

Lebanon's development 'annihilated': UN envoy

AFP, United Nations

Lebanon's 15-year economic and social recovery from civil war was wiped out in the recent Israeli offensive against Hezbollah, the UN development agency said Tuesday. "The damage is such that the last 15 years of work on reconstruction and rehabilitation, following the previous problems that Lebanon experienced, are now annihilated," said Jean Fabre, a spokesman for the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Lebanon's relatively healthy progress towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which cover a range of social and economic targets, "have been brought back to zero," he told journalists. "Fifteen years of work have been wiped out in a month." Fabre estimated that overall economic losses for Lebanon from the month-long conflict between Israel and Hezbollah totalled "at least 15 billion dollars, if not more".

Iran hands over reply to nuclear incentives

Tehran unlikely to suspend uranium enrichment

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran yesterday handed over its reply to an incentives package by world powers aimed at allaying Western fears that Tehran seeks to build atomic bombs, Iran's state-run Arabic-language Al-Alam television reported. Ali Larijani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, gave the response to foreign envoys representing the six co-sponsors of the package in Tehran. Al-Alam gave no details of the reply, which Iranian officials have already indicated is unlikely to address a key demand by the UN Security Council that it suspend uranium enrichment work by an August 31 deadline or face the threat of sanctions. "I expect a very ambiguous

answer," said one Western diplomat. The world's fourth largest oil exporter insists it will not abandon what it calls its right to enrich uranium for use in nuclear power stations. Refusing to suspend the work, which Iran says is aimed only at generating electricity but which the West sees as a disguised bid for atom bombs, would be tantamount to rejecting the package of incentives offered in return, Western diplomats say. A rebuff would not yet trigger immediate action by the UN Security Council, which passed a resolution on July 31 giving Iran a month to halt enrichment or risk sanctions. "We are not treating (Tuesday) as a deadline because it is not the Security Council deadline," one

Western diplomat said. "If Iran flatly refuses to suspend enrichment, then there will, fairly soon, be more talks in the Security Council." Security Council permanent members Britain, France, China, Russia and the United States plus Germany have offered Iran a range of economic, political and security incentives if it suspends atomic work that could be used to make nuclear bombs. Iran has said its reply to the offer will be "multi-dimensional," suggesting no simple 'yes' or 'no'. Officials have also said Iran wants more talks to resolve the dispute. "Confidence building is a two-way road, trust is always a two-way road," Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said in response to questions after a lecture in Pretoria, South Africa.

"Based on negotiations, there is a possibility for a comprehensive solution to this matter," he said. A "multi-dimensional" reply, say diplomats, could lay bare divisions in the Security Council where the United States, France and Britain back sanctions but Russia and China, the other two veto-wielding members and both key trade partners of Iran, oppose them. "If they reject suspension, that's rejection of the package (for Western capitals)," said another Western diplomat. He added that Russia and China might take a different view. "If they see suspension was negotiable, there would be pressure on (the six powers) to think about it."



Sri Lankan troops prepare mortars at an undisclosed location on the Jaffna Peninsula, some 400kms north of Colombo to shell Tiger positions. Sri Lankan warplanes bombed a suspected Tamil Tiger munitions dump yesterday as a ship prepared to sail with food for tens of thousands cut off by fighting in the besieged Jaffna peninsula.

Warplanes bomb Tiger munitions dump

AFP, Colombo

Lankan warplanes bombed a suspected Tamil Tiger munitions dump yesterday as a ship prepared to sail with food for tens of thousands cut off by fighting in the besieged Jaffna peninsula. Israeli-built Kfir jets attacked a Tiger position close to the frontline of fighting in the northern district where rebels 11 days ago launched a push to retake their former stronghold, the military said. In Colombo police said they had foiled a rebel attack after defusing a 15-kilogram (33 pound) mine rigged to a vegetable seller's bike in a busy market area. Officials said they believed the fragmentation device may have

