

## Pearl killers' lawyer files appeal against verdict

AP, Karachi

A defence lawyer filed an appeal Wednesday with a Pakistani court on behalf of three of the four Islamic militants convicted of the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl.

Attorney Rai Bashir asked the Sindh High Court to overturn the conviction handed down Monday against Salman Saqib, Fahad Naseem and Shaikh Adil, who received life sentences, which in Pakistan means 25 years in prison, in the Pearl case.

In documents submitted to the appeals court, Bashir said the prosecution had failed to provide any evidence of his clients' guilt and the judge systematically dismissed all defence points of argument.

## Ecevit loses more support ahead of snap polls

AFP, Ankara

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's power base ebbed further on Wednesday after he was forced to call early elections this year to try to end weeks of political turmoil.

The ailing 77-year-old Ecevit on Tuesday called for elections to be held on November 3 after a mass defection from his Democratic Left Party (DSP) saw his parliament majority disappear.

The poll announcement was welcomed by financial markets after 10 weeks of political upheaval, triggered by Ecevit's failing health and a government rift on key reforms required under Turkey's bid to join the European Union.

## Militants target village heads ahead of polls in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Militants in Indian Kashmir are targeting village heads to frighten voters away from crucial state elections set for September and October, police and politicians say.

They said militants on Monday killed Ghyas Din, a village chieftain in the Badarwa area about 187 km from Jammu, the winter capital of Indian Kashmir.

On Tuesday five Muslim village chiefs were forced to resign from their elected posts in the district of Gandhoo, 190 km from Jammu.

Four other village heads and 28 political workers and local leaders have been killed in the state in the past seven months, according to police figures.

## 3 killed in blast at pro-Indian militant camp in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

At least three people were killed and nine injured Wednesday in an explosion at a camp of pro-Indian militants in Indian Kashmir, police said.

The blast took place inside a base of the Ikhwan, a militia force that assists the Indian authorities, at Ashnuqam, some 75 km south of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar. Police said they were investigating.

The camp lies along the road where thousands of Hindu devotees are expected to travel next week on their annual procession to the Amarnath cave, which they believe is the abode of the god Shiva.

## Taipei-Beijing in rare talks

AFP, Taipei

A group of Taiwanese parliamentarians and retired generals have quietly held talks with military experts from rival China, a legislator who took part in the discussions said Wednesday.

Ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) parliamentarian Chen Chung-shin told AFP the discussions were held in Beijing in late June.

Chen apparently tried to play down the significance of the meeting labelling it "a dialogue rather than a seminar."

"Through introduction of some friends of (our) business circle, we met with some researchers from a Chinese military think-tank," Chen said.

"Our purpose was to get to know each other," he said, adding that no ranking Chinese generals were involved in the closed-door discussions.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of the "Quartet" (L-R) US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov (2nd L), European Community President and Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller (2nd R), and top EU diplomat Javier Solana (R) hold a press conference along with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (C) after a meeting of the "Quartet" at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York on Tuesday.

## Indo-Pak war risk still remains real: Straw

REUTERS, Tokyo

The risk of a devastating conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir remains real despite recent steps by the nuclear-armed neighbours to ease tensions, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said on Wednesday.

Speaking in Tokyo ahead of a visit to South Asia, Straw welcomed Pakistan's condemnation of what he called a senseless attack on Saturday in Kashmir in which 28 Hindu slum dwellers were gunned down as they listened to a cricket match.

India has been restrained in its response to the massacre, allaying fears of a new showdown with Pakistan, which it accuses of foment-

ing Islamic militancy in the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir.

"However, the risk of conflict is still significant because there are over a million men under arms on either side of the Line of Control in a high state of military readiness," Straw said in a speech at Keio University.

"In addition to that, with both countries in possession of nuclear weapons, the potential consequences for the region and for the wider world could be devastating," Straw added.

Analysts believe New Delhi is unlikely to take any military action in response to the massacre as it prepares to hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

In a speech to the Indian parlia-

ment on Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani accused Islamabad of unleashing a "terror war against India for two decades" but did not spell out any new steps to enforce demands that Pakistan crack down on cross-border attacks by Muslim guerrillas.

