

NEWS IN BRIEF

Swine flu kills 33 in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Thirty-three Iranians have so far died from swine flu and more than two thousand have been diagnosed with the illness, the reformist Etemad newspaper reported Sunday quoting the health ministry.

"So far, 33 people have been reported dead from swine flu, while 2,153 have been diagnosed with this illness," the newspaper said. Etemad also reported that 271 classrooms in various schools across Tehran were closed after reports that the A(H1N1) virus was spreading there.

109 arrests at Iran protests

AFP, Tehran

Iranian police arrested 109 people during opposition protests on the sidelines of an official rally marking three decades since the seizure of the US embassy, Tehran's police chief said on Saturday.

"A hundred and nine people were arrested. Forty-seven were released on bail," General Azizollah Rajabzadeh said, adding the files of those in prison were with judicial authorities, according to Mehr news agency.

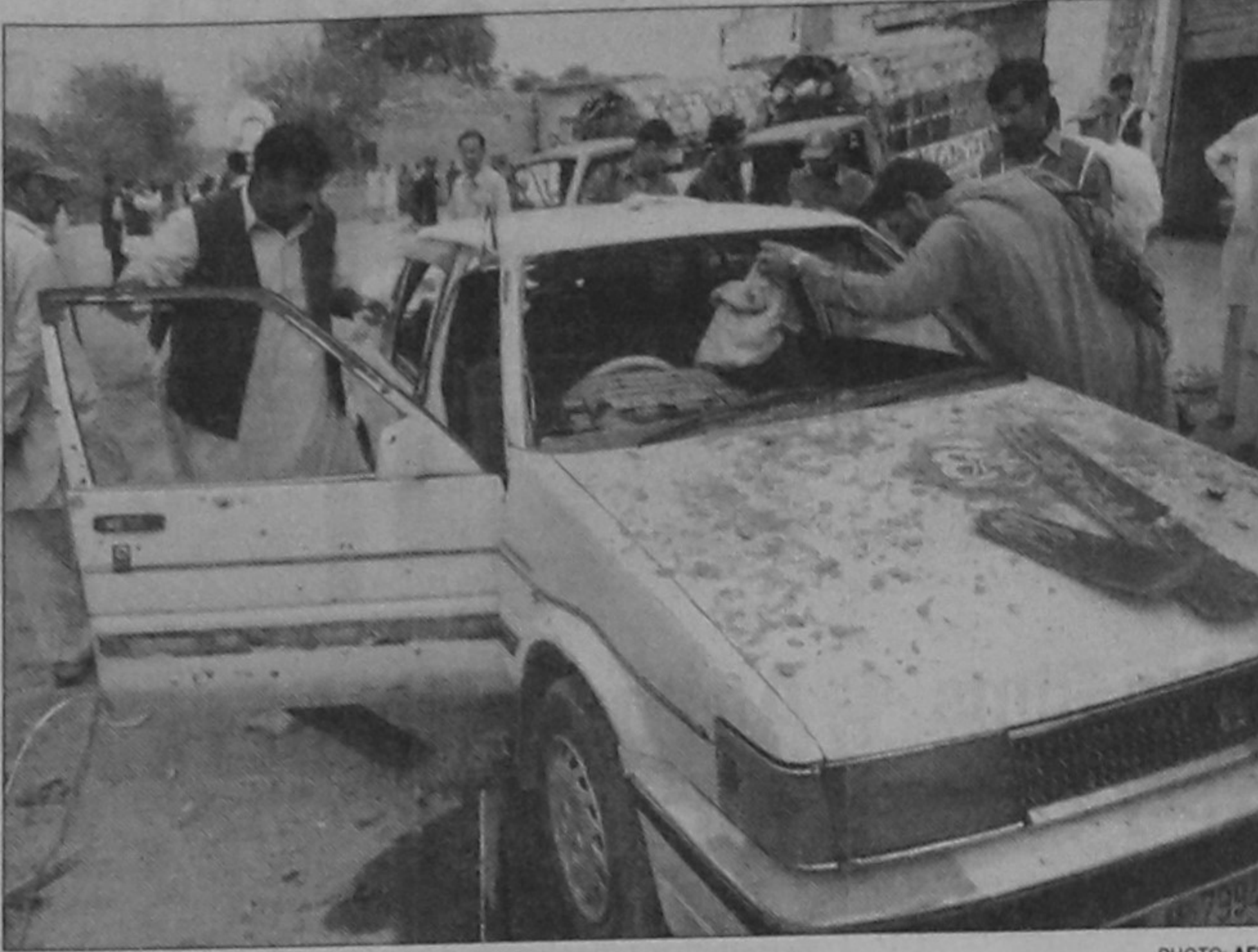
State news agency IRNA reported later that the authorities released 30 more people -- leaving 32 still in detention.

