



Boats head towards a bridge over the Damanganga river in the Indian union territory of Daman which collapsed on Thursday as people gather on the remains of the bridge to watch rescue operations underway. At least 26 people were killed when the bridge collapsed on the western Indian coast, plunging at least five vehicles into the river, police said.

Talks end in acrimony as DPRK threatens to build up nukes

AFP, Beijing

Six-nation talks on the North Korean nuclear crisis ended Friday in acrimony with North Korea threatening to strengthen its nuclear arsenal unless Washington met its demands for a resolution of the standoff.

While envoys reached consensus on the need to address North Korea's security concerns and agreed that more talks were necessary, they failed to set a timetable.

North Korea said its expectations at the three-day talks also involving China, Japan, Russia and South Korea had been "betrayed" by the United States' "hostile" policy and that a new round of negotiations was endangered.

"If our reasonable proposal is turned aside at the talks, we will give up its attempt to stifle the DPRK (North Korea) by force at an appropriate time," said a statement carried by the North's official KCNA news agency.

"In this case the DPRK cannot dismantle its nuclear deterrent force but will have no option but to increase it."

The verbal blast came after US officials said North Korea had threatened during the talks to conduct a nuclear test and declare itself a nuclear power.

China characterised the relationship between the United States and North Korea as one of "severe and serious distrust" that needed to be addressed.

Washington has been adamant that the Stalinist state's nuclear programmes must be dismantled before it will consider economic assistance and diplomatic normalisation for the bankrupt country.

North Korea's chief negotiator Kim Yong-Il repeated during the

talks the regime's long-standing demands that a non-aggression pact be signed, diplomatic relations be normalized and the United States refrain from interfering in the North economic relations with other countries.

He also insisted the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula was Pyongyang's ultimate goal.

Despite the fiery rhetoric, China's chief delegate, Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi, described the talks as "helpful" but admitted that "some disagreement still remains".

"The parties all believe that there should be a nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula and all parties agreed to consider the concerns of the DPRK... including the security concerns," he said.

"All in all the Chinese side believes this round of talks is useful and we have also made a very

important step forward towards finding a peaceful solution of the issue," he said.

South Korea's head delegate Vice Foreign Minister Lee Soo-Hyuck said that while dates and a venue had yet to be decided, an agreement had at least been reached on a new round of negotiations.

"The six countries agreed to continue the talks," he said at a briefing, adding that there was an understanding, but not an agreement, that they should be within two months.

"They have decided to consult on the date and the venue for the next round of talks through diplomatic channels later," he said.

Russian delegation head Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov said Thursday the talks would again be held in Beijing.

Lee also said that, in his opinion,

the talks had met their goal.

"I think the first round of talks has achieved its desired goal with the agreement itself on having a second round of talks," he said.

"This is the beginning of a difficult process. Our goal for six-party talks is to make a road map to resolve the North Korean nuclear problem."

A tired looking US envoy James Kelly, who triggered the crisis last October when he said North Korea had admitted to having a secret nuclear programme in violation of a 1994 bilateral accord, refused comment on his arrival back at his hotel.

Washington cut vital fuel shipments to the Stalinist state after Kelly's revelation in October, while North Korea responded by expelling UN inspectors, re-starting a moth-balled reactor and withdrawing from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Blair testimony prods Britons in questioning his integrity

AFP, London

Britons were left to wonder Friday if the credibility of Prime Minister Tony Blair was intact or in tatters, after his grilling at the judicial inquiry into the death of weapons expert David Kelly.

In a climactic moment in his worst-ever political crisis, Blair effectively declared that he never misled the nation in the run-up to the US-led war against Iraq.

"He went as far as to say he would have quit if it was true -- as a BBC news report alleged -- that Downing Street had "sexed up" a September 2002 dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

"If it were true it would have meant that we had behaved in the most disgraceful way, and I would have had to resign as prime minister," Blair calmly told the inquiry, headed by judge Lord Brian Hutton, on Thursday.

That soundbite led the evening newscasts, but in national newspa-

pers Friday, his performance was billed as anything from "defiant" (The Sun) and "authoritative" (Daily Mirror) to downright dishonest.

"Neither the PM nor his spin doctor can be trusted," said the front page of the Daily Mail, the self-styled voice of middle-class England, referring to Blair's communications chief Alastair Campbell.

"When they say they are going to tell the truth, the suspicion must be that this is just another lie," it said.

The Hutton inquiry is delving into the circumstances behind Kelly's apparent suicide in July.

