



PHOTO: AFP

Anti-US demonstrators take their protest to the waters of Manila Bay near the US embassy yesterday to condemn the visit of US President George W. Bush. The US leader will meet Philippine President Gloria Arroyo during his eight-hour visit on October 18. Arroyo is a staunch supporter of Bush's war against terror.

### Air pollution causes 1.5m deaths a yr in Asia: WHO

AFP, Manila

Air pollution in urban areas contributes to the deaths of 1.5 million people in Asia every year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

"In Asia, with half of the world's city dwellers, more than 1.5 million people die every year from diseases related to air pollution," the WHO Western Pacific office said in a statement from its Manila headquarters.

"About half a million deaths each year can be attributed to particulate matter and sulphur dioxide in outdoor air," the WHO said.

This is one of the potential problems faced by city dwellers as the size of the populations of cities increases rapidly, outpacing the growth in economies, services and infrastructure, the WHO warned.

"This will result not only in outbreaks of disease, but also an upsurge in crime, violence, environmental degradation, pollution, poverty and unhealthy lifestyles," the WHO added.

The urban poor will be especially vulnerable as they are more likely to lack adequate housing, sanitation and other basic services.

# Israeli tanks return to Gaza refugee camp

## Amnesty terms incursion a 'war crime'

AFP, Rafah

Israeli tanks and troops charged back into the Rafah refugee camp Tuesday, days after an operation which brought heavy criticism from the UN as 15 Palestinian prisoners faced expulsion from the West Bank to Gaza.

Palestinian security sources and witnesses said a force of about 40 tanks backed by helicopter gunships launched the new incursion overnight into the camp in the southern Gaza Strip which Israel said was aimed at demolishing tunnels used to smuggle arms from across the border with Egypt.

Medical officials said at least four Palestinians have been injured so far in the operation, which comes barely 48 hours after the army had wrapped up another raid which left eight people dead and scores more injured.

A Palestinian was also shot dead by an Israeli soldier near the West

Bank town of Hebron overnight after approaching a nearby settlement, military sources said.

Dr Ali Mussa, the head of Rafah hospital, told AFP that among the injured was a 12-year-old boy who was in a serious condition after being struck by shrapnel from a tank shell.

Locals said that three houses had been destroyed in the latest raid which began at around 3:30 am (0130 GMT).

Army helicopters could be seen swooping overhead and opened fire on a number of occasions. Israeli soldiers armed with machine-guns could be seen taking up positions in tall buildings.

An Israeli army spokesman confirmed that a new operation was underway in Rafah designed to "destroy the tunnels used by the Palestinians to smuggle illegal weapons" underneath the border between Gaza and Egypt.

During the first operation, which was codenamed Operation Root Canal, the Israeli army destroyed three tunnels but the military spokesman said that others were still intact.

"We will take as long as is necessary to complete our mission and do our utmost to avoid any damage for the civilian population," said Brigadier Eyal Eisenberg, the commander of one of the units which was taking part in the new raid.

UN officials have said that more than 1,200 people were left homeless after the first raid.

That operation was roundly condemned and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan issued a statement in which he "deplored the killing of Palestinian civilians during the Israeli incursion into Rafah."

Meanwhile Israeli military sources said that 15 Palestinian detainees were to be expelled from

the West Bank to Gaza.

Another report adds: Human rights group Amnesty International on Monday condemned Israeli raids at the weekend on the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah that killed eight Palestinians, describing the operation as a "war crime".

"The repeated practice by the Israeli army of deliberate and wanton destruction of homes and civilian property is a grave violation of international human rights and humanitarian law... and constitutes a war crime," Amnesty said in a written statement issued in London.

"Amnesty International calls on the Israeli authorities to put an immediate end to the practice of destroying Palestinian homes and other properties, and of using excessive, disproportionate and reckless force against unarmed Palestinians... which frequently result in the killing and injuring of unarmed civilians, including children."

