

UNSC insists on ME truce

AP, United Nations

The UN Security Council insisted on "immediate implementation" of resolutions demanding an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire and Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian cities without delay.

In a tough statement Sunday issued at the end of an emergency meeting held at the request of Arab nations, the council called Israel's continued military action against the Palestinians "unacceptable" and a violation of international humanitarian law.

But Israel's UN Ambassador Yehuda Lancry indicated there would be no immediate pullout, insisting that an Israeli withdrawal must be "strictly related and connected to certain Palestinian steps -- the cessation of terrorist acts, the meaningful cease-fire."

"Once we have certain assurances that the Palestinian side is determined to prevent suicide bombings, to arrest terrorists -- at least as a declaration of will -- we will be then convinced, maybe, to respond with some similar steps, maybe a selective withdrawal also," he said.

Council members expressed serious concern at "the further deterioration of the situation on the ground," where Israeli troops and Palestinians renewed fierce battles Sunday in the West Bank cities of Jenin and Nablus. They cited "many victims among the civilian population and the threat of destruction of the Palestinian National Authority."

Syria's UN Ambassador Mikhail Wehbe called the situation "very grave," saying Israel's aim "is to kill all the Palestinians in Jenin and Nablus."

Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo on Saturday called for the emergency council meeting to force Israel to pull out its troops and tanks. The ministers denounced the Bush administration's handling of the Middle East conflict, saying US bias was allowing Israel to flout international resolutions, terrorise Palestinians and destabilize the region.

In just over three weeks, the council has adopted three resolutions, laying out a blueprint to end the latest fighting and get the Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table to discuss a peace deal. Members said Sunday night they were "deeply disturbed" by the failure of both sides to implement the provisions.



Two Israeli army tanks and an armoured personnel carrier (APC) move towards the Church of Nativity in the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Monday. Fighting erupted early in the day around the besieged church, leaving a Palestinian dead, two Israelis wounded and a building ablaze next to one of Christianity's holiest sites.

Blair throws support behind Bush to oust Saddam

Military action against Iraq unlikely for a year: British press

AP, College Station

British Prime Minister Tony Blair emerged from weekend meetings with President Bush to throw his support behind U.S. plans to oust Saddam Hussein, risking political fallout at home.

"The regime of Saddam is detestable," the prime minister said hours after leaving Bush's ranch Sunday.

"To allow weapons of mass destruction to be developed by a state like Iraq... would be grossly to ignore the lessons of Sept. 11, and we will not do it," Blair told more than 1,000 people at the presidential library of Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, at Texas A&M University here.

The elder Bush, who introduced Blair, pushed back Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, but was criticised for ending the Persian Gulf War with

Saddam still in power.

Blair's remarks, the strongest signal yet he would support U.S. attacks on Iraq, were a last-minute addition to his speech drafted Saturday night and Sunday morning while the prime minister visited Bush at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas.

The address came as other U.S. allies are questioning Bush's plans for Iraq.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin, in remarks issued Sunday, urged the United States to refrain from military action against Iraq. "International disputes cannot be solved by force," he said.

Blair faces mounting pressure in Britain, including from members of his Labour Party, to steer Bush away from military action against Saddam.

Teeming carefully, Blair initially

named no countries when he said terrorist states must be confronted.

"If necessary, the action should be military and again, if necessary and justified, it should involve regime change," he said. Bush uses "regime change" to describe what he has in store for Saddam. Blair quickly followed the general warning with a specific one to Saddam: "He has to let the (U.N. weapons) inspectors back in any one, any time, any place the international community demands." Iraq has blocked the promised inspections.

Blair spent parts of three days on Bush ranch to discuss Iraq and the mounting crisis in the Middle East. At the Bush library, Blair urged the Saudis to put in the form of a U.N. resolution its proposal to offer Israel "normal relations" in exchange for a full withdrawal from Arab lands held

since 1967.

The prime minister viewed the call as a way to throw his support behind the principles of the Saudi plan, but not necessarily every detail of the sweeping proposal, an aide said.

Meanwhile, US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have agreed on a military campaign against Iraq but no action is likely for at least a year. The Times reported Monday, citing sources close to the two leaders.

Blair and Bush sketched out a "three-phase plan" to overthrow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, during their weekend meeting at the US President's Texas ranch, the paper wrote.

Pak police break up anti-Musharraf demo

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police Monday broke up a small demonstration by an opposition party opposed to President Pervez Musharraf's referendum on extending his rule.

Police pounced on a group of more than a dozen people as they appeared at a venue in the eastern city of Lahore where General Musharraf is due to address a public meeting to mobilise support before next month's vote.

Around 15 members of ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif's faction of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) had gathered at the Minar-i-Pakistan park with banners and placards denouncing the referendum.

"We have not detained them but only removed them from the scene," local police officer Zulfiqar Ahmed

told AFP.

He added however that the "miscreants" had been locked up in a police station and would be released shortly.

