

## Polluted lakes put 1b at risk

AP, Tokyo

Nearly 1 billion people are at risk because of overuse and pollution of the world's lakes, say global experts gathering Monday in central Japan to draw up plans for combating the trend.

Already, more than half the world's lakes and reservoirs -- representing 90 per cent of all liquid fresh water on the Earth's surface -- are degraded by pollution and drainage.

And the problem is likely to get worse as the world's population increases, according to delegates at the International Conference on Conservation and Management of Lakes.

"Lakes are among the most vulnerable and difficult to restore of all natural ecological systems, but they have been widely ignored even as they have deteriorated," said Masahisa Nakamura, director of Japan's Lake Biwa Research

Institute -- one of the hosts of the five-day conference.

The lakes symposium is a preparatory meeting for the Third World Water Forum, which is expected to draw about 8,000 researchers and government officials when it convenes in the nearby city of Kyoto in 2003. Up to 1 billion people worldwide depend on endangered nearby lakes for drinking water, sewage, fishing, irrigation, transportation or tourism, said World Water Forum vice president William Cosgrove. As those lakes wither, so do their livelihoods and health.

People in developing countries, who are more dependent on local surface water, are especially vulnerable, delegates said.

Part of the problem is that the number of lakes is shrinking rapidly as a growing population overtops them for irrigation and drinking water or overpollutes them with sewage and industrial

runoff.

As an example of how fast things can change, panelists said 543 large- and medium-sized lakes disappeared in China alone between 1950 and 1980 when their water was diverted for irrigation.

Adding to the dilemma is global warming, which is expected to raise average lake temperatures by 2-3 degrees Celsius (3.6-5.4 degrees Fahrenheit) over the next 50 years, Cosgrove said. Warmer water is not as good at naturally cleansing itself of pollution.

Among the lakes on current session's watch list: The Great Lakes of North America, Lake Okeechobee in Florida, Lake Victoria in Africa and the Aral Sea between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The conference, taking place on the shores of Lake Biwa, Japan's largest lake, is expected to conclude with a proposal on ways of saving lakes.

## Anti-Taliban forces stamp victory

AP, Kabul

With the Taliban retreating south amid heavy US bombing, opposition forces said Monday that they were poised to seize two provinces where the Islamic militia still has some control in northern Afghanistan.

Anti-Taliban troops were trying to move toward Baghlan, the capital of a province of the same name, and then to Kunduz province, which is completely in the hands of the Taliban, said opposition spokesman Mohammed Abil. He said they were encountering resistance.

A victory of the opposition northern alliance in those two provinces would ensure its dominance in northern Afghanistan even if pockets of Taliban fighters remain. Opposition forces were also pushing west toward the city of Herat.

Taliban officials had no immediate comment, although they have acknowledged their forces

were in a "strategic withdrawal."

US aircraft, including B-52 bombers, roamed the skies over Kabul Monday and bombed Taliban positions at the front line north of the city. Taliban anti-aircraft guns fired sporadically.

The sudden shift of battlefield fortunes began Friday night with the fall of the Taliban-controlled city of Mazar-e-Sharif, near the border with Uzbekistan. It was a boost for the US-led coalition that seeks to topple the Taliban and hunt down terror suspect Osama bin Laden.

President George W Bush has urged the opposition not to take Kabul, the capital, before a new, broad-based government could be formed. But some opposition commanders at the front line north of the city were eager to advance.

About 200 fighters of the northern alliance's elite Zarbati force loaded their weapons Monday and moved in trucks closer to the front line.

"God is great!" they shouted.

Abil said opposition forces had seized Pul-e-Kumri, a strategic city in Baghlan province that lies on the road between Mazar-e-Sharif and Kabul. The report, which could not be independently confirmed, would mean that Taliban forces retreating southward could be cut off.

The opposition appealed to holdout Taliban commanders to change sides, a common tradition among Afghanistan's warring factions.

Abil said the northern alliance has sent radio messages to Taliban commanders as well as village elders throughout Kunduz province, on the border with Tajikistan. The messages asked them to hand over Pakistani, Arab and Chechen volunteers fighting with the Islamic militia.

"We want to take these foreigners alive to show who is fighting against us," he said. He claimed the greatest resistance was coming from the foreign fighters.

