

Malaysia to deport illegal migrants from Borneo

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia said yesterday it will launch a massive operation to deport tens of thousands of Filipino and Indonesian illegal migrants from Borneo island where they are blamed for drugs and crime.

"We are ready to launch a large-scale operation to flush out all illegal immigrants from the state of Sabah and deport them," deputy prime minister Najib Razak told reporters.

Najib said authorities will also bolster security along Malaysia's land and sea borders with the Philippines and Indonesia to prevent further illegal crossings.

The root cause is because the borders are very porous and traditionally the people there do not recognise the borders. They move in and out due to economic opportunities in Sabah," he said.

Lanka says its troops capture land from Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's defence ministry said yesterday that its forces have made some territorial progress in fighting with the Tamil Tigers that it said killed at least 10 guerrillas.

Security forces took a three square kilometre (1.15 square miles) area in the district of Mannar on Tuesday, the ministry said, adding that five soldiers were wounded in the fighting.

"So far 10 terrorists have been killed in these confrontations," the ministry said. "Battles continue as army troops advance further in capturing uncleared territory. Five soldiers are also reported wounded in action."

There was no immediate word from the Tigers, and the government prevents independent reporting from frontline areas in the north.

In other violence, at least five Tiger rebels were killed and two soldiers were wounded in the adjoining district of Vavuniya, on Tuesday, the ministry said.

Indian coalition still deadlocked over nuclear deal

AFP, New Delhi

Crisis talks between India's ruling Congress party and its left-wing allies ended yesterday without them resolving a dispute over a nuclear energy deal with the United States, officials said.

The parties, however, agreed to meet "in due course" for more negotiations over the pact with Washington, a divisive accord that has threatened to bring down the government and send India into early elections.

Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee told reporters the government coalition partners discussed "all aspects" of the deal, which would open India to long-denied Western nuclear energy technology.

Mukherjee, who led the 90-minute meeting between his Congress party and its anti-

American communist partners, who are fiercely opposed to the deal, said the two sides will hold further talks.

"The next meeting of the committee to be convened in due course will finalise its findings," he told reporters, declining to reply to questions.

India, a declared nuclear weapons power that refuses to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has been barred from buying atomic energy technology.

But the pact with the United States bypasses that by allowing India to shop for such hardware and fuel if India can separate its civil and military nuclear programmes and allow some United Nations inspections.

India must work out a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency and get a waiver from the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group.

The agreement then would return to the US Congress for ratification. New Delhi is aiming to get the deal there before US President George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009.

PTI adds: The UPA government got support from unexpected quarters when the Shiv Sena yesterday hit out at the left parties for its opposition to the Indo-US deal and said barring the left everybody knows that it would benefit India.

"There is no doubt that the Indo-US deal will be in the interest of India. This is a fact which everyone knows except the left parties," an editorial in the party mouthpiece 'Saamana' said.

Dubbing the leftists as "red monkeys," 'Saamana' said they are taking a hardline stand against the Indo-US deal only to keep China in good humour even at the cost of India's development.



Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa (L) poses with Spanish actress Aitana Sanchez Gijon (R) during a photocall to present his work "The thousand and one nights" adapted to the theatre yesterday in Madrid.

Clinton offers to help Obama win White House

AP, Washington

Former President Bill Clinton on Tuesday offered to help Barack Obama win the White House, although what work he'll do for his wife's former rival remained uncertain.

The Obama campaign is still smarting over some of Bill Clinton's criticism in the primary race, while the last Democratic president remains a popular political draw. But before the two can work together, they have to speak.

Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton have taken steps to join efforts in the last three weeks - she met with him privately, endorsed his campaign and will campaign with him Friday. But the former Democratic president and the man running to be the next one haven't talked since the campaign ended.

Obama said the only reason they haven't spoken is because Bill Clinton is traveling overseas. He praised the former president and said he's "looking forward to setting up a long conversation."

"He's as smart as they come. He's a great strategist. We're going to want him campaigning for me," Obama said Tuesday.

UK to sign nuclear deal with Jordan

AFP, Amman

Britain will sign a nuclear deal this week with energy-poor Jordan, which is struggling to find alternate resources to generate electricity and desalinate water, the British embassy said yesterday.

Chairman of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Lady Barbara Thomas Judge, will arrive Saturday in Amman on a two-day visit to sign a "nuclear cooperation" agreement with her counterpart Khaled Toukan.

Judge and Toukan "will discuss how best Jordan could benefit from the United Kingdom's wide experience in the field of nuclear energy," the embassy said in a statement.

It did not give details of the agreement but said Judge would also meet with Jordanian Prime Minister Nader Dahabi.

Over 30,000 Myanmar refugees resettled

AP, Bangkok

More than 30,000 Myanmar refugees living in camps in Thailand have been sent to third countries in what the United Nations said yesterday had become the world's largest refugee resettlement operation.

Most of the refugees are Karen ethnic minority people who had been sheltered in nine refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said 30,144 refugees have left Thailand to start new lives abroad since the resettlement operation began in January 2005. A UNHCR statement described it as the world's largest refugee resettlement operation.

But the camps remain home to 123,500 refugees and asylum-seekers.

"Some of the refugees have been here for nearly two decades. Some were born in refugee camps, grew up there and are now raising their own families in refugee camps," UNHCR regional representative Raymond Hall said Wednesday. "For them resettlement offers a way out of the camps and the opportunity for a fresh start in life."

The United Nations and human rights groups say that over the years the Myanmar military has burned villages, killed civilians and committed other atrocities against the Karen, who have long fought for autonomy from the central government.

Some activists have charged that Myanmar's ruling junta is waging a genocidal campaign against the Karen and other rebellious ethnic groups.

Hall said prospects for the refugees to return to Myanmar or settle permanently in Thailand were dim.

Nearly 21,500 of the resettled refugees have gone to the United States, while Australia has received 3,400 and Canada 2,600.

Other resettlement countries are Britain, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.

Myanmar refugees are now leaving Thailand for resettlement at an average rate of more than 300 a week, the UNHCR said.

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