

## 'N Korea real danger to the world'

REUTERS, Sydney

A top European Union official said North Korea represented "a real danger to the world" and more aid was needed to encourage Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

"North Korea is a real danger to the world," EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten told Seven Network television in Australia. Confusion has risen in the past few days over whether North Korea has begun reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods that can be used to make atomic bombs.

"None of us want North Korea to turn into a sort of bomb-making factory, selling of weapons to any group or country that can afford to buy them," said Patten, who is visiting Australia.

"I think that the deal with North Korea has to be one of more for more," he said.

"I think we should expect... from North Korea, in terms of transparency and verification, in terms of commitment, not to manufacture nuclear weapons... and in return for that we should be prepared to give more assistance to North Korea," Patten said.

# Clashes in WB, Gaza: 7 Palestinians killed

AFP, Gaza City

Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces left seven Palestinians dead and more than 40 wounded late Saturday as violence that had eased during the Iraq war flared during the Jewish Passover festival.

Five Palestinians, including a teenager, were killed during a raid by Israeli troops on the town of Rafah and a nearby refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip. Palestinian security and medical sources said.

Twenty seven people were wounded, six of them critically, including a woman, medical sources said.

The sources listed the dead as Hussein Zaanu, 22, Saib el Masri, 28, Mohamed al-Hamayda, 20, Nahed al-Nawajha, 32, and Mahmud Abu Koch,

15, all killed by Israeli fire.

Earlier Saturday in the northern West Bank city of Nablus, Nazeah Darwazi, a television cameraman for both Palestinian television and the US Associated Press Television Network, was shot dead in the central Casbah district.

Eighteen others were injured in clashes Darwazi was filming when he was killed.

An unidentified Palestinian gunman was also killed after he opened fire on a Jewish settlement in the northern West Bank, slightly wounding two Israeli soldiers and seriously injuring a civilian who appeared to be a guard.

An anonymous caller later told AFP the radical group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for that attack.

More than 30 Israeli tanks, armoured

vehicles and troop carriers drove into the centre of Rafah, covered by helicopter gunships, Palestinian security forces said.

The Israeli troops fired heavy machine guns and mortars, and were engaged in firefights by armed Palestinians, they added.

Explosions of an undetermined origin were heard and soldiers reportedly destroyed several homes in the camp.

The troops entered Rafah along the Egyptian border, which is controlled by Israel. The town itself straddles the border.

The Palestinian Authority condemned the incursion, saying it was "aimed at sabotaging efforts at publishing the roadmap," in reference to an international proposal for resolving the

Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

The plan calls for the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

In Nablus, more than a thousand people turned out for the funeral of Darwazi, who was 42.

"A soldier killed Nazeah in cold blood as he was standing only 20 metres (yards) from him," said Bilal Bana, a Palestinian reporter with him at the time.

Bana added that Darwazi was with four other journalists and was wearing a bullet-proof vest marked "Press".

His death came amid clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian stone-throwers in which 18 Palestinians were injured by rubber bullets and live fire.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian bride sits in a car as an Israeli soldier looks at her while she waits to get permission for her passage at a checkpoint outside the West Bank town of Qalqiya on Saturday. In the West Bank city of Nablus a Palestinian cameraman was killed by Israeli gunfire during clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian stone-throwers in which 18 Palestinians were injured by rubber bullets and live fire.



PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiri people brave the rain as they wait for Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at a public meeting in Srinagar on Saturday. Vajpayee was to inaugurate a railway reservation centre there before he cancelled the event due to bad weather.

## 'US willing to help solve Pak-Afghan disputes'

AFP, Kabul

The United States is willing to help resolve any disputes between Afghanistan and Pakistan, US presidential envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said Saturday following a border clash earlier this week.

"We would like good relations between these two countries, we want problems to be resolved in a friendly cooperative atmosphere and America is willing to play a constructive role..." he told reporters at a press conference inside the heavily fortified US embassy.

"Instability in Afghanistan, in our view, is not in Pakistan's interests," said Khalilzad, who is President George W. Bush's special envoy to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Afghan and Pakistani forces clashed Wednesday around the village of Ghulam Khan in Afghanistan's eastern Khost province.

It was not clear what triggered the

clash in the village, which is very close to the border.

US military spokesman Colonel Roger King Friday confirmed the presence of Afghan and Pakistani forces in the area but said the only shots fired had been warning shots. King had stressed that the border was "ill-defined" in the area.

Pakistan's Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said Pakistani troops had not crossed into Afghan territory and underlined Islamabad's support for the Afghan government.

Cross-border security is on President Hamid Karzai's agenda when he visits his Pakistani counterpart General Pervez Musharraf on Tuesday.