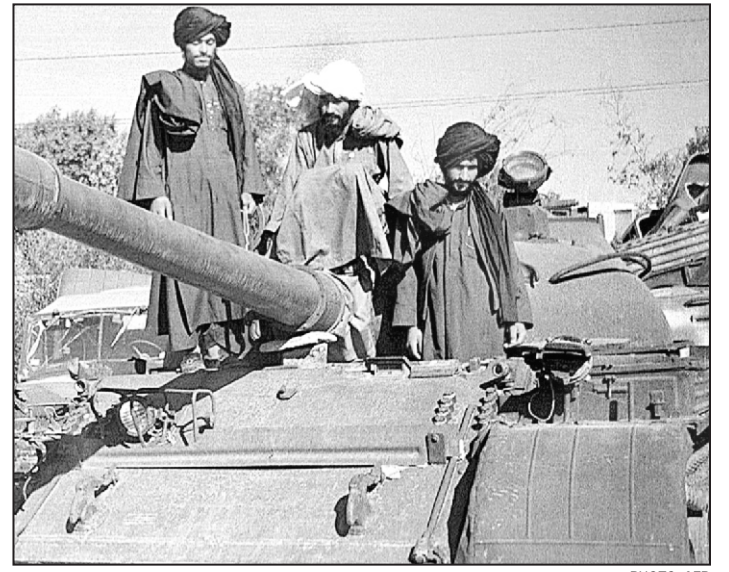


PHOTO: AFP  
Afghan Taliban fighters pose on their battle tank in the Afghan capital Kabul on Monday. The Afghan opposition, buoyed by successes in northern Afghanistan, geared to launch their long-awaited offensive on Kabul, but will not enter the capital.

## APHC calls for Kashmir truce

AFP, Srinagar

The leader of Kashmir's main separatist political alliance on Monday called for a ceasefire by all groups including Indian security forces and militants in the troubled Himalayan region.

"We propose that India, Pakistan, the APHC (All Party Hurriyat Conference) and other parties concerned call for a ceasefire," APHC chief Abdul Gani Bhat told reporters in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

"The APHC proposes that India, Pakistan and the APHC initiate negotiations with the seriousness and purpose to move forward. All parties (should) come forward and resolve the issue of Kashmir as per the wishes of the people of the troubled state," he said.

The call comes almost a year after India announced a suspension of combat operations in Kashmir to mark the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The month of fasting and prayer will begin again on Friday or Saturday with the rising of the full moon.

New Delhi in May withdrew the non-initiation agreement, saying Muslim militants had not responded to government efforts.

The APHC -- an umbrella of 23 Kashmiri separatist social and religious groups -- had welcomed the suspension of combat operations by Indian security personnel last November.

However, India's Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani last month ruled out any new ceasefire in Kashmir, where more than 35,000 people have died since 1989.

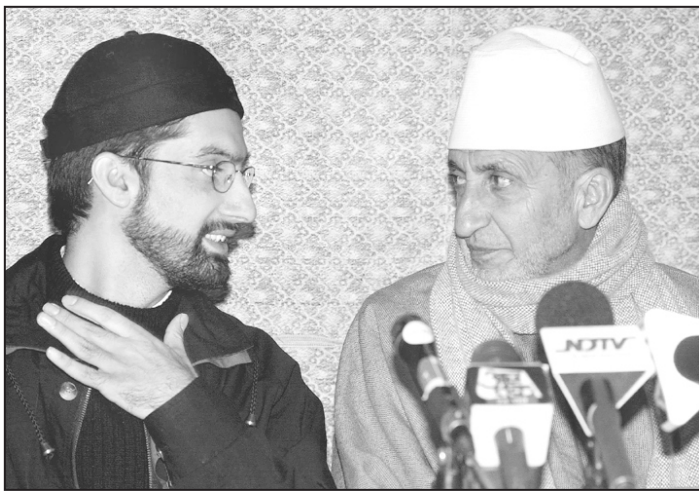


PHOTO: AFP  
Abdul Gani Bhat (R), chief of the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), and Kashmir's head priest Moulvi Umar Farooq (L) chat during a press conference on Monday in Srinagar.

## Dhirendra widow feared dead as helicopter crashes in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

A private helicopter carrying the sister-in-law of the Nepalese king and five other people crashed into the kingdom's largest lake Monday, state radio said.

A police source said it was unlikely anyone survived the crash of the Fish Tail Air Service helicopter into Rara Lake in the northwest of the kingdom.

Princess Preksha Shah is the widow of Dhirendra, the youngest brother of late king Birendra who was among 10 royals killed in the June 1 palace massacre carried out by a drunken crown prince Dipendra.

