



PHOTO: AFP

A Lebanese man is evacuated with some of his belongings from a building, which was damaged following an air strike on a nearby mosque and a three-storey building in the southern village of Zefta, some 10km north of Nabatieh in southern Lebanon Wednesday.

KILLING OF 4 OBSERVERS

# UNSC struggles to condemn Israel

## Israeli forces kill 3 more Palestinians

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council was set to try again yesterday to find an acceptable way of condemning the killing of four UN observers in Lebanon, after the United States rejected any criticism of the Israeli attack.

After intense haggling among the 15-nation council, ambassadors Wednesday failed to agree a presidential statement after becoming deadlocked on how to describe the attack, French ambassador Jean-Marc de La Sabliere, council president for July, told reporters.

"Members of the council are aware of the responsibility of the council towards the safety and the security of UN personnel all around the world," he said.

"We did not reach an agreement tonight because there was no consensus on how to qualify the incident, and thus no consensus on the best wording to react to it."

China, home of one of the dead soldiers of the UN mission in Lebanon (Unifil), had originally demanded the statement condemn the attack. The United States would not accept any criticism of its ally, diplomats said.

China's envoy Wang Guangya

said: "China, definitely we condemn this, and definitely I think most of the members will condemn what happened."

"We need to not only condemn what happened but we need to adopt a forward-looking approach to make sure that no future events like this happen."

Military observers from Austria, Canada, China and Finland were killed in the bombardment of an observation post at Khiam in southern Lebanon on Tuesday. Israel has said the attack was a mistake.

De La Sabliere said that France also condemned the attack.

He said that by striking Unifil observers, "the peacekeeping force of the international community has been attacked. We, as France, cannot but condemn this action, which demonstrates more than ever that the fighting must cease urgently."

Questioned about the impact of the disagreement, the Chinese envoy warned that the failure to agree a text could have an affect on efforts to agree other key issues before the UN Security Council, particularly on Iran's nuclear programme.

"I hope not, but I think that somehow it will have an impact, because

if we want the unity of the council on this issue we also want the unity of the council on other issues," he said.

Questioned specifically about the Iran dispute, where China and Russia have resisted US calls for sanctions, the Chinese ambassador said: "I think all members will reflect on what lessons there are to be learned from this episode."

China distributed a draft statement at the start of the day calling the attack "apparently deliberate", echoing the wording of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, but this was immediately rejected by US ambassador John Bolton.

Meanwhile, Israeli gunfire killed three Palestinians, including a 75-year-old woman, in Gaza yesterday after the coastal strip suffered one of the deadliest days since the start of a massive offensive a month ago.

The woman was killed when an artillery shell slammed into her home near the Jabaliya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, hospital officials said. In addition, a 16-year-old boy and 23-year-old man were killed east of Gaza City.

# Beirut dailies accuse US of torpedoing truce call

AFP, Beirut

Beirut newspapers accused the United States yesterday of "assassinating" an international conference in Rome, which Lebanese had hoped would issue a call for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice continues to open fire ... and assassinates the Rome conference," read the bold headline of the leftist As-Safir newspaper.

The daily said Hezbollah had succeeded in imposing "bitter realities on the ground" by killing nine Israeli soldiers on Wednesday, which "were reflected in the 'improvised' international conference in Rome" that failed to call for an immediate truce.

A summit of world powers in Rome on Wednesday failed to agree to a demand for a ceasefire for the Middle East, vowing instead to work with "utmost urgency" for a truce and calling for an international force to be deployed in Lebanon.

"Loud American-European

confrontation foils Rome conference," said the front-page headline of the leading An-Nahar daily. The paper said Hezbollah's deadly strikes on Wednesday "triggered a big political and military shock in Israel, and a similar failure on the diplomatic front with the failure of the Rome conference to agree a ceasefire."

Ad-Diyar newspaper regretted the "diverging points of views between Washington and European countries which foiled the Rome conference".

"There were no surprises at the Rome conference. The party which supervises the conduct of war has cast its shadow on the agenda of the conference," said Al-Anwar in reference to the United States, adding that "the American position blocked the Rome conference from calling for a ceasefire."

