



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians gather on Tuesday at the site of destroyed buildings following an Israeli air strike on Monday night in central Gaza City while a Palestinian fighter tries to awake a child injured in the attack at al-Shifa hospital. The attack killed 15 people, including Salah Shehade, a leader of the military wing of the radical Islamic group Hamas, and eight children. Some 140 people were also injured in the air strike, which destroyed or damaged about five apartment buildings in the city, one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

PA promises legal action, militants vow revenge

AFP, Ramallah

The death of 15 civilians, including eight children, in an Israeli air strike which killed Hamas' military leader sparked outrage Tuesday from Palestinian leaders, who accused Washington of complicity in a "war crime," while military groups vowed bloody vengeance.

Hamas and other hardline groups swore to exact unprecedented revenge, with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed wing of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, saying it would not hesitate to kill

Israeli children in response. Islamic Jihad said a foiled infiltration into a collective farm just inside Israel was in retaliation for the attack.

Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo described the air raid, in which an F-16 fighter-bomber fired a 1,000-pound (450 kilo) missile into a crowded residential area of Gaza City as a "war crime."

The missile killed Salah Shehade, the head of Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, his bodyguard,

wife and daughter and 11 civilians in the neighbouring apartments.

The raid was "a war crime aimed at sabotaging all the efforts to bring back stability in the region," Abed Rabbo said in Ramallah, accusing the United States of complicity.

"The Americans are also responsible for this crime inasmuch as the Israelis used an American-made F-16 for this criminal attack," he said.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's top adviser, said the authority would appeal to the United Nations Security Council within 24 hours.

"We put the Israeli government on its guard and place the responsibility for this massacre on it. The Israeli government is playing with fire and we shall appeal to the Security Council within 24 hours," he told Qatar's Al-Jazeera television.

He added that the Palestinian Authority will file a complaint with the International Criminal Court for the "crime against humanity."

India has no plan to hit Pak militants' camps

AFP, PTI, New Delhi

New Delhi is committed to dialogue with Islamabad over Kashmir and has no plans to launch military strikes on militant camps in the Pakistani zone of the disputed state, a minister told parliament Tuesday.

"At this point in time, we do not want to attack the camps," said Junior Minister for Home Affairs Vidya Rao.

"India remains firmly committed to the path of dialogue," Rao said in reply to a question demanding action against Pakistan posed by an MP from the right-wing Hindu party Shiv Sena.

Stating that India wanted to solve its differences with arch-rival Pakistan bilaterally, Rao ruled out a mediatory role for any third party.

But he said that despite assurances from Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf not to allow Islamic rebels to cross over into Indian Kashmir, infiltration was still taking

place.

In the first six months of this year, 695 militants had crossed over, the minister claimed.

"All these terrorists were trained and transported from across the border (in Pakistani Kashmir)," Rao said.

Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, has been in the throes of an Islamic insurgency since 1989, which has claimed more than 36,500 lives.

India accuses Pakistan of fomenting the insurgency, a charge that Islamabad denies though it admits to extending moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris.

PTI adds: Pakistan has no intention to open its airspace for Indian aircraft in the near future, Defence Secretary Lt Gen (Retd) Hamid Nawaz Khan said.

"We are not in a hurry and would take a decision after considering all the aspects," Khan told newsmen at the passing out parade of Airport Security Force at ASF Training School in Karachi on Monday.

"Closure of Indian airspace for Pakistani aircraft was an irrational act," he said describing the India's June decision to open its skies to Pakistani aircraft as an attempt to "redress their blunder by putting the ball in our court."

The defence secretary pointed out that India had only allowed over flying to Pakistani planes but flights to India remain banned.

Losses being incurred by India due to the restriction were several times that of Pakistan, "so how could we allow them to fly over our airspace," Khan said.

Officials say Indian losses are five times greater than Pakistan. PIA has estimated its losses at Rs250 million.

India withdrew airspace facilities for Pakistani carriers on January 2 after the attack Parliament and Pakistan immediately reciprocated by banning Indian planes from its skies.

Later in June, Indian government revoked the decision.