A rescue helicopter arrived at Rara Lake in the slim hope of rescu-

ing the victims, police said.

The 180-metre (590-foot) deep lake, situated at 3,062 metres (10,044 feet) altitude with a 13-kilometre (eight-mile) radius, is Nepal's largest.

The radio said the helicopter, carrying five passengers and a pilot, was flying from southwestern Nepalgunj when it lost contact with the airport tower. The reason for the crash was not immediately known.

Other passengers on the helicopter included Dan Bahadur Shahi, a retired government employee, and Rishi Kumar Khatri, a medical doctor. Two other victims were identified as Sharda Singh and Iswsor Basnyat.

## Pakistan warns against factional rule in Kabul

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan warned Monday against Afghan opposition forces entering Kabul, saying no single body should be allowed to gain control of the Afghan capital.

"The Pakistan position is that no single faction or group or body should be in control of Kabul," foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmad Khan told reporters.

He spoke as Northern Alliance forces claimed to have broken through Taliban defensive front lines north of the city.

Citing the chaos and infighting that gutted Kabul during the 1992-96 rule by factional mujahedin forces, Khan said the lessons of the

past should be learned to avoid future bloodshed and instability.

"Past experience tells us that care should be taken that any entity that controls Kabul is acceptable to all Afghans," Khan said.

"This is not personal or prejudiced," he added.

Previously the main backer of the Taliban, Pakistan has cited the installation of a "friendly government" in Kabul as one of its conditions for supporting the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan.

The Northern Alliance is dominated by Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities.

Pakistan has always supported Afghanistan's dominant Pashtun community.

## US to monitor Iraq: Rice

AFP, Washington

The United States continues to "watch and monitor" Iraq, but has not stepped up vigilance since the terror attacks September 11, national security advisor Condoleezza Rice said Sunday.

"Iraq has been a problem for American security, for security in the region, for the security of its neighbours, and not to mention its own people, since well before the Gulf War," Rice told CNN.

"And it should be no surprise to anyone that we continue to watch and monitor Iraq, that we believe that it's a threat."

Iraq has said it expects to be a target of the six week-old US mili-

tary campaign, which Washington has indicated will eventually expand beyond Afghanistan to include other countries accused of supporting terrorism.

Rice evaded questions whether the United States planned to "deal with Iraq" in the future, but noted Baghdad is "the only regime that actually has used weapons of mass destruction in recent memory -- chemical weapons against its own people."

"It should not be surprising that this is a regime that we watch very closely, and should it threaten our interests, we are perfectly willing to deal with it -- and that was the case before September 11 and it continues to be the case today," she said.

## Arafat meets Powell

AFP, United Nations

US Secretary of State Colin Powell was to hold talks on the Middle East crisis Sunday with top UN, Russian and EU officials after meeting with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, sources said.

Powell met Arafat at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel after the Palestinian leader told the UN General Assembly that he welcomed a call by US President George W. Bush for a Palestinian state based on secure borders.

Informed sources said Powell would meet his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov; the European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana; and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan later on Sunday to discuss the Middle East.

The sources, requesting anonymity, said the four would meet in Annan's office at UN headquarters.

Arriving for his meeting with Powell, Arafat told reporters at the hotel that the statement by Bush was "very important" and added: "He fulfils his promises, and we thank him from our heart."

Earlier, Arafat told the UN General Assembly that he would try to revive peace negotiations with Israel, but he rejected "interim solutions" -- an allusion to the policies of Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon.

Arafat also called on the United Nations to send observers to protect the Palestinian people "from occupation, terror and ethnic cleansing practised by Israel."

## 'India's nuclear arsenal absolutely safe'

AFP, New Delhi

The architect of India's ballistic missile programme stepped down Monday saying New Delhi had better safety standards for its nuclear weapons than many nations and that its growing arsenal includes the hydrogen bomb.

Abdul Kalam, speaking after a farewell meeting with military scientists, said India's nuclear assets are "safe and well in position and well in place."

"If weapons are made then they are not meant for storing. They are for deployment, which means our command control is in place," said the 70-year-old scientist.

Kalam also said more missile systems would go into production "in a few years time."

He acknowledged that both the medium-range surface missile Prithvi (Earth) and the ballistic missile Agni (Fire), with a range spanning 1,500 kilometres (930 miles) and 2,500 kilometres (1,550 miles), have gone into production.