A former UN arms inspector in Iraq, Kelly served as a defence ministry adviser on Saddam Hussein's lust for weapons of mass destruction.

At the heart of the inquiry is the September 2002 intelligence dossier, which notably claimed that Saddam's armies could deploy chemical or biological weapons in just 45 minutes.

Mulayam new UP CM

IANs, Lucknow

Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav yesterday took over as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for the third time, four days after his predecessor and foe Mayawati lost her majority in the state assembly.

Watched by several thousands of supporters who lustily cheered him, a triumphant Yadav read out the oaths of office and secrecy in the presence of Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri at an open ground.

The wrestler-turned-politician took over as head of India's most populous and politically volatile state after a 16-month Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combine collapsed on Monday over the real estate scandal near the Taj Mahal.

Yadav, a former Indian defence minister, drove up to the venue in an open jeep with his political colleagues.

Accompanying him were Ajit Singh of the Rashtriya Lok Dal, Kalyan Singh of the Rashtriya Kranti Dal and Sitaram Yechury of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M).

Hamas vows to avenge killing of its activist

AFP, Gaza City

The Palestinian militant group Hamas vowed yesterday to avenge the death of another activist in a helicopter strike hours after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the army to prevent the group from firing rockets.

"Our Mujahedeen (holy warriors) will avenge our martyr as soon as possible to ensure that the Zionists pay the price," said a statement from the group's armed wing, the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades.

Hamdi Kalakh, 24, was killed in the air strike while riding his donkey cart near the southern town of Khan Yunis late Thursday, in the fourth attack on Hamas militants in the past week. Three bystanders were also wounded.

His killing appeared to be Israeli retaliation for a Qassam rocket being fired on the outskirts of the major port city of Ashkelon, the first time an improvised rocket fired from the Gaza Strip had reached so far into Israel.

An Israeli military spokesman said that "explosives expert" Kalakh

had been preparing an imminent Qassam attack against the nearby Gush Katif Jewish settlement bloc.

"Kalakh was responsible for the repeated firing of Qassam rockets and mortar rounds at Israeli targets in and outside of the Gaza Strip as well as planting roadside bombs," he said.

"The targeting of Kalakh is line with IDF (Israel Defence Force) policy to operate against the Hamas terror infrastructure."

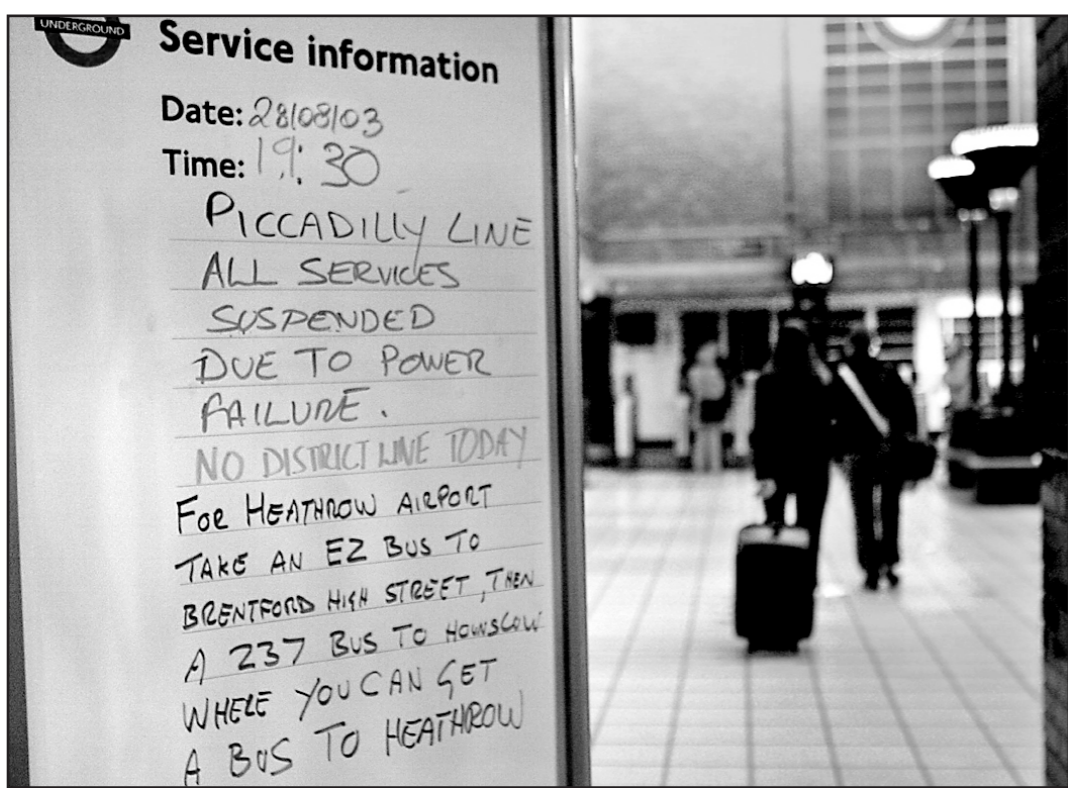
The helicopter strike came hours after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the army to take "all necessary measures" to prevent Hamas from firing rockets.