Anti-corruption rally in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

Hundreds of Indonesians gathered in the capital Jakarta on Sunday to protest perceived moves to cripple the country's once-powerful corruption watchdog.

Musicians sang songs and supporters made speeches demanding President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono move to protect the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) after the release of wiretap recordings of police and prosecutors exposed an alleged high-level official conspiracy against it.



Pakistani security officials inspect the car of Mayor Abdul Malik at the site of a suicide attack on the outskirts of Peshawar yesterday. The suicide car bomber struck near local Mayor Abdul Malik's house in Peshawar city, killing 12 people including the one-time rebel backer turned anti-Taliban campaigner.

Military offensive no solution for insurgency hit areas: Gilani

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has admitted that military operations in insurgency hit regions such as Swat, Malakand and South Waziristan would not help resolve the real issue and would have lasting effect.

Speaking in the National Assembly, Gilani said the government is taking all possible steps to ensure stability and peace in the region.

Gilani stressed that all political parties were taken on board before launching the military offensive in South Waziristan.

"The nation is also united on combating terrorism to the finish," The Dawn quoted Gilani, assaying.

He said the government has taken all necessary steps to ensure the safe return thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were rendered homeless following the military operation in the region.

Gilani added that people who have been forced to flee the region following the South Waziristan offensive were being provided all help by the administration.

"A sum of 8.5 billion rupees has been set aside for Waziristan IDPs and every displaced family was being given 5,000 rupees. An amount of Rs 25,000 would be provided to each family on return home," Gilani added.

Gilani also said that the controversial issue of the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) is dead and has been "buried forever."

Interacting with media persons on the sidelines of a function in Jamber where he inaugurated a power plant, Gilani said the NRO was no longer an issue.

When enquired that whether Islamabad would discuss India's alleged involvement in fanning insurgency in Baluchistan with New Delhi, Gilani said the issue could come

up for discussions, but only when his counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh comes forward for talks.

He said Pakistan believed in maintaining friendly relations with all its neighbours, including India, on the basis of equality.

Commenting on the on-going military operation in South Waziristan, the stronghold of the Taliban, Gilani said the extremists would soon be flushed out of the region.

"In view of the nation's high spirits, it will not take long to fight out the terrorists," The Daily Times quoted Gilani, as saying.

Gilani stressed that a peaceful political environment was imperative for the country's economy to improve.

Despite the prevalent political chaos in the country, he said the situation was stable and pointed out that the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is working to take all political parties on board.

US, Pakistan negotiating deal on security of nukes

AFP, Washington

The United States has been negotiating highly sensitive understandings with the Pakistani military about the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported in the latest issue of The New Yorker magazine.

The journalist wrote that during meetings with current and former officials in Washington and Pakistan, he was told that the agreements would allow specially trained American units to provide added security for the Pakistani arsenal in case of a crisis.

At the same time, the Pakistani military would be given money to equip and train Pakistani soldiers and to improve their housing and facilities, the report says.

The principal fear was that extremists inside the Pakistani military might stage a coup, take control of some nuclear assets,

or even divert a warhead, Hersh notes.

The Pakistani nuclear doctrine calls for the warheads and their triggers to be stored separately from each other, and from their delivery devices.

The arrangement serves as a safeguard in case of a quickly escalating confrontation with India but also makes the weapons vulnerable during shipment and reassembly, the report points out.

"We give comfort to each other, and the comfort level is good, because everybody respects everybody's integrity," Hersh quoted Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari as telling him in an interview about the security relationship with Washington.

"Our Army officers are not crazy, like the Taliban," Zardari went on to say. "A mutiny would never happen in Pakistan. It's a fear being spread by the few who seek to scare the many."

