

Al spells out its worries over US detentions

AFP, London

Rights group Amnesty International expressed concern in its annual report released Tuesday about the fate of some 1,200 people detained in the United States since September 11 suicide attacks.

The group also complained about continued US use of the death penalty.

Amnesty's report criticised the conditions under which the more than 1,200 people -- mostly non-US nationals of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin -- have been held.

Chinese FM talks Indo-Pak crisis with Powell

AFP, Beijing

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan has told US Secretary of State Colin Powell that Beijing is "very concerned" at heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, state media said.

"China is very concerned about the development of the India-Pakistan situation, and will spare no effort to promote reconciliation," Tang was quoted by the Xinhua news agency as telling Powell during a phone call to discuss the crisis late Monday.

The international community should "adopt a more balanced and fairer attitude to encourage direct dialogue between the two nations," Tang added.

Norway team heads for Lanka peace talks

AFP, Colombo

Norwegian peace brokers left here Tuesday after talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga ahead of arranging a face-to-face meeting between Tamil rebels and the Colombo government, officials said.

Norway's deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and special envoy Erik Solheim are due in London for talks with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the rebels' chief negotiator Anton Balasingham.

During their talks Monday, Kumaratunga expressed opposition to an interim administration for the embattled regions although the government is set to discuss the issue during proposed talks in Thailand.

Venezuelan coup leaders seek asylum abroad

AFP, Caracas

Two leaders of last month's coup have sought political asylum as top military leaders planned a protest against President Hugo Chavez, who has not consolidated power six weeks after his two-day ouster.

Chavez said Monday that he would grant Pedro Carmona free passage to Colombia, a day after authorities there offered political asylum to the leader of the April 12 coup.

The announcement came as another coup leader, retired rear admiral Carlos Molina Tamayo entered the residence of the Salvadoran commercial attache and requested political asylum in that country, his lawyer said Monday.

Cold War foes turn friends

AP, Rome

NATO allies welcomed Russia on Tuesday as a junior partner in the alliance set up more than a half century ago for the Cold War containment of Moscow. "Two former foes are now joined as partners," President Bush said.

Russia took its place at the NATO table with its 19 other members. "We have come a long way from confrontation to dialogue, and from confrontation to cooperation," Russian President Vladimir Putin said in accepting the new role.

The leaders spoke ahead of signing an agreement to formally create a new NATO-Russia Council.

Under the new arrangement, Russia will have more authority in the new body than in an earlier, less formal arrangement set up several years ago to try to nudge Moscow closer to the West.

Even so, its future involvement will be limited to certain areas. They include crisis management, peacekeeping and such military areas as air defence, search-and-rescue operations and joint exercises.

"The significance of this meeting is difficult to overestimate," Putin said, noting that a few years ago, such a role for Russia "would have been, simply, unthinkable, whereas today it has become a reality."

"Being realists, we must remember that relations between Russia and the North Atlantic alliance have been historically far from straightforward," Putin said. Even though Russia was not admitted as a full partner and has a limited role, "we must understand this Rome Declaration ... is only a beginning," he said.

NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, who will be chairman of the new council, opened the session, declaring "this gathering represents the hope of a better, saner future."

He said he considers the council a real breakthrough and expressed hope that it would "not just deliberate but take decisive actions. ... There is a common enemy out there."

Bush, just days after he and Putin signed an agreement slashing their nuclear arsenals by two-thirds over ten years, hailed the transformation of Russia from Cold War rival to friend.

"Today marks a historic achievement for a great alliance and a great European nation," Bush said during his turn in sequential speeches by NATO partners.

"Two former foes are now joined as partners, overcoming 50 years of division and a decade of uncertainty," Bush said. "This partnership takes us even closer to a larger goal, a Europe that is whole, free and at peace for the first time in history."

The leaders formalised their new arrangement amid the tightest of security at the seaside Pratica di Mare air base. Concerned about terrorist attacks, Italy deployed 15,000 security forces and mounted robust air and sea defences to protect the 20 world leaders.

Bush, meeting privately with Robertson beforehand, praised the alliance for recognising that a united Europe is "more likely to be achieved by welcoming Russia west."

British Prime Minister Tony Blair also welcomed Russia's new role in a front-page article for Tuesday's *Corriere della Sera*, the Italian daily.

He said the new arrangement "shows how the world has evolved in the past 15 years." Still, Blair noted that Russia is not a full-fledged NATO member "and won't have the right of veto."

