



Lebanese troops are welcomed by civilians upon their arrival at the Lebanese village of Shebaa yesterday. Lebanese troops pressed their historic deployment to Hezbollah's longtime bastion in the south, taking up positions in the heavily bombed border town of Khiam and other villages.

Lebanon force takes shape at UN

AFP, United Nations

The UN voiced guarded optimism Thursday over its plans to deploy peacekeepers to Lebanon, warning that much remained to be done to meet its goal of having 3,500 troops on the ground in 10 days.

The vanguard force is charged with policing a fledgling ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel after a month of fighting and will be followed by the full deployment of 15,000 peacekeepers as agreed under a UN-brokered ceasefire.

Initial plans for a French-led force stalled over concerns about its rules of engagement, but Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown said that many issues appeared to have been overcome in talks Thursday.

"I think we're in business," he said after winding up talks between dozens of member states to thrash out the force's scope and composition.

"We've had a lot of interesting offers this afternoon, some fairly firm, some conditional on seeing the rules of engagement and the concept of operations," he said.

"The show's on the road, we're in business, but there's a lot of work to be done in the coming days to meet the deadline that we insisted on in this meeting, which is that we have 3,500 additional troops deployed within 10 days."

While he declined to offer the number of countries involved or troops pledged, other UN sources said that at least six nations had given firm offers, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Denmark and Germany.

France earlier said it would offer some 200 troops -- far short of the large commanding role that many had foreseen.

While insisting that the vanguard force would have to be on the ground in 10 days, Malloch Brown was less upbeat about the likelihood of such a deployment, when asked how feasible the deadline was.

"I don't want to give you an instant answer, we've got to follow up on this... The issue is which battalions can we get there in the timeline required, are they the right battalions with the right skills and equipment."

"We have to have 3,500 troops on the ground in 10 days... This deploy-

ment of 3,500 is very, very important," he added.

Much of the concern expressed by member states surrounded the force's rules of engagement when it deploys to the southern region, a traditional stronghold for Hezbollah, amid concerns of confrontation with the Shia group.

"Very much the issue is under what circumstances our troops have to engage in hostile offensive activities," Malloch Brown said.

"This is a prudently designed rules of engagement which is not offensive in character but does call on you to robustly use force if it's necessary," he said.

"If (small groups) do not voluntarily disarm when confronted by our troops and if they try to forcefully resist disarmament we will indeed employ force ourselves to disarm them," he added.

He further warned that any delay to the force's deployment threatened the four-day old ceasefire, saying: "Every moment we delay is a moment of risk that the fighting could re-erupt."

Ulfa envoys to hold talks in Delhi

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Guwahati

Representatives of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa) are meeting Indian government officials in New Delhi to discuss the outfit's stand on the suspension of military operations last week.

A two-member team of civil society leaders chosen by the Ulfa to begin talks will meet National Security Adviser MK Narayanan and Home Secretary VK Duggal at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) at 6 pm on Friday.

"We are meeting the two officials with a view to smoothen the peace process. One of my colleagues, Rebati Phukan, has come from Guwahati and he is carrying some message from Ulfa," Indira Goswami, a noted Assamese writer and sought by the Ulfa to mediate for the talks, said from New Delhi.

The Ulfa, which is fighting for an independent Assamese homeland since 1979, is yet to formally respond to New Delhi's snap decision Aug 14 to halt anti-insurgency operations against the outfit for 10 days.

UN appeals for aid access in Lanka

EU urges both parties to stop fighting

AFP, REUTERS, Geneva/Colombo

The United Nations refugee agency yesterday appealed for urgent access to thousands of victims of the conflict in Sri Lanka, after aid workers were locked out of several areas in the north and east of the country.

"We call on the Sri Lankan government and the rebel Tamil Tigers to urgently allow access for humanitarian aid workers so vital supplies can reach those in need, and to permit freedom of movement to all affected populations," said UNHCR spokeswoman Jennifer Pagonis.

"We and our partners are now seriously concerned about the welfare of civilians in areas inac-

cessible to humanitarian agencies because of strictly enforced travel restrictions," she added.

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said the key access road to the Jaffna peninsula through a rebel-held district was closed.

Food and water supplies had fallen to "alarmingly low levels" in many areas, it added.

Thousands of displaced families in eastern areas in Trincomalee and Batticaloa also face "a similar crisis".

Help for about 15,000 to 20,000 people displaced in Kilinchchi district is also disrupted, the UNHCR said.

Earlier the European Union

expressed concern on Thursday about the renewed violence in Sri Lanka and urged the government and the Tamil Tiger rebels to stop fighting at once and resume peace talks.

"The senseless violence will not resolve the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka," EU President Finland said in a statement, adding that it was deeply concerned about the growing humanitarian crisis in the country.

"The presidency urges the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to cease hostilities at once and to resume peace talks," Finland said.

It reiterated its full support for

the peace process and the work of the Norwegian facilitator and called on both parties to guarantee free access for relief agencies to those affected by the violence.