Meanwhile, former Pakistani presi-

dent Pervez Musharraf acknowledged that his government had given US State Department nonproliferation experts insight into the command and control of the Pakistani arsenal and its on-site safety and security procedures, the report said.

In Islamabad, US Embassy spokesman Larry Schwartz did not confirm or deny the report, but noted that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had recently stated that the United States had confidence in the ability of the Pakistani government to protect its nuclear programs and materials.

"The United States has no intention to seize Pakistani nuclear weapons or material," Schwartz said. "Pakistan is a key ally in our common effort to fight violent extremists and foster regional security. We work cooperatively with Pakistan on a wide range of security assistance initiatives."

Sex through false wedding promise not rape, says Indian judge

AFP, New Delhi

A New Delhi judge told Indian women to beware of men who promise marriage after a prospective bride accused her lover of rape because he failed to propose, a newspaper said yesterday.

The unnamed woman said she had effectively been raped because she only agreed to sleep with Arif Iqbal, 22, on the understanding that they would soon be man and wife, the Hindustan Times reported.

However Justice Kailash Gambhir said the woman, 23, had to accept the consequences after Iqbal went back on his vow to wed her.

"Mere promise of marriage should not have prompted (the victim) to establish a physical relationship with the accused," Gambhir said.

"It is the prime responsibility of the women to protect her modesty. A woman should not throw herself to a man and indulge in promiscuity."



Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama (C) smiles as he arrives at Tawang monastery in the northwestern corner of Arunachal Pradesh yesterday. The Dalai Lama visited the remote Tibetan monastery in northeast India at the start of a trip that has infuriated China, which claims the surrounding Himalayan region as its own.

Dalai Lama visits Arunachal despite China's protest

AFP, Tawang

The Dalai Lama visited a remote Tibetan monastery in northeast India on Sunday at the start of a trip that has infuriated China, which claims the surrounding Himalayan region as its own.

Thousands of Buddhists gave the Tibetan spiritual leader, who has lived in exile in India for 50 years, a rousing welcome as he arrived at the Tawang monastery, perched at 3,500 metres (11,400 feet) in Arunachal Pradesh state.

"We are very pleased and blessed to have His Holiness here," said Sarwang Lama, a monk attired in a new maroon robe, as Tibetan prayer flags fluttered in the air and posters of the Dalai Lama adorned streets and rooftops.

"The Dalai Lama is very happy and is excited to be in Arunachal Pradesh," T.G. Rinpoche, a senior Buddhist and former state minister, told AFP.

Sandwiched between Myanmar, Bhutan and Tibet, the lush, forested state of Arunachal is governed by India but claimed by China. Beijing has slammed the visit as a provocation aimed at harming relations between China and India.

Anti-crime drive counts

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died in the last 30 days, which is a reflection of the government's intensified dependency on this "encounter" tool.

No policeman was killed in these incidents.

Talking to The Daily Star, many expressed their belief that the country's weak judicial system, where hardened criminals sneak through the loopholes of laws, is the reason behind these unlawful acts.

But government officials rather defended the ongoing extra-judicial killings.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun ruled out occurrence of any extrajudicial killings under the present government although she said, "What will police do if they are attacked or come under fire while trying to arrest criminals?"

Sahara said the ongoing drive against criminals and outlaws in different parts of the country would be strengthened in a bid to root out terrorism.

Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder said, "The government does not support such killings but the law enforcers have every right to self-defence when they come under attack by armed assailants."

At a recent press conference in New York, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said she is against extra-judicial killings. However, she defended the law enforcement agencies, saying, "Law enforcers cannot sit idle when a criminal opens fire on them."

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan told The Daily Star, "We talk about human rights violation whenever a criminal is killed in crossfire but what about the rights of those who are killed by criminals?"

Former adviser to a caretaker government and human rights activist Sultana Kamal terms these means of extrajudicial killing an unacceptable short cut to combating crime. Such practice is nothing but the outcome of the weakness of the country's judicial system, she told The Daily Star.

She said if the government has any policy to kill criminals in crossfire or encounter, it must stop immediately. "If

it does not have such a policy, it has to initiate enquiry into these killings and punish the persons or agencies responsible," added Sultana Kamal.

