

# Georgia annuls Russian peacekeeping accords

Thousands fleeing S Ossetia buffer zone: UNHCR

AFP, Tbilisi/Geneva

Georgia yesterday said it was terminating agreements under which Russian peacekeepers were allowed to operate in its breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

"The prime minister of Georgia, Lado Gurgidze, has signed a decree that will terminate the so-called peacekeeping operations on the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," the government said in a statement.

"The decree... also requires the immediate withdrawal of Russian Federation armed forces from the entire territory of Georgia."

Georgia allowed Russian peacekeepers to operate in Abkhazia under the 1994 Moscow agreement and in South Ossetia under the 1992 Dagomys Agreement.

"Georgia thus will demand the immediate withdrawal of the peacekeepers from both the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and their replacement with neutral, international peacekeepers," the statement said.

Russia sent tanks and troops into Georgian territory in response to a Georgian offensive on August 7 to retake South Ossetia.

Moscow withdrew the bulk of its forces from Georgia on Friday under a French-brokered ceasefire agreement, but thousands of Russian troops remain deployed in two rebel regions and in a "buffer zone" around them.

Russia describes the remaining troops as peacekeepers, but Georgia says they are an occupying force.

Russia's recognition this week of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states drew condemnation from Georgia and many Western countries.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency said Friday that thousands of people have fled their villages in the buffer zone between the Georgian town of Gori and South Ossetia amid reports of rampaging militias.

Some 2,300 people have registered as internally displaced in the town of Gori and 800 of them are staying in a tent camp erected earlier in the week, UN High Commissioner for Refugees spokeswoman Helene Caux told journalists.

"The newly displaced in Gori all have stories of intimidation, including beatings by the militia in buffer zone villages," she said. "People talked about militias entering the villages, shooting in the air, harassing the inhabitants and looting their property," she added.

Many of the new arrivals had in fact only recently returned to their villages after fleeing the fighting that erupted between Georgian and South Ossetian forces earlier this month, which was followed by Russian military intervention.

Caux said that some of these people have now returned to Gori "because they felt unsafe when they arrived back in their villages: they found their houses damaged and looted, their cattle slaughtered."

She added that a UNHCR assessment mission to villages north of Gori on August 27 "confirmed that many returnees they met were traumatised and scared."

"Some people had returned to their villages even though basic services such as water supply, medical care and food supplies are not available anymore."

## Karadzic refuses to enter pleas to charges

AP, The Hague

Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic has refused to enter pleas to charges including genocide and crimes against humanity.

Karadzic faces a total of 11 charges at the UN's Yugoslav war crimes tribunal.

The tribunal judge entered not guilty pleas on Karadzic's behalf Friday. Karadzic said he would challenge the court's jurisdiction at a Sept. 17 hearing.

Prosecutors accuse Karadzic of masterminding a savage campaign of ethnic cleansing to drive Muslims and Croats out of territory claimed by a breakaway Bosnian Serb ministe.

He was arrested late last month after 13 years on the run.

Karadzic wants to wait until prosecutors file a new indictment before entering a plea, lawyer Goran Petronijevic told media in Belgrade.

However, another member of Karadzic's team of legal advisers, Svetozar Vujacic, told Vecernje Novosti, a Serbian daily newspaper, that "there is also a possibility that Karadzic will plead not guilty to all 11 counts, as well as say that he is proud of what he did" during Bosnia's war.

## US kills 12 more Taliban

AFP, Kabul

The US-led coalition in Afghanistan said yesterday its troops had killed almost a dozen militants after coming under attack while operating near the border with Pakistan.

Two people were detained during the operation in the eastern province of Paktika on Thursday, the coalition said in a statement.

Troops were in Barmal, a district on the border, looking for militants involved in moving foreign fighters between the two countries when they were fired upon, it said.

"Militants engaged coalition forces during their search of the compounds. The forces responded with small-arms fire, killing the militants," it said.

"Almost a dozen militants were killed and two were detained."

The coalition announced Thursday that it had killed more than 100 Taliban militants in three days of clashes in the southern province of Helmand.

Fighting between insurgents and troops has intensified this summer with several fierce battles reported across the country, many resulting in

high death tolls.

However a clash in the western province of Herat a week ago killed more than 90 civilians, most of them children, according to investigations by delegations from the Afghan government and the United Nations.

The US military disputes the number.

There are nearly 70,000 international soldiers in Afghanistan, helping the government to root out extremists including those from the hardline Taliban movement that was in government between 1996 and 2001.

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- ◆ Should have sound computer proficiency, excellent interpersonal skill and good command over written & spoken English

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- ◆ Ready to work under stress & pressure,
- ◆ Age should be around 30 years.

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#### Requirements:

- ◆ B.Sc.-in-Architecture / Diploma-in-Architecture from any of the recognized universities or institutions,
- ◆ Minimum 1-2 years hands on experience in real estate sector for B.Sc. Engineers & 5-7 years for Diploma Engineers,
- ◆ Age should be around 30 years.

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#### Requirements:

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- ◆ Age should be around 30 years.

