

# EU calls for ME truce

## Chirac for UN resolution, Muslim nations demand end to fighting

AFP, AP, Kuala Lumpur/ Paris

The European Union's foreign policy chief Javier Solana said yesterday he expected a UN Security Council resolution to mandate an international stabilisation force for Lebanon to be passed soon.

Five Muslim countries denounced Israel's offensive in Lebanon yesterday, calling for an immediate halt to the hostilities.

The foreign ministers of Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan held hastily called talks on the sidelines of a regional security meeting in Kuala Lumpur to discuss "their grave concern over the deteriorating situation and unabated violence" in Lebanon and occupied Palestinian territories, according to a joint statement.

"The ministers strongly condemned Israel's military actions and indiscriminate and excessive use of force," the statement said. The countries "called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire."

The talks were arranged after Iranian Foreign Minister

Manouchehr Mottaki arrived in Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur's invitation.

"We are all very concerned about what is happening in the Middle East. There is no other issue more important right now," Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, told The Associated Press.

Solana said he envisaged few difficulties in obtaining a resolution that would define the objectives and structure of the force.

"I have not spoken with all the members of the Security Council but I have spoken with a good number of the permanent members," he said. The five permanent members are Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

"I have a good feeling that the position is very open in the Security Council to have a resolution in that direction," he told a press conference at the end of a regional security meeting here.

An international force for Lebanon was "something which shouldn't have in principle a lot of

difficulties to be written down," he said. "The sooner, the better."

Foreign ministers from the European Union are to hold an emergency meeting on Tuesday to discuss the Middle East crisis.

"We need first a resolution that has to define politically the objective of the force, and at the same time we have to have the force ready," he said. "We have to do both things at the same time."

Solana said a number of countries at the meeting here had expressed interest in participating, including Malaysia, New Zealand and Indonesia.

He said Thursday that the EU would be willing to contribute peacekeeping force. "What is important is to get a ceasefire as soon as possible," Solana said.

"We are going to consider now first a humanitarian component but without a political settlement, a ceasefire, it will be very difficult to do it," he said.

Earlier French President Jacques Chirac said yesterday that he wanted the adoption of a UN resolution "as quickly as possible" calling for an immediate ceasefire

in the Middle East.

"The president of the Republic wants France to work towards the adoption of a Security Council resolution as quickly as possible stating the commitment of the international community to an immediate ceasefire based on a political agreement supported by the deployment of an international force under UN mandate," said a statement from Chirac's office.

On Friday, Chirac convened a mini cabinet meeting to discuss the Israel-Lebanon crisis attended by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin.

The statement said that Chirac had underlined "the urgency of humanitarian corridors on land and at sea to ensure that aid gets rapidly and safely to the civilian population".

Documents obtained from the French foreign ministry on Thursday showed that France has presented a three-pronged strategy to its UN Security Council partners to end the Middle East conflict, which has claimed the lives of an estimated 426 people in Lebanon.



A southern Lebanese family fleeing their village waves white flags to signal to the Israeli army not to bomb them as they drive into the Bekaa valley yesterday. Israeli planes blasted south Lebanon for a 17th day yesterday while the military mobilised thousands more reservists for the battle that the Jewish state's main backers, the United States and Britain, are to discuss at the White House.

# Israeli army assesses tactical failures in Lebanon offensive

AFP, Jerusalem

Faced with unexpectedly stiff resistance from Hezbollah fighters and mounting casualties on the ground, the Israeli military is scrambling to correct its tactical setbacks in the 17-day-old offensive in Lebanon, analysts and the military said yesterday.

"It is inconceivable that it has taken five days for two entire regiments, backed by artillery and the air force, to overcome, with heavy losses, resistance by a hundred Hezbollah fighters in Bint Jbeil," said military analyst Reuven Pedatzur.

The battle for the flashpoint Lebanese border town of Bint Jbeil, which left nine Israelis dead on Wednesday and has reportedly killed dozens of Shia militants, was continuing on Friday.

"The army high command led the government to believe that the battle would take just a few days," Pedatzur told AFP. "Either it was badly informed by military intelligence or else it misinterpreted its information."

Israel began its campaign in Lebanon with brass claims that it would quickly annihilate the

Lebanese Shia militia, but after 17 days of relentless air strikes and cross-border incursions, it was settling for far more modest goals.

Now the main objectives are to weaken Hezbollah, push it back from the border, and stop it firing rockets into Israel, as well as retrieving the two soldiers abducted on the border on July 12. The capture of those soldiers sparked the conflict.

Israel has called up an additional 30,000 reserve troops to help achieve those aims.

The army itself admits that Hezbollah had some nasty surprises in store for Israel's soldiers.

Captain Doron Spielman said Hezbollah fighters have had ample time since Israel pulled out of south Lebanon in 2000 to prepare themselves for a new conflict, digging underground bunkers and stocking up on weapons Israel says are delivered from Iran. "We're facing a real army that uses the Lebanese civilian population as a shield because it knows that we don't want to cause thousands of deaths by carpet bombing," the military spokesman told AFP.



