



Muslims leave the city of Ahmedabad in the western Indian state of Gujarat for safer places on Tuesday as sectarian violence continues. Violence in Gujarat has claimed more than 900 lives in the past two months as India's parliament prepared to debate a motion censuring the government for its handling of the unrest.

# Indian president appeals for end to communal violence

## 3 more killed in fresh Gujarat rioting

AFP, New Delhi

Indian President K.R. Narayanan appealed on Monday for all citizens to help end the communal violence that has claimed about 900 lives in the western state of Gujarat.

"I am deeply anguished and pained at the violent incidents and the killings that have disturbed the peace in Gujarat and elsewhere," Narayanan said in a statement.

"I appeal to my fellow citizens to restore communal harmony and do everything to end the communal violence that has devastated the state and continues to occur even after two months."

Narayanan said it was the duty of every Indian "to strive their best to restore peace so that the foundations of our state and tradition of tolerance are preserved and

strengthened in this crisis of our state and society".

About 850 people, most of them Muslims, have died in the riots that broke out after a Muslim mob torched a train carrying Hindu activists on February 27, killing 58 people.

During the past week, Narayanan has received groups of Muslims and others living in resettlement camps in Gujarat at his presidential palace in New Delhi.

After meeting one such group on Saturday, Narayanan promised to take up their cause with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

India's parliament is due to vote Tuesday on an opposition-sponsored resolution that would condemn the attacks on religious

minorities as a failure of the government.

India's National Human Rights Commission has indicted the Gujarat government, headed by Narendra Modi, a member of Vajpayee's BJP party, for turning a blind or even sympathetic eye to the assault on Muslims.

But although India's opposition parties and even members of Vajpayee's ruling coalition have sought Modi's resignation, the BJP has refused to dismiss him, calling on him instead to seek a fresh mandate in early elections.

Meanwhile, sectarian violence in Gujarat state claimed another three lives as India's parliament prepared Tuesday to debate a motion censuring the government for its handling of the unrest.

# Israel rebuffs UN over Jenin mission

## Army takes over villages near Bethlehem, Jenin

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel on Tuesday again rebuffed a UN fact-finding mission into the devastation at the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin, saying the world body had not yet met all its conditions.

As the deadlock between Israel and the United Nations continued, plans progressed to end the siege of Palestinian chief Yasser Arafat following an agreement brokered by Washington over the weekend.

On the ground, the Israelis rolled into two more West Bank villages in their sweep for Palestinian militants, while a Vatican envoy reportedly prepared to enter talks on the Israeli siege of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his security ministers again vetoed the arrival of a UN mission to look into Palestinian charges of a civilian massacre at Jenin which the Israelis

deny.

"Israel has presented crucial conditions so that the mission can honestly seek the facts, but as long as these conditions are not met it is not possible for the mission to start its work," an official statement said.

Israeli state radio said all but one of the 14 members of the security cabinet supported the decision, the fourth time the Israelis had spurned the mission.

The United Nations on Monday postponed for the third day running its team's departure for Israel. The group of some 20 fact-finders and advisers waited in Geneva for the green light after a week of diplomatic wrangling.

Israeli Communications Minister Reuven Rivlin earlier told army radio here Tuesday that the Jewish state would never allow the mission to visit the camp in the northernmost West Bank unless its mandate was redefined.

"Israel will not cooperate with this mission if UN Secretary General Kofi Annan maintains his position on the terms and continues to seek the right for this mission to summon whomever it wants as witnesses."

Rivlin, who is close to Sharon but does not sit on the "security cabinet," added that "Israel will not allow itself to be placed in a dangerous situation where the committee's conclusions will be decided in advance."

Israeli officials say they have Washington's backing for their position on Jenin after agreeing to a US proposal to free Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from a month-long siege of his West Bank base.

Washington made no comment on the Israeli claim but called Monday for "an expeditious agreement" on the fact-finding mission and said it should "move forward as soon as possible."

Controversy has swirled around

what happened during nine days of ferocious fighting after Israeli troops, tanks and helicopters swooped down on Jenin on the northernmost West Bank on April 3.

The Palestinians say Israeli forces massacred hundreds of civilians while the Israelis insist they killed 52 people, mostly fighters, in pitched battles that left 23 of their soldiers dead.

Rights groups such as Amnesty International that have visited Jenin found no signs of a massacre but said Israeli forces might have committed war crimes such as bulldozing civilian homes or failing to treat the wounded.

US and British officials moved ahead with plans to put six militants holed up in Arafat's Ramallah headquarters in international custody to clear the way for a lifting of the Israelis' month-long siege.

A US official said discussions on the plan were continuing while

British security experts were to visit a jail in the West Bank town of Jericho where the militants would be transferred, Palestinian sources said.

Under the plan proposed by US President George W. Bush, Arafat would be free after the six Palestinians were in US or British custody. The White House said Monday the prisoners should be in Jericho "within a day or two."

The deal to end Arafat's isolation was hailed as a potential breakthrough in efforts to restart talks on ending the 19-month-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has claimed more than 2,000 lives.