Regarding the hydrogen bomb, Kalam said: "We have a nuclear system, both fission and fusion, but there are unbelievers and believers throughout the world."

Kalam's assurances over India's arsenal came amid Western concerns over the security of the nuclear assets of Pakistan, where the government has taken the controversial step of supporting the US-led attacks in Afghanistan.

India conducted a string of nuclear blasts in May 1998 and said the tests included a thermo-nuclear



PHOTO: AFP  
Scientist Abul Kalam

device and nuclear weapons meant for battlefield use. The experiments were the second since 1974 when New Delhi carried out its first such test.

Pakistan conducted rival tests in 1998, prompting the United

States to impose a raft of nuclear sanctions on the two South Asian adversaries, who have fought three wars since 1947. Most of the sanctions were lifted in September.

In an interview on the eve of his retirement, Kalam said scientists and technicians who conducted the 1998 tests were "all satisfied with the results."

"Safety standards are in-built in our country. We possibly have much better safety standards than many others. These standards are absolutely safe," newspapers quoted him as saying Monday.

His comments came as Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in an address to the United Nations in New York offered a treaty on nuclear restraints with India.

## 4 journalists killed in Taliban ambush

AFP, Dushanbe

Four journalists accompanying opposition forces were killed in an ambush by the Taliban militia in northeastern Afghanistan, an opposition Northern Alliance envoy in Tajikistan told AFP Monday.

Ambassador for the Afghan government-in-exile in Dushanbe, Said Ibragim Hikmat, confirmed that two French reporters and a German photographer died in the attack Sunday 30 km from the city of Taloqan.

He said a fourth journalist, possibly American, who was travelling with them on a tank, had also been killed.

The bodies of the dead journalists were due to be brought by helicopter to the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, later Monday, Hikmat added.

## Y'slav admiral surrenders to Hague tribunal

AFP, Belgrade

Retired Yugoslav vice-admiral Miodrag Jovic, indicted for war crimes in Croatia, notably involving a siege of the medieval walled port of Dubrovnik, flew to The Hague Monday to turn himself over to prosecutors.

"He arrived in the Netherlands and is now on his way to the detention centre," an ICTY spokesperson told AFP.

Jovic, 66, together with three other Yugoslavian officers, is accused of murdering 40 civilians during the bombardment of Dubrovnik on the Adriatic and the surrounding area between October and December 1991.

As soon as the chief prosecutor

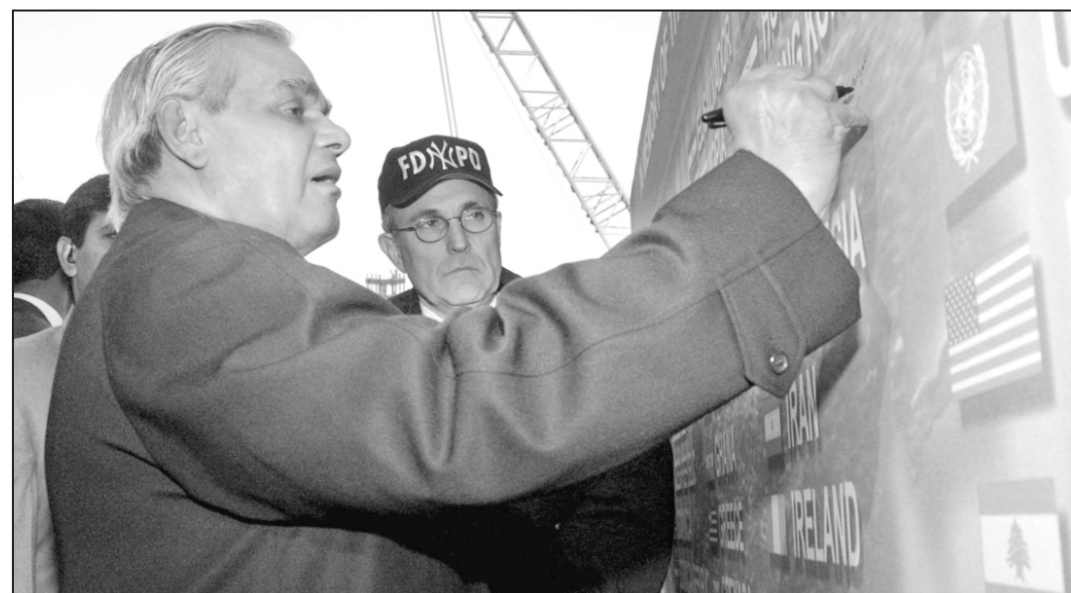


PHOTO: AFP  
Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (L) is joined by New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani (C) as he signs a wall at Ground Zero of the World Trade Center site on Sunday in New York. The wall lists the nations of citizens killed in the September 11, World Trade Center attacks. Vajpayee is in New York for the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

## Taliban, terrorism product of Cold War, says Putin

AFP, Moscow

The Taliban militia in Afghanistan and international terrorism are a product of past Cold War rivalries between Russia and the United States, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Sunday.