The English-language Daily Star could not hide its anger, headlining its front page: "Getting Away with Murder" as it said that the Rome talks "wrap up without apparent progress on ceasefire."

# Congo govt signs peace deal with northeast militia

AFP, Kinshasa

The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has signed an accord to end hostilities with a militia in the northeastern Ituri region, according to a text of the pact obtained by AFP yesterday.

"The two sides agreed to put an end to the armed conflict in Ituri and to create the conditions for a return to peace, reconciliation between all Congolese communities and consolidation of the electoral process," the agreement states.

The UN-facilitated accord to end the clashes, which have claimed more than 60,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the region since 1999, was signed by the Kinshasa government and the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC), all of whose members will receive an amnesty.

The MRC is made up of several thousand fighters from former armed groups in Ituri and is the only structured militia still active in the region. It has recently carried out a series of attacks on regular army positions.

# Bombs batter Baghdad as PM ends US visit

## 31 civilians killed

AFP, Baghdad

Bombs and mortar rounds ripped through a bustling district of central Baghdad yesterday, killing at least 31 civilians in a bloody riposte to a pledge from the Iraqi premier to halt the violence.

Insurgents detonated at least one car bomb -- some witnesses spoke of more -- and fired mortars into the Karrada district at the heart of the strife-torn city, spraying shrapnel and partially demolishing a three-storey building.

In a simultaneous and apparently coordinated attack, mortar bombs were fired into the busy commercial area, adding to the chaos and destruction.

A defence ministry official put the initial death toll at 31 and 115 injured, but the casualty count was expected to rise.

The latest attacks, in a city which sees around 60 violent incidents per day, came after Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki wrapped up his first visit to Washington by characterising the fighting a battle for the soul of Islam.

"This is a battle between two

Islams -- for which a person's liberty and rights constitute essential cornerstones -- and terrorism, which wraps itself in a fake Islamic cloak," he told the US Congress on Wednesday.

"Iraq is the front line in this struggle, and history will prove that the sacrifices of Iraqis for freedom will not be in vain," he vowed.

But Thursday's attack underlined the challenge he faces in seeking to reunite a country, which has descended into sectarian bloodletting since a US-led invasion ousted president Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Karrada was regarded as one of the few remaining relatively safe areas of the city. Its bustling shops still attract customers from both the Sunni and Shia communities.

An interior ministry official said the attack had targeted an area near a petrol station and that at least three mortar rounds had been fired after the explosion of a powerful car bomb.

The mortars were fired across the Tigris river from the mainly Sunni Al-Dura district into mainly Shia Karrada, a security source said.



PHOTO: AFP

Anti-war protesters march towards the convention centre where the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) foreign ministers forum is being held in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice earlier in the day arrived here for Asean security talks where she faces a wave of criticism over ally Israel's operations in Lebanon.

# Asian powers confront Rice over Israel

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian powers planned yesterday to confront US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice over Washington's stance on Israel and the Lebanon conflict at a regional security forum here.

After flying in from Rome, where she conducted a high-stakes Middle East crisis mission, Rice faced a difficult agenda including the North Korean missile crisis and the deteriorating situation in Israel and Lebanon.

Rice had been seeking to seize on the momentum of a UN Security Council resolution on North Korea's recent missile tests to pressure Pyongyang to return to nuclear talks, which it has boycotted since November.

But instead she faces anger over the deadly Israeli airstrike on a United Nations post in Lebanon on Tuesday that killed four UN observers including one from

China.

Foreign ministers from the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan and South Korea on Wednesday expressed their deep concern over Israel's "apparently deliberate targeting" of the UN post.

The ministers have said they would raise the attack, and their calls for an immediate ceasefire, with Rice at Friday's Asean Regional Forum (ARF).

"The United States, which has the greatest influence on the Israelis, must encourage them to take a decision to stop all these bombings," Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said Wednesday.

"I think it is very easy to express deep regret after the event has happened, but I think the call by the majority of the international community is that they should stop and cease the bombing of Lebanon."