

## World powers start work for 'stabilisation' force

AFP, Saint Petersburg

World leaders got down to work yesterday on sending an international force into Lebanon to help quell the raging violence there as the Middle East crisis dominated the closing day of a G8 summit.

UN chief Kofi Annan, speaking at the gathering of the Group of Eight major powers, demanded a "cessation of hostilities" between Israel and Hezbollah to put a well-equipped "stabilisation force" along the Lebanon-Israel border.

Annan said the United Nations needed time and space "to make sure we have the troops -- well-trained, well-equipped troops -- to go in quite quickly."

The final hours of the G8 summit of wealthy nations were supposed

to focus on Africa and global trade talks, but minds were still very much on the Middle East and the fear of all-out war.

The UN secretary general said a team now in the region led by his special political advisor Vijay Nambiar would report to the Security Council towards the end of the week.

"The sooner ... decisions are taken by the Council, the better it is. But the parties need not wait for their full implementation to start the cessation of hostilities and to spare civilians," he said after talks here with British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Blair said the force was key to ending the immediate conflict and restoring confidence.

"The only way we are going to

have a cessation of violence is if we have an international force deployed into that area," he said. "This is a very, very, serious situation indeed."

Annan flew to Saint Petersburg a day after the G8 group -- Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, host Russia and the United States -- proposed the international force in a statement.

The G8 group also called jointly for a halt to "extremist" attacks on the Jewish state, an end to Israel's military operations in Lebanon and Gaza, and the release of captured soldiers and detained Palestinian ministers.

Israeli forces have been relentlessly pounding targets in Lebanon since the middle of last week after Hezbollah captured two soldiers, while the militant movement has

retaliated with rocket attacks on Israeli cities.

More than 170 people, according to a running AFP toll -- 148 in Lebanon and 24 Israelis -- have been killed in the latest violence that has brought widespread international appeals for restraint.

Israel has also been pressing an offensive in Gaza after militants captured a soldier there, and scores have died.

US President George W. Bush said the G8 statement would help bring "calm," adding that "for the first time we've really begun to address with clarity the root causes of the conflict."

"I'm most pleased that the leaders came together to say, 'look, we condemn violence, we honour innocent life'."



Lebanese firefighters try to extinguish the fire after an Israeli air raid on the Beirut port yesterday. The Israeli offensive against Lebanon continued for the sixth consecutive day killing more than 200 people.

## Maoists kill 26 in India

BBC ONLINE

Suspected Maoist rebels have killed at least 26 villagers in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, authorities say.

The villagers belonged to a voluntary people's movement, which resists the Maoists and is backed by the state government, reports say.

Police say 23 people were wounded in the attack in Dantewada district.

Thousands have died in Maoist campaigns across central and southern India in the past 30 years. Maoists say they are fighting for the rights of the poor.

Senior district official KR Pinda told the BBC the casualties in Sunday night's incident were expected to rise.

The police said the rebels targeted local people taking part in a civil militia called Salwa Judum, supported by the state government and launched one year ago to fight the Maoists.



PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (L) stands next to British Prime Minister Tony Blair prior to attending second working session at the Konstantinovsky Palace outside Saint Petersburg in Russia on Sunday.

## Bush, Blair's chat caught on open microphone

REUTERS, St Petersburg

A microphone picked up an unaware President Bush saying yesterday Syria should press Hezbollah to "stop doing this sh--" and that his secretary of state may go to the Middle East soon.

Bush was talking privately to British Prime Minister Tony Blair during a lunch at the Group of Eight summit in St Petersburg about an upsurge of violence in the Middle East, not realizing a microphone was transmitting what he said.

"I think Condi (Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) is going to go pretty soon," Bush said.

Blair replied: "Right, that's all that matters, it will take some time to get that together." Rice said on Sunday she was thinking of going to the Middle East if it would help.

Blair said Rice has "got to succeed" if she goes to the region. Bush replied: "What they need to do is to get Syria to get Hezbollah to stop doing this sh--"

The US president blames Syria and Iran for supporting Hezbollah guerrillas operating in southern Lebanon.

Bush also seemed to complain about UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan wanting an immediate ceasefire to stop the violence between Israel and Hezbollah.

"I don't like the sequence of it," Bush said. "His attitude is basically ceasefire and everything else happens."

Blair said: "I think the thing that is really difficult is you can't stop this unless you get this international presence agreed."

## Discovery lands safely after 13-day ISS mission

AFP, Cape Canaveral

Space Shuttle Discovery made a smooth landing in Florida Monday, completing a 13-day mission considered critical for the US space program's recovery from the 2003 Columbia disaster.

The orbiter landed on schedule under overcast skies at the Kennedy Space Centre at 9:14 am (13:14 GMT) after what the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) called a highly successful mission.

Officials heaved a sigh of relief as a parachute deployed from the shuttle's rear, and Discovery came to a full stop on the 4,572-meter (15,000-foot) Atlantic seashore runway, safely returning the six astronauts to Earth.

"Welcome back Discovery and congratulations on a great mission," ground control told the crew of six, as they shut down the systems and prepared to leave the space vehicle.

