

# Britain leads calls to punish Russia

## EU leaders hold emergency summit

AFP, Brussels

European leaders met yesterday seeking a way to condemn Russia's conflict against Georgia as hundreds of thousands of people staged an anti-Russian rally in the Georgian capital.

EU heads of state started an emergency summit on the Georgia crisis with divisions between Eastern European nations and Britain which want a tough line against Moscow, while Germany and France lead a group opposed to any move which provokes the Kremlin.

Britain urged the suspension of negotiations on a successor to the current accord that set out EU-Russia relations. Talks on a new agreement are due this month.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown wrote on the eve of the summit that there should be a "root

and branch" review of EU relations with Moscow.

"It's vital we send a strong and united EU message today. We must be clear in our support for Georgia's territorial integrity and in our condemnation of Russia's action," his spokesman said Monday.

Poland said the 27-nation bloc should consider calling off an EU-Russia summit in October.

But German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the EU must "speak clearly" over the crisis but insisted that the bloc "should not cut off dialogue" with Russia over the five-day war.

The Kremlin ordered tanks and troops into Georgia last month to push back a Georgian offensive on August 7 to retake the South Ossetia, a separatist region that broke away from Tbilisi in the early 1990s with Moscow's backing.

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev upped the stakes last week by recognising the independence of South Ossetia and a second separatist region Abkhazia, drawing fierce criticism from the West.

Russian troops still hold positions in western Georgia after the five-day conflict, serving in what Moscow describes as a peacekeeping mission. Tbilisi calls them an occupation force.

In Tbilisi, Georgians staged what officials called the biggest protest in the country's history against the Russian action.

"Georgia is united as never before, there are one million people on the streets," President Mikheil Saakashvili told a huge crowd on Freedom Square in central Tbilisi that was awash with the red crosses of the national flag.

Simultaneous protests took place in several other towns against Russia's partial occupation of

Georgia and the decision by Moscow to recognise the two separatist provinces.

Huge posters depicting graphic images of dead and injured from last month's fighting against Russia hung from buildings along the protest route.

Similar demonstrations were planned in European cities including Brussels, London and Vienna.

Monday's summit was called by French President Nicolas Sarkozy so that the European Union could formulate a "clear and united message" over the conflict.

Talk of slapping sanctions on Russia has waned amid threats from Moscow of retaliatory measures.

EU leaders are expected to concentrate on aid for Georgia, ways to bolster its economy and easing visa restrictions for Georgians.



European Union Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana speaks to journalists after a meeting with Georgia's Prime minister Lado Gurgelidze ahead of an emergency summit of European Union leaders on the crisis in Georgia at the headquarters of the European Council in Brussels yesterday.

## Lawyer says Suu Kyi is thin but well

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has lost some weight but is feeling well, her lawyer said yesterday after a 30-minute meeting with her.

Kyi Win said he went to the Nobel peace laureate's lakeside Yangon home, where she has been confined for most of the last 19 years, to show her a draft of a legal appeal against her ongoing detention.

Exiled dissidents have said they believed that the 63-year-old could be staging a hunger strike, but Kyi Win declined to comment on the reports.

Her National League for Democracy (NLD) party said last week that she had not collected her food supplies for the previous two weeks, but said the circumstances were unclear and downplayed speculation of a hunger strike.

"She says she is well, but she has lost some weight," Kyi Win told reporters. "She told me, 'I am a little tired and I need to rest.'"

He said he left her a draft of the appeal for her to read over, saying their meeting was too short for him to discuss it with her in detail.



Tina Chrestensen (R), Kevin Hubbard and Jermaine Jackson (L) wait for Hurricane Gustav to arrive from their Burbon Street apartment on Sunday in New Orleans, Louisiana. According to the National Hurricane Centre, Gustav downgraded to Category 3 with top winds near 125 mph early Sunday.

# Hurricane Gustav hits US coast

## Two million people flee homes in biggest evacuation in US history

AFP, New Orleans

Torrential rain and intense winds blasted Louisiana as Hurricane Gustav neared New Orleans and the Gulf Coast yesterday after forcing nearly two million people to flee.

New Orleans was locked down and streets completely empty as emergency workers who remained behind hunkered in safe buildings on high ground.

