

Hurriyat's memo to UN

PTI, Srinagar

Hurriyat Conference, an amalgam of 23 separatist organisations, on Sunday said it has submitted a memorandum to the United Nations and other world powers calling for early resolution of the Kashmir issue.

The memorandum, addressed to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, was also despatched to the heads of United States Britain, Russia, China, Japan, Amnesty International and European Union yesterday in connection with the Hurriyat's protest march programme, a spokesman of the Hurriyat Conference said.

Releasing the memorandum, signed by Hurriyat Chairman Abdul Gani Bhat to the media persons, here, the Hurriyat said, "Consequent upon the mass killings of innocent men, women and children yet again at Qasim Nagar in Jammu, it decided in an extraordinary meeting a couple of days back to organize a protest march with a view to emphasizing the need at the global level to unmask the ugly criminals involved in the carnage".

Israel makes promise on deportations

Palestinians present security plan to Tel Aviv

BBC, AFP, Jerusalem

Relatives of Palestinian militants have dropped a legal challenge to Israel's attempt to exile them from the West Bank after being told they will be given reasonable time to appeal against their deportations.

The 16 men withdrew their case after Israel promised them a 12-hour notice period if it were decided that they should be removed to the fenced-in Gaza Strip.

The men, some of the 21 male relatives of Palestinian militants arrested in the West Bank on Friday, had been challenging Israel's attempts to exile them on the grounds that such a move would be illegal under international law.

The Israeli Government has drawn strong international criticism over the deportation plan, which is widely seen as an illegal attempt to collectively punish Palestinians.

On Sunday, Israel's attorney general issued a statement declaring that deportation from the West Bank to Gaza would only be legal in the case of those "directly involved" in attacks on Israelis.

And a militant group, the al-Aqsa Martyrs, has said it will attack the fami-

lies of Israeli officials if expulsions go ahead.

Israel's staunchest ally, the United States, has made clear its opposition to the deportation proposals.

The European Union has said that collective punitive measures are neither legitimate or acceptable, and the United Nations has also voiced its condemnation.

However, Israel officials have argued that the action would be justified in disrupting the support network behind the suicide bombers, and deterring future attacks.

The 21 men currently under arrest are related to two militants who, Israel says, organised separate attacks last week which left 12 Israelis dead.

Meanwhile, new Palestinian interior minister Abdelrazek al-Yahiya has presented Israel with a plan for his security forces to take back control of Palestinian zones reoccupied by the Israeli army and campaign against violence, the daily Haaretz said Monday.

The plan provides for an Israeli army withdrawal to the lines it occupied before the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, in September 2000, while Palestinian security forces take control of the zones the army evacuates.



PHOTO: AFP

Riot police armed with clubs and shields charge at left-wing protesters during a demonstration outside the Philippine Congress in Manila on Monday. Police clashed with thousands of protesters as Philippine President Gloria Arroyo delivered her annual state of the nation address to outline her government's initiatives over the next year.



PHOTO: AFP

Iranian President Mohammed Khatami (C) is introduced to Malaysian cabinet members by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (L) in Putrajaya, south of Kuala Lumpur on Monday. Khatami, who is on a three-day visit to Malaysia, holds talks with Mahathir focussing on the Middle East crisis and terrorism.

Khatami proposes 'Islamic union'

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami proposed the formation of an "Islamic union" as a force in world affairs during talks with Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad Monday, an official spokesman said.

The union would bring economically strong countries together with those with human resources in a bid to benefit all Islamic countries, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told reporters after the meeting.

"President Khatami brought the idea of a possibility of looking at an Islamic union where strong countries with economic resources and countries with human resources capabilities can combine together in order to take part and to be mainstream in global affairs," he said.

"At present we have the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), but there is no association as such.

"He just threw in the idea that we need to discuss further, look into it,

because the most important thing is not the discussion forum, which we have plenty of, but what we want is something we can develop that will bring benefits to all Islamic countries."

Syed Hamid said the proposed union -- which was "still at a very, very early stage" -- could be launched by a small number of countries and joined by others later.

He gave no further details of what form the union would take, politically or economically.

Khatami met Mahathir on the first full day of a three-day visit to Malaysia during which the two Islamic countries are expected to focus on the situation in the Middle East and terrorism along with economic cooperation.

Reuters adds: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad welcomed visiting Iranian President Mohammad Khatami Monday, telling his fellow Muslim leader that better bilateral ties could help all Islamic nations.

Opposition demands federal rule in riot-hit Gujarat

AFP, New Delhi

Opposition MPs Monday held up parliamentary proceedings by demanding the Indian government dismiss the chief of Gujarat and impose federal rule on the riot-torn state.

Krishan Kant, the chairman of the Rajya Sabha or the upper house of parliament, suspended the sitting for the day after opposition parties demanded president's (federal) rule in riot-torn Gujarat.

The Lok Sabha, or the lower house of parliament, was also rocked by the Gujarat issue, with opposition MPs led by the Congress party trooping to the well of the house shouting slogans such as "Remove Narendra Modi, save the nation."