Straw, who visits New Delhi and Islamabad on Friday, welcomed steps last month by both governments to de-escalate tensions.

"I know that Japan shares our view that an enduring solution can only be found through face-to-face discussions between India and Pakistan which take account of the wishes of the Kashmiri people," Straw said.

## US fails to sell ME stance

### Washington feels isolation at Quartet meeting

REUTERS, New York

The United States has failed to win over its European and Arab partners in Middle East policymaking to a new U.S. strategy based on ostracising Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and setting security for Israelis as a primary precondition for progress towards peace.

After the first high-level consultations of the Middle East "quartet" since President George W. Bush reversed policy on June 24, the United States stood isolated on crucial issues.

Representatives of the European Union, Russia, the United Nations, Egypt and Jordan disagreed publicly with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell on relations with Arafat and on whether Palestinians alone can end Middle East violence.

Powell chaired a meeting in New York of the "quartet" -- European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan -- to devise a working plan they hope would bring about a Palestinian state alongside Israel in three years.

The United States presented the outlines of a plan to reorganise the Palestinian security forces but knocked down Solana's prediction that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency would send a mission to the Middle East within two weeks.

"At this stage we're just in the process of talking to some of the others ...

We're several steps behind that," a senior State Department official told reporters.

The "quartet" did agree that a task force would meet in late August or early September to talk about economic assistance to the Palestinians and that the leaders would meet again during a U.N. General Assembly session in September.

But public statements on Arafat and on the sequencing of steps by the Palestinians and the Israelis showed that the Europeans and the moderate Arabs do not share Bush's approach to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Meanwhile, the United States found itself isolated on two key Middle East issues Tuesday as its partners in the international diplomatic "quartet" differed sharply with its stance on Yasser Arafat and the pace of Israel's response to Palestinian reforms.

Meeting just hours after a West Bank bus ambush that killed seven Israelis, representatives of the quartet -- the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia -- found common ground in condemning the attack and endorsing US President George W. Bush's call for a Palestinian state within three years.

But they appeared deeply split on two issues critical to moving forward with peace efforts.

## Helicopter crashes in UK: 5 killed, 6 still missing

AFP, London

A huge search operation was underway early Wednesday for six civilians feared dead after five others were killed when an oilrig helicopter crashed into the North Sea off the east coast of England.

Five people were killed late Tuesday when the helicopter, carrying nine passengers and two crew, crashed into the sea, 30 miles (48 kilometres) north east of Cromer, in eastern England, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) said.

"Five bodies have been recovered," said a coastguard spokesman.

## Spain forces Moroccan troops off island

### Spanish govt withdraws envoy to Rabat

REUTERS, Madrid

Spanish forces have stormed a disputed island off Morocco's Mediterranean coast, ousting Moroccan troops camped there since last week.

Spain said in a statement Wednesday's operation to remove the Moroccans -- who had set up a temporary camp and flown the Moroccan flag on the uninhabited islet -- had been carried out without any injuries to either side.

"This morning the government was forced to order Moroccan forces to abandon the position they

had established on the island of Perejil. The operation was successful and no one was killed or injured," it said.

Local media reported that the operation involved special forces, fighter planes, helicopters and warships and had been begun at 5:15 a.m. British time, with six Moroccans taken prisoner.

Spain said it had informed its international allies and maintained it wanted to patch up relations with Morocco.

"Spain reiterates its desire to maintain healthy relations of friendship and cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco, and shows from this moment its willingness to start talks with this aim," it added.

Late on Tuesday Spain recalled its ambassador to Rabat, but despite a military build-up in the area since Morocco sent paramilitary gendarmes to the island just 200 metres off its Mediterranean coast, it gave no public warning that it would attempt to remove the Moroccans by force.

AFP adds: The Spanish government has recalled its ambassador from Morocco for consultations with immediate effect, Spanish officials said late Tuesday.

## Pakistan hopes for talks with India over Kashmir

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani officials said Wednesday they expected upcoming visits by foreign envoys to South Asia to set in motion a dialogue between India and Pakistan.