PML vice chairwoman Tehmina Daultana described the arrests as shameful.

"Now that the military dictator wants to become a politician, he should learn to tolerate opposition," Daultana told AFP.

Political and religious parties have vowed to boycott the referendum, saying it is unconstitutional.

Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999 and made himself president last June, wants public approval to prolong his leadership by five years to implement political and economic reforms.

Two rockets strike Kabul suburb, 4 recovered

REUTERS, Kabul

Two rockets struck a mainly middle-class Kabul suburb yesterday, a day after international peacekeepers were the target of similar attacks, residents said.

They told Reuters the two rockets hit the suburb of Pul-e-Charkhi in the afternoon.

Four more rockets have been found aimed at installations of peacekeepers in the Afghan capital at the same place from where two other rockets were fired, a spokesman for the multi-national force said yesterday.

Lieutenant-Colonel Neal Peckham said the six rockets had been on primitive launchers attached to a wrist-watch timing device which allowed them to be fired without anyone at the site.

The two fired rockets struck early

on Sunday near a compound of the nearly 5,000-strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which has a mandate to keep law and order in Kabul and protect interim leader Hamid Karzai and his administration. There were no casualties or damage.

The rockets, Chinese-made 107-mm weapons widely used in guerilla wars, were fired from about five kilometres away, Peckham said.

A search of an open field on the outskirts of Kabul found four more rockets on the same homemade launchers. It was not known if they were meant to fire at the same time as the others of if there had been a malfunction.

"We're coming up to the return of the king, we're coming up to the start of the Loya Jirga (Grand Tribal Council) process. There are elements within society here who are

opposed to it," Peckham told Reuters.

Nobody was hurt in the attack on the camp in Kabul of German and Danish troops, which came just after 2:30 am local time, said Flight Lt. Tony Marshall, a spokesman for the British-led ISAF.

He said the attack was probably linked to efforts to destabilise the interim Afghan administration ahead of the loya jirga, which meets in June to select a new government.

Afghan authorities last week arrested at least 160 people on suspicion they were trying to destabilise the government and plot attacks against interim leader Hamid Karzai and the exiled former king, Mohammad Zaher Shah, whose homecoming is expected later this month.

Indian coalition allies call for Gujarat CM's ouster

PTI, New Delhi

Two key allies of India's coalition government added their voices Monday to opposition calls for the dismissal of the chief minister of Gujarat state.

Demands for the sacking of Chief Minister Narendra Modi have been growing as sectarian violence in the state, which has killed more than 800 people, continues more than one month after an attack on a train carrying Hindu activists triggered India's worst communal bloodletting in nearly a decade.

"It is very painful to admit that Modi has failed to discharge his constitutional responsibility," said Samata Party spokesman Shambhu Shrivastava.

The Samata Party, of which Defence Minister George Fernandes is a member, is part of

the governing alliance built around Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist party.

The Gujarat administration is controlled by the BJP.

"We request the BJP leadership select a new leader who can restore a sense of security among the people of Gujarat," Shrivastava said, adding that Modi lacked either "the will or competence" to curb the violence in his state.

Mamata Banerjee, who heads another BJP coalition partner, the Trinamul Congress, said the continuing attacks in Gujarat had undermined Modi's inadequacies as head of the state government.

Modi "should go and a new person should take over," Banerjee said.

Opposition and leftist activists meeting Sunday in New Delhi called for nationwide protests to demand

that Modi be sacked.

Somnath Chatterjee, a senior leader of the Communist Party of India-Marxist, called on Vajpayee himself to resign for allegedly siding with Hindu hardliners trying to make Gujarat a "laboratory to promote their (Hindu revivalist) agenda."

Modi's administration has been accused of standing by as Hindu mobs went on the rampage across Gujarat to avenge the February 27 train attack.

Vajpayee, who visited Gujarat last week, has publicly rebuked Modi, but so far resisted calls to dismiss him, despite a series of reports by human rights groups and other fact-finding missions that directly blamed the Gujarat government for the heavy death toll.



Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar (R) escorts Lakhdar Brahimi, United Nations secretary general's special envoy to Afghanistan, for a meeting in Islamabad on Monday. Brahimi discussed Afghanistan issue specially reconstruction progress with Sattar during his meeting at foreign office. Brahimi will leave for Kabul this week after his meeting with Pakistani officials.

Laden escaped hours before raid on Faisalabad hideout

PTI, Islamabad

Terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden managed to escape hours before a joint team of FBI and Pakistan commandos raided an Al-Qaeda hideout in Faisalabad in Punjab province on March 28, which resulted in the capture of his lieutenant Abu Zubaydah, a media report said on Monday.

Laden stayed for three days in Faisalabad and was able to slip out of the town barely a few hours before the FBI conducted a surprise raid, Pakistan daily The Nation reported on Monday.

Zubaida was critically injured

when he and other al-Qaida militants tried to resist the raiding parties. American media teams that arrived late were tipped off that Laden had been present at the scene, the daily said. Even the local police and Pakistani authorities were kept completely in the dark about the true target of the raids.