Meanwhile, Israeli tanks and troops on Tuesday took over the village of Shawawra, just to the east of Bethlehem, and arrested dozens of Palestinians, witnesses told AFP.

## I shall continue: Queen

AFP, London

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II promised Tuesday to continue serving her nation, seemingly brushing aside any idea of abdicating, while admitting the monarchy had to evolve with the times.

In a personally written speech to parliament for the first major ceremony marking her golden jubilee on the throne, she praised core British values of moderation, tolerance and public service.

They had inspired her, she said, during a reign that had witnessed the end of the Cold War, the rise of the Commonwealth and the "dark threat" of world terror.

She added: "I would like above all to declare my resolve to continue with the support of my family to serve the people of this great nation of ours to the best of my ability through the changing times ahead."

It was that stress, delivered at the end of her speech, that was seized on by commentators as a sign that the queen was not ready to abdicate.

There have been suggestions, particularly since the death of her mother on March 30, that Elizabeth, 76, was preparing to hand the throne to her eldest son, Prince Charles, within a few years.

Aged 53, he is said to be restless for the throne, feeling that until the day of destiny comes he has only a limited useful role.

The queen's speech to both chambers of parliament was in Westminster Hall, the medieval chamber where three weeks ago the Queen Mother lay in state.

It was only the fifth time in her reign that the queen has addressed both houses in a personal capacity.

Although she officially opens each new parliament session, that is with a speech written by the government outlining its legislative programme.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II stands with (L-R), Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher, Ted Heath, James Callaghan and John Major in Downing Street in London on Monday before a celebratory royal Golden Jubilee dinner.

# Tigers breaking truce: Al

## Lanka to revamp intelligence operations

AFP, Colombo

Amnesty International expressed concern Tuesday for the safety of an elderly Tamil man abducted by Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels in violation of a Norwegian-backed truce.

The London-based human rights group called for the immediate release of K.V. Sithamparapillai, 82, who had been held hostage by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since Friday.

"The abduction of K.V. Sithamparapillai was brought to the attention of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, a body set up under the cease-fire agreement to monitor its observance," AI said in a statement.

Amnesty noted that under truce deal between the LTTE and the government both sides must "in

accordance with international law abstain from hostile acts against the civilian population, including such acts as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment".

The LTTE had for several months put pressure on Sithamparapillai to provide money or face captivity in the eastern district of Batticaloa, AI said.

He was previously abducted two weeks ago after he had refused to pay five million rupees (\$2,000 dollars). He was held overnight and released on condition the money would be paid.

A relative stood surety and negotiated for a reduction in the amount. The LTTE apparently then asked for 2.2 million rupees as a down payment and another 300,000

rupees later.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's government has decided to disband a plethora of intelligence units and establish a centralised agency, a press report here said Tuesday.

The reorganisation of the intelligence establishment was being undertaken following recommendations by experts from the United States and other countries, the Sinhalese-language daily Lankadeepa said.

Sri Lanka's police are known to operate two intelligence outfits, while the army, navy and the air force have their own units.

But the apparatus did not prevent Tamil Tiger guerrillas from staging a devastating attack last July on the country's only international airport and adjoining military air base.

# Benazir vows comeback

AFP, London

Exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has pledged to return to Pakistani politics, a report said Tuesday as military ruler Pervez Musharraf held a referendum to extend his presidency.

Benazir, twice prime minister in the 1990s, told the News daily that she would contest elections scheduled for October even if she was arrested and thrown into prison.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader has divided her time between London and Dubai since fleeing into exile shortly before her conviction for corruption in 1998.

But despite relentless attacks from Musharraf, she remains a potentially powerful force with a strong and loyal following.

"The People's Party is a reality. General Musharraf has to deal with it," she told the News.

Musharraf says Benazir has

forfeited her right to participate in Pakistani politics and will be arrested on outstanding corruption charges if she returns.

The general who ousted Benazir 's main rival, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, in a coup in 1999, is seeking to extend his term as president by five years through a referendum Tuesday.

But Benazir 's party and most other opposition groups have called for a boycott, saying the vote is an unconstitutional force designed to perpetuate military rule in Pakistan.

"If people boycott the referendum it means that he has lost," Bhutto was quoted as saying.

"Pervez Musharraf was a good officer ... during my government. Now he wants to rule the country as a dictator and I am for democracy."

She said the Pakistani army needed to stay out of politics after its repeated interventions since the country split from India and gained independence from Britain in 1947.

# Myanmar UN envoy hints at release of Suu Kyi

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations special envoy to Myanmar, Razali Ismail, hinted Tuesday that the release of Nobel peace laureate and democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi could be imminent.

And in the Myanmar capital Yangon, a high-ranking junta official made a rare visit to Aung San Suu Kyi's home Tuesday, sources said, heightening speculation she could be freed after 18 months under house arrest.

Razali, who visited Myanmar last week, was commenting on a statement by a minister in Myanmar's military government Sunday that "significant progress" in national reconciliation was due in the next few days.

Asked by reporters what he

expected, the normally reticent Razali replied: "It must be the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, release of political prisoners and further freedom for political activities."