The top diplomats from Britain, the United States, France and the European Union are all headed to the region, as tensions rise again over alleged militant incursions into Indian-controlled Kashmir.

"We expect the upcoming visits by British, American, French and European diplomats will help bring about a dialogue process between the two countries to resolve the core

issue of Kashmir," a foreign ministry official told AFP.

He said British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw would visit the capital Islamabad on Saturday, after swinging through New Delhi on Friday on his third visit to South Asia this year.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell will also make a return trip to the region the following weekend, arriving in Islamabad on July 28.

French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin and the European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana were due to follow in early August, the official said.

"Straw is arriving here on Saturday and will hold talks with

minister of state on foreign affairs, Inamul Haq. He is also expected to call on President (Pervez) Musharraf later in the day," he said, requesting anonymity.

Simmering tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan have risen again in recent weeks after accusation from New Delhi that Musharraf had broken his pledge to stop militant incursions into Indian-held territory.

India has also accused Pakistan-based groups of being behind Saturday's massacre of 27 Hindus near Indian Kashmir's winter capital Jammu.

## India deports 4 Maoist sympathisers to Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Four Nepalese arrested in India for advocating a Maoist revolution back home have been deported to Kathmandu and could face life in prison, officials said Wednesday.

The four Nepalese nationals, two of whom published a pro-Maoist newspaper out of New Delhi, were arrested last week in the Indian capital and brought to the Nepalese border town of Nepalgunj, sources at Nepal's home ministry and the Indian embassy here said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Spanish navy ship leaves Ceuta Port on its way to Gibraltar's Strait on Wednesday. Spanish navy soldiers retook the Island of Perejil spelling out the last Moroccan soldiers earlier on Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Holding her baby daughter, Nancy Nio takes out a hunger strike with her lips sewn shut on Tuesday in Bogota. Five people are on a hunger strike since July 12 to protest the lack of public services, poverty and unemployment. The strikers are threatening to cut their fingers if their demands do not receive a hearing. Nearly 60 per cent of Colombians live in poverty.

## IRA apologises for killing

AP, Belfast

The Irish Republican Army's surprise apology for killing civilians stirred passions Wednesday in Northern Ireland, where some welcomed it as a conciliatory and historic gesture while others saw it as a calculated bid to divert attention from ongoing violence.

In a statement Tuesday, the IRA offered "sincere apologies and condolences" to the families of about 650 civilians slain during 27 years of bombings and shootings.

The shadowy group, which called a cease-fire in 1997 but remains a potent force in militant Catholic areas, said it also wanted to "acknowledge the grief and pain" of the families of 1,150 others slain whom the IRA described as "combatants." That term angered many relatives.

The victims include British soldiers, police, prison guards, judges, and Protestant extremists, many of whom were killed either while off-duty and unarmed or otherwise unable to defend themselves. The dead also included IRA members who were executed as informers or who accidentally blew themselves up.

"It would have been unthinkable not too many years

ago for the IRA to have apologised for the effects of their campaign," said Colin Parry, whose 12-year-old son was killed along with a 3-year-old boy in a 1993 IRA bombing in Warrington, England.

Parry said the historic shift ought to boost reconciliation in Northern Ireland but brought him no personal solace.

"The simple, harsh truth is that I lost my son and he shouldn't have died," Parry said, "and nothing they can say or do will change that."

The British, Irish and American governments gave the move a qualified welcome. All three stressed that the IRA must keep scrapping its weapons stockpiles, a goal of the 1998 peace accord here. The IRA began that process in secret last October but has confirmed no progress since April.

Britain's Cabinet secretary for Northern Ireland, John Reid, welcomed "the unprecedented strength of the apology" but also made clear that the IRA's future conduct was "the real test."

Richard Haass, the Bush administration's liaison to Northern Ireland, called the announcement significant, adding it would be helpful for the IRA and other paramilitary forces to forsake violence by disarming.



PHOTO: AFP

Farmers from San Salvador Atenco opposed to the building of a new airport brandish machetes during a protest on Tuesday in Mexico City. President Vicente Fox raised the possibility of relocating a planned airport that has sparked a five-day standoff between hundreds of angry farmers and Mexico's federal government, in an interview broadcast on Tuesday.