

**Thai cabinet cancels meeting as protests drags on**

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's government cancelled its weekly cabinet meeting yesterday as protesters loyal to fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra surrounded its Bangkok offices for a sixth day.

Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban said the meeting was called off to avoid clashes with the 2,000 demonstrators still remaining, but added that the government had sought a court injunction to disperse them.

Thaksin supporters, known as the "Red Shirts" because of their distinctive crimson outfits, first blockaded the compound last Thursday to press for the resignation of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.



Supporters of Thailand's ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra shout slogans during a protest outside Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Thai government cancelled its weekly cabinet meeting as protesters loyal to fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra surrounded its Bangkok offices for a sixth day.

**UK starts Iraq pullout**  
Seven killed in suicide attack on Iraqi police

AFP, Basra/ Baghdad

British troops launched their pullout from Iraq yesterday with the lowering of a Royal Marines flag and handover of a Basra base to US control six years after their joint invasion.

A ceremony in the southern province of Basra marked the official start of a months-long process ending a role that kicked off with the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

"Our nations are bonded by the blood we have shed together. That is a bond that no man can break," said General Ray Odierno, senior US military officer in Iraq, shortly before a US flag went up and the Royal

Marines colours went down.

"You have restored hope where chaos reigned," he said before an audience of about 300 invited guests including top US, British and Iraqi officers and diplomats from all three countries.

Meanwhile, a suicide truck bombing on a security post in Iraq's restive northern city of Mosul yesterday killed at least seven people, in an attack bearing the hallmark of al-Qaeda, police said.

The attack in the Al-Bid district of central Mosul killed seven people, including four policemen, and wounded at least 17 others, nine of them police, said Captain Ahmad al-Sabbawi.

**Cambodian PM warns against more Khmer prosecutions**

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen yesterday warned that his country would be plunged back into civil war if the current UN-backed Khmer Rouge genocide court pursued more suspects.

Hun Sen, himself a former

low-level commander for the communist movement, made his comments as the tribunal's first trial heard the regime's prison chief express remorse for his crimes.

Another four senior Khmer Rouge members are also being held by the tribunal but the Cambodian co-prosecutor has

opposed pursuing six more suspects on the grounds it could destabilise the country.

"I would like to say that I prefer for this court to fail... I won't allow war to re-occur in Cambodia," Hun Sen said at the opening of a street named after him in the seaside town of Sihanoukville.

**Afghan backers look to build on US strategy**

AFP, The Hague

Afghanistan's international backers, including Iran and the United States, met yesterday to try to boost efforts to combat the Taliban-led insurgency and spread democracy in the shattered nation.

"Only if all the neighbours of Afghanistan have the political will to contribute will there be a chance for Afghanistan," EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said at the meeting in The Hague.

The one-day conference puts Pakistan, a haven for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, at the

epicentre of international efforts, but also attempts to draw in other neighbours, like China and Russia.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton joined representatives from some 90 countries and organisations taking part in the one-day meeting.

Iran will take part in the talks - hosted by the Netherlands, the United Nations and Afghanistan - but Clinton said she had no plans for a meeting here with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Mehdi Akhondzadeh.

**Netanyahu shows pragmatic side as he takes power**

AP, Jerusalem

During the election campaign, Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed peace talks with the Palestinians, supported expanding West Bank settlements and warned that concessions only embolden Israel's enemies.

But preparing to become Israel's prime minister Tuesday, Netanyahu adopted a more conciliatory tone, reflecting the

same pragmatic streak that in the past allowed him to navigate complex domestic and global politics.

He has embraced peace negotiations since being tapped as the country's leader after the Feb. 10 elections. He also says Israel should not rule Palestinians, although he has remained vague on the details and never said the words "Palestinian state."

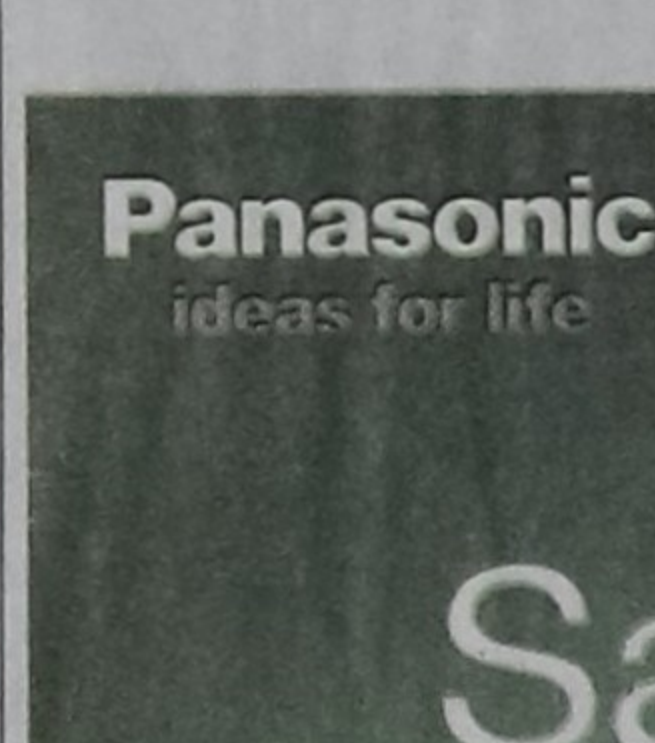


PHOTO: AFP

A man wears a brain-machine interface, equipped with electroencephalography (EEG) devices and near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) optical sensors in a special headgear.