Khatami slams US for steering world to war

AFP, ala Lumpur

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami on Tuesday accused the United States of steering the world along a "frightening" path towards war in its fight against terrorism.

Speaking at a news conference on the second day of a visit to Malaysia, Khatami also condemned plans for US military action against Iraq to oust President Saddam Hussein.

"We live in a very frightening situation today. In the course of world history, we have never witnessed war being promoted so much," he said.

"Even in the course of the two

world wars and the very difficult era of the Cold War, never has such an environment of war been created in the world by the US and the US administration.

"We are concerned about such a situation. Our world today can by no means accept military challenges especially when such challenges are initiated by a superpower with great military power."

US President George W. Bush has named Iran as part of an "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea but Khatami, without naming the United States, said it was evil for a superpower to "define everything according to its power and not in the interest of others."

Al-Qaida suspects detained in Pakistan: Rumsfeld

AFP, Washington

Several suspected al-Qaida members have been arrested in Pakistan, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Monday.

The suspects were caught in raids two weeks ago, Rumsfeld said. "There is some hope that one of them has been (a senior al-Qaida official)," Rumsfeld said, but "it's hard to know in near real time, after someone's picked up, what they are. There's so much lying and disinformation and so many aliases."

Abu Zubaydah, a senior al-Qaida member captured in Pakistan at the end of March was recently moved by the United States to the British military base on Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean, according to Time Magazine.

Zubaydah is among 20 Arabs suspected of links to al-Qaida awaiting transfer to the US base in Guantanamo, Cuba from Diego Garcia.

Rumsfeld also confirmed that US forces specialised in close protection for VIPs were to help protect Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

"It is important for that country that the outcome of the Loya Jirga (tribal council) not be negated by violence," he said, recalling the recent assassination in Kabul of Karzai's deputy Haji Abdul Qadir.

Rumsfeld also defending the US aerial bombardments of Afghanistan, saying that despite regrettable mistakes, "the air campaign has had greater precision and less collateral damage probably than any air campaign in history."

US adds 9 more groups to 'terror' blacklist

AFP, Washington

US Attorney General John Ashcroft on Monday asked the State Department to add another nine names to the blacklist of groups considered "foreign terrorist organisations" under US law.

Such groups are considered terrorist organisations if they provide material or financial support to further terrorist activity, or if they plan, commit or gather information for terror attacks, the Justice Department said.

"As a result of the designations, law enforcement will be able to prevent noncitizens with ties to these groups from entering the United States," Ashcroft said in a statement. "Aliens will be denied entry if they raise funds for, or encourage others to join a terrorist organisation."

The new groups are: Al Taqwa Trade, Property and Industry Co. Ltd., known as Himmat Establishment; Bank Al Taqwa Ltd.; Nada Management Organisation; Youssef M. Nada and Co.

Gesellschaft; Ummah Tameer E-na; Afghan Support Committee; and Revival of Islamic Heritage Society.

Two other groups, the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defense Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters, have already been identified by the State Department as terrorist organizations but have yet to be subject to sanctions under the USA Patriot Act, approved in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Chandrika threatens to sack Cabinet

PTI, Colombo

Locked in a fierce row with her critics in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's Cabinet, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has threatened that she has the power to dismiss the entire Cabinet, a state-run newspaper said on Monday.

"I can send home not only (Commerce Minister) Ravi Karunanayake, but the entire Cabinet, including the Prime Minister," the Daily News quoted the President speaking at a seminar organized by her Sri Lanka

Freedom Party (SLFP) in the eastern town of Polonnaruwa on Sunday.

Kumaratunga's remarks come close on the heels of Wickremesinghe cold-shouldering her recent letter contending that Karunanayake was unfit to be a minister after he allegedly accused her of bringing bombs concealed in her hand-bag to a Cabinet meeting last week.

The Prime Minister's position is that Karunanayake had not made any such allegation and nobody could be removed from his Cabinet without his approval.

Congo, Rwanda reach deal

REUTERS, Pretoria

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo struck a deal on Monday aimed at ending four years of war in the Congo, officials said.

Delegates from the two countries have been meeting in the South African capital Pretoria since Thursday to try to resolve the conflict which has killed an estimated two million people since 1998, mostly from starvation and disease.

