

Israel trying to install puppet govt in West Bank: Erakat

Palestinian fury rises from rubble of Jenin

AFP, Jerusalem

The Palestinian Authority (PA) accused Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Monday of trying to install a puppet government in the West Bank by cracking down on the self-rule administration's infrastructure.

"I don't believe in the Israeli withdrawal -- this is a deception," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said in reference to Israel's announcements that its troops had pulled out of most major towns it had reconquered over the past three weeks.

"Israel's first step of the operation was to deliberately destroy the Palestinian civilian infrastructure," Erakat told AFP.

"They are looking to shut down the PA, and Sharon is still living with the illusion that he can hand-pick his own substitute to the democratically elected leadership of Arafat."

Erakat also accused Israel "of not giving us a chance to rebuild" by maintaining a heavy military presence in the West Bank and refusing Palestinian leaders the right to travel freely through the territories.

Sharon announced Sunday the end of the "first phase" of his Operation Defensive Wall to crush Palestinian militant groups.

"In the course of this phase, the operation achieved very tangible results," Sharon told a government meeting.

However the Israeli premier offered few hints about his vision of the future of Palestinian self-rule, both in terms of civilian and security struc-

tures.

Meanwhile, Fatah fighter and local elder statesman Rashad Alkaser sees one thing clearly while gazing at broken slabs of concrete that Palestinian men here claw through to recover decomposed bodies of relatives below -- the imminent destruction of the Israeli state.

Working patiently with their bare hands, the men spray perfume every few minutes at the Nubani family bodies that slowly emerge from beneath tons of debris. But the sickening stench of death still forces some to climb back atop the rubble, gagging and gasping for air.

"No matter how painful, we will bury our dead and rebuild this camp," vows Alkaser, who uses his nom de guerre after fighting in the Palestinian militia in the 1967 war and staying in Jenin throughout the vicious nine-day battle that ended on April 12.

"Then, we will retake Haifa and all the other cities that Israel took away, bringing us here and then slaughtering us and destroying our homes," he says while breathing through his white and black-polka-dot head scarf to avoid the violent dust storms that now sweep over Jenin.

"Israel says these men were fighters," said Alkaser, 56, pointing at the bloodied fragments of bodies below. "They were civilians, they were workers -- but yes, they turned into fighters when the thousands of Israeli attacked their homes."

Schroeder laments defeat in state polls

AFP, Berlin

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on Monday acknowledged that his party's disastrous result in a week-end election in a depressed eastern state was a "bitter defeat" but attempted to play down its significance for Germany's national election in just five months.

Before entering an executive meeting of his Social Democrats, Schroeder said "all analysts" of the election outcome pointed to the unique issues in the impoverished state of Saxony-Anhalt that led to the SPD's third place finish behind the conservative Christian Democrats and the former communists.

Schroeder said his centre-left coalition with the Greens party would now "close ranks even more tightly" and leave it to voters to decide in the general election on September 22.

"Do you want to have Chancellor Schroeder or Mr Stoiber?" Schroeder asked, referring to his conservative rival and Bavarian premier Edmund Stoiber.



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga (R) is accompanied by Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah (L) after her arrival at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Monday for a week-long visit. Kumaratunga arrived in New Delhi where she is due to meet top Indian leaders ahead of planned talks between Colombo and Tamil Tiger rebels.

Curfew in riot-hit Gujarat

21 more killed in fresh rioting

PTI, Ahmedabad

Four more persons succumbed to injuries on Sunday night raising the death toll to 21 in renewed communal violence here and in other parts of Gujarat even as army was deployed in sensitive areas of the walled city and curfew continuing in all trouble-torn areas.

The army was deployed at 7.30 am on Monday to keep a check on any untoward incident, police said.

Two more companies of Rapid Action Force (RAF) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) were also deployed in the affected areas of the city, they said.

As many as 125 people received injuries in large-scale violence in Gomtipur, Bapunagar, Rakhial areas of the city, Kadi town of

Mehsana district and Kapadvanj and Mehmdavad of Kheda district since yesterday, police said adding curfew continued in all the trouble-torn areas.

At least 17 people were killed, 13 of them in police firing, yesterday and over 100 injured over last two days here and at Kheda and Mehsana districts in the state.

In Ahmedabad, police fired 633 rounds and burst 382 teargas shells to contain the violence in city areas till late last night.

Adequate security arrangements have been made to enable school and college students to appear for the on-going examinations, police added.

Meanwhile, India's deputy speaker of parliament said Monday he will soon rule on whether law-

makers will debate the communal violence in Gujarat state, and break a week-old deadlock in the house. "As I was not able to evolve a consensus after my meeting with leaders of political parties, I have decided I will give a ruling on Tuesday," said the deputy speaker, P.M. Sayeed, who is a member of Sonia Gandhi's opposition Congress party.

Earlier Monday Sayeed chaired an all-party meeting attended by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Gandhi to decide how the topic can come to the floor.

