

Pope calls for violence-free world

AFP, Astana

Pope John Paul II drew a mixed crowd of nationalities and religions to a mass in Kazakhstan on Sunday in which he urged people of all faiths to work together to build a world without violence.

The 81-year-old pontiff, who looked weary and walked slightly stooped, has used his visit to the Central Asian state, situated between China and Russia, to call on Muslims and Christians to work together.

"It is an honour for the country to receive a person who had set himself the task of unifying nations and religions," said Zhibek, 38, who works for a bank in Astana.

"Even though we are Muslims and Christians there is only one God and one human race and we must all work together especially in these difficult times," added Gainy, 37.

Ex-Afghan king Zahir Shah ready to return

AFP, Rome

Former Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah is ready to go home if he could be of help to his people in the current crisis, he said in an interview published Sunday in the daily La Repubblica.

"I am ready to go back to my country if that would help my people. But any punishment for terrorist attacks committed by foreigners present in my country should not strike the Afghan people at all," he said, in a reference to feared US reprisals against Afghanistan for sheltering Osama bin Laden, the Saudi-born prime suspect in the terror attacks on the United States.



William's wish

AFP, St. Andrews

Prince William, the eldest son of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana and the future heir to the British throne, arrived at university on Saturday and said he just wanted to be an ordinary student.

"I want to go there and be an ordinary student. I mean, I'm only going to university. It's not like I'm getting married - though that's what it feels like sometimes," said William, 19.

Since the History of Art student chose St. Andrews, on the east coast of Scotland, applications to attend the university have soared 44 percent, with a 100 percent increase in overseas applicants.

UK mulls plan to strengthen anti-terror laws

AFP, London

Britain is considering strengthening its anti-terrorist legislation after the strikes in the United States which left thousands dead, a Downing Street spokesman said Sunday.

The Sunday Telegraph had reported earlier that Prime Minister Tony Blair was planning three emergency bills to extend police powers to arrest suspects for interrogation, allow the use in court of transcripts of phone calls bugged by security services, and reduce the appeal rights of immigrants turned back at airports.

Beer can help fight cancer!

AFP, Tokyo

Scientists in Japan have discovered that chemicals in beer can help fight off cancer, a report said today. Researchers from Okayama University in western Japan fed a cancer-causing chemical to genes of the salmonella bacteria, which usually leads the genes to mutate as the first stage of developing cancer, according to Jiji Press news agency.

The team freeze-dried beer to separate ingredients and gave each of them to the salmonella genes, finding that at least six of the materials prevented the genes from mutating, the agency said.

The team has succeeded in tracking down the chemical composition of only one of the six so far.

The head of the research team, Sakae Arimoto, said they were trying to identify the other substances and launch more experiments using human cells.

Details of this study are to be reported to a meeting of the Japan cancer academy next week.



PHOTO: AFP

People attend a peace rally on Saturday in Union Square in New York. Nine more bodies have been recovered from the rubble of the World Trade Center bringing the number of confirmed dead to 261, officials in New York said on Saturday.

Benazir urges Islamabad to sever ties with Taliban

AFP, Washington

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on Saturday praised the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for severing its ties with Afghanistan's Taliban regime and called on her country to follow suit.

Benazir interviewed on Cable News Network's (CNN) Larry King Live, described the Taliban who are thought to be harbouring the main suspect in last week's deadly terror attack in the United States, Osama bin Laden as "a major problem."

"The UAE did the right thing in cutting off the relationship. I'd like to see my own government do the same. In fact, back in 1998 we called upon the government to sever the ties with the Taliban. The Taliban are a major problem," she said in the satellite interview from the UAE, where she lives in exile.

Benazir, who was ousted in 1996, hinted that Pakistan should switch its allegiances to Afghanistan's opposition forces, saying that the Taliban would not cooperate in the war against terrorism.

"They are determined to go it

alone, and I think that we really have to look at the others other players within Afghanistan," she said, adding that a change was "possible" within the leadership of the Taliban, headed by Mullah Mohammad Omar.

"Mullah Omar is not going to cooperate. He is related to bin



Laden," she said.

Benazir also backed the global war against terrorism unleashed by the United States after terrorists used hijacked jetliners to attack New York's World Trade Centre and Washington's Pentagon on September 11, leaving nearly 7,000

feared dead.

But she warned against the action being turned into fight against Islam, something US President George W Bush and his administration have said they want to avoid at all costs.

"Muslims are very concerned at some of the coverage that is begin used which sometimes fails to make this distinction. The militants would like to show this as a battle against Islam. And I would like to caution that's something we need to avoid," she said.

