



A Pakistani bomb disposal expert (2R) holds a rocket found in front of the president's residence in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistani bomb disposal experts found and defused two rockets pointed towards President Pervez Musharraf's official residence in Islamabad, hours after a blast near his home.

Nobel winner Kornberg hails his son's award

AFP, Stockholm

Arthur Kornberg, the 1959 Nobel Medicine Prize co-laureate, basked in his son Roger's Nobel chemistry honour Wednesday, saying he long thought his son deserved it, but warned a decline in US government research funding stymied important discoveries.

Speaking hours after the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced in Stockholm that Roger Kornberg, 59, had won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for his discovery of how DNA, the genetic code, creates a message to spur a cell to make protein, his father expressed surprise at the timing, but not at the award.

"I'm very happy that this honour was given by the Nobel committee -- they take their awards very seriously, and I felt for a long time that my son Roger deserved that kind of recognition. But one never knows when, because so many people are deserving," Arthur Kornberg, 88, said in a phone interview with AFP.

Japan, US push divided UN to punish N Korea

AFP, Tokyo

Japan called yesterday on a divided UN Security Council to impose tough sanctions on North Korea if it tests an atom bomb, but Pyongyang warned it would not back down unless the United States compromises.

Stoking regional jitters, the United States said it had detected possible preparations for a nuclear test and a leading South Korean newspaper predicted the communist regime could detonate a bomb as early as next week.

Amid divisions at the UN Security Council, a senior Japanese official on a visit to Washington said the allies supported invoking a chapter of the UN Charter authorizing far-reaching sanctions or theoretically military action.

"In the event that North Korea conducts a nuclear test, it would inevitably be necessary to seek a resolution with Chapter VII at the UN Security Council," vice foreign minister Shotaro Yachi said.

New Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, well known for his hard line on Pyongyang, is set on Sunday to visit China and South Korea, which have warned against further isolating their communist neighbour.

"A good discussion has to take place at the United Nations to make the North realise that if the country continues taking such actions it would be in an even more severe situation," Abe told parliament.

North Korea on Tuesday dramatically raised the stakes in the long-running standoff over its nuclear programme by announcing it would

test a bomb at an unspecified date.

Chosun Sinbo, a newspaper published by ethnic Koreans in Japan and seen as representing Pyongyang's view, warned Thursday that a test was "unavoidable" unless the United States adopted a more conciliatory stance.

"The DPRK (North Korea) statement on a nuclear test is not empty talk but clearly premised on action," the newspaper said in a dispatch from Pyongyang, according to its Korean-language website.

Japan and the United States already have imposed most of the sanctions at their disposal against the impoverished nation, which conducts the bulk of its trade with China and South Korea.

The North, which last year declared itself nuclear-armed, has boycotted six-nation disarmament

talks since November to protest one set of US sanctions aimed at blocking it from money laundering and counterfeiting.

But even after Tuesday's statement there was no sign of unanimity at the Security Council, which rebuffed Japanese and US attempts to invoke Chapter VII after North Korea test-fired seven missiles in July.

US ambassador John Bolton spoke of "division" within the body, saying the regime's "protectors" -- implying veto-wielding Moscow and Beijing -- opposed a tough line.

His Chinese counterpart Wang Guangya took exception, urging "less mistrust" between Washington and Pyongyang.

Fighting flares up despite Lankan peace pledges

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Air Force bombed Tamil Tiger bases for a third day yesterday, and suspected rebels clashed with government soldiers, after the foes agreed to crunch talks aimed at halting renewed civil war.

Residents in the far northern army-held Jaffna peninsula heard volleys of artillery shells before dawn, but said the intensity was far lower than in recent weeks -- the worst fighting since a 2002 ceasefire that now lies in tatters.

The military said the Air Force pounded suspected bases of the rebels' naval Sea Tiger wing in the

eastern district of Batticaloa, and also raided rebel targets in the north.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government have agreed to meet for talks on October 28-30 after a six-month impasse. The government committed to the talks on Wednesday night, and says they will take place in Geneva.

The Tigers wanted to go Oslo and have not yet said whether they agree to go to Geneva.

The rebels have threatened to withdraw from the truce completely if attacks by the military continue, while the government says it reserves the right to retaliate if the Tigers attack security forces.

"Opportunities don't come often. Both sides will have to understand that," said defence spokesman and cabinet minister Keheliya Rambukwella. "Anything that threatens national security will be responded to."

Some analysts believe the time is not right for talks given the intensity of fighting, and fears the war could escalate.

Each side accuses the other of trying to rekindle a two-decade conflict that has killed more than 65,000 people since 1983, and Nordic truce monitors see little will from either side to halt the violence.