"That is on the menu. The one that everyone expects is the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. Be patient. I think something big will happen."

A Malaysian foreign ministry official told AFP it was "fair" to speculate that Aung San Suu Kyi's imminent release was on the cards, but cautioned: "The Myanmar authorities may impose restrictions."

Aung San Suu Kyi has been under virtual house arrest for much of the past decade and all of the last 18 months.

Razali's comments, made on the sidelines of a conference here, came after Myanmar Labour

Minister Tin Win said Sunday: "A certain significant progress will take place within a few days."

But Tin Win played down the possibility this week would see the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

"I don't think so," he said when asked if the junta would release her in coming days.

However, Brigadier-General Than Tun, the official liaison officer between the opposition leader and Myanmar's military regime, spent 10 minutes at her University Drive residence Tuesday, in his first visit for several months.

Than Tun, the head of the political department of the defence ministry, does not see Aung San Suu Kyi on a regular basis, but typically only when there is a matter that needs to be attended to.



Former Afghan King Mohammed Zahir Shah (L), wearing a traditional "Pashtun" turban, speaks with Pashtun tribal leaders at his residence in Kabul on Tuesday. Shah said he planned a tour of his homeland to meet his former subjects after spending 29 years of exile in Italy.

# 'Laden escaped with Afghan commander's help'

AFP, Peshawar

Osama bin Laden was able to escape the clutches of US troops in Afghanistan thanks to a powerful military commander currently serving with the Afghan government, a rival warlord said Monday.

Commander Hazrat Ali helped the alleged terrorist mastermind flee from the eastern Tora Bora mountains during an intense US-led offensive last December, strongman Haji Zaman told reporters in this northwestern frontier city.

Ali was recently appointed security chief and commander of the country's eastern zone by Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai, replacing the sacked Zaman.

Zaman said Ilyas Khel, another Afghan commander, had been

appointed by Ali to guard the route by which bin Laden made his escape.

"Ilyas Khel was a supporter of bin Laden's al-Qaida network and Hazrat Ali knew it," he said.

He said he was unaware of bin Laden's current whereabouts and denied allegations that he was himself instrumental in the al-Qaida chief's escape.

"This is a lie. I captured 55 al-Qaida fighters during the operation in Tora Bora and handed them over to the government," he said.

Zaman also claimed he had been forced from his command post and out of Afghanistan by former members of the powerful anti-Taliban Northern Alliance because of his support for a forthcoming Loya Jirga grand assembly to select the country's next government.

# Is Vajpayee govt falling apart?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Is the resignation of Federal Coal and Mines Minister Ram Vilas Paswan from the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee indicative of the start of falling apart of India's ruling BJP-led coalition National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on the ideological issue of secularism?

The dramatic resignation of Paswan, whose Lok Janashakti Party has demanded the removal of Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of violence-torn Gujarat state, is likely to put pressure on BJP's other allies like Telugu Desam Party, Janata Dal (United) which too joined the chorus for dismissal of Modi but are uncomfortable following BJP's rejection of the demand.

The feeling running through some restive allies of BJP is that if a small party like Paswan's with just four members in Lok Sabha can quit the government as well snap ties with NDA, why not the bigger allies with more numerical strength. TDP has 28 members in Lok Sabha.

Allies like TDP has so far refrained from taking the extreme step of pulling out of NDA thinking mid-term general elections might see the return of their arch political rival Congress party to power at the Centre. But Paswan having taken the lead, the situation may begin to change, analysts here say.

If Paswan, who cited the continued violence in Gujarat and Vajpayee government's "lack" of action to stop it

appears to have succeeded in managing the support of new friends, including BSP and some other splinter groups.

Political sources, however, say the real reasons for Paswan's exit from government and NDA are less ideological.

Paswan, who fought the previous parliamentary elections in alliance with BJP, has been unhappy ever since he was shifted from the key portfolio of Telecommunication ministry to the less important of Coal and Mines last year, the sources say.

Paswan's level of discomfort went up further with BJP firming up alliance with BSP, his rival in securing the vote bank of backward castes in states like Uttar Pradesh and neighbouring Bihar. Besides, Paswan is also irked over his party not being accommodated in the coalition ministry BJP and BSP are going to form in Uttar Pradesh soon.

The sources say Paswan has been feeling strongly about his growing marginalisation as a leader of backward in BJP's scheme of things. He could read the writing on the wall that

his importance would be on the slide with the new tie-up between BJP and BSP, a party which champions the causes of backward castes and minorities.

It is more than mere coincidence, according to the sources, that Paswan's resignation and the decision to pull out of NDA came within hours of BSP leader Mayawati staking claim to form government in Uttar Pradesh with the help of BJP.

Paswan says he will chart an independent political course? But speculation is rife that he may join the opposition Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh has already invited Paswan to join the opposition rank and the Lok Janashakti Party chief's relations with Congress are also cordial.

Although Paswan has time and again attacked Bihar strongman and Rashtriya Janata Dal President Laloo Prasad Yadav, a patch-up between the two is not altogether ruled out as they may decide to come together to effectively challenge the combination of BJP, BSP and Samata Party in Bihar's caste-ridden politics.