**New robot 'steered by human thought'**

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Honda said yesterday it had developed a robot steered by human thought, thanks to a helmet-like device that measures a person's brain activity and sends signals to the machine.

The latest version of ASIMO -- the celebrity robot of Honda Motor Co. that can already dance, run and guide guests through an office floor -- has now been fitted with a so-called "brain machine interface" (BMI), the company said.

The state-of-the-art technology means the humanoid can perform four basic movements with its arms, legs and tongue based on the non-verbal instructions a person sends to it by concentrating on performing the action themselves.

"By only imagining moving their right hand, for example, a test person can move ASIMO's right hand," said one of the scientists involved, Tatsuya Okabe of the Honda Research Institute Japan.

"The accuracy of a movement depends on the test person and whether that person is good at concentrating."

ASIMO can perform the motions correctly in 90.6 percent of cases -- a record in the field of BMI technology -- the scientists told a Tokyo news conference, where they showed video footage of the experiment.



PHOTO: AFP  
US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrives yesterday with Dutch Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen (L) for the start of the international conference on Afghanistan in The Hague.

**30 rebels killed in Afghan battle**

AFP, Kabul

Thirty militants were killed in a police operation in Afghanistan's southern province of Uruzgan, the interior ministry announced yesterday.

The operation was launched Monday in Uruzgan and continued Tuesday in the neighbouring province of Helmand, another hotbed

of Taliban insurgent activity, the ministry said in a statement.

"During this operation 30 enemies of peace and stability were killed and 17 were injured," it said.

Earlier three militants were killed and two wounded when a bomb exploded during a training session in eastern Afghanistan, the defence ministry said yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP  
Former Miss World and Bollywood film actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan (2R), her husband and actor Abhishek Bachchan (R), actors Amitabh Bachchan (3L), Jaya Bachchan (3R), Akshay Kumar (2L) and his wife Twinkle Akshay Kumar pose after receiving awards from Indian President Pratibha Patil during the presentation of the 'Padma Awards 2009' at the President House in New Delhi yesterday.

**NEWS ANALYSIS**

**Pak police ill-equipped against terror**

AFP, Karachi

A spectacular commando-style assault on a Pakistani police training school and a wave of suicide attacks have exposed a cash-strapped force woefully incapable of fighting insurgents, experts say.

Most officers are ill-trained, poorly educated and badly paid -- a regular constable's salary is just 100 dollars a month, and his family is paid 6,000 dollars if he is killed in the line of duty.

They are also badly equipped, lacking the resources even for what in many countries would be regarded as basic police work.

"Our police have miserably inadequate resources for combating terrorism," acknowledged Sharfuddin Memon, who heads the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee, a state-run crime watchdog.

"They have been in this war without proper equipment and skill."

Security forces, elite squads, the army and police took nearly eight hours Monday to overpower a group of attackers who stormed a police training school near the eastern city of Lahore.

Eight police recruits were killed in the fierce firefight, highlighting the particular dangers that security forces face.

Pakistan's regular police force numbers 383,000, according to figures from the National Police Bureau, out of a population of more than 160 million.

The country has been hammered by extremist violence blamed on Taliban- and al-Qaeda-

linked militants -- suicide and bomb blasts have killed nearly 1,700 people in the last two years.

Police are a favourite target. The Police Bureau says the number of attacks against officers soared from 113 in 2005 to 1,820 in 2007.

Last Friday a suicide bomber attacked a packed mosque in the northwest town of Jamrud whose main congregation was tribal police and paramilitary, killing around 50 people.

A top police official in the flashpoint North West Frontier Province said even the Islamic extremists paid better.

"Terrorists pay 15,000 rupees (187 dollars) each to their soldiers and pay the families of suicide bombers three times what a policeman's family gets," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Yet the police are so technologically under-resourced that the military or intelligence agencies frequently need to be called in, even to trace a mobile phone call.

"This is a minimum requirement for police," the Liaison Committee's Memon admitted. "They lack adequate technological support, technical expertise and professional training."

Police estimate they need at least 75 forensic laboratories countrywide -- but currently have just six.

President Asif Ali Zardari told parliament last week that Pakistan had set up a special constabulary to fight terror, saying the country faced "security challenges that need to be addressed urgently."

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