Photo released by the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) shows Tamil Tiger political wing leader S. P. Thamilselvan is greeting British Deputy High Commissioner Lesley Craig (L) in Kilinochchi yesterday. Britain has asked the Tigers to enter peace negotiations and save the island's faltering peace process.

# Lanka truce hangs by thread

## Troops, Tigers trade artillery fire as 6 Tigers slain, Finn monitors quit

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's ceasefire hung by a thread yesterday as Tamil Tiger rebels and government forces traded artillery fire and Finland announced its truce observers would leave the country.

Sri Lankan war planes struck a Tamil Tiger base Friday, the third straight day of bombing, government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said.

"The airforce carried out another round of aerial attacks against the Tigers today in the Trincomalee area," said Rambukwella, the policy planning minister and government spokesman on defence.

He said the bombing campaign was aimed at opening an irrigation

canal shut down by the Tigers that had deprived water to a large farming community in the area.

Members of the Swedish-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) had gone to the area in a bid to settle the water issue, Rambukwella said.

Finland became the first country to announce a withdrawal after the rebels demanded European Union (EU) member states stop monitoring a Norwegian-arranged ceasefire in place since 2002.

Officials said artillery exchanges followed air strikes that started Wednesday against positions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in northeastern Trincomalee.

The LTTE admitted losing six of its cadres on Thursday when five

more were wounded.

Two policemen were shot dead in Trincomalee Friday by suspected Tiger gunmen, police said, pushing the death toll since violence flared in December to at least 910.

Finland is one of three EU member states providing staff for the SLMM.

"Based on the fact the LTTE are not going to guarantee the monitors' safety after September 1, we will recall our observers by then," foreign ministry official Marita Maunola told AFP in Helsinki.

The Tamil Tigers demanded that observers from Denmark, Finland and Sweden leave the island after the EU added the LTTE to its list of "terrorist" organisations in May. That would leave only Norwegian and Icelandic monitors.

# Rice wins rave reviews for piano recital in KL

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

US top diplomat Condoleezza Rice won rave reviews Thursday for her musical performance at Asian security talks, despite skipping the traditional rowdy skits in favour of a sombre piano recital.

With North Korea firing off missiles, carnage in Lebanon, rockets raining on Israel and killings convulsing Iraq, Rice was in no mood for the kind of frivolity staged in previous years.

In keeping with her "serious" mood the Secretary of State performed two pieces from the brooding repertoire of Johannes Brahms - a solo Intermezzo number two, and Brahms Sonata for violin and piano, opus 108, with a Malaysian guest soloist.

She arrived at the Istana hotel in downtown Kuala Lumpur for the annual gala dinner wearing a glamorous red dress and red jacket made of traditional Malaysian batik material.

The dress was designed by Faisal Abdullah, a friend of the Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah



Ahmad Badawi, and was custom-made for Rice.

Regional ministers swooned over the performance as they left the dinner.

"Oh, beautiful, beautiful. She's a great pianist. She's a concert pianist," said Philippines Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, who insisted that despite the geopolitical realities a good time was had by all.

"I don't think it was a sombre mood. We were in a happy mood, we had a lot of fun," he told AFP.

## MISSILE TRANSFER

# US slaps sanctions on 2 Indian firms

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration has decided to impose sanctions on two Indian firms for missile-related transactions with Iran, US officials told Reuters on Thursday.

The disclosure came after the US House of Representatives late on Wednesday overwhelmingly agreed the United States should sell nuclear technology to India and rejected a move by critics to delay the vote over concerns New Delhi had not sufficiently helped the United States to contain Iran.

Congressional critics have accused the administration of withholding conclusive word on sanctions against Indian firms until after the vote to avoid endangering its passage.

The United States considers Iran - patron of the Hezbollah Islamic militant group fighting Israel in Lebanon - a major international threat, accusing it of building nuclear weapons under cover of an energy programme. Tehran denies the charge.

# Ring tone to rubble

## Israeli army telephoning Gaza people before dropping bombs

AFP, Gaza City

"Is that Omar al-Mamluk? This is the Israeli army. You have only a few minutes to leave your house."

The army's new tactic of telephoning people before dropping bombs on their homes is sowing panic in the Gaza Strip.

All that is left of Mamluk's house in Gaza City is a pile of rubble.

"It was Monday night, about 10:30 in the evening," said the officer from the Palestinian security forces who lived in the house along with his two wives and 19 children.

"I received a call with the number of the caller hidden. I thought it was a prank by one of my mates. I asked: 'Are you joking?' and got the reply: 'The Israeli army doesn't make jokes.' Then the caller hung up."

So Mamluk rounded up his children and took them to his brother's house before alerting his

neighbours who then set up barriers on the road outside to stop cars or pedestrians entering the area.

"They hit 25 minutes later," he said. "I'd expected an Apache (attack helicopter) but not an F-16 fighter jet."

