



Kashmiri Muslim villagers walk through a flooded village in Pulwama, some 45kms south of Srinagar yesterday. Two women died in a house collapse and a landslide triggered by the heaviest rains in 25 years in Indian Kashmir as troops rushed supplies to people cut off by floods.

## Int'l community should not isolate Iran: Annan

Tehran to hold nuke talks with EU official today

REUTERS, AP, Madrid/ Vienna

The international community should not isolate Iran, which has indicated it will cooperate in the reconstruction of Lebanon, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan told a Spanish newspaper.

"The international community should count on Iran, not isolate it," Annan said in an interview with El Pais in Qatar, which was published on Tuesday.

Annan spoke to El Pais after a weekend visit to Tehran as part of a Middle Eastern tour to shore up the ceasefire that ended fighting between Israel and Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas.

"The general perception is that Iran is acting on its own, giving money to Hezbollah. In my conver-

sations in Tehran, I asked the Iranians to work with other countries in reconstruction. They accepted my request, which is a very helpful attitude," Annan said.

Iran's stand-off with Western powers over its nuclear program can only be resolved via negotiation, he said.

"The main thing is we have to avoid confrontation. This is an issue, which requires patience and perseverance. The viable solution is negotiation," he said.

The United States says Iran, which failed to meet a Security Council deadline to stop enriching uranium, is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

"The Iranians assured me that they are not seeking nuclear weapons and their intentions are peace-

ful. Nonetheless, they have to find a way of reassuring the world and guaranteeing that these really are their intentions," Annan said.

In the interview, he also called on Israel to make moves to secure peace in Lebanon.

"Israel should withdraw, without needing to wait for the deployment of the 15,000 (international troops) to be complete. Also, mutual trust has to be created, by, for example, Israel lifting its blockade on Lebanon," Annan said.

Meanwhile, the European Union's foreign policy chief and Iran's senior nuclear negotiator tentatively agreed to meet Wednesday in a last-ditch attempt to bridge differences over Tehran's atomic program, UN and European officials said.

The officials, who agreed to share confidential information about the meeting with The Associated Press only if their names weren't used, stressed that the date and venue of the talks could still change.

While word leaked last week that Iranian chief negotiator Ali Larjani agreed to meet with top EU envoy Javier Solana to discuss ways to solve the impasse, details of the talks were being officially kept secret in an apparent attempt not to jeopardize any chance of their success.

Asked to confirm the reports, Cristina Gallach, the spokeswoman for Solana, would only say that "the lines of communications are being kept open" between the two sides.

## Saddam's Kuwait invasion probe gains momentum

AFP, Baghdad

A legal investigation into the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq is gaining momentum and the former strongman may face charges for the alleged execution of Kuwaiti prisoners of war.

US officials close to the Iraqi High Tribunal trying Saddam on charges related to various alleged atrocities committed during his 24-year rein told AFP that Kuwaiti officials had filed a formal complaint with prosecutors.

In the Kuwaiti complaint, filed earlier this year, Saddam stands accused of "illegally invading the country, killing and torturing its people, destroying its oil wells and other infrastructure."

"The complaints have been filed and the court has started an investigation," an American legal expert said, briefing AFP on condition of anonymity because he is not permitted to speak on behalf of the Iraqi body he is advising.

## US cites Iran, Syria as 'worrisome' threats

America safer but we are not yet safe: Bush admn

AFP, AP, Washington

The White House yesterday unveiled a reworked anti-terrorism plan, calling Iran and Syria "especially worrisome" threats and downplaying Muslim anger at the Iraq war and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The 23-page "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism" placed a premium on keeping weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) from terrorists and warned that extremist groups like Al-Qaeda have adapted to US tactics.

"Most troubling is the potential WMD-terrorism nexus that emanates from Tehran. Syria also is a significant state sponsor of terrorism and thus a priority for concern," the report said.

The Bush administration proclaimed significant progress in the war on terror yesterday but said the enemy has adjusted to US defences and that "America is safer but we are

not yet safe."

"Years of failed Republican policies have made America less safe and less able to effectively fight terrorism, and Democrats are ready to take this country in a new direction," Democrats said in statement.

Osama bin Laden's network, which carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks, is "significantly degraded but still dangerous" and serves as the "vanguard" of loosely connected extremists linked by ideology, the report said.

The document, which offered no new policies for fighting terrorism, said Washington would seek to isolate state sponsors of terrorism and warned that "Iranian and Syrian terrorist activities are especially worrisome."

"Iran remains the most active state sponsor of international terrorism," said the report, which was released as US President George W. Bush was to make the second in

a series of speeches on the war on terrorism.

"Through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the regime in Tehran plans terrorist operations and supports groups such as Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ)."

"Iran also remains unwilling to account for and bring to justice senior al-Qaeda members it detained in 2003," it said.

"Syria also is a significant state sponsor of terrorism and thus a priority for concern. The regime in Damascus supports and provides haven to Hezbollah, Hamas, and PIJ. We will continue to stand with the people of Iran and Syria against the regimes that oppress them at home and sponsor terror abroad," it said.

## Lanka troops dig in near key port

Mortar attacks continue

AFP, Trincomalee

Security forces and Tamil Tiger rebels traded mortar bomb attacks in this Sri Lankan port district yesterday, a day after the military captured a nearby rebel artillery base.

Military officials said at least one soldier was killed and 18 hospitalised after being hit by mortar bombs at Sampur, the town security forces wrested from rebel control on Monday after a week-long battle.

A military officer said troops were digging in and establishing new defences in the region.

The Sampur offensive was aimed at neutralising Tiger artillery guns that last month hit naval and air ports in Trincomalee, where security has been stepped up.