Former Home Minister Mohammad Nasim also said that the practice has exposed the weak picture of the country's law and order scenario.

"A move should be initiated soon to give outlaws a chance to surrender and rehabilitate them," he told The Daily Star. Nasim had taken such an initiative under which outlaws surrendered with their arms in 1998.

Ruling Awami League lawmaker Sabir Hossain Chowdhury, who is very vocal against extra-judicial killings, said such "calculated" murder simply cannot be acceptable in a civilised society.

The incidents of extra-judicial killing have a unique story and demand enquiry, he said.

Referring to his party's election pledge to stop extra-judicial killing, Sabir said, "The commitment must be upheld and zero tolerance has to be adopted in this regard...These killings must be stopped for the sake of establishing rule of law in the country."

However, the AL's promise has turned out to be a mockery as the number of such killings has been increasing since the launching of a special drive against outlaws in the southwestern region in August.

Many national and international human rights organisations have demanded that the government stop such killings and produce the perpetrators before the court.

Highly placed government sources said police were given a green signal to combat the criminals, especially in the southwestern region where outlawed parties resorted to widespread extortion, murder and other serious crimes.

"It seems that the present government is also following the policy of the past caretaker and the BNP-Jamaat alliance governments with the police presenting similar stories of gunfight with 'criminals' after each incident of killing," said a cabinet minister, wishing anonymity.

2 outlaws

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upazila of Jhenidah and Moinuddin, 30, son of Yusuf Mollah of Pyirapur in Sadar upazila of Kushtia district.

Acting on a tip-off, detective branch (DB) of police led by ASP Alamgir Hossain raided a banana field of the village at about 11:40pm when a group of the outlawed party cadres was holding a meeting.

They caught two of them while some other cadres managed to flee. Police recovered eight powerful bombs from the spot.

Police at a press briefing held at 1:30am at Police Lines said the arrestees have admitted their involvement in the outfit.

Meanwhile, Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML) Lal Pataka faction Suja Uddin alias Joy Babu, arrested on Saturday, was taken on a five-day remand yesterday while two journalists--Atiq and Mohsin Ali--were sent to jail in two extortion cases filed against them.

Suja's father and one brother, arrested in the case, were also sent to jail.

Chudanga police on Saturday evening produced Suja and the two journalists before a judicial magistrate court in the extortion case filed by Ramjan Ali, a member of Karpasdanga Union Parishad of Chudanga.

Suja Uddin and the two local journalists were arrested from Chudanga and Meherpur districts on Saturday.

According to police, Suja using the name, Joy Babu, had been demanding extortion from people in Chudanga and Meherpur for last several months.

Following Suja's confessional statement, police picked up Atiar Rahman Atiq and Mohsin Ali from their residences. Both are local correspondents of Chudanga based daily Mathabhangra.

Quoting Suja, police said the two journalists were assisting him in collecting toll in their areas and sharing the booty with him.

Lankan general to take on president at polls

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's sidelined military chief, General Sarath Fonseka, will stand against President Mahinda Rajapakse in elections to be held before April, a press report said yesterday.

The Sunday Times newspaper here said Fonseka, who is credited with crushing Tamil Tiger separatists earlier this year, had been chosen by a consortium of opposition parties to be their presidential nominee.

Fonseka has been at loggerheads with the government in recent months after he was removed as army chief and made chief of defence staff, a more ceremonial post with no command responsibilities.

"Constituent parties of the

newly formed (opposition) United National Front reached consensus this week that General Sarath Fonseka should be their common candidate," the Sunday Times said.

There was no immediate comment from Fonseka, who returned to the island last week after a controversial visit to the United States where the Department of Homeland Security wanted to question him about alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka.

Fonseka announced during his US visit that he was willing to shed his uniform and take up "social work" if politicians did not take advantage of the end of the decades-old separatist conflict to ensure economic revival.

Man bites snake to death in Orissa

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Bhubaneswar

In a bizarre incident, a 25-year-old gardener in Orissa, furious after being bitten by a snake, grabbed the reptile, tore it apart and chewed bits of its flesh.

The incident took place Saturday in a government-managed park at Baramunda area on the outskirts of the state capital Bhubaneswar.