## Hindu activists vow to swamp Ayodhya

AFP, New Delhi

Despite a security clampdown, Hindu activists vowed yesterday to press ahead with a plan to converge on the northern Indian town of Ayodhya for a campaign to build a controversial temple.

"Thousands are planning to go. Some of them have reached near Ayodhya, while others will be reaching there soon," Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP -- World Hindu Council) president Vishnu Hari Dalmia told AFP.

"We will continue with the programme despite the arrests. We will brave police firing or if they try to beat us with sticks," he added.

"We wanted to perform the whole thing in a very orderly and peaceful way, but the government does not want it to happen that way. Our democratic and religious rights are being banned."

The hardline VHP has said that more than 200,000 Hindus from all over India would assemble in Ayodhya on Friday to attend "sankalp diwas" (Resolution Day) and stage a demonstration for the construction of the temple.

The VHP is spearheading a campaign to build a temple on the ruins of the Babri Mosque razed by Hindu zealots in 1992.

## Alternative peace plan has no official backing, says Arafat

AFP, Ramallah

Yasser Arafat said yesterday that an alternative peace agreement drawn up between leading Palestinian and Israeli personalities did not have official backing from the Palestinian Authority.

"It's not an official agreement," veteran Palestinian leader Arafat told reporters here. "It's activists from both sides -- Israelis and Palestinians with international participation."

Former Palestinian minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, one of the participants in talks over the weekend in Jordan which led to the agreement, had said that the Palestinian Authority "supports" the blueprint.

But Arafat, who is president of the authority, said merely that he backed all efforts to reach a peace agreement, especially from Israeli activists.

Although full details of the blueprint thrashed out over the weekend in Jordan have yet to be revealed, MP Haim Oron of Israel's left-wing Meretz party said it included an acceptance by the Palestinians that Israel was a Jewish state and there could be no right of return for Palestinian refugees.

## Leading Shiite factions clash in Iraq

### Bush says he's still in charge

AFP, Baghdad

Two leading Shiite factions clashed overnight in the Iraqi holy city of Karbala as US President George W. Bush said he is in charge of operations in the war-torn country, where turmoil still reigns.

And as Washington seeks to secure support to rebuild Iraq through a third revised draft UN resolution, the world's Islamic nations meeting in Malaysia will call on the Security Council to set a clear timetable for a US troop withdrawal from Iraq.

The US draft resolution received a cautious welcome from key war opponents France and Germany but drew criticism in China, a permanent Security Council member with veto-wielding powers.

In Iraq, 18 people were wounded overnight in a shootout between Muslim Shiite groups after supporters of firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr sought to seize control of holy sites in Karbala, 110 km southwest of Baghdad.

The shootout occurred when about 100 members of Sadr's Mehdi Army militia tried to seize control of the mausoleums of two of the holiest figures in Shiite theology, the seventh century imams Abbas and

Hussein, an AFP reporter at the scene witnessed.

They were pushed back to a nearby mosque and later dislodged by supporters of Sheikh Ali Sistani, a leading member of the Hawza, Iraq's highest Shiite authority.

The clash came hours before Sadr, a fierce opponent of the US presence in Iraq, was to unveil details of a "shadow government" he has declared, at a press conference in the other Shiite holy city of Najaf.

But Bush, whose army is still hunting for ousted strongman Saddam Hussein, believed to be behind the anti-US attacks, insisted he was in charge in Iraq and denied that the occupation, tying down some 130,000 US soldiers, had overstretched the American military.

"We're winning decisively in Iraq," Bush told Tribune Broadcasting in one of a series of interviews with regional television operators, part of a forceful campaign to convince the US public that the occupation is going well.

"The definition of when we get out is 'when there is a free and peaceful Iraq based upon a constitution and elections,' and obviously we'd like that to happen as quickly as possible," he added.

