



A Palestinian man pulls out his children's clothes on Wednesday from the rubble of his house in the Jenin refugee camp, which the Israeli army has occupied for the past two weeks. Israeli tanks left the centre of Jenin in the northern West Bank but were still occupying the outer fringes of the town and the adjacent refugee camp, which was reduced to ruins in a fierce week-long battle, a Palestinian official said.

Jenin camp 'horrific beyond belief', says UN envoy

AFP, Jenin Refugee Camp

The devastation of Jenin refugee camp, invaded by the Israeli army, is "horrific beyond belief," UN special envoy Terje Roed-Larsen said Thursday, slamming Israel for not allowing rescue teams in after the battle.

"It is totally destroyed, it looks like an earthquake has hit it," said Roed-Larsen, visiting the northern West Bank camp with Red Cross and UN workers.

"It is totally unacceptable and horrific beyond belief," he told AFP.

"It is totally unacceptable that the government of Israel for 11 days did not allow search and rescue teams to come. This is morally repugnant," said Roed-Larsen, the UN Special Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territories.

Israel declared the camp -- which it said was a hub of Palestinian militancy -- a closed military zone when it invaded on April 3, and refused to allow aid groups or media in afterwards, except for in small groups accompanied by the army.

It said that unexploded bombs and booby traps made

it too dangerous to allow anyone in.

Larsen denounced that argument, saying Israel could have allowed in international experts to help clear the area and search for possible survivors trapped in the rubble.

"That is no excuse," he said.

"I am watching two brothers pull their father from the ruins, the stench of death is horrible. We're seeing a 12-year-old boy being dug out, totally burned.

"We have expert people here who have been in war zones and earthquake and they say they have never seen anything like it," he said.

Larsen said the top priority was to bring in search-and-rescue teams which he said were already on the way but had not yet arrived.

The only rescue efforts currently underway were local residents digging through the ruins of their homes and looking for survivors.

Larsen said such efforts jeopardised the safety of the desperate diggers, working close to buildings that were in danger of collapse.

Maoists stage bomb attacks in Kathmandu

AFP, Kathmandu

Several people were injured Thursday when Maoist rebels staged bomb attacks in parts of Nepal's capital, a home ministry official said.

"A few persons were injured when the Maoists bombed several localities in Kathmandu on Thursday morning but no one was killed," the official said without specifying how many casualties resulted.

Among the places the extremists targeted was the house of the prime minister's political advisor Prakash Sharman Mahat in the outskirts of Kathmandu, he said.

"But no one was killed nor injured in the incident at Mr. Mahat's house," the official said.

A policeman and a civilian were killed late Wednesday when the Maoists staged a bomb attack at a police post in Kathmandu.

'Powell's failure gives Sharon nod for more aggression'

Gulf press blasts US for failing to secure Israeli pullout

AFP, Amman

Jordanian newspapers on Thursday warned that failure by US Secretary of State Colin Powell to succeed in his peace mission gives Israel the green light to step up its onslaught against Yasser Arafat.

"Powell began his mission as an envoy of President Bush and ended it as an envoy of Sharon and in this quality he met with Arafat to submit (Israeli) demands," AlArab AlYawn newspaper said in an editorial.

"Powell came to the region riding high on the wave" of calls by US President George Bush to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for an immediate Israeli pullout from Palestinian territories.

"But Bush had to swallow his orders and bow his head after the Zionist Jewish lobby (in the US) managed to twist his arm," the newspaper said.

An editorial in the pro-government Al Rai said Powell came to the region on a mission "of support to give additional American legitimacy to the massacres of Palestinian people and in order to bring President Arafat to his knees."

"From the moment that Powell left the region the brutality of the Israeli military operation will increase and this time the situation will be more dangerous because Sharon now has the green light to harm Arafat by

assassinating him or expelling him," it said.

For Al Dustour the mission failed because "Powell tried to sell the Palestinians old American merchandise."

"He only made vague pledges to the Palestinians while leaving Sharon, his army and his herd of settlers the chance to pursue the killings, the destruction, the arrests and the occupation," Al Dustour said.

Moreover, Gulf and Iraqi newspapers lashed out at the United States on Thursday following Secretary of State Colin Powell's failure to force Israel to pull out of Palestinian territories it has reoccupied, charging that Washington was in cahoots with the Jewish state.

Saudi papers led the chorus of condemnation, with one daily accusing Powell of having acted "like a Jewish rabbi" during his just-concluded Middle East trip.

"Since he set off from Washington to the region over a week ago, the secretary appeared to be... carrying instructions, not proposals," to the Palestinians, Al-Watan said in an editorial.

"He acted more like a Jewish rabbi, or the head of a Zionist organization, than like an American diplomat trying to find a solution" to the crisis between Israel and the Palestinians, it added.

Muslim students boycott school exams in Gujarat

AFP, Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad have been postponed twice since the Hindu-Muslim killings began in late February.

"We simply felt uncomfortable and unsafe asking our children to go and sit for exams," said one parent, Nafisa Ahmed.

School leaders and relief workers said the students staged the boycott to protest against the government's decision to set up their examination centres in Hindu-dominated neighbourhoods where they considered themselves vulnerable to mob attacks.

"Only half the Muslim students in our school turned up to take the examinations even though we had arranged for transpiration from the school to the exam centre," said one principal of a local school in Ahmedabad's Jamalpur area.

School examinations in



PHOTO: AFP

Former King of Afghanistan Mohammed Zahir Shah (C) waves upon his arrival at Kabul Airport on Thursday as Afghan Interim Leader Hamid Karzai (L) and Afghan Deputy Defence Minister Abdul Rashid Dostum (R) look on. Zahir Shah returned after 29 years in exile.

Afghan king trades luxury of Rome for crumbling Kabul

AFP, Kabul

where most of the population live in extreme poverty.

The contrasts would have been evident to the former monarch from the moment he stepped off an Italian military plane in Kabul's battered international airport.

From there he was to be whisked through dust-covered streets, past the crumbling remains of the city he left behind in 1973, to be installed in his heavily protected new home, enigmatically known as "Palace number eight".

Although the interior of the house is likely to have been furnished with comforts to accommodate an

elderly ex-monarch, outside the building bristles with security worthy of a maximum security prison.

As a potent symbolic target for anti-government forces in Afghanistan, protecting the former king is being seen as a crucial test of the fledgling administration's ability to maintain security and stability.

Parked in the Zahir Shah's street Thursday morning was an Italian light armoured tank and two armoured patrol vehicles, supplied by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) stationed in Afghanistan.

China urges world not to give up ME peace effort

AFP, Beijing

China urged the international community on Thursday not to give up its peace efforts in the Middle East and made an explicit appeal to Palestinians to stop suicide bombings.

The Chinese remark came as US Secretary of State Colin Powell headed home empty-handed from a Middle East peace mission after failing to secure an Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire to end 18 months of bloodshed.

"We hope the international community will continue to adopt

measures to mediate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said at a regular briefing.

Pressed by journalists at the briefing, Zhang made an explicit reference to Palestinian suicide bombings, and urged an end to them.

"We also condemn any bombings against innocent civilians," she said. "To respond to violence with even more violence will not help solve the problem, but will only make the situation even more complicated."

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