Power went out for many areas of coastal Louisiana, according to media reports, with rains that witnesses described as "horizontal". With landfall imminent, police and national guard deployed to New Orleans to prevent looting also pulled back off the streets for safety.

At 8:00 am (1300 GMT) the eye of the Category Two storm was just southwest of Grand Isle, Louisiana and 80 miles (150 kilometers) south-southwest of New Orleans, pummeling the marshy Mississippi river delta coastline with winds of 110 miles (175 kilometers) per hour.

Despite a slight weakening of Gustav as it neared the coast, forecasters warned of an "extremely dangerous" surge of up to 4.2 meters (14 feet), not as high as earlier predicted but still enough to worry locals after Hurricane Katrina burst New Orleans' levees in 2005 and flooded the city for days.

Fearing a repeat of the Katrina disaster, thousands of troops, emergency workers and National Guard troops were positioned in

New Orleans after what is being called the biggest evacuation in US history.

Three critically ill people were reported to have died as they were being moved from the danger zone.

Oil production in the crucial US oil-and-gas region was shut down, the Republican party suspended the start of its presidential election convention and President George W. Bush headed for Texas to monitor emergency preparations for Gustav, which has killed more than 80 people in Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica.

Louisiana officials said there were about 750 National Guard troops in New Orleans if a new rescue operation was needed. Mayor Ray Nagin on Sunday ordered a curfew and vowed to throw looters into prison.

# Iraq takes over Anbar from US forces

AFP, Ramadi

Iraqi forces yesterday took over control of Anbar, once the most explosive battlefield in Iraq, from the US military, symbolising the growing security gains in the war-torn country.

The ceremony to transfer Anbar to local forces took place at the provincial governorate building in Ramadi, the provincial capital, marking the handover of the 11th of Iraq's 18 provinces.

Anbar is the first Sunni province to be returned to Baghdad's Shia-led government.

"I would like to announce that the (Anbar) transfer from the US to Iraqi forces is done," said Muwaffaq al-Rubaie, Iraq's national security advisor at the handover ceremony.

Police said tens of thousands of Iraqi and US troops were on alert across the vast desert province in western Iraq, home to some two million people.

The US military said the transfer of security was an "important

milestone... but does not necessarily mean that the security situation is stable or better."

"It means the government and the provincial authorities are ready to take the responsibility for handling it."

After the transfer, US forces will withdraw from their bases and will take part in military operations only if requested by the provincial governor.

Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin, the number two commander of US forces in Iraq, said the transfer "demonstrates the capability of the Iraqi forces."

"Together with the Iraqi forces, I am sure we will keep Al-Qaeda and all the insurgents from returning to Anbar province," he said during the handover, adding a warning that the jihadists were still not defeated.

Sunni Arabs in Anbar were the first to turn against US forces after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime by US-led invasion forces in 2003, mounting a raging insurgency that tore through the world's most sophisticated military.

# Palestinians reject partial ME peace accord

AP, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected Israel's idea of an interim peace agreement at a Sunday summit, a Palestinian negotiator said, insisting on an all-or-nothing approach that virtually ruled out an accord by a January target date.

The latest meeting between Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was their shortest, lasting less than an hour. Neither side pointed to progress.

Olmert entered the meeting in a weakened position after his decision to submit his resignation this month when his party picks a new leader. Just two days before Abbas arrived for talks at Olmert's residence Sunday, Israeli police passed through the same entrance to interrogate Olmert for the seventh time in a series of corruption cases.

Abbas, too, is not in a strong political position, having lost control of Gaza to Islamic Hamas militants last year.

Because of Israel's complicated political system, Olmert could still find himself in office next year, even if he resigns this month as promised. His aides said Sunday he

hoped the Palestinians would sign a document outlining any agreements reached with Israel before he leaves office.

But Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Abbas flatly rejected that at the brief summit on Sunday.

"We want an agreement to end the (Israeli) occupation and establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," Erekat told The Associated Press. "President Abbas told Olmert that we will not be part of an interim or shelf agreement," he said. "Either we agree on all issues, or no agreement at all."

The Israelis had a more upbeat take on the Sunday summit.