## China starts countdown for manned moon mission

AFP, Jiuquan

Tight security yesterday surrounded the isolated launch center that will send China's first man into space as the chosen astronauts made final preparations ahead of the historic flight.

The leading candidate to be on China's first manned space mission, and in the process become a household name, was identified as Yang Liwei by a pro-Beijing newspaper in Hong Kong.

The Wen Wei Po said Yang, who was born in 1965 and hails from Saizhong county in northeastern Liaoning province, topped a list of three astronauts who have been whittled down from an initial batch of 14 following physical and psychological examinations.

Second in the pecking order is Zhai Zhigang and third is Nie Haisheng, according to the newspaper, which has proved a reliable source of news on the launch.

However, it remains unclear how many astronauts will be inside Shenzhou V when it blasts off from the remote Gobi desert in north China's Inner Mongolia region sometime between Wednesday and Friday.



PHOTO: AFP

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (C) tours with Foreign Minister Sayed Hamid Albar (L) the grounds of the Expo OIC 2003 after its inauguration yesterday in Malaysia's administrative capital, Putrajaya, south of Kuala Lumpur, on the sidelines of the 10th summit meeting of the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

## OIC decries campaign to link Islam to terrorism

AP, Putrajaya

Decrying what they perceive as a Western campaign to unfairly link their religion to terrorism, Islamic nations are calling for stronger international efforts to resolve new and old frustrations such as the US occupation of Iraq and the Palestinian struggle which have fuelled extremism and violence.

"We plead with the Western world to cooperate with us, to help our vision of moderate Islam become more dominant," Munir Akram, Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations, said at a summit of the 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference, considered the Muslim world's most important political grouping.

"There is obviously a sense of anger in the Muslim world, since we have suffered many injustices,"

Akram said on the sidelines of the summit in Putrajaya, Malaysia's new administrative capital. "We may not endorse the acts of desperation, such as suicide bombings, which have followed these injustices, but that does not legitimise important causes such as the Palestinian struggle."

Delegates at the summit which concludes on Friday following a two-day meeting of up to 35 national leaders said many of their countries have been unfairly scrutinized for alleged links to extremists after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

OIC members range from alleged terror sponsors Iran, Libya and Syria to moderate, mostly secular nations such as Malaysia, and US military allies such as Bahrain and Qatar.

## Pakistan test-fires indigenous missile

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan test-fired an "indigenously developed" medium-range ballistic missile yesterday, concluding a series of such tests that began earlier this month, the military said.

"Pakistan today carried out another successful test fire of its indigenously developed medium-range surface-to-surface ballistic Hatf-IV/Shaheen-1," a statement from the military's public relations department said.

It was the second test of Shaheen-1 in less than a week.

Islamabad, wary of superiority of its rival India in conventional weapons, carried out the first test of nuclear-capable Shaheen-1 on Wednesday. The missile has a range of up to 435 miles and can carry all "kinds of warheads," the military has said.

## Vajpayee completes 4-year as PM

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee this week clocked up four years in office -- marked by new tensions with Pakistan and a rise of Hindu nationalism but a somewhat stable and growing economy.

Analysts say the 78-year-old has managed to hold together a rather unwieldy coalition of two-dozen parties and is preparing for what could perhaps be his last electoral battle.

Five key states go to the polls in November-December followed by parliamentary elections, set for October next year but which may be advanced to February.

"Shining India" is how Vajpayee's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is projecting its

achievements of the past four years.

An advertisement placed in major newspapers Monday sought to highlight that prices were stable, telephone connections and cooking gas supplies were available on demand, taxes were friendlier and housing loans easier.

On the economic front, stock markets are witnessing a bull run and the privatisation process is on track, though disrupted sometimes by court orders or by the political opposition.

Vajpayee's tenure has, however, been marked by tensions with nuclear rival Pakistan and the two came close to their fourth war when Islamic militants attacked the Indian parliament building in December 2001.