The snake had bitten Ramesh Kumar Jamda, the gardener of the park, when he was removing weeds, Oriya news paper Sambad reported Sunday.

A furious Jamda then caught hold of the snake and chewed parts of its body and swallowed the flesh.

Jamda then fell unconscious and was taken by other park employees to the local hospital. While the snake died on the spot, Jamda managed to survive after treatment, the papers said.

"I was very angry when the snake bit me on my finger. I chewed parts of its body to take revenge," Jamda was quoted as saying. The paper has not said if the snake was a poisonous one.

Prachanda predicts new govt in Nepal within a week

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, the chief of Nepal's former Maoist guerrillas, yesterday predicted that the political crisis gripping the country for more than five months would end within a week with the formation of a new all-party government headed by his party.

Prachanda, whose eight-month-old government fell in May, triggering protests by his party that have since then paralysed parliament and the new coalition government, said at a press conference called in the southern Birgunj city that the current Prime Minister, Madhav Kumar Nepal, would

have to make way for a new government and new premier.

The call came even as at least two parties allegedly urged for the imposition of President's Rule in Nepal and the dissolution of the constituent assembly that also serves as Nepal's parliament.

The 601-member assembly was formed after a historic election last year following a 10-year civil war by the Maoists.

On Sunday, some Nepali dailies, including the state-run Gorkhapatra, reported that a senior member from the ruling Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (UML), had made allegations about efforts to impose President's Rule.

Nepal turns 'poacher's paradise'

AFP, Kathmandu

Forest warden Narendra Man Babu Pradhan is on the frontline of Nepal's battle against poachers and he grimaces as he recalls the recent discovery of an injured rhino whose horn had been cut off.

"We found a male rhino with bullet in his head around a lake in the park. It was a horrific sight," said Pradhan, who was informed by tour guides about the injured animal.

"The poachers had cut the horn off without killing it and it seemed in great pain," said the chief warden of the Chitwan National Park in southwest Nepal, a UNESCO world heritage site that is popular with foreign tourists.

Pradhan, who said the incident was the worst of his 20-year wildlife career, did everything he could to save the rhino but it died within two weeks.

In Nepal, poaching is getting worse, conservationists say, and the country has emerged as a hub for the illegal trade in animal parts given its strategic location between India, the source of material, and the Chinese



Handout picture released by the Wildlife Conservation Nepal (WCN) and taken on September 7 shows Nepalese policemen put on display a leopard skull, which was seized in Kathmandu.

market. Porous borders, a lack of coordination between countries in the region and political instability in Nepal mean the men with guns and underworld connections are gaining the upper hand.

"The disappearance of tigers and seizures of skins, bones and rhino horns indicate poaching and trafficking is growing," Shiva Raj Bhatta, spokesman at Nepal's department of national parks and

wildlife conservation, told AFP.

"Our wildlife is in a critical stage. We believe Nepal is fast developing as an international hub for wildlife trade and turning into a poacher's paradise."

Chitwan Park has lost 24 rhinos -- 17 of them killed by poachers -- in the past 18 months.

The figures for Asian big cats are not encouraging either.

India shows willingness to start talks with Maoists

PTI, New Delhi

The government yesterday indicated its willingness to start the process of dialogue with Maoists but said such exercise would not be fruitful till they abjure violence.

Home Secretary G K Pillai said if the Maoists abjure violence, there was a possibility for dialogue and operation by the government against them was not really a problem.

"We have taken up (the issue). Home Minister (P Chidambaram) has written to (former Lok Sabha Speaker) Rabi Ray. He said please start. We got some reply. Some dialogue, some process is starting. Let us see. But unless they give up violence I don't think it is possible to talk," he said addressing a conference organised by South Asian Free Media Association.

Ray, along with other prominent members of civil society had urged the government to begin a dialogue with the Naxals and stop the offensive against them.

Quiet 82nd birthday for LK Advani

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) veteran LK Advani turned 82 on a quiet note Sunday, meeting well wishers at home - but not attending any political functions - on what could be his last birthday as leader of opposition.

It was a marked change from last year when he had on this day launched a website, virtually heralding his campaign for prime ministership - an effort that proved unsuccessful.

"Advaniji is meeting people at home. But no political function has been organised by the party on the day," said a party spokesperson wishing to remain anonymous.