been aimed at a Sri Lankan legislator. It followed an attack last week on Pakistan's top envoy who escaped without injury while seven other people were killed. The military reported sporadic rebel mortar and grenade attacks in the northeast overnight before they launched air strikes against the Tamil Tiger position in the Jaffna peninsula. "Just after the air attack, we could hear secondary explosions," a military official in the peninsula said. "It is most likely that their ammunition dump was hit." The peninsula, home to some 350,000 civilians, has been cut off from the rest of the island by fighting that killed 159 troops and 487 rebels during the rebel offensive,

according to the military. A partially-loaded ship carrying more than 1,000 tonnes of food and medicines was to leave Colombo for a two-day voyage Tuesday and the government said a second larger boat would follow in days. "The ship should go today as it is urgently needed," said Peter Krakolnig, deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross team in Sri Lanka. The ICRC said a ferry was also planned for later this week to bring out some of the 400 to 500 foreigners believed trapped on the peninsula. They included aid workers and foreign passport holders of Sri Lankan origin visiting relatives.

Israel presses new Gaza incursion

3 militants killed

AFP, Gaza City

Three Palestinian militants were killed by Israeli troops in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, while tanks and troops pressed a fresh incursion in the north amid a two-month-old offensive. The three men - all members of the hardline Islamic Jihad faction - were killed by tank fire near the village of Qarara, a Palestinian medic said. Troops identified "hitting" three Palestinians who were "carrying large bags and acting in a suspicious manner" as they approached the security fence that separates Israel from Gaza near Kissufim, an army spokesman said. Further north, five Palestinians were wounded and another five detained after Israeli tanks and troops moved across the border into a territory which the military had abandoned last September after a 38-year presence. At least 184 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have died in Gaza since Israel launched its offensive on June 28, but the violence has been largely overshadowed by the deadly conflict in Lebanon.



Children rest on mattresses near the wreckage of a house hit by an Israeli air strike in Jabalia, northern Gaza Strip yesterday.

Israel vows to learn lessons from failures of Lebanon war

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday vowed to learn the lessons from a litany of failures in its conflict in Lebanon as authorities prepared for a feared conflict with Iran or a "next round" with Hezbollah. The 34-day assault - waged by the most powerful army in the Middle East - failed to achieve either of its stated aims of stopping rocket attacks by the Shia guerrillas or freeing two soldiers captured by Hezbollah on July 12. The offensive cost Israel 5.7 billion dollars and the deaths of 120 soldiers and 41 civilians, as the north withered under more than 4,000 rocket attacks fired by Hezbollah until the last day. Government spokesman Avi Pazner said that "independently of a commission of inquiry," the lessons from any faulty tactics and strategies in Lebanon "should be learnt very quickly." The ceasefire is fragile and makes for fears about a resumption of fighting, as long as the Lebanese

army and international force are not deployed in southern Lebanon in keeping with UN Resolution 1701," he told AFP. Sporadic violence has rattled a tenuous truce since it came into force on August 14 with two Hezbollah guerrillas killed by Israeli troops on Monday. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was Tuesday to begin a two-day visit to Paris and Rome to shore up support for a UN resolution setting the groundwork for an Israeli withdrawal and the deployment of 15,000 international peacekeepers. Amid mounting admissions of mismanagement and threats from Iran, a cabinet minister and former Mossad spy warned Israel should prepare for a ballistic missile attack by its arch enemy and one of Hezbollah's chief supporters. "Iran has threatened to attack us with its ballistic missiles and we should prepare behind our lines and civilians for such an attack," Pensioner Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan, who is a member of Israel's security cabinet, said.

9 Taliban killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

British troops killed nine insurgents preparing an attack in southern Afghanistan while two Canadian soldiers were wounded in a Taliban ambush, the Nato-led force said Tuesday. The US-led coalition announced meanwhile that it had arrested three "suspected terrorists" in a pre-dawn raid in the eastern province of Khost that was aimed at capturing a "known al-Qaeda facilitator". British troops spotted insurgents moving into place for an attack in Helmand province late Monday and "initiated an overwhelming response using high explosive ammunition", the International Security Assistance Force said. The strike was in Nowzad district, where an Isaf air strike on Sunday killed another nine other rebels including a man believed to have been a key insurgent organiser.