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- ◆ Age should be around 30 years.

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Georgians burn a former Soviet flag as they demonstrate in front of the Russian peacekeepers' base near the town of Chorchukh yesterday. About 1,000 Georgians protested Friday outside a Russian army encampment in western Georgia, calling on soldiers to leave the country.

## Clintons share limelight with Obama at DNC

AP, Denver

Rarely in the history of American political conventions has the losing side received so much time and attention as this week in Denver.

Barack Obama has been forced, by the clout Hillary Rodham Clinton showed in their primary battle and his need for her voters in his race against Republican John McCain, to allow the gathering of Democrats to look a lot like the Clinton Convention.

The first day, Monday, was dominated by daylong dealmaking between the Clinton and Obama camps over ground rules for the nominating roll call.

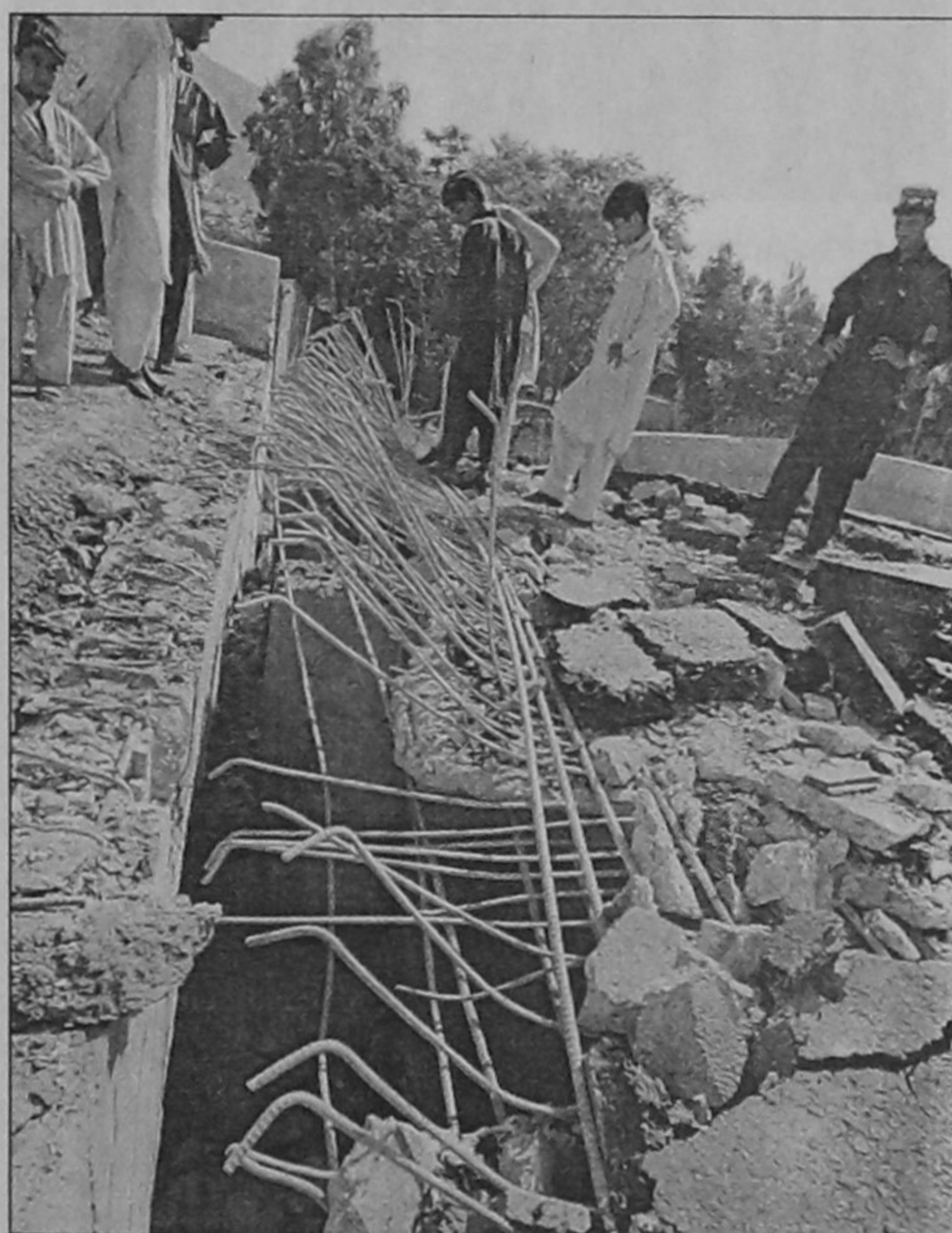
The second day's highlight was Clinton's address. Former Virginia Gov. Mark Warner, designated the official convention keynote speaker, was just a footnote in television and newspaper reports. By contrast, among the most replayed shots of the night was of a still-fuming Bill Clinton, tightlipped and teary, watching his wife from a Pepsi Centre skybox.

Then came Wednesday, day three of four, when the former president himself spoke. He garnered as much or more attention than what was supposed to be the evening's marquee event, the speech from vice presidential nominee Joe Biden.

