

N Korea raps Japan as US seeks action

Russia, China oppose slapping sanctions

REUTERS, Seoul

A senior US envoy began an Asian tour yesterday to press Washington's case that Pyongyang must be brought to heel, as North Korea lashed out at Japan for imposing sanctions over this week's barrage of missile tests.

The United States has stumbled in attempts to impose UN sanctions on North Korea over the July 4 missile tests because of opposition from Russia and China -- echoing the Security Council split over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Kyodo news agency said that China -- about the nearest the reclusive communist state has to an international ally -- had drafted a UN Security Council "statement" in a bid to counter efforts to pass a

stronger resolution.

The last time North Korea fired a missile, in 1998, the Security Council ended up issuing a tepid statement that did not chastise Pyongyang or lead to sanctions.

Defying near-universal condemnation of its latest firings, North Korea has vowed to carry out more launches and has said it will use force if the international community tries to stop it.

On Friday, it threatened "stronger actions" against Japan -- which proposed the resolution after the missiles splashed into the sea off its west coast -- if its sanctions were not lifted.

Japan has banned a North Korean ferry from entering its ports for six months as part of a package of initial sanctions.

"This may force us to take stronger physical actions," Kyodo news agency quoted Song Il-ho, North Korea's ambassador in charge of diplomatic normalisation talks with Japan, as saying.

Asked by Japanese reporters in Pyongyang to elaborate, he said: "I leave that to your imagination."

North Korea's councillor at the UN mission in Geneva, Choe Myong-nam, told South Korea's Yonhap news agency that Wednesday's volley of missiles were "not an attack on someone" and defended Pyongyang's right to such launches.

"From an international point of view, it is not fair to say who can do one thing and who can't," Choe said. "The same applies to possessing nuclear weapons."

Washington's envoy on North Korea, Christopher Hill, began a tour of North Korea's neighbours to forge a united front. But there was no apparent breakthrough on his first stop, Beijing.

The Xinhua news agency quoted State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan as telling Hill merely that Beijing would "keep close contact with concerned sides to preserve peace and stability in the Korean peninsula, realize denuclearisation there and push forward the six-party talks on the Korean peninsula nuclear issue."

In February 2005, North Korea said it possessed nuclear weapons. Since then, it threatened several times to bolster its nuclear arsenal to counter what it sees as US hostility.



Susanna Pell, who was in the second carriage of the Edgware Road tube train when the terrorist bomb went off, lays flowers yesterday at the station to pay tributes to those who lost their lives in the terrorist bombings last year.

Protesters call march against Thai PM for next week

AFP, Bangkok

Anti-government protesters yesterday said they would renew their street demonstrations next week in a fresh bid to force Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to leave office.

"PAD plans a major rally on Friday, July 14 ... before marching to Government House to demand that Prime Minister Thaksin resign," said Suriyasai Katsalis, a spokesman for the People's Alliance for Democracy.

PAD spearheaded months of protests against Thaksin earlier this year, accusing him of corruption and abuse of power over a tax-free stock sale that earned his family 1.9 billion dollars.

Thaksin, 56, called snap elections on April 2 in hopes of ending the protests, but the polls proved inconclusive after the opposition staged a boycott.

The Constitutional Court has since invalidated the polls, and is now considering charges that Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai and the opposition Democrat Party broke electoral laws during the campaign.



A Palestinian boy throws a rock at an Israeli armoured vehicle during a military operation at the Askar refugee camp in the West Bank city of Nablus yesterday. Tamer Qandil, 22, a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a faction loosely affiliated to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party, was shot dead in clashes with Israeli troops in the Askar refugee camp.

Most Israelis want assassination of Hamas leaders

AFP, Jerusalem

An overwhelming majority of Israelis want leaders of the governing Palestinian movement Hamas assassinated in order to release a captured soldier and stop rocket attacks, a poll revealed Friday.

The survey found that 82 percent of people questioned suggested the military "begin assassinating Hamas leaders" given that the armed wing of the faction has claimed a series of attacks, including one in which the soldier was taken.

Another 52 percent of respondents favoured the bombing of targets in the Gaza Strip, even if this could lead to a loss of civilian lives, while 53 percent thought the military should reoccupy parts of the territory.

Only 20 percent thought Israel should release Palestinian prisoners in return for the release of the 19-year-old soldier -- compared to 53 percent who favoured negotiations in a poll published last Friday.

Forty-seven percent of respondents said there were dissatisfied with the performance of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who is facing the first real test of his leadership in the crisis.

