

India shuts 23 iron ore mines

AFP, Bhubaneswar, India

India's biggest iron ore-producing state said yesterday it had withheld permission from 23 mines to operate because they had not supplied proof of environmental and other clearances.

The mines affected by the move by the Orissa government in eastern India are in Keonjhar district, state mining deputy head Umesh Jena said.

Orissa produces some 75 million tonnes annually of iron ore, the key raw material for steel.

"We have asked operators to supply documents like forest clearances, mining leases and surface rights within a week," Jena told AFP.

"Till then, they can't carry on mining", he said.



Nepalese caretaker Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal (L) and Unified Communist Party of Nepal Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as "Prachanda", sign documents during a special function at the Shaktikhor cantonment site, Chitwan some 170km south of Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal's Maoists formally relinquished control of their People's Liberation Army, more than four years after ending a bloody insurgency. The leader of the former guerrillas, now the main opposition party, handed control of 19,000 soldiers confined to cantonments around Nepal since the war ended in 2006 to a cross-party committee set up to decide their fate.

AFGHAN PARLIAMENT

Karzai strikes deal with MPs to avert crisis

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday struck a deal with lawmakers to allow the inauguration of parliament next week, ending a standoff that had thrown the country into political turmoil.

Lawmakers, furious with a presidential decree postponing the January 23 inauguration, had threatened to meet at parliament on Sunday, with or without Karzai. After marathon talks the president offered to convene the assembly on Wednesday.

"We have agreed on Karzai's request to open parliament on Wednesday and refrain from going to parliament tomorrow," said Sediq Ahmad Usmani, a representative from Parwan province.

Karzai rowed back from an announcement he made last week in which he said the inauguration would be delayed until February 22 to allow a special election court he established to continue fraud probes into an election in September.

That announcement sparked political chaos. Lawmakers denounced the decision and the court as illegal and made plans to open parliament without Karzai, while losing candidates who support the delay pledged to bar the winners access to the building.

The United Nations, United States, European Union and Canada had criticized Karzai's decision and expressed "deep concern."

Karzai's proposals to end the stand-off, made to a small delegation, were put to a larger group of lawmakers for a final approval, and their closed-door debate in a Kabul hotel was at times heated with shouting that could be heard from outside.

Some were skeptical the president would stick to his word.

"The majority of us may agree on what has been proposed by the president, but there is no guarantee he won't back away," said Sharifullah Kamawal, a member of parliament for Kabul.

BJP to go ahead with 'Ekta Yatra'

TNN, Dharamsala

In an act of defiance against the J&K government, the BJP has decided to go ahead with its 'Ekta Yatra' and the plan to hoist Indian national flag at Lal Chowk in Srinagar on Republic Day.

The Jammu and Kashmir government on Thursday announced that it would not allow the BJP's Ekta Yatra programme. The 6000-km Ekta Yatra (National Integration rally) is being led by BJP's youth wing "Bhajumyo" national president and Lok Sabha MP Anurag Thakur.

Reacting to the J&K government's decision, Thakur said, "I have the constitutional right to unfurl the national flag in any part of my county." He added that the BJP was going ahead with its plans.

The political rally would be entering Una, Himachal Pradesh yesterday afternoon after it started from Kolkata (West Bengal) on January 12. The BJP rally travelled through Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and would culminate on January 26 with the unfurling of the national flag at Lal Chowk in Srinagar.

About 15000 BJP workers from Himachal Pradesh are participating in this rally.

Bomb kills three in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar, Pakistan

Three people including two paramilitary soldiers were killed in a roadside bomb blast in northwest Pakistan's tribal district of Orakzai yesterday, officials said.

An improvised explosive device planted by militants went off in the town of Ibrahimzai during a routine patrol by paramilitary soldiers, a security official said.

"Two soldiers and one civilian were killed in the blast," a local administration official told AFP.

Seven other people -- one soldier and six civilians -- were wounded in the explosion near the bazaar in Ibrahimzai, he added.

Sri Lanka book fest blames India on Pamuk pullout

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan literary festival yesterday blamed strict Indian visa rules rather than political pressure for a decision by Nobel-winning Turkish author Orhan Pamuk to pull out of the event.

Pamuk and Booker prize winner Kiran Desai chose not to take part in the Galle festival due to Indian visa rules barring foreigners from re-entering the country for two months after leaving India, the Sri Lankan organisers said.

Meanwhile, India dismissed claims by a Sri Lankan literary festival that New Delhi's visa restrictions prompted Pamuk to pull out of the book event, a report said yesterday.

An Indian newspaper quoted a spokesman for the Indian High Commission in Colombo as saying New Delhi cooperated "in every way possible" to ensure visa issues posed no problems for writers wishing to attend the Sri Lankan event.

The Indian mission in Istanbul had given Pamuk a letter stating he should be allowed to re-enter India when he desired after the close of the Galle Literary Festival, the Hindu newspaper said.

Sadr returns to Iran from Iraq

AFP, Najaf, Iraq

Radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has returned to Iran after having only arrived in Iraq around two weeks ago, two senior officials within his movement said yesterday.

"He left Iraq on Thursday to go back to Iran," an aide to the firebrand cleric told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "That's all we can tell you."

Another senior official within the movement, who also did not want to be named, confirmed that Sadr left on Thursday for the Islamic Republic, but neither official would comment on the reasons for the cleric's departure.

