

US, major allies differ on response to Israeli attack

AFP, Paris

Major US allies yesterday condemned the ferocity of Israel's military attack on Lebanon, revealing a clear split with Washington's moderate call for restraint.

Cries of alarm mounted worldwide after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered armed forces to intensify the offensive in response to rockets hitting towns in northern Israel, killing two and wounding 50.

As the civilian death toll in Lebanon mounted above 60 and Israeli warplanes hit buildings, roads and Beirut airport, French President Jacques Chirac questioned whether Israel was seeking Lebanon's destruction.

"One may well ask if there isn't today a kind of wish to destroy Lebanon -- its infrastructure, its roads, its communications, its energy, its airport. And for what?"

"I find honestly -- as all Europeans do -- that the current reactions are totally disproportionate," he said in a live television interview on France's national Bastille Day.

Chirac's comments, echoed across most of Europe and in much of the rest of the world, conflicted with US President George W. Bush's dogged defence of Israel's right to defend itself.

Bush has not publicly criticized the scale of the Israeli assault, blaming Lebanese militia group Hezbollah and radical Palestinian Hamas for sparking the crisis.

Hezbollah guerrillas seized two Israeli servicemen Wednesday, leading to Israel's first ground incursion since it ended its occupation of

the south of the country in 2000.

Bush telephoned Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, however, vowing to push Israel to limit the damage it is wreaking in Lebanon.

"President Bush asserted that he will exert pressure on Israel to limit damage inflicted on Lebanon through the ongoing military operation," said a statement from Siniora's office.

Around the rest of world, however, leaders bluntly condemned Israel's response.

"In my view, Israel is making a mistake," said Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. "It will only lead to an escalation of the violence."

In Italy, Prime Minister Romano Prodi said he recognized Israel's legitimate concerns and condemning the kidnapping of the soldiers.

But "we deplore the escalation in the use of force, the serious damage to Lebanese infrastructure and the civilian casualties of the raids," the Italian leader added.

The Vatican secretary of state, Angelo Sodano, said: "The Holy See deplores the attack on Lebanon, a free and sovereign country," adding that he felt for the people "who had already suffered in defence of their independence."

Germany called on Israel to consider the longer term impact of its strike on Lebanon.

"On the one hand, Israel has the internationally recognised right to self defence. But at the same time we ask our Israeli friends and partners not to lose sight of the long-term consequences when they exercise this right," German deputy government spokesman Jens Pleoetner said.

"Here we think care should be taken about the situation in Lebanon, which is a fragile entity as a state and could be further destabilised," he added.

Already, Israel has imposed an air and sea blockade on Lebanon, shut the only international airport by bombing its runways and damaged the main Beirut-Damascus highway.

Iran, which with Syria is a sponsor of Hezbollah, called on the United Nations to step in. "The international community and the UN must intervene to stop this crime," Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said during a visit to Greece.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim state, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was quoted by the state news agency Antara as saying: "Indonesia repeats its call for Israel to stop its military action."

British Prime Minister Tony Blair called for restraint on all sides but kept closer to the US line.

"I totally understand the desire and the need for Israel to defend itself property and I also understand the plight of Lebanon and the Lebanese government, not to say the many Palestinians that are suffering as well," Blair said in London.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was meeting with Bush before hosting a summit of Group of Eight powers in Saint Petersburg, said he would formally place the Middle East crisis on the agenda.

"I consider that all sides implicated in this conflict should immediately stop military action," Putin said.

"We have contacted elders and Shia leaders, who themselves are appealing to their people for restraint and to remain peaceful,"

Nepal arrests 2 Pakistanis, probes links to Mumbai blasts

AFP, Kathmandu

Police in Nepal are probing possible links between two Pakistani men arrested here on explosives charges and the serial train blasts in Mumbai that killed 179 people, an official said yesterday.

The men were arrested at a downtown hotel Wednesday in connection with the 2001 discovery in a Kathmandu flat of 16 kilograms (33 pounds) of powerful RDX explosive.

"We will also investigate their possible links in the Mumbai blasts during interrogation. We can't say anything at the moment," said Sharad Oli, deputy superintendent of Kathmandu police.