The former leader, twice elected and twice dismissed from office, Bhutto has lived in self-imposed exile since shortly before her 1999 conviction for corruption, said she wanted to go home to lead her party and help bring stability to Pakistan.

"I'd like to go back, and I hope that given this new situation, given the fact that my party did very well in the recent local elections, Islamabad will reach out to myself and to other political dissidents to create the kind of unity that is needed for a stable Pakistan to back the battle against international terrorism," she said.

Sharon postpones Peres-Arafat talks

Israeli tanks blast truce

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has postponed a meeting between his Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat which had been planned for later Sunday, a senior Israeli official told AFP.

"The prime minister gave instructions to his foreign minister not to go to the meeting today because of the continuing violence and terrorism," the official said.

"Yasser Arafat has not passed the test of 48 hours of total calm that the prime minister set last Sunday as a condition for a Peres-Arafat meeting," said the official, who asked not to be named.

A meeting later in the week has not been ruled out however, he said.

He said the decision was also made on the advice of the head of military intelligence, General Amos Malka, who informed the cabinet of continuing "terrorist attacks and

Yasser Arafat's refusal to arrest the perpetrators."

Most of the ministers at the cabinet session were against the meeting being held Sunday, Israeli public radio said.

A senior Palestinian official said earlier the meeting was to go ahead at Gaza City's airport at 5:00 pm (1400 GMT).

Meanwhile, Israeli tanks rolled briefly into the Gaza Strip on Saturday night, shaking a fragile ceasefire that will determine whether Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat proceed with crucial peace talks. "Three Israeli tanks made an incursion of several hundred metres (yards) at Deir al-Balah, in autonomous Palestinian territory in the center of the Gaza Strip," a Palestinian security official told AFP.

He said the tanks were likely responding to mortars fired at the nearby Jewish settlement of Kfar

Darom, although there was no statement from the Israeli military.

The advance, which sparked exchanges of gunfire but left no injuries, came after Peres met with top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat and parliament speaker Ahmed Qorei over whether the much-anticipated peace meeting could be held late Sunday, Israeli diplomatic sources said.

The Peres-Arafat meeting is intended to relaunch the Middle East peace process and end the year-long Palestinian intifada, or uprising, which has claimed more than 800 lives, most of them Palestinians.

The Israeli army's head of planning, Major Giora Eiland, who took part in the talks, laid out plans for easing the blockade on Palestinian territories and a redeployment of Israeli forces following a withdrawal from reoccupied autonomous Palestinian land last week, the diplomatic sources said.

US warns allies of probable attack this week

REUTERS, Tokyo

The United States has warned its allies of a possible second round of attacks by the end of this week following the deadly recent strikes against New York and Washington, Jiji news agency quoted Japanese government sources as saying.

The next round of attacks, if really launched, would be on an even greater scale than those on September 11, which killed more than 6,000 people, according to information provided to Japan by the United States, Jiji said.

The news agency quoted the sources as saying on Saturday that the "means of terrorism" would be "more cruel and shocking" than in the September 11 carnage, when hijackers flew airliners into New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington.

The targets of the possible attacks were unknown but possibilities included members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Pakistan, Jiji said.

The government sources said attacks on Japan could not be ruled out since Tokyo has expressed support for US retaliation against the September 11 strikes.

India, Iran, Russia plan to boost anti-Taliban forces

Top Afghan commander holds talks with Russian generals

AFP, New Delhi

India, Russia and Iran are holding talks on ways to jointly back the opposition Northern Alliance forces against the ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan, officials and reports said Sunday.

"The three countries are keen on jointly promoting the Northern Alliance, which is battling the Taliban, chief benefactor of international terrorism, headquartered in Afghanistan," the Hindu newspaper said, citing highly-placed Indian sources.

Other officials told AFP that the Indian government was also likely to offer its "full backing" to the new military commander of the Afghan opposition, General Fahim.

Fahim, the former intelligence chief of the Northern Alliance, has taken over from Ahmad Shah Masood who died after an explosion on September 9 caused by suicide bombers posing as Arab journalists.

"Our support to Fahim is inevitable because in Masood's death we saw a great loss to the Northern Alliance. Also, Fahim has been closely associated with Masood for years and shared our perceptions (on the Taliban)," a top government source said.

Masood, a guerrilla leader who fought Soviet Union troops for a decade in Afghanistan, visited India last summer to seek its help in training and arming a force of 20,000 Afghan soldiers, reports say.

The fatal attack on Masood came just before the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11.