The western state's chief minister, Narendra Modi, who has been lambasted by the opposition for failing to stop bloody

sectarian riots, dissolved his government Friday to pave the way for fresh elections.

More than 1,000 people have died in Gujarat since February 27, most of them Muslims, in riots which erupted after a Muslim mob torched a train killing 58 Hindu pilgrims in Gujarat's Godhra town.

The violence in the state still continues, although only isolated incidents have occurred in the past month. The Hindu nationalist BJP party, which rules the state government, was accused by opposition parties of complicity in the rioting.

When lower house speaker Maohar Joshi admonished opposition MPs for behaving badly they were quick to retort.

"You are talking about the proper conduct of the house when the very constitution of India has been violated," shouted senior Congress leader

Jaipal Reddy.

"What Modi has done shows much more gross misuse of power. The issue should be taken up first over any other business in the house."

The Gujarat state elections are expected to be held in October, but India's election regulator will decide on the actual date.

Political analysts suggest early elections would favour the BJP as the majority of the state's dominant Hindu population is likely to vote for it.

They also argue that early elections will favour the BJP as a large number of Muslims are still living in refugee camps and have lost their voter identity cards while fleeing from their homes.

Modi has already voiced confidence that his party will be voted back into power.

Mamata sets 48-hour deadline

HINDUSTAN TIMES, Kolkata

Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee gave Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee an ultimatum on Sunday: drop the proposed bifurcation of Eastern Railways in the next 48 hours, or I quit the NDA.

"We have waited for a long time. We'll give Vajpayee and Deputy PM L.K. Advani time till Wednesday to junk the bifurcation plan. After that, we will decide our course of action," she said at a rally in Kolkata.

Mamata accused Railway Minister Nitish Kumar of giving the entire controversy a regional colour, and said: "He should go." The Trinamool leader threatened to bring Bengal to a standstill, saying she would call a 72-hour bandh if Delhi did not accede to her demand.

Lanka reaps fruits of int'l war on terror

AP, New York

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe says the international community's new focus on terrorism has bolstered his government's ability to end his country's bloody civil war.

More than 64,500 have been killed and some 1.6 million displaced during the 19-year conflict between Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels and its government, in which the Sinhalese majority predominates.

The government and rebels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam signed a cease-fire agreement in February and Wickremesinghe told

The New York Times on Sunday that he hoped peace talks could begin next month.

"After last September, we have benefited, because the world has been looking around and they've been more concerned," Wickremesinghe said in a telephone interview. "That's also led to the fact that in places like Sri Lanka, where a political solution can be found, we should go for it."

Wickremesinghe is due to meet President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell on Wednesday as part of a weeklong official visit to the United States to discuss efforts to end the ethnic conflict.

Amarnath yatra suspended

PTI, Jammu

The month-long Amarnath yatra has been suspended for 2-3 days due to inclement weather leaving about 7,000 pilgrims stranded in Jammu, official sources said on Monday.

Senior officers decided to suspend the yatra after receiving reports about bad weather along the highway and Pahalgam, they said.

Pilgrims all over the country have been advised to leave for the base camp in Jammu only after ascertaining the status of the yatra, an official release said.

The sources said about 7,000 pilgrims, awaiting their turn to embark on the yatra, have been stranded in Jammu.

Arrangements have been made

for their lodging in community halls and government schools in the city, they said.

The yatra commenced on July 19. So far, 10,297 pilgrims have left Jammu for the holy shrine.

Another report says, terrorists on Monday triggered an explosion in a car parked inside a CRPF camp in the heart of the city, official sources said. There was no casualty.

The blast in Regal Chowk destroyed the Maruti car in which explosives were kept, they said.

The sources said the car belonged to an official of the Registrar of Company Affairs, whose office is located in the same building which houses the 113rd Bn of the CRPF.

India preventing massacre probe in Gujarat: Amnesty

AFP, New Delhi

Rights group Amnesty International said Monday New Delhi had effectively refused its delegates access to the western Indian state of Gujarat, where they wanted to investigate recent massacres and other human rights violations.

The Indian government had failed to issue visas by a deadline of July 12 as agreed with its representatives in London, the group said in a statement.

"Amnesty International believes that the refusal of the Indian government to grant access to the state will only reinforce the concerns that the government of Gujarat and the state police might have been accomplices in ... allowing (the violence) to occur and could be now attempting to cover up involvement of their officials."

Gujarat witnessed India's worst communal

clashes in a decade in February when around 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

The riots were triggered by a mob -- believed to be Muslim -- torching a train carrying Hindu activists at Gujarat's Godhra town on February 27, which killed 58 people.

The worst of the clashes were brought under control after New Delhi ordered troops to take charge of law and order in the state on March 1, although sporadic violence continued for some weeks.

Nearly 27,000 people, most of them Muslims, are still living in relief camps in Ahmedabad.

Indian rights activists have accused the government of complicity in the riots, with police allegedly turning a blind or even sympathetic eye to reprisal attacks on Muslims.

Couples on cloning move

AFP, Glasgow

Six couples trying to become the parents of the first clones will be flown to an unnamed developing country by a leading fertility expert before the end of the year, a Scottish weekly said Sunday.