Security forces moved cautiously around Sampur to inspect buildings and bunkers used by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Elam (LTTE) to mount attacks on Trincomalee harbour, one of the world's largest natural ports.

The port houses military facilities, the premises of an Indian oil company, a Singaporean flour mill and a Japanese cement plant. It was a staging post for Allied troops in World War II.

"There are some bunkers and fortified positions of the Tigers which have not been cleared yet," a military official said.

Defence ministry spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella told reporters in Colombo that troops were firmly in control of Sampur and a process of "consolidation" was under way.

"Sampur is under the full control of the security forces," Rambukwella said. "We are consolidating our gains in the area."

He said the offensive was aimed at securing commercial interests in Trincomalee and ensuring the safety of military installations.



Pakistani parliamentarians from the hardline Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) shout slogans against amendments to the country's Islamic laws 'Hudood Ordinances' by the government on rape and adultery outside the Parliament House in Islamabad yesterday. Under the "Hudood Ordinances", women must produce four adult Muslim male witnesses to prove an act of rape.

## Blair set to go next year, says aide

AFP, London

Prime Minister Tony Blair can "reasonably" be expected to leave office in about a year's time, a key minister loyal to the embattled British leader said yesterday.

Environment Secretary David Miliband made the comment amid mounting pressure on Blair to name a date for his resignation, to put an end to increasingly damaging infighting with his ruling Labour Party.

"The conventional wisdom is that the prime minister sees himself carrying on for about another 12 months and it seems to me that conventional wisdom is reasonable," Miliband told BBC radio.

"I haven't spoken to the prime minister about that so that I am not able to give you this from the horse's mouth, but it seems to me that that conventional wisdom is perfectly reasonable."

Blair, who came to power in 1997, has said he will step down before the next general election, due May 2010 at the latest.



Nuns of the Missionaries of Charity gather around the tomb of Mother Teresa after a prayer to observe her 9th death anniversary at Mother House in Kolkata yesterday. Few hundred nuns of the house with a good number of volunteers took part in the morning prayer to mark the day.

## Pak tribes ink deal with govt for expulsion of foreign militants

AFP, Miranshah

Pro-Taliban militants and tribal elders yesterday signed a peace deal with the government calling for the expulsion or disarming of foreign al-Qaeda fighters from the restive tribal area bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

The peace deal aims to end two years of violence in the semi-autonomous tribal zone of North Waziristan where hundreds of people have died in clashes between security forces and Islamic rebels.

The pro-Taliban militants had already been observing a unilateral ceasefire there since June.

"The agreement has been signed, it's a big achievement, it is very good for peace in the region," government spokesman Qazi Ejaz Ahmed told AFP from the northwestern city of Peshawar.

The peace accord signing ceremony was witnessed by some 500

tribesmen in North Waziristan's main town, Miranshah, after weeks of dialogue, he added.

Local administrator Fakhar-e-Alam and representatives of militants, some tribal elders and religious leaders signed the accord, the spokesman said.

He said details would be released later.

A tribal MP, Maulvi Nek Zaman, who helped broker the deal, said pro-Taliban militants "will not attack security forces, government officials, tribal elders and journalists and would not run a parallel government in the region."

The militants also agreed that they would not take part in any cross-border attacks inside Afghanistan.

"The agreement entails expulsions of all foreign militants from North Waziristan," the MP said.

If they want to stay they must "lay down their arms and pledge to live peacefully," he added.

## Japan fixated on royal birth

AP, Tokyo

The expectant mother is at the hospital and the news conference schedule is set. Stocks of maternity product companies are rallying and some Japanese are even predicting a mini-baby boom.

Japan is fixating this week on the birth of Princess Kiko's baby, scheduled for Wednesday by Caesarean section. There's good reason for all the attention: The birth of a boy would give the ancient Chrysanthemum Throne its first male heir in 40 years.

"I'm hoping for a healthy baby. This is such happy news," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told reporters late Tuesday at his official residence. "It would be even better if this makes young people want to have more babies," he added, in reference to Japan's declining birth rate.

Much is riding on the gender of the infant, which will have a major impact on a heated debate over whether the 1947 imperial succession law should be changed to allow a female to assume the throne for the first time in centuries.

## Dozens of Taliban killed in Nato raid

AP, Kandahar

US artillery and airstrikes killed between 50 and 60 suspected Taliban militants yesterday, the fourth day of a Nato-led offensive in southern Afghanistan, an alliance spokesman said.

Nato already has reported more than 200 Taliban killed in the operation.

The US troops, operating under Nato command, clashed with the militants in Panjwayi district of Kandahar province, where an offensive began over the weekend to flush out hundreds of Taliban fighters.

Maj. Quentin Innis, a Nato spokesman, said the troops had identified Taliban positions and the two sides had exchanged fire. He said the estimate of 50 to 60 killed was based on reports from troops looking through "weapons sights and other observation devices."

He said there had been no Nato or Afghan troop casualties.

It wasn't possible for reporters to reach the site of the battle to independently confirm the death toll.

The Afghan Defence Ministry also said 200 militants had died since Saturday increasing its previously reported toll of 89. The dead included four Taliban commanders and 12 of their bodyguards, a ministry statement said, citing intelligence reports.

Five Canadian soldiers have also been killed, one in a friendly fire incident Monday involving a US warplane.

Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban military commander for south and southeastern Afghanistan, has rejected Nato's claims of more than 200 dead.

Qari Yousaf Ahmadi, who claims to speak for the Taliban, said if Nato had killed so many Taliban fighters, they should show them to the media. He also denied that hundreds of Taliban militants were trapped in Panjwayi, and said its fighters were battling Nato and Afghan forces there. He spoke to an Associated Press reporter by phone from an undisclosed location.