The army staged an incursion several hundred metres (yards) into north Gaza earlier to level trees which it said had been used as cover to launch a Qassam rocket which landed in an industrial zone of Ashkelon, without causing any injuries.

The Israeli army has launched a series of attacks on Hamas figures since the group carried out an August 19 bus bombing in Jerusalem which killed 21 people.



A Palestinian doctor treats a wounded child at Nasser hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Thursday. The child was wounded during an Israeli attack where the member of Hamas Hamdi Kalakh, 24, was killed. The armed wing of the Islamic radical group Hamas vowed to "avenge as soon as possible" the death of one of its members in an Israeli helicopter strike in central Gaza.



Commuters seek information at the abandoned Northfields underground station Thursday as a major power failure in parts of London brought rail networks to a halt during rush hour. London Mayor Ken Livingstone ruled out terrorism as cause for the power cut that caused travel chaos for up to 500,000 people. Electricity was restored to most of the British capital within hours.

Thousands stranded as London goes dark

AFP, London

The lights came back on in London late Thursday after a major blackout during rush hour stranded hundreds of thousands of commuters, snarled up traffic and shut down most of the public transport system.

Power was fully restored some two and a half hours after the blackout, said a spokesman for the National Grid, which operates the electricity system throughout the country. Most areas hit had power restored within 30 minutes.

The blackout hit nearly 60 percent of the London underground rail network and a large number of electrically-powered suburban commuter trains heading south out of the capital.

It came two weeks to the day after a massive blackout threw much of the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada into darkness.

London mayor Ken Livingstone released a statement calling for an inquiry into the capital's power failure, which he called a "disgrace".

"It is totally unacceptable that this has happened, affecting at least

250,000 people as well as the transport system," he said.

"Under-investment in the National Grid must not be allowed to cause this kind of chaos in a city like London. This event demands the fullest inquiry to ensure it does not happen again in the future."

Livingstone said that up to half a million people could have been affected by the blackout.

The power supplier to the area hit is EDF Energy, a subsidiary of the main French power utility Electricite de France.

"Following a fault with high voltage power lines... EDF Energy worked quickly to mitigate the problems resulting from the fault so that power could be restored to customers as quickly as possible," said a statement by EDF.

The National Grid said it could take distributors time to fully restore supplies to customers and it was investigating the cause of the fault.

Major central London rail hubs such as Waterloo, Victoria and London Bridge stations were badly hit by the power failure which occurred at 6:15 pm (17:15 GMT).

US general wants more Muslim peacekeepers

AFP, Washington

The top US military commander in Iraq told The New York Times he wants peacekeepers from Muslim countries, and a functioning Iraqi army, rather than more US troops in Iraq.

"We've got to get more of an Iraqi face on the security establishment," Central Command chief John Abizaid said, "and we need to have more international participation in the international coalition force."

Published Friday, his comments follow a growing realization in the United States that rebuilding Iraq is more difficult and costly than had been foreseen and that more US troops may be needed to improve all-round security there.

However Abizaid said he favors seeing more peacekeepers from countries like Turkey and Pakistan and accelerating the training of a new Iraqi army to counter the image of a US-dominated occupation.

"You can't underestimate the public perception both within Iraq

and within the Arab world about the percentage of the force being so heavily American," he told the daily at his headquarters at Florida's MacDill Air Force Base.

He said both issues of international peacekeepers and rebuilding Iraqi security services would be discussed next week in Baghdad during a major strategy review by top US military and civilian officials.

The session, the daily said, would try to produce "a better coordinated long-term plan for rebuilding Iraq and ensuring its security."

"A campaign plan exists, but what we need to do is sharpen it up," Abizaid said. "There's a need for a synchronization of effort, not only by the United States, but the international community and coalition forces."

On the US idea of putting an UN-sponsored international peacekeeping force in Iraq as long as it remains under US command, Abizaid said the sticking points were more likely political rather

than military.