Seven blasts went off in the space of 15 minutes Tuesday along Mumbai's western railway line, tearing open first-class train carriages that were packed with people travelling home from work in India's commercial hub.

Nepalese officials pledged Friday to make thorough investigations following the arrests.

"We will take action as per the existing law of the state if someone exploits our territory for operating violent activities in foreign soil," said home ministry spokesman Baman Prasad Neupane.

Sandwiched between India and China, Nepal would not be used as a regional base for terrorists, another official said.

"We don't allow our territory to be used against any neighbours and we are committed to curb terrorist infiltration," said foreign ministry spokesman Yadhav Khanal.

Kathmandu district court granted police five days to interrogate the two Pakistanis, a police officer said Friday.

"The two arrested Pakistani nationals will be kept in police custody for at least five days for investigation on possession of 16 kilograms of RDX explosives back in 2001," said Oli.

On Thursday police said four people had been arrested from two hotels in the capital, but on Friday said only two men had been detained.

The Pakistani Embassy in Kathmandu said that they had no information about the arrest of the two men.

"We have not been told officially. We don't know anything about this issue," said an embassy spokesman on condition of anonymity.

Illegal immigrants

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foreign workers in the country, he said.

Malaysia has launched several crackdowns since 1992 on illegal workers, most of whom come from impoverished parts of Southeast Asia.

But each one led to a labour shortage followed by a new wave of illegal immigration -- a pattern, which was apparent after last year's blitz.

Malaysia is one of the largest importers of foreign labour in Asia. Foreign workers, both legal and illegal, number around 2.6 million of its 10.5 million workforce, officials say.

William, Harry 'saddened' by Italian photos of Diana death

AFP, London

Britain's Prince William and Prince Harry expressed regret yesterday at the publication in Italy of a picture of their mother Princess Diana in the wreckage of the car crash that took her life.

"We feel deeply saddened that such a low has been reached," William and Harry said in a statement issued by Clarence House, the official London residence of their father Prince Charles.

"Despite the support shown to us and our mothers memory by so many people over the last eight years, we feel that, as her sons, we would be failing in our duty to her now if we did not protect her -- as she once did us."

Chi, a weekly newsmagazine in Italy, has published the image of Diana being given oxygen at the scene of the crash in a Paris road tunnel in August 1997 that took her life and those of her lover Dodi Fayed and driver Henri Paul.

Umberto Brindani, Chi's editor, has said the photo comes from a just-published book in France by crime writer Jean-Michel Caradech, titled "Lady Diana: The Criminal Investigation".

William and Harry, who have both embarked on military careers, urged other publications to refrain from reprinting the photo.

"We appeal to all forms of media throughout the world to appreciate fully that publishing such material causes great hurt to us, our father, our mothers family and all those who so loved and respected her," they said.

Freedom fighter

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and a host of well wishers to mourn his death. During the Liberation War, he fought under sector 2.

Meanwhile, an eight-year-old girl allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself from a ceiling fan at his house in Lalkuthi area of Mirpur on Thursday night.

A class three student, Tania Akhter, was being brought up by her aunt and killed herself following a spat with her (aunt), family members said.

In Meradia, Khilgaon police recovered body of Nasima Begum, 19, from her house at Bhuiyanpara Thursday night.

The body was found suspended from a ceiling fan. Police suspect she killed herself following a feud within the family.

Boundary talks

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through the Third Amendment to the constitution on November 28, 1974, the Indian government has not yet ratified it.

The last meeting of the Joint Boundary Working Group was held in New Delhi March 26-27 in 2002.

Dipu, Azad

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two revolvers, a pistol with eight bullets, a private car and Tk 74,000 from the possession of the arrestees.

Both Dipu and Azad said one of the two .32 revolvers belongs to Biltu's father and another revolver and pistol were left by two others who fled away.

When contacted, Biltu's family denied having any .32 revolver. Dipu said he hired the private car from Kalabagan a few days back. Police said both Dipu and Biltu were drug addicts.