Malaysian commandos spoil ship hijack

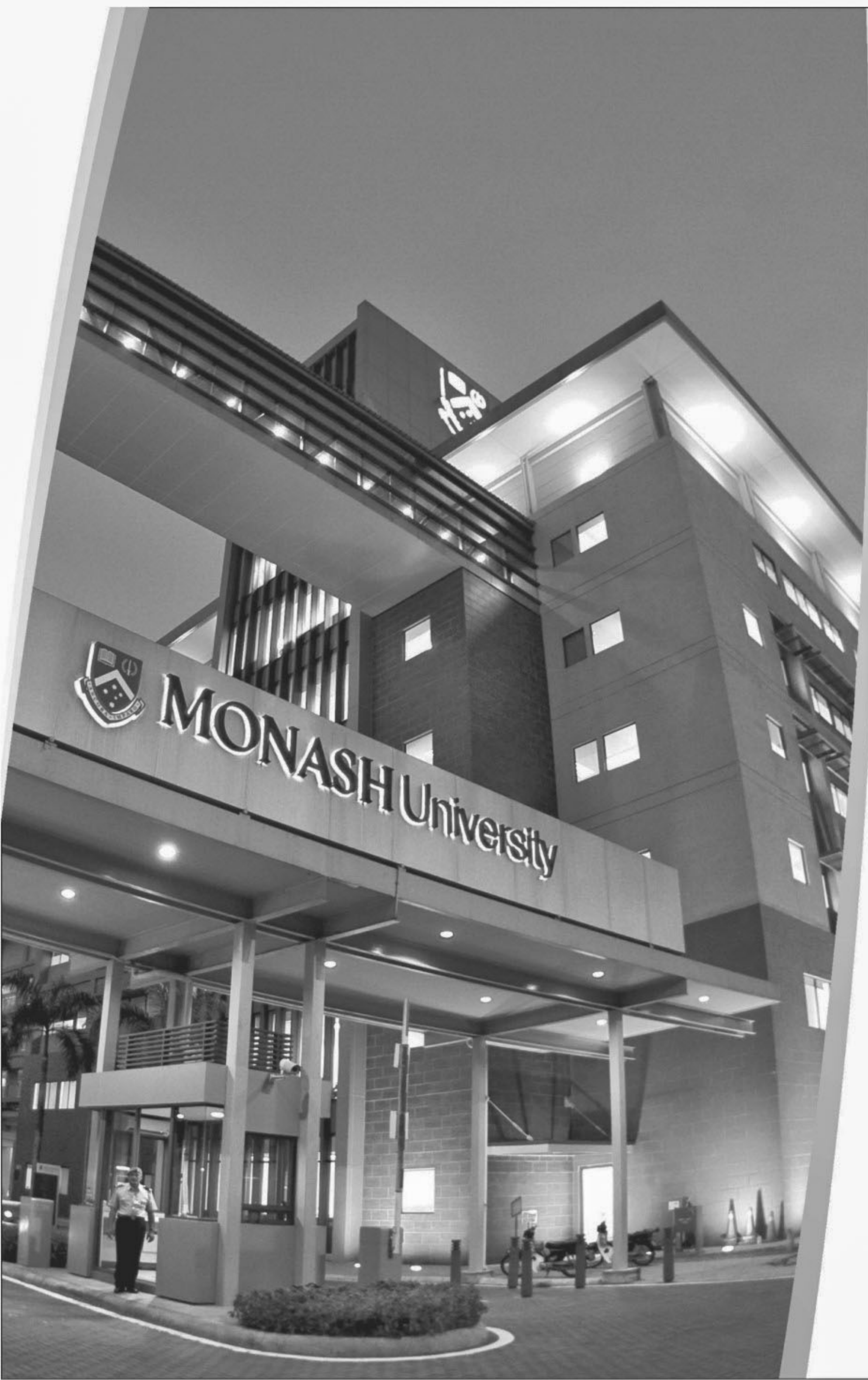
AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian naval commandos have rescued 23 crews and captured seven Somali pirates following a gunfight to free a hijacked oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden, reports said yesterday.

The commandos were called in after the Malaysian tanker MT Bunga Laurel, sent out a distress call late Thursday after pirates armed with AK-47 assault rifles boarded and took control of the ship.

State media said the tanker was headed to Singapore with a cargo of oil worth more than 10 million dollars when it was hijacked.

Malaysian navy chief Admiral Abdul Aziz Jaafar said the commandos, who were manning commercial vessel protecting shipping in the area, responded to the distress call.



An international education that is closer to home.

With a strong commitment to academic excellence, Monash University Sunway campus offers a truly world-class education and a learning experience of a lifetime. Renowned for the premium quality of its schools, staff, facilities and educational outcomes, a degree from Monash University gives students the best possible start to a successful career.

Monash University Sunway campus Information Session and Student Interviews

Date: 26 January 2011
Time: 11 am – 4 pm
Venue: Fast Track Education Services
Telephone: 811 3171

Date: 29 January 2011
Time: 11 am – 4 pm
Venue: H & I Council, 145/1 Green Road, Farmgate
Telephone: 8118180, 9117234, 01711781451, 01715564383

IDP Education Fair
Date: 30 – 31 January 2011
Time: 10 am – 6 pm
Venue: Sheraton Hotel, Dhaka

Jalan Lagoon Selatan, 46150 Bandar Sunway, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Contact us for further information.

Call +60 3 5514 6000
email info@monash.edu.my
www.monash.edu.my

Australia Malaysia South Africa Italy

KP(JPS)/5195/US/595(16)KP/JPS/DFT/US/BO4 Co. No. 458601-U (Date of establishment: 20 March 2000)