"There are innovative ways of working the chain of command that are acceptable from a military point of view and a unity of command point of view," he added.

The US general said he would like to get a 40,000-soldier Iraqi army trained more rapidly than the planned two to three years, even if it was a less than perfect military body.

"Somewhere between the perfect army and the just-good-enough army is the right answer," he said.

An Iraqi security force would help establish ties with the Iraqi public and provide intelligence on loyalists of toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, foreign fighters and terrorists, he said.

Abizaid said he would also like Turkey and Pakistan to lead a third foreign peacekeeping division in Iraq, in addition to the ones currently led by Britain and Poland.

Talks with Pakistan impossible if attacks persist: Vajpayee

REUTERS, Jammu

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday ruled out talks with Pakistan until there was an end to militant attacks which New Delhi blames on Pakistan-based Kashmiri separatists.

"We would like to have meaningful talks but, if terrorist activities continue, that will not be possible," Vajpayee told a news conference in Jammu, winter capital of Indian Kashmir.

He was speaking after twin car bombings in Mumbai which killed 52 people and a spate of attacks in Kashmir, where India faces a separatist revolt in its only Muslim-majority state.

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan came close to war last year over Indian allegations, denied by Islamabad, that Pakistan is stoking Kashmiri militancy. Islamabad says it gives only moral support to the Kashmiri "freedom struggle."

But relations had been improving

slowly after Vajpayee began a peace initiative in April.

"The process is slow, but that is the policy. We would like to go step by step," Vajpayee said.

Vajpayee said he would like to see two-way trade increase.

But peace talks were not possible without a return to normality in Indian Kashmir, hit this week by a spate of attacks which culminated in an overnight gunbattle between militants and security forces in the heart of the summer capital, Srinagar.

The gunbattle coincided with a visit by Vajpayee and other senior government leaders to Srinagar.

"Whatever happened the other day there is an indication that things are not yet normal. And without normalcy, how can there be talks?" Vajpayee said.

India did not blame Pakistan directly for the Mumbai blasts, which Islamabad condemned as "acts of terrorism." But police said they suspected an outlawed Indian

students' organization, acting along with the banned Pakistan-based Kashmiri militant group, the Lashkar-e-Taiba. Police also blamed the Lashkar-e-Taiba for the attacks in Kashmir.

Indian and Pakistani troops also exchanged fire overnight across the Line of Control, a military line dividing the Indian and Pakistani armies in Kashmir.

An Indian police officer said on Friday two young boys, aged six and four, had been killed in the overnight shelling.

Echoing Vajpayee's comments, Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha said during a visit to Australia on Friday that talks would be meaningless unless violence ended.

"By all means, we are interested in friendship with Pakistan," Sinha told a news conference in Melbourne.

Blix felt US intimidating him before Iraq war

REUTERS, Vienna

Former chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix felt Washington was intimidating him to produce reports that would justify military action in the run-up to the Iraq war, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said yesterday.

In an interview on BBC television's Hardtalk, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei also said he believed Iraq had not tried to revive its clandestine nuclear weapons program as the United States and Britain insist.

Blix and ElBaradei led the hunt for Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction for nearly four months late last year and early this year. The IAEA hunted for nuclear weapons, while Blix's UNMOVIC monitoring agency looked for chemical, biological and ballistic arms.

Asked if the administration of President Bush had tried to intimidate him to produce reports support their case for a war on Iraq,

ElBaradei said it had not.

"I think there were probably more efforts to intimidate Hans Blix, because there were more serious concerns about chemical and biological (weapons)," he said.

"Hans complained a lot about the media campaign, some of the administration's efforts to put pressure on him."

The Bush administration sharply criticized Blix before the war for refusing to back US and British assertions about Iraq's weapons programs in his reports to the UN Security Council.

UN weapons inspectors never found the massive stockpiles of banned weapons that Britain and the US claimed President Saddam Hussein possessed. Neither have the US and British forces who took over the hunt for his arsenal after the war.

ElBaradei said a lesson should be learned about the dangers of cutting short weapons inspections.



Laurent (2nd L) and Adrian de Mello (3rd L), sons of Sergio Vieira de Mello, and his wife Annie (2nd R) light a candle near the coffin containing the body of Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, during the funeral ceremony for UN special envoy to Iraq Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, in Saint Paul's Church in Geneva on Thursday. Vieira de Mello died on August 19 in a suicide truck bombing attack at the UN headquarters in Baghdad.