Russia's participation comes as NATO looks forward to expanding further in November and as it ponders its role in an age when Russia is no longer an adversary, but a friend.

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to nudge Moscow closer to the West.

Even so, its future involvement will be limited to crisis management, peacekeeping and such military areas as air defence, search-and-rescue operations and joint exercises. NATO and Russia will decide only on those issues on which they can find consensus. More contentious issues will be left off their agenda, and NATO will keep a free hand in setting and implementing policy.

Tuesday's gathering brought Putin and Bush together for the second time in a week. Bush spent three days in Russia last week as part of a four-nation European tour, visiting both Moscow and St. Petersburg. In Moscow last week, the two leaders agreed to slash their strategic nuclear arsenals to one-third of the present levels over the next decade.

Bush began the day Tuesday with a visit with Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. After Tuesday's NATO summit, he will go to the Vatican to meet Pope John Paul II before heading home to the United States.

The United States counts Russia as a key ally in the present anti-terrorism war just as it was a key ally in World War II. In advance of Tuesday's ceremony, NATO opened a military mission in Moscow on Monday.

"This will allow ... NATO and Russia, to discuss ... and take decisions on things to be done in collaboration in fields of security and military interests," said Italian Admiral Guido Venturioni, head of NATO's military committee.

Putin portrayed the mission as "an extra contribution by Russia to international security."

The new council is to replace a consultative body set up in May 1997 to ease Moscow's alarm over NATO's plans to include some of Russia's Soviet-era allies and neighbors.

The rupture over the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia undermined the earlier effort.



Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (L), US President George W. Bush (C) and NATO General-Secretary George Robertson (R) pose on Tuesday at an airbase in Pratica di Mare near Rome, where the NATO-Russia summit is taking place.



Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar (R) along with his deputy Inamul Haq (2nd r) hold talks with the British counterpart Jack Straw (L) at the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad on Tuesday. Straw is on a peace mission to the region as tension soars between nuclear rival Pakistan and India over the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir.

'India not on the brink of war'

Musrarraf's speech designed to provoke India:Media

AFP, New Delhi

India denied Tuesday it was on the brink of war with Pakistan, but said Islamabad had failed to meet its commitment to halt religious militancy and was allowing al-Qaeda fighters to swarm into Kashmir.

"We are not on the brink," Defence Minister George Fernandes said. "The fact is that troops are on the border, but to say that they are on the brink of war would not be proper."

Fernandes rejected claims by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf that Islamabad had stopped militants infiltrating into the disputed Kashmir region -- one of New Delhi's key demands.

"What (Musharraf) has said about the present situation is totally wrong (regarding cross-border militancy)," Fernandes said.

"On the contrary, I have intelligence reports which say ISI (the Pakistani intelligence service) is planning more strikes in many parts of the country," Fernandes told Star

television.

Musharraf said in an address to Pakistan late Monday that all infiltration across the Line of Control, the de facto border between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, had ended.

He backed the "freedom struggle" in disputed Kashmir state, but vowed Pakistan would not allow terrorism to be launched from its soil.

"I also want to tell the world and give the assurance that no infiltration is taking place across the Line of Control," he said.

Fernandes rejected this and said jihad (holy war) fighters from Afghanistan had descended on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) in large numbers.

"On the contrary, we have information that the number of terrorists who are on the other side of borders, people who have fled from Afghanistan, people from al-Qaeda, Taliban, are in POK," he said.

The Indian defence minister said there was "no question" of pulling back the troops from the border

under the prevailing conditions.

Musharraf also said late Monday that the tension between the two testy neighbours who have fought three wars since independence in 1947 "is at its height."

"The danger of war is not yet over," he said in his toughly worded speech, delivered with one million troops massed on the border between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Fernandes was speaking Tuesday even as Pakistan defied international calls for restraint to fire its third missile test since Saturday.

Meanwhile, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's much-vaunted speech was designed to provoke India and had little to offer except added belligerence, India's media said Tuesday.

The speech Monday night was designed, some newspapers said, to further provoke Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee towards a confrontation.

However, the leading daily Times

of India said New Delhi would only be marching into the trap set by the Pakistani general by taking a hasty recourse to war.

"General Musharraf delivered a hard-hitting speech that granted no fresh concessions on the terrorism issue and essentially dared the Vajpayee government to go to war," the Times of India said in a news analysis.

"Logic and common sense, however, suggest India should not be in any hurry to accept the challenge," it added.