Pakistani Shia leader

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Turabi's nephew Ali and the bomber were killed instantly while the cleric died of his injuries in hospital, Mughal said. The bodyguards were all seriously injured.

"Hassan Turabi is dead, we tried to save his life," a doctor at the city's Patel Hospital who gave his name as Ejaz said. An AFP correspondent saw the white-bearded cleric's bloodstained body at the hospital.

His nephew's corpse, in a striped t-shirt, could be seen shortly after the blast lying in a narrow white-washed alleyway outside the house.

Next to him was the bomber's severed head with its eyes still open, along with an unexploded hand grenade.

"There was a huge bomb blast outside our home and a cousin of mine has died while my father is being treated in hospital," said the cleric's son, Murtaza Turabi, said before his father died.

Turabi escaped another assassination attempt without injury on April 6 when a bomb hidden under a fruit cart exploded as he was getting into his car outside his home. Two bodyguards and a passerby were hurt in that incident.

A crowd of 300 people, many of them crying, shouted slogans outside the hospital after Turabi's death.

Hundreds more waited for his body to be brought back to his house in an area which has seen frequent sectarian attacks blamed on militants from the majority Sunni Muslim community.

"We have contacted elders and Shia leaders, who themselves are appealing to their people for restraint and to remain peaceful,"

Nayan's family

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Banu, the accused police officer was suspended.

The SI along with three other policemen went to Nayan Banu's house on July 2 to arrest Badsha Mia, an accused in an abduction case. Failing to arrest Badsha, Mukhes booted and beat Nayan to death.

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SMEs in 7 dists

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was chief guest at the seminar held at Sheraton Hotel.

Wahiduddin Mahmud observed, "We should have a conscious policy for developing rural economy."

Kamal Siddiqui said finance is a serious problem for the SMEs and there should be multiple sources of funds for them. "We have to devise something innovative for developing SMEs, and local government bodies should be engaged in developing local business," he said.

Establishment of an SME foundation and formulation of a policy for the SMEs will further vitalise local economy, he hoped.

Mir Nasir Hossain, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said, "We have to develop an SME sector if we really like to have a balanced economy."

One of the major problems the SMEs are facing is that they do not have drier access to bank finance, he said. Moreover, rural people pay more for electricity but they do not get adequate power.

MA Momen, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said business bodies should play a more active role in promoting SMEs.

Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, executive director of Brac, suggested immediate establishment of an SME foundation. Enterprises can grow across the country if infrastructure and other services are available, he said.

Other speakers included Md Abdul Karim, chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Prashant Rana, general manager of Katalyst.

Japanese FM

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Bangladesh, Taru Aso will make a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and hold official talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart.

Taru Aso belongs to the Liberal Democratic Party and he is a Member of the House of Representatives. He was elected nine times from Fukuoka Prefecture constituency. He was elected Member of the House of Representatives for the first time in October 1979.

A graduate in Politics and Economics, Taru Aso was appointed as Minister for Foreign Affairs in October 2005. He previously held the positions of Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, Chairman of Policy Research Council, Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy, Chairman of Special Committee on Fiscal Structure Reform, Minister of State, Economic Planning Agency, Chairman of Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Chairman of Special Committee on Coal Issues, House of Representatives, Vice-minister for Education, Sports, Science and Culture.

Foreign ministry officials consider the meetings with the Japanese foreign minister very

Karachi police chief Niaz Siddiqui said.

Turabi's party is a member of the country's main alliance of religious parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal.

Thousands of people have died in more than a decade of sectarian violence in Pakistan, although Sunnis and Shias generally live peacefully together.

Fresh violence

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were found, apparently the latest victims of a mass kidnapping that took place in the nearby town of Muqaddiyah on Wednesday.

The bodies were found in a field, handcuffed, blindfolded and shot in the head. Twenty-four bodies had already been found on Wednesday.

An Iraqi contractor working with the US forces was shot dead by gunmen close to the northern city of Tikrit, hometown of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein, police said.

The contractor's 18-year-old son was also wounded in the attack when gunmen ambushed the car in which they were travelling.