Israeli aircraft have dropped thousands of flyers on the Gaza Strip in recent weeks, warning people that all sites and buildings where weapons or military equipment are stored will be bombed.

The warnings came amid a massive Israeli offensive that has now left 145 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier dead, and has wreaked massive damage on the impoverished Gaza Strip, where electricity is now rationed and sewage left untreated.

The assault was launched in late June to recover a soldier captured by Gaza militants and to halt rocket fire from the strip into southern Israel. So far neither goal has been achieved.

# Asia to strengthen civilian-military disaster coop

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asia's top security forum, which includes the United States, China and Russia, plans to develop guidelines for civilian and military cooperation to ensure swift responses to natural disasters, officials said.

The plan includes taking an inventory of the transport capabilities of the region's armed forces that can be used for humanitarian operations in the aftermath of a calamity, they said.

Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Regional Forum (ARF) adopted a statement on "disaster management and emergency response" at the end of their annual meeting here Friday.

The statement said the ministers would "consider, as appropriate, the development of ARF general guidelines... for the use of both civilian and military personnel within the ARF participating countries."

Such guidelines however must be consistent with existing United Nations and Asean mechanisms on disaster management and emergency response, the document said.

ARF groups the 10 Asean countries as well as the United States, Russia, Canada, China, Japan, South Korea, India and the European Union, among others.

"The decision to develop standard operating procedures on civilian military cooperation for humanitarian operations, I think, is among the most important portions of the statement," said M.C. Abad, head of Asean's ARF unit.

"It will allow for the use of military assets of ARF members for disaster relief... We will develop a database of these assets of the member ARF states," he told AFP.

Officials said the move to work on guidelines was timely following a spate of major natural disasters that have struck the region.



Nepalese Maoist leaders Krishna Bahadur Mahara (R) and Dev Gurung (L) talk to media representatives after meeting with UN head of Mission to Nepal's Peace Process Staffan De Mistura in Kathmandu yesterday. A United Nations team met Prachanda to discuss Nepal's fledgling peace process as the rebels confirmed the renewal of a three-month ceasefire.



Protesters burn a US flag with an effigy of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in front of the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Hundreds of anti-war demonstrators and political activists tried to storm the venue of Asian security talks here, and demanded talks with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

# UN rights body asks US to shut 'secret' jails

REUTERS, Geneva

The UN Human Rights Committee yesterday told Washington it should immediately shut all "secret detention" facilities and give the International Committee of the Red Cross access to anybody held in armed conflict.

In findings on US observance of the UN's main political rights' convention, the committee said it had "credible and uncontested" information that the United States had detained people "secretly and in secret places for months and years."

"The state party should immediately abolish all secret detention and secret detention facilities," it said, echoing a similar demand in May by the United Nations' Committee on Torture.

The committee said it could not accept Washington's argument that the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights, which the United States has signed, does not apply to anyone held outside US territory.

The covenant spells out basic individual rights, including equality before the law, protection against torture and inhumane treatment and arbitrary arrest.

"The state party (the United States) should review its approach and interpret the covenant in good faith," said the committee, which was subjecting Washington to its first review since 1995.

The US report to the committee, submitted in October, was seven years late.

The UN body also expressed concern at the past use of interrogation techniques like prolonged stress positions and isolation, hooding, sleep or food deprivation, that may be a form of torture and welcomed assurances they were no more used.

# Major powers closer to Iran resolution

AFP, United Nations

The six major powers held a meeting on Iran's nuclear programme on Thursday and came closer to agreeing a resolution to put to the UN Security Council, diplomats said.

The meeting of the council's permanent members - Britain, China, France, Russia and United States - plus Germany, agreed to send the latest draft resolutions back to their governments, the sources said.

They were to decide on Friday morning whether to distribute the text to UN Security Council members. One diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that if there was agreement there could be a vote on the resolution next week.

A non-proliferation item has been put on the Security Council's agenda for Friday.

The six countries have been working for weeks on a resolution to demand that Iran halt its uranium enrichment activities, which the United States and its allies believe hides nuclear weapon development.

China and Russia have been resisting US pressure to threaten sanctions against the hardline Islamic government.

Thursday's meeting went ahead despite China's anger over a "watered-down" statement on the killing of four UN peacekeepers during an Israeli attack in Lebanon this week.

China's envoy Wang Guangya had warned that the US refusal to accept criticism of Israel in a

Security Council statement could have a "negative impact" on other council work, including the Iran resolution.

Before the dispute erupted at the United Nations over Lebanon, diplomats had reported progress in their negotiations, which have been marked by China and Russia's refusal to accept any talk of sanctions.

Diplomats said the main elements of the draft under discussion reflect a compromise adopted by foreign ministers from the six at a meeting in Paris on July 12.

"One fundamental element of that agreement is to make the suspension of all enrichment-related activities mandatory, including research and development," said French envoy Jean-Marc de La Sabliere on Tuesday.