"The crew of Discovery is safely home," mission control said.

Two high-altitude aircraft equipped with high-tech cameras accompanied Discovery as it glided to the landing strip after soaring over southern Mexico and across the Gulf of Mexico. Its arrival was heralded by two resounding sonic booms.

The final moments of the mission are among the most critical, and it was upon re-entering into the Earth's atmosphere that Columbia had burst into flames on February 1, 2003.

## Foreigners flee Israel's Lebanon onslaught with fears & tears

AFP, Beirut

Wiping away tears and hugging loved ones left behind, hundreds of foreigners were fleeing Lebanon yesterday, under the thumps of missiles as Israel intensified its military onslaught on the country.

While British and US citizens started to leave by helicopters, France chartered a ferry, which can carry some 1,200 passengers, and other European, Asian and African nationals were being bussed overland to neighbouring Syria.

In six days of relentless air, sea and ground attacks, Israel has tightened its grip on the country by imposing a maritime blockade and gouging deep craters out of Beirut airport's runways, shutting down the facility.

Israel launched the offensive to crush the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, but the strikes have also targeted infrastructure and killed more than 170 people, almost all of them civilians and including foreigners.

Foreigners heading out of Lebanon were fearing for their

safety as Israeli forces have targeted the roads to Syria, despite assurances Monday from the Jewish state that it was liaising with Washington and the EU on the evacuation.

In a silence only broken by whining complaints, foreigners boarded busses at meeting points across the capital for a six-hour journey to the Syrian capital from where they will fly home.

For safety reasons, European embassies were coordinating joint convoys for their nationals, who are mostly of Lebanese descent and had spent the summer holidays to visit family back home.

"I feel we are cowards. We are leaving our dear Lebanese friends behind. But I have not been in a war zone before, and my family wants me to go back home," said Belgian Sigrid Hoste, a teacher who had been studying Arabic in Lebanon.

"I am really angry at what Israel is doing. It is a disproportionate attack, and nothing justifies war. Beirut was a buzzing place just last week, today it is a ghost town. They have no right to do this," she said.



PHOTO: AFP

French nationals and tourists gather in Beirut for evacuation by a Greek ferry taking them to Cyprus from Lebanon yesterday as Israeli airstrikes continued for the sixth consecutive day.

## Palestinian foreign ministry ruined

### Israel keeps up Gaza blitz, EU FMs call for restraint

AFP, Gaza City/Brussels

Israel bombed the Palestinian foreign ministry in Gaza yesterday for the second time in a week, demolishing the building and tightening the noose on the Hamas-led government three weeks after the capture of a soldier.

With Israel showing no let-up in its deadly offensive, launched with the twin aims of retrieving 19-year-old Corporal Gilad Shalit and stopping Palestinian rocket fire, a civilian was killed by tank fire in Beit Hanun.

Israeli troops have been operating for the past two days in the northern town, where three gunmen were wounded in Israeli attacks on Monday and dozens of panicked local residents have fled for shelter further south.

Operation Summer Rain has now left at least 85 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier dead, with Israel opening a second front, waging six days of war in Lebanon after Hezbollah captured another two soldiers last week.

Israel confirmed the overnight attack on the foreign ministry, accusing minister Mahmud al-Zahar, a leading member of Hamas,

whose armed wing was jointly responsible for Shalit's abduction, of planning "terrorist attacks".

Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers yesterday renewed calls for restraint from Israel and Hezbollah as they awaited a briefing from foreign policy chief Javier Solana, back from a snap trip to violence-torn Lebanon.

The appeals came as Lebanon shook under a new wave of killer air raids after Israel vowed a fierce response to a deadly Hezbollah rocket attack deep inside its territory, with no sign of a let-up in the conflict.

## Coalition forces kill 4 'al-Qaeda fighters'

### Bomb demolishes govt building, 2 officials die

AFP, Kabul

The US-led coalition in Afghanistan said it killed four suspected al-Qaeda fighters in a raid yesterday while a suicide attack in the troubled south destroyed a justice headquarters and killed three people.

Three other alleged members of Osama bin Laden's terror network were arrested in a raid in the eastern province of Khost about 15km from the Pakistan border, the coalition said.

It said it was not sure if the man the raid was targeting, whose name and nationality were not revealed, was among those killed or captured.

"Coalition forces killed four suspected al-Qaeda terrorists, detained three suspected al-Qaeda terrorists..." a coalition statement said without giving details.

"The purpose of this operation was to capture or kill an al-Qaeda

operational leader, who is a significant threat to Afghan and coalition forces in Khost province," it said.

Provincial governor Sarajudin Patan said the four were an Afghan mullah and three Arabs. The three arrested men were brothers of the mullah, he told AFP.

al-Qaeda militants are believed to be fighting alongside the Taliban movement in Afghanistan in a growing insurgency against the government of President Hamid Karzai.

In the south a suicide bomber blew up a crowded provincial justice headquarters in Helmand province, killing the department head and two other employees, an official said.

Nine other people were hurt when the attacker blew himself up in the office in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah and caused the building to collapse, provincial government spokesman Haji Mohaidin Khan said.