But the discussions failed, with the opposition refusing to drop its demand that a censure motion be presented on the sectarian violence, which has claimed another 17 lives since Sunday.

Omar pleads not guilty in Pearl murder trial

AFP, Karachi

British-born Islamic militant Sheikh Omar pleaded not guilty Monday during his trial for the abduction and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl, police sources in the closed court said.

They said Omar also reiterated his refusal to recognise "British law" and demanded a trial under Islamic law.

Judge Abdul Ghafoor Memon read out the charges of murder, kidnapping for ransom and terrorist activities -- which are punishable by death -- to Omar and three other accused present in court. All pleaded not guilty.

Seven other suspects have been formally charged with the same crimes but remain at large. Memon ruled Monday that their trial would

be separated from the ongoing proceedings and would take place at a later date.

Journalists have been barred from the trial, which is being held in a prison for security reasons, but chief prosecutor Raja Qureshi later told reporters he had called taxi driver Nasir Abbas as his first witness.

He said Abbas told the court that he took Pearl to the Metropole Hotel in Karachi on the day the Wall Street Journal reporter disappeared on January 23.

"Nasir Abbas's statement was recorded in which he said that Daniel Pearl was kidnapped before him from a village restaurant adjacent to the Metropole Hotel," Qureshi said.

US is encouraging Indian aggression: Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan said Monday the sale of US radars to India would encourage New Delhi's "belligerence" amid the nuclear neighbours' ongoing standoff over Kashmir.

Foreign office spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said last week's 146-million-dollar deal was unhelpful at a time when hundreds of thousands of troops are poised for battle on both sides of the border.

"It will encourage India to more belligerence," he told a press briefing.

"As it is they have deployed their troops along the border. We think that anything more that adds to India's arsenal is only used in prompting it to intimidating postures."

India's army chief General Sundarajan Padmanabhan was due to begin a week-long visit to the United States Monday to cement working military ties.

The trip comes on the heels of the agreement between India and the United States last week for New

Delhi to buy eight US-made Firefinder counter-battery artillery radars.

The Pentagon called the deal "a historic move that further signals improving relations between India and the United States".

Washington this year lifted restrictions on military sales to India and Pakistan, imposed after their tit-for-tat nuclear tests in 1998.

The Firefinder deal was the first US military contract in more than a decade with India, which historically has looked to Russia for the bulk of its arms supplies.

India and Pakistan mobilised their armed forces following a terrorist attack on the parliament in New Delhi in December, which India blamed on two Pakistan-based Islamic militant groups.

The groups, which have since been outlawed in Pakistan, are among the most hardline militant outfits fighting to end Indian rule in the divided Himalayan territory of Kashmir.



PHOTO: AFP
Paramilitaries patrol a street strewn with rocks and rubble after rioting in the Gomtipur area of Ahmedabad on Monday in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Twenty-one more people died in communal violence in India's riot-torn state of Gujarat.

Y'slavia to order arrests of war crimes suspects

Ojdanic, 3 others to surrender

AFP, Belgrade

Yugoslavia was set to order the arrest of Serb war crime suspects, including top fugitives Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, on Monday when a deadline for their surrender to the UN war crimes tribunal expires, officials said.

Only one of 23 Serbs facing indictment by the tribunal in The Hague -- former Yugoslav army general Dragoljub Ojdanic -- has so far agreed to surrender, but local reports said three other suspects have indicated they want to turn themselves in.

"Today after 2:00 pm (1200 GMT) the Yugoslav justice ministry will announce a list of those who have decided to surrender," Yugoslav Deputy Justice Minister Nebojsa Sarkic told AFP on Monday.

He said the ministry would then send to court indictments against those who had not come forward

and order their arrests as a first step towards extradition to the UN court.

Ojdanic, indicted by the UN tribunal for war crimes in Kosovo, is the only suspect to have agreed to give himself up so far, Sarkic said, adding that "everything was agreed with Ojdanic's lawyers" about the surrender.

"He will leave for The Hague by the end of the week," depending on the time needed to obtain a visa and buy a plane ticket to The Netherlands, Sarkic said.

The Yugoslav government on Wednesday gave 23 indicted war criminals three days to voluntarily turn themselves in or face arrest and transfer to the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The deadline was later extended by two days.

On the published list were two of the ICTY's most wanted fugitives, Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and his army chief Ratko Mladic.

Pak court hears challenges to Musharraf's referendum

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court began hearing three petitions Monday challenging the constitutionality of President Pervez Musharraf's referendum to extend his term in office.

The complainants are the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy made up of opposition political parties, the country's main fundamentalist religious party Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), and the Supreme Court Bar Association.

Ji lawyer Farooq Hassan, in "opening remarks" which took up most of the day's proceedings, told the court its ruling would change the fate of Pakistan.

"The referendum called by General Pervez Musharraf is unconstitutional, without any legal authority. This case will decide the fate of the nation," he said.