As the evening's final speaker, Biden held the so-called prime-time slot. Yet, in Eastern and Central time zones, Biden wound up on TV after many folk's bedtimes and it was Bill Clinton people saw, being cheered so roundly that he had to plead "Please stop... Please sit" to be heard.

"I love this," the former president said as delegates cheered and cheered for him through a speech that, characteristically, went on longer than it was meant to.

Another surprisingly Clinton-focused event was Wednesday's roll call vote. It climaxed with Obama's acclamation as the Democratic candidate for president but only after Clinton amassed hundreds of still-diehard delegates and requested the process be shut down to make the night officially Obama's.



Tribesmen look at a damaged bridge on the main Indus Highway near a road tunnel in the lawless town of Darra Adam Khel in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) yesterday. A suicide bomber targeting government troops blew up his explosives-laden car in northwestern Pakistan, killing two people and wounding more than 30, officials said.

## Israel willing to free 450 Palestinians in swap

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is willing to release 450 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a soldier held by militants in the Gaza Strip, a newspaper reported yesterday.

Olmert has asked the five ministers dealing with the proposed swap with Hamas to draw up the list which would increase from about 80 the number of prisoners Israel is willing to release in exchange for Gilad Shalit, the Haaretz newspaper said.

The Israeli corporal, who turned 22 on Wednesday, was captured in a deadly cross-border raid from Gaza in June 2006 and is believed to be held by Hamas, the Islamist movement which rules the tiny Palestinian territory.

Olmert's spokesman Mark Regav would not confirm or deny the report. "Giving such information does not facilitate his release," he said.

Haaretz said the ministers are to meet on Sunday to discuss ways of easing the criteria that determines which prisoners can be released.

Israel and Hamas have been holding indirect negotiations through Egyptian mediators on a deal to exchange Shalit for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Israel blacklists Hamas a terrorist organisation, but the two sides agreed on June 19 to a truce in Gaza, also through Egyptian mediation.

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, violently seized power in Gaza in June 2007, routing forces loyal to secular Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas who now only holds sway in the West Bank.

On Monday, Israel freed 198 Palestinian prisoners in a gesture to Abbas as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in the region to spur US-backed peace talks. Most of those prisoners were from Abbas's Fatah party and none from Hamas.

## Thai PM refuses to rule out emergency rule

Police fire tear gas as protests escalate

AFP, Bangkok

Embattled Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej yesterday refused to rule out invoking emergency rule as protests spread from his government office to the city's police headquarters.

Vowing not to give in to thousands of anti-government demonstrators calling for his resignation, Samak said he would "wait and see" what Saturday brings.

"I will not quit. At this moment, I will not declare emergency rule, I will wait and see tomorrow," he told reporters.

"I will not let the situation go on like this. I will deal with it," he added, but said he would postpone any further decision until after a royal function planned for Saturday.

"It's in my hands now but I choose not to (invoke emergency rule) if I have to cancel tomorrow's function," he said.

Samak said he remained confident he could restore law and order to the country, despite protests spreading Friday afternoon from Bangkok to the regions, forcing three airports to close.

Speaking directly to protesters

from the People's Alliance for Democracy, Samak asked angrily: "Who do you want as your next leader? Do you think that somebody will reward you or honour you?"

Earlier anti-government protests forced Thai authorities to close three airports on Friday, stranding travellers at popular tourist destinations in the south of the country.

Protesters invaded the runways at tourist-packed Phuket International Airport in solidarity with demonstrators currently besieging Bangkok's government compound, and rallies also hit Hat Yai and Krabi airports.

The blockade by up to 5,000 people on the southern resort island of Phuket prevented passengers from going in or out, said Airports of Thailand spokeswoman Monrudee Ketphand.

Thai police on Friday fired tear gas and scuffled with protesters who are demanding the premier step down, as escalating turmoil in the kingdom heaped pressure on the seven-month-old government.

Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej again insisted he was not going to give in to the protesters' demands, and vowed to keep his promise not to use violence to

end the unprecedented challenge to his administration.

Up to 25,000 protesters have barricaded themselves in the main government complex in the capital, accusing Samak of being a figurehead for ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra and insisting he must step down.

As protests spread across the country, shutting airports in the southern tourist hotspots and provoking minor clashes on the streets of Bangkok, Samak said he was still weighing up whether to invoke emergency law.

"I will not quit. At this moment, I will not declare emergency rule, I will wait and see tomorrow," he told reporters.

Skirmishes broke out throughout the day as police used shields and batons to deal with angry mobs, causing slight injuries to a handful of protesters.

A crowd of about 2,000 protesters left the besieged Government House compound and marched to the nearby police headquarters on Friday evening to demand the officers involved in the clashes be handed over, prompting police to fire tear gas, witnesses at the scene said.



Anti-government protesters battle with Thai riot policemen during a demonstration at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Defiant Thai protesters scuffled with police as tensions flared on day four of the Bangkok government compound siege, but the premier vowed that his peaceful resolve would not crack.