One of the six couples, Americans Bill and Kathy -- who did not want to reveal their surname -- told The Sunday Herald that the experiment will be led by American fertility expert Panos Zavos.

"We want children so badly and we have tried so hard and for so long. No one has tried as hard as Kathy has to have children," Bill, a high school teacher in his fifties, told the paper.

Kathy, a sales representative in her mid-40s, spent a total of 24 months on IVF treatments and for 17 months of this time she was taking injectable drugs, the paper said.

The couple would also be considered too old to adopt in the US, the weekly said.

Pak militants warn of attacks

AP, Peshawar

A former Taliban commander says Islamic militants led by al-Qaida want to strike quickly against American interests in Pakistan in retaliation for the death sentence in the Daniel Pearl murder case and the ongoing crackdown on Muslim extremists.

Fazul Rabi Said-Rahman, once the top Taliban military commander in eastern Afghanistan, said it was important to the militants to act quickly because Pakistani security

forces were stepping up pressure on Taliban and al-Qaida members who fled the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan.

"There will be another big attack in Pakistan, and it will happen soon," he told The Associated Press in an interview conducted Friday in a moving vehicle in this Pakistani city 40 miles from the Afghan border.

Said-Rahman predicted the attack would be carried out by Pakistani militants at the instructions of al-Qaida operatives. But he would not discuss details except to

say the attack would be carried out in a Pakistani city.

The warning was similar to one he conveyed less than three weeks before the June 14 car-bombing at the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, which killed at least 12 Pakistanis. His associate, Obeidullah, a former assistant to Taliban intelligence chief Qari Ahmadullah, also had spoken of an upcoming attack shortly before the May 8 car bombing in Karachi that killed 11 French engineers and three others, including the bomber.

Thousands stranded by Assam floods

BBC, Guwahati

Flash floods have left more than 100,000 people stranded in India's north-eastern state of Assam.

The floods were triggered by days of heavy monsoon rains. Officials said the situation turned worse early on Monday morning when gushing waters broke an embankment on the main Brahmaputra River, engulfing nearly a 100 villages.

All rivers in Assam are flowing at dangerous levels threatening several new areas, they said.

The eastern district of Dhemaji was among the worst affected due to the breach in the embankment.

The Deputy Commissioner of Dhemaji, BR Shyamal, told the BBC that relief camps were being set up to shelter thousands of marooned villagers.

He said it would take at least two months for the water levels to recede.

The authorities have pressed into service motor and other boats to ferry those stranded to safer areas.

State officials said food prices have soared and essential supplies cannot be transported to the flood affected areas.

Officials said they have requested the Food Corporation of India, the agency responsible for the procurement and distribution of foodgrains, to supply 1,000 quintals of rice to the relief camps.

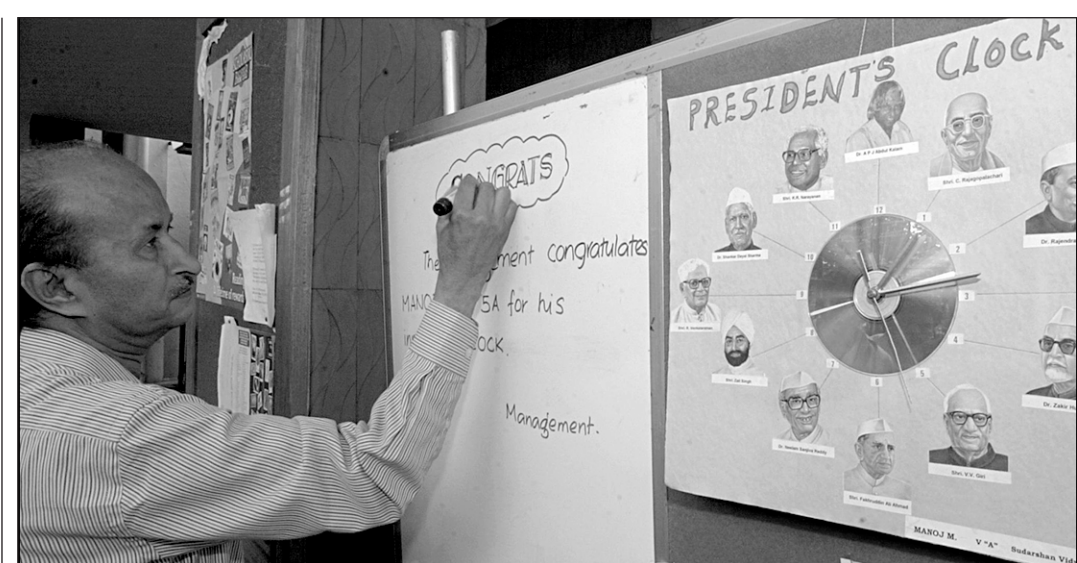


PHOTO: AFP

A teacher writes a congratulatory message to India's president-elect A. P. J. Abdul Kalam next to a hand-made "President's Clock" at the Sudarshan Vidya Mandir school in Bangalore on Monday. The clock, prepared by M. Manoj, a class five student as part of his school mathematics project, has photographs of Indian presidents in place of the 12-hour digits.