Pakistan had supported the former Taliban regime before joining Washington's "war on terror" following the September 11 attacks masterminded by Taliban "guest" Osama bin Laden.

## Chechen rebels kill 17 cops

REUTERS, Moscow

Rebels in the southern Russian region of Chechnya claim to have killed 17 pro-Moscow police in a filmed attack posted on a separatist Web Site on Sunday.

The video, which the Web Site said was recorded on Tuesday just outside the Chechen capital of Grozny, shows a white van being ripped apart in a huge explosion.

One man appears from the mangled wreckage, and staggers back and forth until he is rescued by a jeep which appears about 30 seconds later. A second, smaller explosion follows about a minute after the jeep's arrival.

"Resulting from a successful attack of the Chechen Mujihadeen (Muslim holy warriors), a bus was almost completely destroyed along with 15 occupiers and traitors," a statement posted with the video said.

## Uncertainty as US, DPRK head for talks in China

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea and the United States head into crisis talks in Beijing this week with the perils of a nuclear-armed Pyongyang far more clear than the intentions of the secretive communist state.

Talks between North Korea, its main ally, China, and its chief adversary the United States are expected to be held April 23-25 -- the first formal meeting between Pyongyang and Washington since the nuclear crisis erupted last October.

Experts say a fundamental task for Washington will be to determine whether impoverished North Korea is seeking to become a nuclear-armed state or is willing to trade its nuclear arms programs away for security guarantees and aid.

"The only way to find that out is to talk with the North Koreans," said Han Sung-joo, the new South Korean ambassador to the United States, who flew to Washington on Sunday.

A Japan-based North Korean newspaper said on Sunday Pyongyang would seek US guarantees for its "sovereignty and survival."

"If the United States ends its hostile policy to stifle our country and clears its nuclear threat, North Korea will verify to the United States that it will not build nuclear weapons," the Chosun Sinbo said, repeating earlier North Korean statements.

In a move analysts saw as North Korean pressure tactics, Pyongyang issued a statement on Friday indicating it had begun reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods -- a provocative step that would enable it to start making atomic bombs.

The United States later said the North Korean Foreign Ministry statement, issued in English, might have been mistranslated. A Korean version

published on Saturday said that facilities were at the "final stage" before reprocessing.

South Korean officials and scholars said North Korea sought to leave Washington guessing to boost its bargaining leverage.

"North Koreans commonly use deliberately vague expressions on sensitive issues to give them wiggle room in negotiations," Seoul's Yonhap news agency quoted Korean linguist Jeon Soo-tae as saying. Jeon has written a study of North-South language differences.

Peter Hayes, director of the Nautilus Institute, a California-based think tank, said raising fears about reprocessing was a North Korean tactic that may signal its willingness to negotiate before crossing the nuclear threshold.

"At this stage, therefore, the Bush Administration must table a stark, credible, and dramatic roadmap that outlines what the DPRK (North Korea) could obtain for which it would be worth giving up its nuclear program," Hayes wrote.

"Nothing less will reverse North Korea's nuclear trajectory."

EU Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten told Australian television on Sunday that North Korea represented "a real danger to the world" and more aid was needed to encourage Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

"None of us want North Korea to turn into a sort of bomb-making factory, selling off weapons to any group or country that can afford to buy them," said Patten.

"I think that the deal with North Korea has to be one of more for more," he said on a visit to Australia.

North Korea proposed to South Korea on Saturday that the two Koreas hold ministerial talks in Pyongyang from April 27 -- two days after the Beijing meeting is slated to wrap up.

## Vajpayee sends right signal

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Considerable political and diplomatic significance is being attached to Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's extending the hand of friendship to Pakistan during his just-concluded two-day visit to the militancy-hit state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The importance of the venue Srinagar, the summer capital of the state, for Vajpayee to make the remarks both at a public meeting and at a news conference, is certainly not lost on diplomatic front.

Analysts note that the Indian Prime Minister's remark that "we are again extending the hand of friendship" clearly sent out the right message that was necessary for a "course correction" after External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha's recent statement during a newspaper interview that Pakistan is "a fitter" case for an Iraq-type pre-emptive strike gave rise to complications.

While Vajpayee's remarks in Srinagar said little that even remotely suggested a change in its stated posture: that India will not talk to Pakistan unless Islamabad stopped cross-border terrorism and created a conducive climate for dialogue.

Yet, the Prime Minister's avoidance of sharp attacks on Pakistan and willingness for dialogue has created

space for India for diplomacy, analysts said.

Sinha's remarks and the sharp reaction it drew from Islamabad had tended to push up the temperature between the two countries. The US State Department clearly disagreed with the Indian Foreign Minister's view.