The newspaper said the speech was aimed at whipping up support for Musharraf's shrinking base back home.

"Anything that even smacked of bending before India's diktat would have been the kiss of death for him."

The analysis said the wiser course of action would be to let the diplomatic pressure from the United States to quietly and allow Pakistan to increase the work of eliminating Islamic militants.

Israel hits Jenin after suicide bomber kills 2

Arafat vows to announces new govt within 10 days

AFP, Jenin

Fighting erupted Tuesday as the Israeli army swept into the Palestinian town of Jenin as part of its rolling campaign of West Bank raids to track down militants, after a suicide bomber killed an Israeli toddler and her grandmother outside a mall near Tel Aviv.

A 55-year-old Palestinian was killed in the shooting which broke out as Israeli armour backed up by helicopters rolled into Jenin town, but not the refugee camp devastated in last month's fighting, security officials said.

An army spokesman said six Palestinians wanted for "terrorist activities" had been arrested in Jenin, which had been declared a "closed military zone."

Among those arrested was the regional head of the radical Islamic group Hamas, Khaled el Had, the army said.

The spokesman also announced the arrest of eight other Palestinians in the West Bank including two in Hebron, two in Beit Jala near Bethlehem, two at Azzun near Qalqiyah and two in the village of Beit Anan north of Jerusalem.

All those arrested were handed over to the internal security service Shin Beth for interrogation.

The raid was the second into Jenin since Israel ended its huge West Bank campaign, Operation

Defensive Wall, on May 10 and replaced the month-long re-occupation of cities with a series of shorter incursions.

Its new tactics include frequent raids into Palestinian self-rule towns which are often taken over for 24 hours at a time and searched for militants suspected to be sheltering there.

The army says it has seized dozens so far, while Palestinians have accused Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of using the heavy-handed tactics to erode Palestinian autonomy and wipe out the 1993 Oslo peace accords which he so opposed.

Meanwhile, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat vowed to have a new government within 10 days during a meeting of the Palestinian leadership Monday night in his Ramallah headquarters, the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam reported Tuesday.

The move would aim at streamlining the government as well as making its ministries more efficient and frugal, the daily said.

Twenty ministerial portfolios were deemed "an appropriate number" during the meeting, the paper said.

It was also proposed that "various political factions" participate in the new government as well as non-political figures, so as to "bring in new blood and vitality in governmental work and extend its popular base," the paper said.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's new surface-to-surface short-range indigenously Hal-II (Abdali) missile leaves its launching pad from an undisclosed location in a test fire on Tuesday. Pakistan defied international calls for restraint and test fired a third ballistic missile, hours after British Foreign Minister Jack Straw arrived in Islamabad in a bid to avert war with India. The missile is capable of carrying warheads accurately up to a range of 180 kilometres.

Pakistan ends missile tests, awaits Indian response

REUTERS, Islamabad/New Delhi

Pakistan fired the third and last in a series of missile tests on Tuesday as Britain's foreign minister began talks to try to pull the country back from the brink of war with nuclear rival India.

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said in a speech late on Monday that his country not start a war with India but was ready to defend itself "with full might" -- an apparent reference to the nuclear warheads the tested missiles could carry.

India's formal response to the speech was due later on Tuesday, but the country's defence minister has already said that New Delhi had detected no signs of Pakistan seeing reason.

"It appears that reason is still not finding any place in the leadership of Pakistan," Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes told Star News Television.

He said India's options were narrowing, but added that to say both nations were on the brink of

war "may not be proper."

India says its patience with Pakistan is running out after an attack on its parliament in December and another attack on an army base in the disputed Kashmir region on May 14 which it blames on Pakistan-backed militants.

But it has been sending conflicting signals since Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told his troops last week to prepare for a "decisive fight," but then told a news conference he saw clear skies rather than war clouds.

Musharraf's speech was also one with conflicting messages for different audiences, balancing a hawkish condemnation of Indian "atrocities" in Kashmir with a repeat of his appeal for dialogue between the nuclear-capable rivals.

Musharraf condemned the attacks in India as acts of terrorism, but said there was no infiltration taking place by militants across the line which divides the two armies in Kashmir. He did, however, express support for Kashmir's "liberation struggle."

Analysts say much of the rhetoric from both sides -- as well as the Pakistani missile tests -- is partly saber-rattling by leaders aimed at satisfying domestic hawks and shoring up their shaky political bases.

