesday, the eve of a landmark election expected to end his stint as a Himalayan "god-king."

King Gyanendra broke his silence over the polls to tell the nation he was supporting Thursday's elections -- comments seen by observers as a last-ditch attempt to reverse Nepal's march towards becoming a republic.

"It has always been our desire to ensure that under no circumstance

are the nation's existence, independence and integrity compromised," said Gyanendra, the big loser of a peace deal with Maoist rebels that ended a decade of civil war.

"We call upon all adult citizens to exercise their democratic right in a free and fair environment," he said in a rare statement.

King Gyanendra -- viewed by his supporters as a Hindu god -- looks likely to be the last in his 240-year-old line after an unsuccessful period of direct rule ended in April 2006 when rebel Maoists and main-

stream political parties united to lead nationwide protests against him.

Since the enforced climbdown, the monarch has been stripped of most of his powers and the interim government agreed last December that the monarchy would be formally ended at the first meeting of the body to be elected Thursday.

Bhasker Gautam, a political analyst and author, said that the king's message was "an attempt to give the impression that he is in favour of democracy."

## India, Pakistan to review peace process next month

AFP, Islamabad

Nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan will next month review the fourth round of a slow-moving peace process launched in 2004, the Pakistani foreign ministry said yesterday.

The meeting in Islamabad will be the first major talks between the South Asian neighbours since Pakistan's new government came to power after defeating allies of President Pervez Musharraf in February elections.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, two of them over the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir, but they launched a wide-ranging peace dialogue four years ago.

"The Foreign Secretary level review of the Fourth Round of Pakistan-India Composite Dialogue will be held on 20 May 2008 in Islamabad," the ministry said in a statement.

The fourth round of the talks began in March 2007. The Indian and Pakistani foreign ministers will conduct a final review of the progress of that round on May 21, the ministry statements said.

In New Delhi, an Indian foreign ministry statement confirmed that "the External Affairs Minister will be visiting Islamabad on May 21 to hold a review meeting of the Composite Dialogue," but gave no further details.



A handout picture shows Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visits Natanz uranium enrichment facilities some 300km south of the capital Tehran Tuesday. Ahmadinejad announced Tuesday that Iran is starting work to install 6,000 new uranium-enriching centrifuges at its nuclear plant in Natanz.



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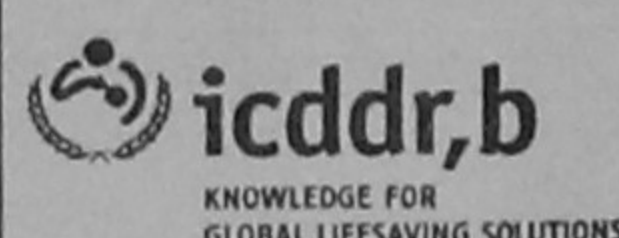
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