The troops of the then-Soviet Union did not lose the war in Afghanistan, but had "achieved all the set objectives" and had committed political mistakes at the time of or after the military withdrawal in 1989, Putin said.

The remarks by the Russian president -- who was speaking with a group of US journalists ahead of his visit Tuesday to the United States -- were published Sunday on the Kremlin website.

Putin also said the United States had in turn "created or at least done nothing to hinder the creation of the Taliban movement, in

order to fight the Soviet Union."

The Soviet Union in contrast supported the enemies of the United States, he added, without specifying who these enemies were.

"We forgot that control (over Afghanistan) would be lost sooner or later," he said.

"The result is that we now have on Afghan territory training camps of terrorists who have been sent to Russia, more specifically to Chechnya, and the United States who were hit by an unprecedented attack on September 11," he said.

He said Russia and the United States now had the chance to jointly work towards preventing such events from occurring again.

As to the then war in Afghanistan, Putin said: "One often speaks of the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan."

"But if you look at it carefully,

and not at what happened in a propagandist fashion, you see that there was no military defeat. The Soviet Union achieved all the (military) objectives that it had been given," the president added.

"But (then) unpardonable political mistakes were made," he said, and the regime that took over running Afghanistan after the Soviet troops left did not draw support from the many political and ethnic forces within the Central Asian country.

"Thank God, we are today capable of avoiding mistakes of this kind. And it is in this (context) that the international anti-terrorist coalition is precious," Putin said.

Putin arrives in Washington Tuesday for a summit with Bush which begins in the capital and then moves Wednesday to Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas for the final two days.

## US boycotts N-test ban conference at UN

AFP, United Nations

Russia on Sunday offered the United States a new incentive to ratify a permanent global nuclear test ban, but US officials boycotted the meeting at which it was made.

The offer came in a speech by a senior aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin in the opening session of a three-day conference called to rally support for the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The treaty cannot take effect until it has been ratified by all 44 states named in an annex to the CTBT as having a nuclear potential, but 13 of those have failed to do so.

The United States, which has the world's largest nuclear arsenal, told a preparatory meeting last week that it did not support the CTBT and its chair was empty

when United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan opened proceedings.

Annan appealed to the 13 key states to ratify the treaty, saying that the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States "made it clear to everyone that we cannot afford further proliferation of nuclear weapons."

Osama bin Laden, accused by US President George W. Bush of masterminding the attacks, claimed in an interview published Saturday by the English-language Pakistani daily Dawn that he possessed nuclear arms and was willing to use them.

"We must do everything we can to reduce the risk of such weapons falling into the hands of terrorists," Annan said, adding that the CTBT was "a crucial element in the non-proliferation regime".

## UK to detain terror suspects without trial

REUTERS, London

Britain will declare a "state of public emergency" on Monday as the government seeks powers to detain indefinitely without trial foreigners suspected of terrorism.

Home Secretary (Interior Minister) David Blunkett will put forward an order before parliament declaring that events following the September 11 attacks on the United States are threatening the life of the nation.

Under the proposed legislation, suspects can be held for six months in high-security jails until their case is reviewed by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, headed by a supreme court judge. The case could then be reviewed every six months.

The move, which will invoke a clause in European law that allows parts of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Britain is a signatory, to be set aside in time

of public emergency, is sure to spark heated debate.

Blunkett insisted on Sunday that the legislation would not be an abuse of civil liberties, but human rights advocates have decried the moves.

"We can live in a world with airy-fairy civil liberties and believe the best in everybody and then they destroy us, that's not the world we live in," Blunkett told London Weekend Television on Sunday.

Civil rights group Liberty said they would challenge the move in court. "This is a fundamental violation of the rule of law, our rights and the traditional British values," Liberty director John Wadham said.

Current British human rights laws effectively mean that foreigners suspected of crimes abroad cannot be detained if there is no immediate prospect of being sent back to their country of origin.