Uneasy Britons mark London bombings

New video aired on Al Jazeera

REUTERS, London

As Britain marked the first anniversary of the London suicide bombings yesterday, the city's chief police officer said the threat of another attack had grown.

One year after four young British Muslims blew themselves up on London's transport system, killing 52 people and wounding 700, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair described the threat as "grim."

"There are, as we speak, people in the United Kingdom planning further atrocities," he told BBC Radio. "Since July, the threat has palpably increased."

As Londoners went to work on Friday morning, stopping to lay flowers at the site of the July 7, 2005, attacks, the mood was one of unease mixed with resignation and defiance.

"I was there. It could have been me, so I am just lucky to be alive and

remembering those who weren't that lucky," said Robert Andrews, 29, who was on one of the bombed London Underground trains.

"I am aware it could happen again but I am not worried," he told Reuters. "I have just got to get on with my life."

In what appeared to be a well-timed bid to fuel fears, a video surfaced on Thursday apparently showing one bomber, Shehzad Tanweer, reading his last statement before death.

The previously unseen video, broadcast on Qatar-based Al Jazeera television, also showed al-Qaeda's deputy leader Ayman al-Zawahri, suggesting a link between Osama bin Laden's network and the bombers.

The failure of the police to charge anyone in connection with the attacks, despite an exhaustive inquiry, has added to unease.

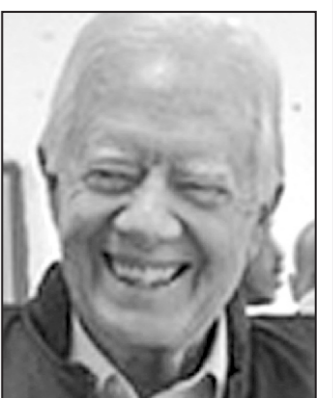
The British government says it knows little about the motivation of

the bombers, their possible training abroad or their alleged links to al-Qaeda.

A survey by the Pew Global Attitudes Project released in Washington on Thursday showed 42 percent of Britons were very concerned about a rise in Islamic extremism in Britain compared to 34 percent a year ago.

Many of Britain's 1.8 million Muslims feel their community has been unfairly targeted by the police since the attacks. Two botched anti-terrorist operations in which police shot two innocent men, killing one of them, have not helped.

Survivors of the bombings say an official report into the attacks published in May did not answer all their questions. Many want a full public inquiry into the events which, like the September 11 attacks in the United States, have become etched into the British psyche as a simple date -- 7/7.



Jimmy Carter, Wife mark 60th Wedding Anniversary

AP, Atlanta

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, fresh off of a trip to Nicaragua to monitor preparations for November's elections, plan to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary Friday with a quiet day in their Georgia hometown.

In the long line of American presidents and first ladies, the Carters have the second longest marriage. George and Barbara Bush have been married for 61 years.

Jimmy Carter is 81. Rosalynn Carter is 78. They have four children and 11 grandchildren, and are expecting their first great-grandchild in September.

Friends and associates say the Carters remain as active as ever two and a half decades after leaving the White House.

"They continue to be full partners in the post-presidency to this day," said Deanna Congilio, spokeswoman for the couple. "They're continuing the work of the Carter Centre, strengthening democracy, advancing human rights and ending suffering around the world."

Japanese soldiers head home from Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Japanese troops in Iraq began heading home Friday as the first batch of 38 soldiers were flown out by British military choppers as part of the announced withdrawal, a military source said.

"Thirty-eight Japanese soldiers left Iraq today. The actual troop withdrawal has started," the source told AFP, adding the soldiers left for Kuwait.

Japan ordered its 600 troops to leave Iraq on June 20, ending its first military mission since World War II to a country where fighting is under way. The withdrawal is expected to be completed by late July.

While the withdrawal of Japanese troops from the southern province of Muthanna began on Friday, Japan has been moving its military vehicles and engineering equipment out of Iraq since June 20.

The Japanese mission in Iraq relied on British and Australian troops for protection as its own troops are barred from using force.

The British military when contacted declined to comment on the troop withdrawal.

In June Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced that Iraq would assume responsibility for security in

Muthanna province -- the first such handover of a region from coalition troops to fledgling Iraqi forces.

Japan's military mission, which has helped reconstruct the relatively peaceful area around the city of Samawa since January 2004, is the first of its kind since Japan was forced by the United States to renounce war after World War II.

Announcing the plan to bring home the troops, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had said the troops had accomplished their goal of rebuilding the relatively peaceful region.