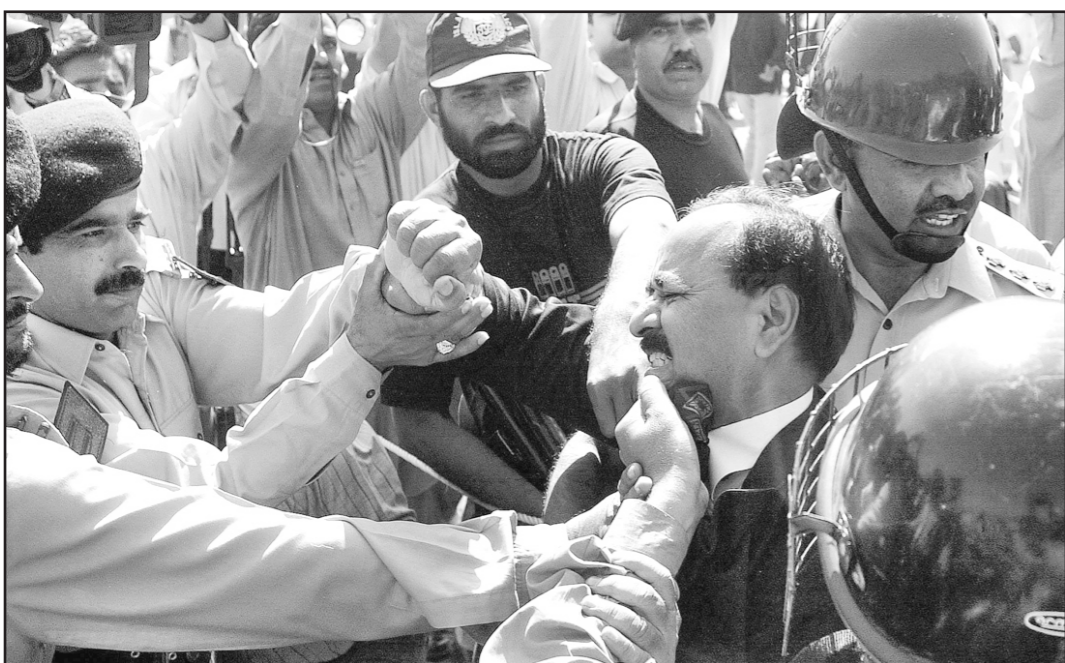


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani policemen prevent an unidentified Pak lawyer (3-R) from protesting against the government in front of the Parliament House in Islamabad yesterday. As part of their year long protest against President Pervez Musharraf, Pakistani lawyers took a 53-vehicle convoy on a "long march" from eastern city of Lahore towards Islamabad.

## US troops see Saddam hiding in Tikrit

AP, Tikrit

Saddam Hussein is believed to have been hiding out recently in Tikrit, influencing the anti-American insurgency, the US military said Monday. Fresh attacks by resistance forces across central Iraq were reported to have killed three American soldiers and wounded five others.

"We have clear indication he has been here recently," Maj. Troy Smith, a deputy brigade commander, told reporters in Tikrit, the fugitive former president's hometown and now headquarters for the 4th Infantry Division. "He could be here right now," he said of Saddam.

The insurgents' attacks on US occupation forces averaged 22 a day in the past week, the US military reported Monday in Baghdad.

That's an increase of several a day over the pace of some weeks earlier, and has resulted in American deaths at a rate of almost one every two days.

The attacks late Sunday and Monday, against 4th Infantry Division troops, took place in Tikrit and at locations north and east of here, according to the US command.

At 7:45 p.m. Sunday, one division soldier was killed and another wounded when their Bradley armored vehicle struck a mine near Beiji, 30 miles north of Tikrit.

At 11:15 a.m. Monday, a division convoy traveling near Jalyula, in a desolate area 80 miles east of Tikrit, was ambushed with a makeshift roadside bomb and small-arms fire. One soldier was killed and two were wounded.