Also in the restive northern city of Mosul, a policeman and a bodyguard of a judge were shot dead in separate attacks by gunmen, police said.

Meanwhile, the US military said it successfully targeted and captured an al-Qaeda in Iraq "terrorist and two other suspects during a raid in the vicinity of Baghdad" on Friday.

"The targeted individual is reported to be an Omar Brigade member and recruiter with control of several terrorist fighting cells," the military said.

It said the group is an al-Qaeda in Iraq created and sponsored Iraqi insurgent group "known to target Shias and specifically designed to incite sectarian violence."

The military also said that in another raid in the Abu Ghraib area on the western outskirts of Baghdad, its forces killed one suspected rebel and captured another.

Quality education

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teaching as a profession and bright students do not want the profession due to its poor salary.

AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Kader said the BNP-Jamaat alliance government has destroyed the quality of education as they have employed their political activists in teaching who lack the quality to teach students.

Prof Harun-ur Rashid, dean of Social Science Faculty of Dhaka University, said every teacher has to think about easier and effective method of teaching, so that students can understand the lessons better.

"The future of Bangladesh will be bright if better quality education could be ensured," he added.

Prof Abdul Mannan Chowdhury and leaders of AL and different teachers' association also participated in the roundtable.

8 bombs found

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12:30pm. They recovered the bombs and kept them in a bucket filled with water at Sadar Police Station.

Explosives experts have been called in to defuse the bombs. Security has been tightened in the district town.

Our Satkhira correspondent reported that Kolaroa police recovered five bombs from a house at Chandanpur village at around 8:00pm on Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, the law enforcers raided the house of Rafiqul Islam and retrieved the bombs from a heap of straw.

Police picked up Rafiq, son of Akher Sardar, for quizzing.

Top outlaw

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bullets while trying to escape from the Rab custody and died on the spot, Rab said.

The law enforcers rushed the dead bodies to Pabna General Hospital where the doctors confirmed their death.

The Rab recovered two pipe-guns and three bullets from the spot. Kamrul Master, son of Hamid Sardar of Daspara village of Pabna sadar upazila, was accused in numerous cases, including 15 for murder, and was on the "most wanted" list of criminals.

Jhnu was accused of five murder charges, Rab sources said.

Kamrul's political career started with his involvement with the Naxal Movement. Later, he formed the PBCP Lalpataka and became famous as an intellectual leader. Kamrul was general secretary of the PBCP five years ago and later became its chief adviser.

He had been involved in underground politics since the Liberation War.

US vetoes

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US Ambassador John Bolton said the veto was because of the "unbalanced" nature of the draft text which he argued laid a disproportionate amount of blame on Israel for the current crisis in the region. The text had also condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and Shalit's abduction.

What has become the worst Israeli-Palestinian crisis in months was sparked when in 19-year-old was snatched by Palestinian militants, including members of the armed wing of Hamas, on the Gaza border.

Faced with twin Israeli offensives in Gaza and Lebanon, following Wednesday's abduction of two soldiers by Hezbollah, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas issued a stark warning against the eruption of "regional war".

Shalit's captors have, like Hezbollah, demanded the release of prisoners in exchange for their hostage.

But Israel has refused any talks with the Islamist movement that advocates the destruction of the Jewish state, or to engage in a prisoner swap, vowing the assault will continue "in places, in time, in measures" at its convenience.

Other speakers included Md Abdul Karim, chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Prashant Rana, general manager of Katalyst.

Pakistan

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I assure (Indian) Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that the Pakistan government and I myself are with him in any investigation he wants to carry out", Musharraf said in an interview with Business Plus Television.

Musharraf, who has led a crackdown on Islamic militancy, said he mourned the loss of "precious lives" in the attack on the Indian financial hub's railway network on Tuesday.

"We condemn it and we are with the Indian government to investigate anything," he added.

Mumbai police said the seven coordinated blasts targeting rush-hour commuters had the hallmarks of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamic militant group fighting Indian control of part of Kashmir.

Pakistan has come under fire from Indian authorities for allegedly failing to control militant groups operating from its territory.