His utterances in Srinagar come at a time when the international focus appeared back on Kashmir issue after the end of US-led war against Iraq in the backdrop of escalating cross-border infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir.

Significantly, US Secretary of State

### NEWS ANALYSIS

Colin Powell and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw had earlier this month spoken of the need for Indo-Pak dialogue even when the military campaign against Iraq was at its height. The US is sending its Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca to India and Pakistan next month.

Ahead of those visits, Vajpayee's positive statements in Srinagar were aimed at clearing the air following statements of Sinha.

Vajpayee's addressing a public meeting in Srinagar was the first by an

Indian Prime Minister there in a decade and a half. Clearly, he wanted to build on the international approval of the free and fair elections to a new Jammu and Kashmir state legislature held in last September-October.

Vajpayee made it a point to recall that the people of Jammu and Kashmir defied militants' threats and turned out in large number to make the assembly elections a success.

The polls brought to power a government consisting of political parties (including Congress and Chief Minister Mufti Mohd Sayeed's People's Democratic Party) which are BJP's political rivals.

Vajpayee's remark that his federal government would do its best to help Mufti Sayeed government to restore peace in Jammu and Kashmir was reflective of the fact that divergence in political views would not affect the national consensus on the intractable bond between India and Kashmir.

Analysts note that in extending cooperation to Mufti Sayeed government, Vajpayee was rising above partisan considerations particularly in view of the fact the main opposition National Conference party in Jammu and Kashmir led by Omar Abdullah is a constituent of India's ruling National Democratic Alliance.

## Bloodshed mars Nigerian polls

AFP, Ibadan

Nigerians waited nervously Sunday for the results of landmark presidential and state governorship elections which observers said were marred by violence and ballot rigging.

Outside the strife-torn Niger Delta, polling day was relatively peaceful, but observers warned that disputed results from the three-day counting process could trigger a violent reaction in some areas.

Men in security force uniforms shot dead six opposition supporters in a village in the Niger Delta, poll monitors said Saturday, while witnesses reported intimidation and fraud across the south of the country.

The chaos in the south took the shine off what might otherwise have been a fairly positive showcase of Nigeria's four-year-old democracy, the first civilian-run presidential election in 20 years.

In much of the country large numbers of would-be voters turned out, determined to make their voices heard.

## China raises SARS alert as new figures likely soon

AFP, Beijing

China Sunday stepped up its efforts to alert its people to the dangers of SARS, as the government appeared on the verge of announcing drastically higher figures for the spread of the virus.

New cases were reported in parts of the country previously said to be free of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), while officials warned against long-distance travelling during an upcoming week-long holiday.

The SARS scare dominated mass-circulation papers in Beijing, which carried practical information on prevention and announced new measures to combat the disease's spread, including an order to hospitals not to refuse patients suspected of having the deadly disease.

Health Minister Zhang Wenkang was scheduled to hold a press conference later Sunday, amid a drive to stop what was believed to be a wide-spread cover-up of cases of the outbreak.

Diplomats closely following the health crisis told AFP that China was preparing to report SARS figures that would be much greater than current official data.

They said the number of cases for Beijing, which officially has 44 cases and four deaths, would be in the several hundreds.

State media said Sunday that three cases of SARS had been detected in east China's Zhejiang province, a part of the country where no cases had been reported previously.

The three cases were discovered in Zhejiang's capital Hangzhou, the China News Service reported, citing the provincial health bureau.

Chinese state media said Saturday that a total of 67 people nationwide have died from SARS.

China's education ministry has urged university students to refrain from travelling home during an upcoming week-long holiday, in a bid to stop the spread of the disease, the Beijing Star Daily said Sunday.

The call for students to confine

themselves on campus comes just 10 days before China's May Day holiday, which has seen frantic nationwide travel activity in previous years.

"During the May 1st holiday, students should spend the vacation where they are on campus, and should not go travelling," the ministry was quoted by the paper as saying.

Many Chinese students attend universities hundreds of kilometres from home, and the May Day holiday -- along with two other week-long annual holidays -- has previously offered them a rare chance to see their family.

If students heed the call to stay on campus, it could run counter to one of the explicit aims of the holiday, which is to boost travel and tourism and help lift the economy.

Like in other parts of China, Beijing's schools are a focal point for the official campaign to combat SARS.

Schools in the capital that detect confirmed or suspected cases are free to suspend classes, the Beijing Morning Post said.



PHOTO: AFP

A diver (L) from a rescue team jumps from a helicopter after the sinking of the Tona Galea ferry carrying 45 passengers on Saturday near Papagayo island, about 200 km east of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At least 12 people were killed and 14 injured, most of which were tourists from the Sao Paulo region.