Sri Lanka has seen three weeks of fierce fighting that many regard as a new chapter in a two-decade civil war halted by a 2002 ceasefire. International truce monitors say they believe hundreds of civilians have been killed in the renewed violence.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils.

Olmert's WB pullout plan on hold for now

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has put his proposal for an Israeli pullout from parts of the occupied West Bank on hold for now following the war in Lebanon, an Israeli newspaper reported on Friday.

The Haaretz daily, citing what it said were private conversations between Olmert and other ministers and party members, quoted the prime minister as saying the issue was no longer at the top of his government's agenda.

A source in Olmert's office acknowledged that the prime minister's more pressing priority for now was leading the recovery from economic damage in northern Israel caused by a month of rocket attacks by Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas.

Under the West Bank plan, which had yet to be set in motion, Israel, in the absence of a Palestinian peace partner, would remove dozens of isolated settlements and bolster major enclaves it says it intends to keep and set a border by 2010.

But resurgent violence in Gaza, which Israel evacuated last year, plus the Lebanon war appear to have dampened the public's enthu-

siasm for territorial withdrawals, which Olmert made the centrepiece of his manifesto that won him election in March.

Rightist opponents of the Gaza pullout had warned it would only embolden Palestinian militants in their fight against Israel.

Palestinians have remained sceptical of Olmert's "convergence plan," saying it would deny them a viable state encompassing both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Olmert -- who succeeded Ariel Sharon, comatose since a massive stroke in January -- was quoted by Haaretz as saying it would not be "appropriate" to discuss his West Bank proposal at this time.

He told Reuters in an interview earlier this month that it was too soon to talk about his West Bank plan but that he had no intention of abandoning it altogether.

At least 1,110 people in Lebanon and 157 Israelis were killed in the 34-day war that erupted after Hezbollah guerrillas captured two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid on July 12.

US jet bombs Afghan police: 12 killed

AFP, Kabul

A US-led coalition plane mistakenly dropped a bomb on a police patrol in eastern Afghanistan Thursday, killing 12 policemen, a commander said, as President Hamid Karzai angrily condemned the incident.

The coalition, which has been hunting down Taliban and other insurgents in the war-torn country for nearly five years, confirmed "an event did happen" and said it was collecting details.

The bomb struck a patrol near the border with Pakistan in eastern Pakhtika province, provincial border police regiment commander Abdul Hamid said.

"They came under US bombardment and 12 policemen were killed, including the police commander," he said.

The coalition, which has been searching for Taliban insurgents in the province, had apparently come under earlier attack, he said. "They may have mistaken our convoy for the enemy."

Saddam back in the dock

Iraq's former strongman returns to court Monday for his second trial in two years

The charge
Genocide relating to the killing of at least 100,000 Iraqi Kurds during the Anfal campaign

The court
Iraqi High Tribunal
Previously the Iraqi Special Tribunal, established December 2003

Presiding judge
Abdullah al-Amir

The accused
Saddam Hussein
President of Iraq
1979 - 2003

Co-defendants
Ali Hassan al-Majid
Nicknamed 'Chemical Ali' for allegedly ordering gas attacks

Plus five top-ranking members of Saddam's former regime
• Saber al-Duri • Farhan al-Juburi
• Tahir al-Ani • Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti
• Sultan Hashem al-Tai

The Anfal campaign
Iraq's main Kurdish region

Anfal ('spoils' in Arabic) campaign launched to depopulate Kurdish areas 1987 - 1988

IRAQ

Iraqi forces attacked the country's Kurdish region by systematic bombing, gassing and assault of areas/civilians

Dohuk Haj Omran Taqtaq Qader Karam

Baghdad

AFP 100906

BOMB BLASTS IN MUMBAI Musharraf disappointed over Indian allegation

REUTERS, New Delhi

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said he was angry and disappointed that India had blamed his government for last month's bomb blasts in Mumbai, which he said was the work of "freelance terrorists."

Musharraf, in an interview with Indian magazine Frontline conducted on August 1, said the accusations had been made immediately after the blasts, with "hardly any substantiated proof," as if he had ordered the attacks, which killed 186 people.

"This is very, very annoying. It is disappointing," he said. "Such allegations lead to vitiating the atmosphere. It should not be done."

Indian officials say Pakistan-based Islamist militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba is a prime suspect for the blasts in India's financial capital. Some officials have also pointed a finger at Pakistan's powerful military intelligence.

But Musharraf said the lack of

trust between the two countries was "pitiable," adding that they needed to learn to work together to combat extremism.

"There are freelance terrorists who are roaming around and doing this," he said.

The peace process between the old rivals was launched nearly three years ago but has recently run into trouble.

India is angry that Pakistan has not done enough to stop Islamic militants using its soil to support a separatist revolt in Indian Kashmir.

Pakistan feels that India is dragging its feet in the quest for a solution to their central dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Musharraf is expected to meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Cuba next month.

While Musharraf remains hopeful for a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute, some Pakistani diplomats are not optimistic.

Arabs seek new ME peace initiative

AP, United Nations

Arab nations want the UN Security Council to help launch a new peace process to end the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, saying the "road map" unveiled in 2003 to establish a Palestinian state is dead.

