



PHOTO: AFP  
Louise Arbour (R) the UN high commissioner for human rights, walk under the destroyed roof of the Assamna family home in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanun yesterday. The Assamna family lost 16 members including women and children in one attack by the Israeli forces on the town earlier this month.

## Gaza suffering 'massive' rights violation: UN

REUTERS, Beit Hanoun

A senior United Nations official described Gaza as suffering "massive" human rights violations during a visit to the territory on Monday and urged all sides to be bold in trying to end the violence.

"The violation of human rights I think in this territory is massive," Louise Arbour, the UN high commissioner for human rights, told reporters during a visit to Beit Hanoun, a town the Israeli army shelled earlier this month, killing 19 civilians.

"The call for protection has to be answered. We cannot continue to see civilians, who are not the

authors of their own misfortune, suffer to the extent of what I see."

Arbour, on a five-day trip to the region, spent time at the house of a family who had lost more than a dozen members in a shelling on November 8, when Israel says a mistake led to the barrage of artillery shells hitting the neighbourhood.

Her visit, the first she has made to the region since becoming commissioner, comes days after the UN General Assembly approved a resolution that "deplored" Israel's shelling of Gaza and called for an immediate cessation of violence.

Asked what she planned to do about the rights violations, Arbour

said: "I will help to keep the conscience of the many who care about what happens in this part of the world alive."

"I will speak to the Palestinian Authority about their responsibility to enforce the law, to create an environment in which people can seek protection of the law and, of course, I will also speak to the Israeli authority."

"We need to collectively call on leaders, political, military and militia leaders, to have the courage to break the cycle of violence to ensure the well-being of civilians."

## Tigers scoff Lankan aid offer as political gimmick

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday scoffed a government offer to send supplies to the besieged Jaffna peninsula as a "political gimmick" aimed at appeasing the international community.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they had no formal word from the government about its offer to send essential food and medicine to Jaffna through rebel-held territory.

"We have checked with the SLMM (Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission) and there is no official offer from the government except a statement to the media," LTTE military spokesman Rasiyah Ilanthiriyar told AFP.

"We cannot react to this political gimmick aimed at the meeting of aid donors today in Washington," he said, referring to a review of Sri Lanka's faltering peace process by the US, European Union, Japan and Norway Monday.

The office of President Mahinda Rajapakse said on Sunday night that he had ordered the opening of the highway to Jaffna amid local and international concern for half a million civilians trapped there.

A government spokesman said a formal request was offered to relief agencies to support a food convoy by road to the Jaffna peninsula, virtually cut off since fighting erupted in mid-August.

"International humanitarian organisations are requested to offer their assistance to the supply of humanitarian goods to the Jaffna peninsula," said Chandrapala Liyanage, spokesman for President Mahinda Rajapakse.

The president's office announced Sunday night a large convoy of trucks would be assembled soon to transport essentials to Jaffna, where prices have rocketed with the closure of the only land access, via the A-9 highway.

Peace talks between the government and Tamil Tiger rebels col-

lapsed in Geneva last month as the authorities resisted Tiger demands to open the A-9.

The severe shortages in Jaffna prompted neighbouring India to announce last week that it would send over 7,000 tonnes of food and medicine for the Tamil civilians in Jaffna, who are living under virtual siege conditions.

India's Foreign Secretary, Shiv Shankar Menon, was expected here this week to convey New Delhi's deep concern over the humanitarian crisis, diplomats said.

Minority Tamils in Jaffna share close cultural and religious links with the more than 60 million Tamils in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The opening of the highway was a key element of the February 2002 truce brokered by Norway. New Delhi has backed Oslo's efforts to end the island's drawn out conflict which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

## Bush praises Indonesian pluralism & diversity

AFP, Bogor

US President George W Bush yesterday praised Indonesia's "pluralism and its diversity" and said that the world should look to the predominantly Muslim country as an example.

"It's very important for the people of America to understand that this vast country has got tremendous potential," he said as he met here with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Muslim and non-Muslim civic leaders.

"It's got a prominent role to play in the world in showing how it's possible for people to be able to live together in peace and harmony," the US president said as he opened a seven-hour visit.

## Hu visits India to bolster ties, resolve border row

AFP, New Delhi

Chinese President Hu Jintao arrived in the Indian capital yesterday for landmark talks aimed at boosting trade ties and resolving a decades-old border dispute, witnesses said.

Hu stepped off an Air China passenger jet and was greeted by Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee at the Indira Gandhi International Airport.

He is slated to hold talks Tuesday with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and then visit India's financial capital Mumbai and the Taj Mahal city of Agra, before leaving for Pakistan on Thursday.

Hu's trip is the first by a Chinese president leader since a visit by his predecessor Jiang Zemin in 1996, and is an indication of the improving relations between the two countries.

India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee made clear the importance the country attaches to its ties with China when he addressed diplomats last week.

"How we manage this relationship will have a tremendous impact on peace and stability in the regional and increasingly the global context," he said.

One senior Indian official, who declined to be named, said India and China may use Hu's visit to announce the establishment of a hotline, "possibly at the level of foreign ministers", to deepen trust between the two countries.

They will also sign a 10-year agreement to "increase the investment between China and India", the official said.

Trade between the economic rivals is growing rapidly and is

expected to reach 20 billion dollars this year.

China's Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi said security-related bars to investment would likely be on the agenda when Hu visits.

But the Indian official said China would be unlikely to allow private firms from India to invest in Tibet, while New Delhi would bar Chinese firms that had invested in Pakistan from operating in India.

Despite the improving relations between the world's two most populous countries, "anxieties and wariness" remain, said C.U. Bhaskar, a senior analyst at the New Delhi-based Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses.