"Musharraf is violating the constitution blatantly." The case, being heard by a full

nine-member bench of the country's highest court, comes only eight days before the referendum is due to be held on April 30.

Musharraf, who seized power in a military coup in 1999 and proclaimed himself president last year, has said he wants the mandate of the people to remain in the post for five years.

Banners and posters of the general have been strung up at strategic places and the state media runs lengthy advertisements and stories about Musharraf's campaign rallies.

Hassan accused the military ruler of "openly using sources of the state of Pakistan for (his own) political ambitions," and of flouting the 1973 constitution by banning public political meetings other than his own.

"The political parties are restricted in their movement. There is restriction on the movement of the political parties' chiefs. What kind of democracy are they going to bring?"

Hassan asked the court.

Musharraf has promised to hold general elections in October to return the country to "genuine democracy" but insists his programme of economic, social and political reforms cannot be interrupted.

The referendum has been condemned by opposition groups and last week a high court judge resigned in protest, alleging he was being pressured to support the vote.

In Multan city in Punjab province, lawyers are preparing to hold a one-day strike on April 25 to protest the referendum, a spokesman for Multan's High Court Bar Association said.

But Musharraf, in a nationally televised press conference last week, quoted article 48 of the constitution which states that the president can call a referendum to decide "any matter of national importance".

Europe shocked at Le Pen win

AFP, Paris

European politicians and media reacted with shock on Monday to the success of far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen in France's presidential vote, describing the surprise as a catastrophe and a wake-up call for Europe.

European newspapers overwhelmingly led with the upset by Le Pen, with headlines ranging from "Shock" and "No" in French dailies to "A French revolution" in Italy, "sensation" in Poland and "repugnant" in Britain.

"Europe hit by a thunderbolt," shouted the left-leaning La Repubblica in Italy, reacting to the results of Sunday's first round vote which saw Le Pen knock socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin out of the race.

Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel said the results were worrying, and warned not to "dismiss the extreme-right out of hand because of what we have seen in Austria, Italy and now in France, the home of human rights."

"I regret there will be a non-democrat in the second round" on May 5, when Le Pen will face off against

conservative incumbent Jacques Chirac, Michel told the Belga news agency.

Austria, which two years ago was hit by EU sanctions when the far-right Freedom Party entered a coalition government in Vienna, crowded at the results, recalling France's leading role in imposing the penalties at the time.

"France would do better to take a look at itself rather than preaching morals to others," wrote the popular daily Kronen Zeitung, read by one in two Austrians.

In Germany, public television station ZDF described Le Pen's success as "a signal of alarm for all of Europe," while Berlin's Der Tagesspiegel called it a political "earthquake."

"The presence in the second round of a xenophobe and a racist was unimaginable in a country which cried with indignation when the Haider Party entered government in Austria," a ZDF commentator said.

Emergency declared in S Philippine after bomb attacks

AFP, General Santos

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo on Monday declared a state of emergency in the southern city of General Santos where a series of bomb attacks left 14 people dead and 60 injured, her chief security adviser said.

National security adviser Roilo Golez said the government was looking at expanding the coverage of the emergency order to other troubled spots in the main southern island of Mindanao following the

attacks on Sunday.

"The president has ordered the declaration of the state of emergency at least in General Santos city. We are looking at the possibility of covering other areas," Golez told reporters.

"We have to take bold measures because what they did was not a joke," he said, referring to groups that set off the deadly explosions.

The Muslim Abu Sayyaf group has claimed responsibility for the bombings and warned that more attacks were in store.

Chandrika's party to join reds against Norway's peace bid

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party is joining the country's main Marxist group to oppose Norway's attempts to broker peace in the island, organisers of a joint rally said Monday.

The joint opposition rally against the Norwegian-brokered bid for peace with the Tamil Tiger rebels is due to take place in the capital Colombo Tuesday with Kumaratunga's brother, former

speaker of parliament Anura Bandaranaike, billed as a key speaker.

The demonstration is organised jointly by Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) and the Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, with which Kumaratunga went into a disastrous coalition last year.

Kumaratunga has publicly supported the peace process, but has accused Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of surrendering the country's sovereignty to

Norwegian peace brokers.

Kumaratunga's PA government went into a pact with the JVP in September in a bid to stave off opposition attempts to topple it. However, with mass defections from her ranks, her government collapsed a month later.

The PA lost parliamentary elections in December and is now in an uneasy cohabitation government with Wickremesinghe, who is pushing the peace process.



PHOTO: AFP
Chairman of the Nepal Bar Association, Sindhu Nath Pyakural (2nd R-front) and Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist MP, Subash Newang (2nd L), lead a rally for peace in Kathmandu on Monday. Politicians and lawyers marched for peace in the Nepalese capital to call for an end to the bloody Maoist insurgency in the kingdom. The banner reads 'peace rally.'