Olmert spokesman Mark Regev said "significant progress had been made in the talks," but "there are still considerable gaps between the two sides." He would not elaborate.

With cameras rolling as the two stood in front of their flags, Olmert rebuked Abbas for meeting with released prisoner Samir Kantar during a recent trip to Lebanon. Israel traded Kantar and other prisoners for the bodies of two of its soldiers. Kantar was convicted of killing three people in a grisly attack in northern Israel in 1979.

Olmert told Abbas he was "upset" by the meeting with Kantar, "a murderer," Olmert said. "You are a man of peace. You should meet people of peace." Abbas' response was not audible.

At a US-sponsored peace conference last November, Olmert and Abbas pledged efforts toward a peace treaty by the time President Bush leaves office in January 2009.

But frequent summit meetings and negotiating sessions since then have made little apparent progress on the core issues that have stymied peace efforts for decades including borders, Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees.

Erekat refused to confirm the private views of officials on both sides that some headway has been made on setting borders between Israel and a Palestinian state.

Officials in Olmert's office said Israel has proposed giving the Palestinians all of Gaza, 93 percent of the West Bank along with Israeli land equivalent to 5.5 percent of the West Bank, as well as a land corridor through Israel to link the two separate territories. The Palestinians have said that offer is unacceptable.

# US concerned over Zardari's 'mental health'

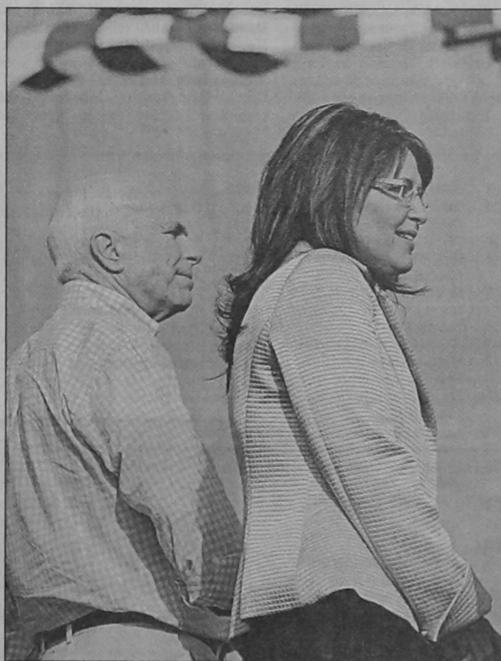
PTI, New York

Several US officials including a senior Republican senator have expressed concern over reports that Pakistan People's Party chief Asif Ali Zardari, a strong contender for presidency, was diagnosed with mental problems as late as last year, a media report said yesterday.

Though Zardari's spokespersons contend that he had been cured, the American officials were wary of Zardari having a partial control over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal if elected to the post during the September six presidential poll, Newsweek reported.

"Typically (the US) would not want that kind of person involved in a nuclear chain of command," said Pete Hoekstra, ranking Republican on the US House Intelligence Committee. Doctors hired by Zardari had reportedly diagnosed him with mental problems including dementia, depression and post traumatic stress disorder.

Lawyers for Zardari, the report noted, argued in London's high court he was too ill to testify in corruption-related cases, and they submitted recent mental-health evaluations as evidence.



Republican presidential candidate John McCain (L) and his running mate Alaska Governor Sarah Palin (R) attend a campaign rally in O'Fallon, Missouri on Sunday.

# Fate of New Orleans mutes Republican convention

AFP, St Paul

The Republican Party severely curtailed the start yesterday of its convention to nominate John McCain for president as Hurricane Gustav bore down on the United States.

Stalked by memories of the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, McCain shelved most of the convention's opening day. President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney cancelled plans to attend to concentrate on the deadly storm.

Party leaders scurried to change their plans amid fears of being seen to stage a political celebration while a killer storm pummels the Louisiana coast.

"The challenges are grave and we have to, as you know, put our country first," said Senator McCain at a rally in O'Fallon, Missouri, late Sunday.

"We will put aside our political hats and put on our American hats and we will do everything America needs to do and America must do because the nature of our nation is to help any of us."

McCain's Democratic rival Senator Barack Obama said he would make his campaign's mam-

moth donor list available to channel money and volunteers towards relief efforts.