11 charged in plot to bomb UK planes

AP, London

Suspects accused in the alleged plot to blow up US-bound airliners appeared in court Tuesday on terrorism charges. The first suspect was ordered held until his next court appearance in early September. Eight people were charged Monday with conspiracy to commit murder and preparing acts of terrorism. A 17-year-old was charged with possessing articles that could be used to prepare a terrorist act, and two other people are accused of failing to disclose information that could help prevent a terrorist act. The suspects were arrested on Aug. 10. Eight people were each charged with two offences: conspiracy to commit murder and preparing acts of terrorism. One person, a 17-year-old, was charged with possession of articles that could be

used to prepare a terrorist act and two people were charged with failing to disclose information that could help prevent a terrorist act. One person was also released without charge, while 11 remain in custody but have not yet been charged. Nine of those charged are from London, according to a Bank of England list of suspects whose assets were frozen following the arrests. Two are from suburban High Wycombe, 50km northwest of London. Investigators warned that the case was still being investigated. "Fingerprints, DNA, electronic data, handwriting comparisons, chemical analysis and indeed the full range of forensic disciplines will be used," Peter Clarke, the head of the Metropolitan Police's anti-terrorism unit told reporters after the Crown Prosecution Service announced the charges.

Kurds tell of gas attacks at Saddam trial

AFP, Baghdad

Saddam Hussein came face to face with Kurdish villagers yesterday who gave chilling court testimony that the ousted Iraqi leader's forces bombarded defenceless civilians with poison gas. On the second day of Saddam's genocide trial at the Iraqi High Tribunal, prosecutors presented witnesses to testify to the alleged savagery of the 1987-1988 Anfal campaign against Iraq's Kurdish minority. "If we were Iraqis, why did you bomb us?" demanded Najib Khudair Ahmad, a 41-year-old mother who confronted Saddam with a scarred face she said was the result of a chemical weapon attack on the village of Sheikwasan. The prosecution alleges that up to 182,000 civilians were slaughtered in air strikes, chemical attacks and armed sweeps by Iraqi forces through designated "prohibited zones" in Kurdish regions between

1987 and 1988. "On April 16, 1987 in the evening as the cattle were returning home and the sun was setting in the sky, about eight to 12 jets covered the sky," said Ali Mustafa Hama, a Kurdish villager with a thick moustache and spotted headscarf. "The jets started firing on the villages of Belisand and Sheikwasan. The explosions were not very loud," he said, testifying in open court, unlike the witnesses in Saddam's previous trial, whose identities were concealed. "There was green smoke rising from the bomb, as if there was a rotten apple or garlic smell. Lots of citizens immediately had red eyes and began to vomit. Afterwards it was dark," the middle-aged farmer continued. Hama was the first witness to testify in Kurdish, the native tongue of his minority community. Afterwards, Ahmad told the court how she lost family members in the attack on Sheikwasan.

REUTERS, Colombo

Thousands of hungry Sri Lankan Tamils, trapped by a new bout of war between the Tamil Tigers and the military, desperately waited yesterday for aid to be shipped north, as suspected rebel arms procurers were arrested in the United States. US officials said overnight more than a dozen people were arrested on suspicion of trying to provide money and surface-to-air missiles to the Tigers, amid a probe across more than 10 countries. Sporadic violence continued in Sri Lanka's north and east before dawn on Tuesday during the fourth