Elaborate arrangements were made to conduct the surprise raid, the daily said adding the al-Qaida hideout was tracked by sophisticated FBI technology which traced cellular phone transmissions through satellite.

Vigilance reports had suggested that the "target" was staying in a

rented house for three days before the raid. Once the hideout was traced, FBI high-ups in Islamabad accompanied by crack airborne commandos and marine contingents secretly landed at the Faisalabad airport from Lahore in the night and proceeded towards the hideout, the daily said.

The inmates of rented house came to know of the raid only when the whole area was cordoned off and the commandos and Elite Force jawans jumped over the walls, it said adding that the operation was over after a brief fire fight.

Aspirin lowers cancer risk

AP, San Francisco

A once-a-day baby aspirin can modestly ward off the development of common polyps that eventually grow to become colon cancer, a study finds.

Many earlier studies have suggested aspirin might be a way to prevent polyps and cancer, but the new analysis is the first to put the idea to a rigorous test.

Experts say that while aspirin's benefits appear to be small, it may still be a reasonable option for those at moderately high risk of this malignancy, the most common after lung cancer.

"It's clear aspirin will not be a magic bullet," said Dr. John Baron of Dartmouth Medical School, who directed the study. "You can't take

an aspirin and do nothing else."

The experiment was intended to see if aspirin prevents a recurrence of polyps after the growths have been removed during routine colonoscopies. It found the 80-milligram baby aspirin size taken daily reduces this risk by 19 percent.

The dose is the same one already taken by millions of Americans to prevent heart attacks. The new work suggests they may be getting an additional benefit.

Until now, the strongest evidence of aspirin's cancer-preventing powers came from large population reviews that show regular aspirin users have only about half as much colon cancer as usual. However, those reports do not prove that aspirin rather than some other lifestyle habit is responsible, so the

latest study was undertaken to see if people given aspirin solely to prevent polyps truly have fewer of them.

The effect it found is only about half as powerful as the earlier reports suggested it would be. Nevertheless, even this much reduction could have substantial impact, considering that colon cancer is the second-leading cancer killer, responsible for 48,000 deaths annually.

Federal health officials say they are close to recommending that daily aspirin be considered for people who have polyps removed, although they are likely to hold off until the outcome of a second aspirin study is known later this year.

World's water worries mount

REUTERS, Sydney

A lack of clean water will be the biggest issue facing the world in the next 50 years and governments and business are failing to face up to the challenge, a senior Australian researcher said on Monday.

Graham Harris of the state-funded Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) told an environment conference in Melbourne that business needed to understand its dependence on the environment and create a new economic framework that focused on longer-term returns.

"Even if human populations were to level off in the next 50 years, we will require double the

present supply of energy, materials and water. Water is the big issue for the next 50 years," Harris said in a prepared speech.

"The vast majority of the worlds people already have only limited access to clean water, basic shelter and adequate food, and the situation is not going to get any better. Without water, food, shelter and compassion, we are all lost."

Harris told delegates at the ENVIRO 2002 conference that the Australian government's actions, for instance, "fail to reflect the urgency... We talk too much and act too slowly."

The conference followed another in Melbourne last week that focused on the impact cities have on the ecosystem with more than

50 per cent of the world's population living in urban areas.

At the end of that earlier meeting, around 40 environmental experts from around the world called on governments to control urban water use as a key part of creating "sustainable cities."

"A lot of people think 'if I've got lots of green parks and gardens, that's fantastic,'" said Harry Blustein, director of sustainable development for the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) of the Australian state of Victoria.

"But hang on. They're using enormous amounts of water, often not recycled water. Perhaps an Australian city has to look a bit browner during its summer," he told Reuters on Monday.

Lankan 'highway of death' opens

AFP, Colombo

A strategic highway to the ravaged northern Jaffna peninsula was reopened for the first time in 12 years on Monday after a last minute deal between Sri Lankan troops and Tamil Tiger rebels.

The move to reopen the A-9 highway which thousands have died fighting over came in overnight talks brokered by a Norwegian peace mission, official sources said.

"A decision was taken by both parties to stick to the original agreement of opening the road on Monday," the source said. "The modalities were agreed up on only early this morning."

When fighting erupted in 1990, the road -- the main land access to the Jaffna peninsula -- was closed for all civilian traffic.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) wrested control of the road from government troops in December 1995 forcing the military and civilians to use expensive sea and air transport.



This file picture dated February 20, 2002 shows Sri Lanka's top Tamil Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran signing an historic ceasefire agreement in Kilinochchi to clear the way for Norwegian-brokered peace talks with the Lankan government. Prabhakaran, hero to fans and devil incarnate to detractors, is set to enter mainstream politics for the first time with his first press conference in 12 years scheduled for April 10 after years of motivating young Tamil men and women to take up arms and die as martyrs.