But fears have risen that with a million troops facing each other on the border, another strike by Muslim militants in India could push the two countries toward a war neither side wants.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars since independence in 1947 over Kashmir. New Delhi claims the Muslim majority state as integral Indian territory, but Islamabad accuses it of massive human rights abuses in the region and says Kashmiris have the right to self-determination.

Dozens of people have been killed and injured in the past two weeks by daily firing across the frontier, and thousands of villagers have fled to safer areas.

100 Maoists killed in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

More than 100 Maoists have been killed in a clash with the army in southwestern Nepal, cabinet sources said Tuesday.

Five soldiers and 10 civilians were also killed, a cabinet source said.

Army officials said the fierce fighting took place overnight in Khara village in Rukum, 320 kilometres (198 miles) southwest of Kathmandu, but could not confirm the number of casualties.

The violence came as King

Gyanendra Monday night extended by three months a state of emergency imposed to tackle the Maoist insurgency -- after it expired at midnight on Saturday.

The emergency was first introduced in November last year after the guerrillas broke a four month ceasefire and pulled out of peace talks.

It gives local authorities and security forces wide powers to detain and interrogate suspected Maoists and impose curfews, measures critics say are draconian and which have not stopped the rebels.

India, Pakistan to hold talks on water treaty

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan are to hold talks on the crucial Indus Water treaty on Wednesday despite the tensions between the two countries which have massed troops along their border, a senior official said Tuesday.

"The present level of tension will have no bearing on the talks being held tomorrow," India's junior minister for water resources Bijoya Chakraborty told the Press Trust of India, adding it was a routine meeting.

"India will share data pertaining to flood forecast and the talks will be held as per the international treaty signed between the two countries in September 1960," she added.

An official in India's water ministry told AFP a Pakistani delegation was expected to arrive in the India capital on Tuesday.

Under the Indus Water Treaty, the waters of three rivers -- Sutlej, Beas and Ravi -- were allocated to India and another three rivers -- Indus, Jhelum and the Chenab -- largely to Pakistan.

Chemical in broccoli kills colon cancer germs

AP, Washington

Broccoli and broccoli sprouts contain a chemical that kills the bacteria responsible for most stomach cancer, say researchers, confirming the dietary advice that moms have been handing out for years.

In laboratory tests the chemical, sulforaphane, killed helicobacter pylori, a bacteria that causes stomach ulcers and often fatal stomach cancers.

And the good news is there appears to be enough of it in broccoli sprouts and some varieties of broccoli to benefit people who eat the vegetables. Broccoli sprouts are tiny three-day-old plants that resemble alfalfa sprouts and have a peppery flavour.

The researchers could not say how much broccoli one would have to eat for there to be an impact, something they said could not be determined without long-term tests involving humans.

"The levels at which we tested it ... are such that those could be achieved by eating broccoli or broccoli sprouts. It's a reasonable level that we think would be reached in the stomach," said Jed W Fahey

of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

The findings are reported in Tuesday's issue of Proceedings of the National Academy of Science.

"I feel quite comfortable suggesting people eat more fruits and vegetables, specifically cruciferous vegetables, specifically broccoli," Fahey said. "We know it's safe and healthy... we know sulforaphane is effective in protecting against cancers."

Dr Paul Talalay, a co-researcher at Johns Hopkins, had previously reported sulforaphane is an effective anticancer agent and the new studies extended that work to the bacteria that causes stomach cancer and ulcers.

In the lab, the scientists found that sulforaphane even killed helicobacter that was resistant to commonly used antibiotics.

They also showed it can kill the bacterium whether it's inside or outside cells. In people the bacteria can hide in cells lining the stomach, making it more difficult to get rid of the infection, said Fahey.

The studies concentrated on mice and the researchers will now

seek to determine of the same effect occurs in humans.

"If future clinical studies show that a food can relieve or prevent diseases associated with this bacterium in people, it could have significant public health implications in the United States and around the world," Fahey said.

"In some parts of Central and South America, Africa and Asia, as much as 80 per cent to 90 per cent of the population is infected with helicobacter, likely linked to poverty and conditions of poor sanitation," said Fahey, a plant physiologist.

The bacteria can usually be treated with antibiotics, but these are too costly and scarce in many parts of the world, he noted.

Perhaps "people in some of these very poor areas, where it's almost impossible to even conceive of antibiotic therapy ... might, by a relatively minor change in diet, be able to heal themselves," he said.

Dr Carlos F Quiros of the University of California, Davis, said he was not surprised by the findings, commenting that many compounds found in vegetables inhibit the growth of pathogens.