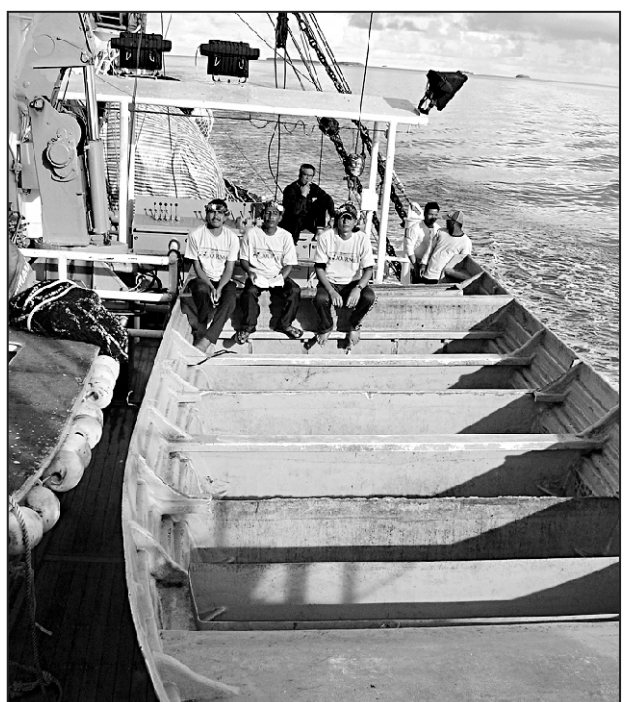
week of the worst fighting since a 2002 ceasefire, which monitors say is now dead in all but name. Nordic truce monitors said on Monday they were temporarily withdrawing to Colombo to regroup ahead of a Sept. 1 ultimatum the Tigers have given their European Union members to quit the island, which leaves them with too few staff to do their job properly. Analysts say the Tigers - who have been banned as a terrorist organisation by countries including the United States, India, Britain and the European Union - have used the past four years of ceasefire to regroup and rearm, and have smuggled a lethal arsenal into the

country. Several people who had agreed to pay more than \$900,000 for hundreds of AK-47 rifles and 50 to 100 Russian-made surface-to-air missiles to shoot down Israeli-made jets like those used by the Sri Lankan Air Force were nabbed in a New York Sting operation, according to US court documents. "These defendants allegedly sought to obtain, through a variety of means, weapons and materials to carry out a deadly campaign of violence," US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said in statement.

Mexicans touch land after 9 months lost at sea

REUTERS, Mexico City

Three Mexicans who survived an epic voyage across the Pacific Ocean in a small fishing boat have arrived in the Marshall Islands, setting foot on land for the first time in more than nine months. The three men walked off the Taiwanese tuna trawler that found them two weeks ago floating in their 25-foot (8-meter) fiberglass boat about 5,000 miles from their departure point, the Mexican Pacific coastal town of San Blas. Their bare feet were swollen, but otherwise the men appeared in good health. The men, who said they set off on a fishing trip in November and lost their way when they ran out of gasoline, reached the Marshall Island capital of Majuro on Tuesday, which was Monday in Mexico. They smiled and waved and one man shouted "Hello Mexico," to Mexican journalists as the trawler got close to the islands. The Mexicans stayed alive by eating raw birds and fish and drinking rain water. They said two other men died of starvation during the trip and were thrown overboard.



(L-R) Mexican fishermen Jesus Vidana Lopez, 27, Salvador Ordenez, 37 holding his Bible, and Lucio Rendon, 27, sit on their boat upon arriving in Majuro yesterday, while Koo's 102 captain Ching-sheng Tien (C-back) looks on. The three Mexican fishermen were rescued after drifting more than 8,000km across the Pacific Ocean and stood on land for the first time in nearly 10 months.

'Blair's foreign policy makes UK a target'

AFP, London

Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreign policy has made Britain more of a target for terrorists, according to a poll on Monday, sentiment that is helping drive support for Blair's governing Labour Party to a 19-year low. In a Guardian/ICM poll of 1,007 adults carried out over the weekend, 72 percent thought the government's foreign policy had increased the threat against Britain from terrorists. The same poll, published in Tuesday's edition of The Guardian, also showed that support for Labour dipped four percentage points to 31 percent, the lowest since 1987, while the main opposition Conservative Party gained support, rising to 40 percent, its strongest showing since 1992. Britain's second-biggest opposition Liberal Democrat Party, meanwhile, gained five percentage points to 22 percent. Were those results to be repli-

cated in a general election, the Conservatives would win a majority in Parliament by about 10 seats. Only one percent of respondents to the survey thought Blair's actions in the Middle East had made Britain safer. The prime minister came under heavy criticism over the past month when he stood alongside US President George W. Bush in declining to call for an early ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and the Shia militia Hezbollah in Lebanon. The poll also indicates British voters are suspicious of the news from ministers about the alleged threat from terrorism, with 21 percent saying they thought the government actively exaggerated the danger, compared with a fifth who believed it was telling the truth. Some 51 percent of respondents also said they were convinced ministers were not telling them the full story with regard to the threat from terrorism.