Koizumi, who touts his personal friendship with US President George W. Bush, went ahead with the Iraq deployment despite domestic opposition in a country that has been firmly pacifist for six decades.

During their mission in Iraq, the Japanese troops suffered no casualties and did not fire their weapons.

Japan also sent troops to Cambodia in 1993 as part of a UN force and some troops to Thailand and Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami disaster. More recently, it sent military medical teams to Indonesia following its latest deadly earthquake.

8 detained for plot against Gloria Arroyo

AFP, Manila

Eight people including six Philippines military officers were detained yesterday in a raid that may have foiled a plot to attack the legislature during an address by President Gloria Arroyo later this month, the authorities said.

A team of soldiers and police swooped on a house in suburban Manila near the House of Representatives complex before dawn and arrested the eight, seizing guns, bombs, documents, and a blueprint of the government building, they said.

"As we all know, the state of the nation address of the president is approaching," national police chief Oscar Calderon told a news conference.

Arroyo is set to deliver the annual policy address at the legislature on July 24.

The group rented the house several weeks ago and the authorities pounced after a three-day stake-out, military officials said.

"It arouses your interest why they would rent a house there at this point in time, and then we found this blueprint of the (House of Representatives building) in their possession," said armed forces chief of staff General Generoso Senga.

Lankan bipartisan peace bid fails

Says opposition

AFP, Colombo

A fresh attempt to hammer out a bipartisan approach to Sri Lanka's drawn out Tamil separatist conflict ended abruptly with the defection of an opposition legislator, officials said yesterday.

President Mahinda Rajapakse met with United National Party opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe Thursday evening to agree on a common approach to the festering conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

The meeting between Rajapakse and Wickremesinghe came a day after US Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead said that a solution to civil strife would require "radical changes in the way the entire nation is governed."

These changes must "empower all the people of Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and others, and give them a greater say in how they are governed in the areas where they live," he said.

Spiralling violence has claimed the lives of more than 830 people and displaced tens of thousands more since December as a ceasefire agreement between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) crumbles.

Analysts say a settlement with Tiger rebels in the decades old

ethnic conflict requires an amendment to the constitution and that would mean bipartisan support for the two thirds majority needed in parliament.

The failed effort came as Sri Lanka's political parties were under pressure from the island's foreign backers to end the separatist conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

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Coalition soldier, 8 Taliban killed

AFP, Kabul

A soldier from the US-led coalition and eight rebels died in new violence in Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, as Britain mulled sending extra troops after six were killed in a month.

The coalition soldier was killed and another wounded on Thursday when rebels attacked a convoy in Helmand province, the US-led coalition said in a statement. It did not give the nationality of either service member.

"Coalition forces returned fire, and at least five extremists were killed," it said. The attack was in Baghran Valley in the north of the province.

Helmand, which borders Pakistan, is a hotspot for attacks by militants from the extremist Taliban movement that was removed from power in late 2001 by the coalition and by Afghan warlords.

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A baby girl (2L) is carried by her mother as she offers flowers to King Gyanendra (R) of Nepal on his 60th birthday at Narayanhiy Royal Palace in Kathmandu yesterday.

Constitution framers in Nepal begin work

AFP, Kathmandu

The committee drafting Nepal's interim constitution that will pave the way for rebel Maoists to join a power-sharing government has finally begun its work, an official said Thursday.

The committee was supposed to start drafting the new document two weeks ago but was awaiting approval from government, which was considering increasing its size to nine people.

In the end, the government decided to keep the committee at just six members, said Laxman Prasad Aryal, coordinator of the committee.

"We were asked to start our formal work without inducting new members," he said, adding, "We received terms of reference from the talks team of the government and the Maoists (who) asked us to begin our work from Thursday."

On June 16, the rebels and the recently reinstated government made a landmark power-sharing

agreement that would see the rebels join an interim government after the interim constitution had been drafted.

"The committee has been given a mandate to draft the interim constitution in the next 15 days and we are hopeful that it will be completed within the stipulated time," said Aryal, a former supreme court justice.

The interim constitution, he said, would clarify the position of the king, recommend an alternative body to parliament, and announce the date for constituent assembly elections.

"Once the interim constitution is drafted it will be handed over to the government-Maoists talks team for approval," Aryal said.

Since King Gyanendra was forced to end 14 months of direct rule in April, the new government has stripped him of most of his powers, including having any role in parliament and ending his supreme command of the 90,000 strong Nepal Army.