New Delhi remains suspicious of China's close ties with India's arch-rival Pakistan, and has bristled over its support for Islamabad's nuclear

power industry and military.

Beijing, for its part, is wary of New Delhi hosting Tibet's spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who fled to India in 1959 and created a government-in-exile.

India and China have also still not resolved their border dispute, despite several rounds of talks.

New Delhi says Beijing occupies 38,000 square kilometres (14,670 square miles) of Indian territory in Kashmir, illegally ceded to it by Pakistan in the 1950s, while Beijing claims 90,000-square-kilometres in the Indian-administered state of Arunachal Pradesh.

A formal ceasefire line is yet to be established, but the unsettled frontier has remained largely peaceful, thanks to agreements signed in 1993 and 1996.

## Saddam trial 'flawed', says HR Watch

AFP, New York

Human Rights Watch said yesterday that Saddam Hussein's trial for crimes against humanity was fundamentally flawed and called for his death sentence and conviction to be overturned.

"The trial... was marred by so many procedural and substantive flaws that the verdict is unsound," the rights watchdog said in a statement released with its 97-page report on the trial.

"The proceedings in the Dujail trial were fundamentally unfair," said Nehal Bhuta, who wrote the report.

"The tribunal squandered an important opportunity to deliver credible justice to the people of Iraq.

And its imposition of the death penalty after an unfair trial is indefensible," he added.

The report is based on 10 months of observation and dozens of interviews with judges, prosecutors and defence lawyers.

It says the court that tried Saddam and seven co-defendants "was undermined from the outset by Iraqi government actions that threatened the independence and perceived impartiality of the court."

"Unless the Iraqi government allows experienced international judges and lawyers to participate directly, it's unlikely the court can fairly conduct our trials," the report said.

## Deadline for Nepal peace deal approaches

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's government and Maoist rebels said Monday that last minute haggling was not expected to delay for the second time the signing of a landmark peace deal to end a decade of war.

"We held intensive discussions Monday. Everything is going positively but we could not agree on a final draft of the document because we ran out of time," Krishna Prasad Sitaula, home minister, told AFP Monday evening.

The two sides had been due to sign the agreement last

Thursday, but failed to reach consensus on the document that will end the rebel's "people's war". The deadline to sign the deal is on Tuesday.

Dinanath Sharma, a rebel negotiator, said: "The spirit of the talks on Monday was highly encouraging. Both sides are upbeat about signing the peace accord within the set deadline."

Both sides declined to reveal details of what was holding up the historic peace agreement. They are planning to hold talks on Tuesday morning before signing the agreement later in the day.

Once former foes, the government and rebels have observed a ceasefire for over six months, and the rebels are to be allowed to join the government in return for placing their weapons and army under United Nations supervision.

This is the third time that the rebels and government have tried to hammer out a peace deal in the impoverished Himalayan nation.

Two previous attempts in 2001 and 2003 failed, plunging the country back into the conflict that has killed at least 12,500 people since 1996.



PHOTO: AFP  
Indonesian children hold a protest against US President George W Bush in Bogor yesterday. Indonesia, as a democratic country, had not banned protests against Bush's second visit to the country starting on Monday, but they should remain "peaceful and non-anarchic", said foreign ministry spokesman Desra Percaya.

## Military victory not possible in Iraq

Says Kissinger

AP, London

Military victory is no longer possible in Iraq, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said in a television interview broadcast Sunday.

Kissinger presented a bleak vision of Iraq, saying the US government must enter into dialogue with Iraq's regional neighbours including Iran if progress is to be made in the region.

"If you mean by 'military victory' an Iraqi government that can be established and whose writ runs across the whole country, that gets the civil war under control and sectarian violence under control in a time period that the political processes of the democracies will support, I don't believe that is possible," he told the British Broadcasting Corp.

But Kissinger, an architect of the Vietnam war who has advised President Bush about Iraq, warned against a rapid withdrawal of coalition troops, saying it could

destabilize Iraq's neighbours and cause a long-lasting conflict.

"A dramatic collapse of Iraq whatever we think about how the situation was created would have disastrous consequences for which we would pay for many years and which would bring us back, one way or another, into the region," he said.

Kissinger, whose views have been sought by the Iraqi Study Group, led by former Secretary of State James Baker III, called for an international conference bringing together the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Iraq's neighbours including Iran and regional powers like India and Pakistan to work out a way forward for the region.

"I think we have to redefine the course, but I don't think that the alternative is between military victory, as defined previously, or total withdrawal," he said.

## Israel moots int'l force to prevent Gaza rockets

Palestinians suspend unity cabinet talks

AFP, Jerusalem/ Gaza City

An Israeli cabinet minister yesterday raised the possibility of deploying a multinational force in the Gaza Strip to prevent persistent Palestinian rocket attacks on the Jewish state.

"For the moment there is no military solution to the Qassam (rocket) fire problem on Israel from the Gaza Strip and therefore the deployment of a multinational force needs to be considered," minister without portfolio Yitzhak Cohen, from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party,

told public radio.

"This model has worked in Lebanon... We went to war this summer in Lebanon and an average of 180 Katyusha rockets were fired against our territory every day. That stopped only thanks to (UN) Resolution 1701," he added.

The Security Council resolution ushered in an August 14 ceasefire ending the 34-day conflict between Israel and Shia militia Hezbollah and saw the deployment of a multinational UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

Palestinian militants on Monday

fired seven rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip, which caused no casualties or damage, a military source said.

Meanwhile, The two main Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah, yesterday suspended talks on forming a national unity government because of a lack of progress, a Palestinian official said.

"We can say that discussions have been suspended," Nabil Amr, an advisor to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, told a news conference.