The Indian government has come under strong pressure from the domestic media to adopt a tougher posture toward Pakistan over the issue of militancy.

The two countries came close to a fourth war in 2001 after a militant raid on parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistani-based guerrillas. Pakistan denied any involvement.

White House sends mixed signals on detainee trials

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration is sending Congress conflicting signals on how to try foreign terrorism suspects despite earlier calls for Congress to ratify the current system struck down by the US Supreme Court, senators said on Thursday.

The White House was grappling with whether to expand legal rights of detainees by basing policies on the US military justice code to satisfy the court, or try to preserve much of President George W. Bush's plan for military commissions that limits access to counsel and evidence, the senators said.

Sen. John McCain said White House national security adviser Stephen Hadley told him the administration would base its proposal on the Uniform Code of Military Justice, not its commissions system that the Supreme Court said violated US military rules and had not been authorised by Congress.

But administration officials at hearings earlier this week urged Congress to pass legislation enacting Bush's military commissions, with some minor changes.

"Hadley told us in a meeting face to face that we would use the UCMJ as a basis," McCain, an Arizona Republican, said. "I don't know what to make of this."

Congress is crafting a process to try terrorism suspects -- mostly held at the US naval facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba -- after the Supreme Court slapped down the commissions system Bush established in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Bush has faced international criticism for the indefinite detention

and allegations of mistreatment of detainees, mostly scooped up in the war in Afghanistan.

US military judge advocates general, appearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, agreed Congress should not ratify the current system. Most said Congress should base legislation on the military justice code, but with changes to allow interrogations without legal counsel, protect classified information, allow some hearsay testimony and other measures.

That follows the course advocated by Democrats and a number of Senate Republicans.

Sen. John Warner, the committee's chairman, said he was "somewhat perplexed" by administration testimony earlier this week which he said was "not consistent with what the national security adviser told me."

The White House was working through differing views and planned to present a policy soon after Bush returns from the Group of Eight summit in Russia, the Virginia Republican said.

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, speaking to reporters, appeared to back more limited legal rights, saying he believed the best way to try the cases "is through military commissions, and we want to get on with it."

A number of House of Representatives Republicans also indicated they likely would back much of the current system, setting up a potential clash with the Senate. They said the military code, geared to protect US uniformed personnel, would give terrorism suspects too many rights and compromise national security.

Sen. Jeff Sessions, an Alabama Republican, also was sceptical of using the military code for "unlawful combatants," many of whom he said were "obsessively committed to suicidal destruction of American lives."

Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts said Congress must clarify Geneva Convention language barring inhumane treatment of prisoners that the Supreme Court said applied to US-held detainees.

Interrogators who got information leading to last month's killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, "could conceivably be held accountable" for war crimes under current language, the Kansas Republican said.

Oil prices

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York's main contract, light sweet crude for delivery in August, was quoted at 78.10 dollars per barrel, up 1.40 dollars from its last settlement of 76.70 dollars in New York.

Oil pushed higher still to hit an all-time high of 78.40 dollars in after hours electronic trade before some profit-taking took off the top.

Brent North Sea crude for August delivery was at 77.52 dollars, off its high of 77.76 dollars.

"It seems like hitting 80 dollars a barrel is inevitable," said Victor Shum, a Singapore-based analyst with energy consultancy Purvin and Gertz.

"We're in uncharted territory. It is a result of a confluence of a number of geo-political events in a tight market that shows healthy demand growth."

"The factors are getting together in a tight market and we haven't even got our first hurricane in this US hurricane season, so pricing is going to remain strong."

Shum said oil at 100 dollars a barrel "is still quite a bit off from where we are today (but) there is certainly the potential for it to hit that."

Tony Nunan, the Tokyo-based manager for energy risk management at Mitsubishi Corp, agreed 100-dollar oil is now a possibility.

"I don't want to cause panic in the market ... but I think the market has to understand that triple-digit (oil prices) are not a fantasy anymore and are definitely possible," he said.

"We'll definitely be seeing 80 dollars. It could either gradually escalate ... or it could explode."

Israel widens attack

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