Arab League foreign ministers have asked to send a delegation to a ministerial meeting of the Security Council in September to initiate a new effort to bring lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians after nearly 60 years of conflict.

Yahya Mahmassani, the Arab League's envoy to the United Nations, said he had personally discussed the foreign ministers' request with the 15 Security Council members and "there is very strong support" for the idea of convening a council meeting. It will likely take place between Sept. 20-24, he said.

"Now, we are working... on what outcome would be coming out of this

meeting," Mahmassani told The Associated Press.

He said bringing the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the Security Council will be one of the main items on the agenda of an Arab ministerial meeting on Sunday at Arab League headquarters in Cairo. The Arab ministerial delegation to go to New York will probably be selected at the meeting, he said.

Arab foreign ministers decided to take the issue to the Security Council at a meeting in Cairo on July 15, two days after Israel launched an offensive against Hezbollah militants after they captured two Israeli soldiers, he said.

At that meeting, Arab ministers displayed frustration and declared the Mideast peace process "dead," blaming Israel for its demise.

"The Middle East peace process has failed," Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said after that meeting. "We are going to the Security Council this is a unani-

mous position to discuss the whole situation from scratch."

The road map was drafted by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia known as the Quartet and aimed to end the most recent Middle East violence and establish a Palestinian state by 2005. But Israel and the Palestinians have failed to carry out the parallel steps in the peace plan and it has languished.

The Arab initiative to try to restart the peace process from scratch at this time is significant, because the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict is at the heart of the current Palestinian-Israeli fighting in Gaza and the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah militants in south Lebanon.

Diffident Manmohan hailed for speech on nuke deal

AFP, New Delhi

India's sometimes diffident prime minister was hailed yesterday by the press and analysts for his passionate defence of a controversial nuclear pact with the United States, but some critics of the deal remained unconvinced.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh tried Thursday to calm fears of India's political and scientific establishments that a historic civilian nuclear deal with the United States would blunt India's nuclear weapons programme.

Singh, wearing his trademark pale blue turban, spoke for more than an hour, beginning with a surprisingly emotional preface in which he promised to "discharge my duties for the country to the last ounce of my blood."

The prime minister took the offensive with quotes from "The Prince," Niccolò Machiavelli's medieval treatise on statecraft, to present himself as a man unafraid to

take unpopular political decisions for the good of the nation.

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things," quoted Singh.

He said the deal was crucial to meet the energy needs of power-starved India, which is aiming to sustain annual economic growth of eight to 10 percent.

The premier's comments came in response to criticism of the deal from eight nuclear scientists, opposition groups as well as Singh's own left-wing legislative allies.

On Friday, the Hindu newspaper applauded his performance before parliament, saying it indicated a "transformed" man.

"In a way Singh won the day even before he came down to the specifics of the nuclear deal," political editor Harish Khare wrote.

Under the pact, India has agreed to open most of its atomic reactors

to international inspection but is allowed to keep pre-selected military nuclear facilities out of public scrutiny.

In return, India will receive unfettered access to long-denied US nuclear technology to generate power.

Washington has been withholding civilian nuclear know-how from India since 1974 when New Delhi conducted its first atomic test. New Delhi conducted more tests in 1998.

The deal, passed by the House of Representatives 359-68, now has to be approved by the US Senate.

However some US lawmakers are demanding a greater convergence of views between New Delhi and Washington on foreign policy, most notably on Iran.

Others have also questioned whether India can be trusted with critical nuclear secrets and have demanded that more stringent safeguards be put in place.

Cartoons are even more comforting than Mom TV a painkiller for children

AP, Washington

Sometimes the numbing effect of TV can be helpful. Especially if you're a kid being stuck with a needle at the hospital.

Researchers confirmed the distracting power of television something parents have long known when they found that the children watching cartoons suffered less pain from a hypodermic needle than kids not watching TV.

Especially disturbing to the author of the scientific study was that the cartoons were even more comforting than Mom.

While it's good to have a powerful distraction for children getting painful medical procedures, it is also troubling "because we have demonstrated the excessive power of television," said chief author, Carlo Bellieni, a father of three and a neonatologist and pediatrician at the University of Siena in Italy.

His research at a nearby hospital was reported this week in the British journal Archives of Disease in Childhood.

The study involved 69 children, ages 7 to 12, who were separated into three groups and then asked to rate their pain on a numerical scale when they were stuck with needle used to take a blood sample. The children's mothers also rated the kids' pain.

Those watching TV cartoons reported half the pain as those who were being soothed by Mom. When compared with children who just sat in a hospital room with mothers who didn't try to soothe them, the TV watchers reported one-third the pain.

"The power of television is strong and it can be harmful for children if it is stronger than the force made by the mother to distract children," Bellieni said. "I believe that this power must be controlled and reduced."



Pakistani children look into a car as they play in floodwaters after a heavy downpour in Karachi yesterday. Pakistan declared a public holiday in Karachi after the heaviest rains for four years killed at least 15 people, mostly by electrocution.