America blames the attacks on Osama bin Laden, who is believed to be hiding in Afghanistan as a guest of the Islamic Taliban militia.

Europeans rally for peace

REUTERS, Liege

Demonstrators marched on Saturday through a number of European cities, ranging from London to Berlin and Budapest, in opposition to possible US strikes in retaliation for the devastating September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Around 1,000 protesters marched through the Belgian city of Liege under banners reading "Make Love, Not War" as European finance ministers discussed the September 11 assaults on the United States.

The organisers, a broad alliance of social rights groups and left-wing activists dubbed D14, staged a festive rally several hundred metres (yards) from the barricaded conference centre where the ministers met, and later dispersed peacefully.

"Today, the first principle is to be anti-war and refuse to participate in US action," D14 militant George

Robert said.

The rally broke up in late afternoon after a minute of silence for the dead in the September 11 terror attacks on the United States.

In London, about 4,000 demonstrators gathered peacefully outside the Defence Ministry dressed in black and carrying pieces of paper saying: "Stand shoulder to shoulder for peace and justice. No more violence."

Several thousand demonstrators took to the streets of Berlin and other German cities, shouting "No Third World War" and urging the United States not to answer attacks on its cities with more violence.

Carrying banners reading "Enough deaths" and "No retaliation," the demonstrators gathered outside the Berlin city hall. Police said a few thousand people were on the streets. Smaller protests were also held in Cologne, Bremen and Kassel.



PHOTO: AFP

Miss America 2002, Katie Harman, reacts as she is crowned by last year's winner Angela Perez Baraquio at the conclusion of the Miss America Pageant on Saturday in Atlantic City, US. Harman, the current Miss Oregon, is from Gresham.

Kashmiri leaders, rebels on collision course

AFP, Srinagar

The attacks on the United States and Washington's push for an international coalition against terrorism have set off a collision course in Indian-ruled Kashmir between separatist leaders and Muslim radicals angered by Pakistan's stance.

The divisions were on full display Friday, when Kashmiris in the Muslim majority summer capital Srinagar defied calls by the main separatist alliance and largely observed an anti-US strike called by a handful of militant groups.

The radicals had called the strike out of solidarity with hardline Pakistanis angered by President Pervez Musharraf's decision to cooperate with the United States.

Not bothered by confronting the hardliners, the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an amalgam of two dozen separatist parties, told Kashmiris not to heed the strike call and termed Musharraf's stance towards Washington "pragmatic and realistic."

Hurriyat chairman Abdul Gani Bhat angered the radicals further

when he said the issue of Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States that killed more than 6,300, was "irrelevant" to the APHC and the decade-long separatist struggle in Kashmir.

Bin Laden, wanted "dead or alive" by Washington, has according to New Delhi provided aid to rebels in Kashmir, where thousands of Afghan war veterans have allegedly gone to battle.

Buoyed by the success of the strike, the radicals accused APHC leaders of hurting the Kashmiri cause in the struggle since 1989 to secede India and either become independent or join Pakistan.

Kashmir, divided between India and Pakistan, has sparked two of the three wars between the nuclear powers since they gained independence from Britain in 1947.

"The people of Kashmir by observing a complete strike have practically demonstrated their affiliation with mujahedin (holy warriors) and their Islamic point of view," said a joint press release by the rebel groups that sponsored the strike.

Lanka kills 30 Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan navy gunboats on Sunday sank at least four Tamil rebel craft off the island's northeastern coast killing at least 30 rebels, the defence ministry said.

The fighting erupted when the navy detected boats of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) off the coast of Mullaitivu, ministry spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said.

"We have confirmed reports of four LTTE boats destroyed by the navy and that at least 30 terrorists have perished in the attack," he said.

Navy craft sustained minor damage during the gun battle, but there were no fatalities among sailors, Karunaratne added.

He said there had been initial suspicion that another two vessels were bringing in supplies for the rebels, but investigations established they were genuine merchant ships.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels to the military claims.

A week ago, the LTTE launched a major suicide attack against a ship ferrying 1,200 government soldiers near the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

The navy beat back the attack but at least 11 sailors were killed and another 12 were reported missing.

The Tigers admitted that they had deployed six suicide bombers in boats packed with explosives to carry out the attack which was repulsed by navy gun boats escorting the ship.

Tiger guerrillas are leading a campaign for independence in the island's north and east. More than 60,000 people have been killed in fighting in the past three decades.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers killed a civilian in violation of a temporary truce agreed with a UN agency for the conduct of a polio immunisation campaign, the defence ministry said Sunday.