"We can activate an email list of a couple million people who want to give back," Obama told reporters after attending church in Lima, Ohio.

"I think we can get tons of volunteers to travel down there if it becomes necessary," said Obama, who was formally installed as the Democratic nominee at a triumphant convention last week.

The Republican convention will open for two-and-a-half hours on Monday simply to put in place the start of the legal process needed to nominate a presidential and vice presidential candidate, officials said.

"We will refrain from any political rhetoric which would be traditional in an opening session," McCain's campaign manager Rick Davis said.

"Right now we have a horrible storm bearing down on the Gulf, people should be more concerned about that than a political campaign and that is the way we are going to let the chips fall."

It was unclear whether the four-day convention would resume as planned on Tuesday.



A handout image obtained on Monday from Gabrielle Shaw Communications shows British explorer and adventurer Lewis Gordon Pugh (R). British explorer and adventurer Lewis Gordon Pugh has begun a kayak expedition to the North Pole aimed at drawing attention to the dramatic impact of melting polar ice in the Arctic, his blog said Sunday.

# Tamils live in fear

AP, Colombo

People in the poor, mainly Tamil neighbourhood in Colombo described it as a harrowing day.

It was 5 am on a Wednesday when police started knocking on doors. They searched hundreds of homes, then forced thousands of men, women and children to get dressed and walk through the narrow streets lined with soldiers to a nearby sports field. Over the next six hours, authorities questioned, photographed and videotaped the neighbourhood's inhabitants.

Still, few of those rounded up expressed surprise at the intrusion.

Members of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil community say police raids, harassment, arbitrary detentions and even abductions have become routine in recent years as violence has escalated in the 25-year civil war between the government, dominated by the

Sinhalese majority, and the Tamil Tiger militia fighting for a separate state in the island's north and east.

"They think every Tamil-speaking person is a terrorist. They want to control us," said Sanjeevi Ramiah, 47, one of the few residents of the Kimbulla Ela neighbourhood willing to speak publicly about the July 2 raid.

While Tamils and human rights advocates complain about police excesses, most agree this Indian Ocean island nation is faced with a serious threat from the rebels.

The Tigers have been blamed for deadly attacks over the past year that have spread fear across the capital, Colombo, in the south. A June bombing on a crowded suburban bus killed 21 people, two days after a blast targeting the railroad in the city narrowly missed a passenger train.

"No one suggests for the moment that there should not be security measures and precau-

tions," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, executive director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives think tank. "At the same time, we need to be a lot more serious in finding the balance between democratic rights and human rights and the right security measures. We can't alienate an entire community, an entire section of the citizenry."

Emergency regulations renewed by parliament each month give the government wide-ranging powers to arrest terror suspects and detain them indefinitely.

With each new attack in the capital, the complex web of checkpoints, road closures and random searches tightens. And many Tamils say their lives grow harder.

They say police assume they sympathize with the rebels' fight for a homeland for ethnic Tamils and single them out at checkpoints and during searches on buses.

# China appeals for tents after China quake

AP, Beijing

Rescuers appealed for temporary housing and tents Monday after a weekend earthquake in southwest China killed at least 36 people, injured hundreds and left tens of thousands of homes in ruins.

The tremor Saturday in Sichuan province, which the US Geological Survey measured at magnitude 5.7, struck along the same fault line as a May 12 earthquake that killed nearly 70,000.

"We need temporary houses ... we need more than 10,000 tents," said Zhang Hai, head of the foreign liaison office of the Communist Party propaganda department in Panzhihua city. "This is a mountainous place and so we can't build temporary houses everywhere."

The beginning of the school year, which was supposed to be Monday, was postponed for a week

because authorities were inspecting damage in classrooms, he said.

"We still can't bring all kids back to their previous classrooms," Zhang said.

China is still basking in the glory of hosting an extravagant and widely viewed Olympic Games that International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge called "truly exceptional." But the earthquake underscores the country's need to turn its attention back to pressing domestic issues such as high inflation, pollution, and now disaster relief.

The quake killed five people in Panzhihua and surrounding rural areas, and the death toll also included 25 victims in Sichuan province's Huili county, local officials said. Authorities in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture in neighbouring Yunnan province reported six deaths.