UN European HQ faces terrorist alert

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations boosted security at its European headquarters yesterday after receiving warnings of a possible terrorist attack, according to an internal document obtained by AFP.

"The Swiss authorities have contacted us to inform of a possible terrorist attack against United Nations premises in Geneva," the UN security service said in a note to staff.

"This attack would take place between 5th of October and the 10th of October. No information has been provided about the possible authors or the means to be used, and no specific target has been mentioned."

The security service told staff that it "is regarding this threat seri-

ously and is taking extraordinary security measures."

However, it said that it did not plan to suspend operations at the UN building, which is known as the Palais des Nations.

UN spokeswoman Marie Heuze confirmed that the security level was "a little higher" than usual.

"The alert level varies according to the local situation and the information given by the Swiss authorities," she told AFP.

The UN offices are set in a large park which is itself ringed by a security fence.

Staff arriving at work on Thursday morning had noticed extra controls by UN security guards at the three entrance gates and a stepped up Swiss police presence on the surrounding streets.



United Nations security guards check cars at the entrance of the UN Office in Geneva yesterday. The United Nations boosted security at its European headquarters Thursday after receiving warnings of a possible terrorist attack.

Airports step up security over hijack fears

REUTERS, AFP, New Delhi

Security has been stepped up at a string of major Indian and Nepali airports after warnings that a flight to or from Nepal could be hijacked, a security official said.

Security at Nepal's only international airport has been tightened after an intelligence tip-off that a flight to India could be hijacked, officials said yesterday.

"Security has been kept on high alert for the last five days after we got Indian intelligence reports that a flight from Kathmandu could be hijacked," Loknath Gautam, security chief at Tribhuvan International Airport, told

AFP.

The alert was issued after a New Delhi court ordered Mohammed Afzal, convicted for his role in a 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, to be hanged on Oct 20.

Afzal's wife on Tuesday asked the president of India, APJ Abdul Kalam, to pardon her husband, and his decision is awaited.

"We have received a specific intelligence input that terrorists may plan to hijack a plane to or from Kathmandu in response to the hanging," the official, who asked not to be named, told Reuters.

US, EU warn Israel over closure of Gaza border

REUTERS, Jerusalem

US and European security officials have told Israel that European states may withdraw their monitors from the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt unless Israel agrees to keep it open.

Rafah is the Palestinians' only crossing to the outside world that does not require passing through Israel.

It has been closed for all but 12 days since June 25 when Gazan gunmen seized an Israeli soldier and killed two others in a cross-

border raid.

In a letter to Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters, the officials said Rafah's continued closure could well prompt EU member states to "seriously question the desirability of maintaining" their monitoring mission there.

The monitors are required for the crossing to function under a deal brokered last year by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who was in the region again on Wednesday for talks with Palestinian and Israeli leaders.

The withdrawal of the monitors would amount to a diplomatic slap for Israel as well as the United States.

The September 29 letter -- signed by US security coordinator Lieutenant-General Keith W. Dayton and EU monitoring mission chief Pietro Pistolesse -- warned Israel that Rafah's frequent closure would also "make it very hard to convince the EU to send monitors to Karni," Gaza's main commercial crossing, as Washington has proposed.

Nato takes command of Afghan peace forces

REUTERS, Kabul

Nato assumed responsibility for security across the whole of Afghanistan on Thursday when it took command in the east of the country from US-led coalition forces.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) already commanded forces in the north, west and south, as well as in the capital, Kabul. On Thursday it took command of about 12,000 US troops in the east.

"The unity of command that today's transition brings should enhance the effectiveness of the overall operation," the commander of Nato's Afghan force, General David Richards, said in a speech at a change-of-command ceremony in Kabul.

"Isaf has shown it has the resolve

to meet the challenges of its expanded mission," he said, referring to fighting in the south since Nato took command there at the end of July.

The US troop transfer had been expected later in the year, but alliance officials said battles with resurgent guerrillas in the south showed the urgent need to pool British, Dutch and Canadian troops under Nato with the US forces.

With the inclusion of the US troops in the east, the Nato force in Afghanistan will number about 31,000 troops. About 8,000 US troops remain in a separate force, concentrating on counter-terrorist operations and training Afghan forces.

The Afghan mission is the biggest ground operation in Nato's history.



Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry (R), commander of the US-led coalition forces shakes hands with British Lieutenant General David Richards, Nato's top general in Afghanistan as Afghan President Hamid Karzai looks on during a transfer of command ceremony at the Isaf headquarters in Kabul yesterday.