"We have reached an understanding and agreement at a technical stage," said South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma, who

chaired the talks.

A Rwandan government official told Reuters in the Kenyan capital Nairobi the two sides had signed a memorandum of understanding restating their commitment to the Lusaka peace agreement of 1999.

The Democratic Republic of Congo agreed to track down ex-FAR Rwandan army soldiers (Ex-FAR) and Hutu "Interahamwe" militia within the territory it controls in collaboration with the U.N. Mission in the Congo, the official said.

Rwanda blames the ex-soldiers and extremist Hutu militias for the slaughter of some 800,000 minority

Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994 and has accused Congo of harbouring them.

For its part, Rwanda pledged to withdraw its troops from the Congo once effective measures had been undertaken to address its security concerns. Addressing those security concerns involved the dismantling of ex-FAR and Interahamwe.

The official said the Congo, Rwanda and South Africa had agreed to urge the United Nations to consider changing the mandate of the Congo mission to a full peace-keeping mission.

C'wealth to send observers to monitor Pak polls

AFP, Islamabad

The Commonwealth is planning to send observers to monitor the country's first general elections since a military takeover almost three years ago, officials announced Tuesday.

Chief Election Commissioner Irshad Hasan Khan said the 53-nation group, from which Pakistan is suspended, had sent a letter outlining its intention to send observers, following a request by Islamabad.

But it would first send an assessment team to judge security conditions in the country, which has been scourged by a chain of deadly terrorist attacks on foreign targets this year.

"The Commonwealth intends to constitute an observer group and wishes to send a preparatory mission for the purpose of studying the security environment and other

related conditions," said a letter from the Commonwealth's political director John Shephard, which Khan read out.

The four-member team, which will also make logistical arrangements, would arrive in Pakistan next week.

Khan said the presence of Commonwealth observers would lend credibility to the upcoming polls.

"They are most welcome to see for themselves that the elections are fair, free and reflect the will of the people," he said.

Khan said President Pervez Musharraf had also expressed his desire to see Commonwealth observers in Pakistan during the elections.

Pakistan has been suspended from the Commonwealth since Musharraf ousted the civilian government of prime minister Nawaz

Sharif in a bloodless military coup in October 1999.

Musharraf appointed himself president in June 2001, and secured another five year term in April through a controversial referendum which was marred by widespread complaints of rigging and ballot-stuffing.

Musharraf has set October 10 for elections for the national and four provincial parliaments in accordance with a Supreme Court order to restore civilian rule before the third anniversary of his takeover.

Meanwhile Britons are still advised by London against non-essential travel to Pakistan because of the threat of terror attacks on western targets, the Foreign Office said in a statement overnight.

Pakistan can ill afford fourth war with India: Benazir

THE NEWS, Islamabad

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has said Pakistan cannot afford a fourth war with India which could turn nuclear causing destruction in South Asia.

"We can ill afford a fourth war that could turn nuclear and annihilate large portion of the South Asian population," she said in an interview to Pakistani daily The News, published on Monday.

Benazir, the leader of Pakistan People's Party, also pointed out that the previous "three wars between India and Pakistan took place under military dictators."

Charging Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf with attempting to "institutionalise dictatorship", former Premier Benazir Bhutto has warned that his move to exclude her from the poll process

would embolden militants and marginalise the moderate forces.

"I cannot be banned from politics nor disqualified from taking part in elections. Elections without the PPP (her Party) will sham elections without credibility. Those would embolden the militants and hardliners while marginalising the moderate forces," Bhutto said.

"Musharraf's attempts to block me under laws that violate the constitution make a mockery of his pledge to hold free and fair poll," Bhutto who is in exile, mostly living in London, said adding she was "still planning to contest the elections. My advisors are looking into this."

She termed Musharraf's proposed constitutional amendments as "Benazir Bhutto specific" saying he was trying to "institutionalise dictatorship".



PHOTO: AFP

A man stands next to a car submerged in the water after heavy rains cause flooding in Kathmandu on Tuesday. At least 80 people have been killed since July 21 in flooding triggered by heavy monsoon rains in 45 of Nepal's 75 districts.

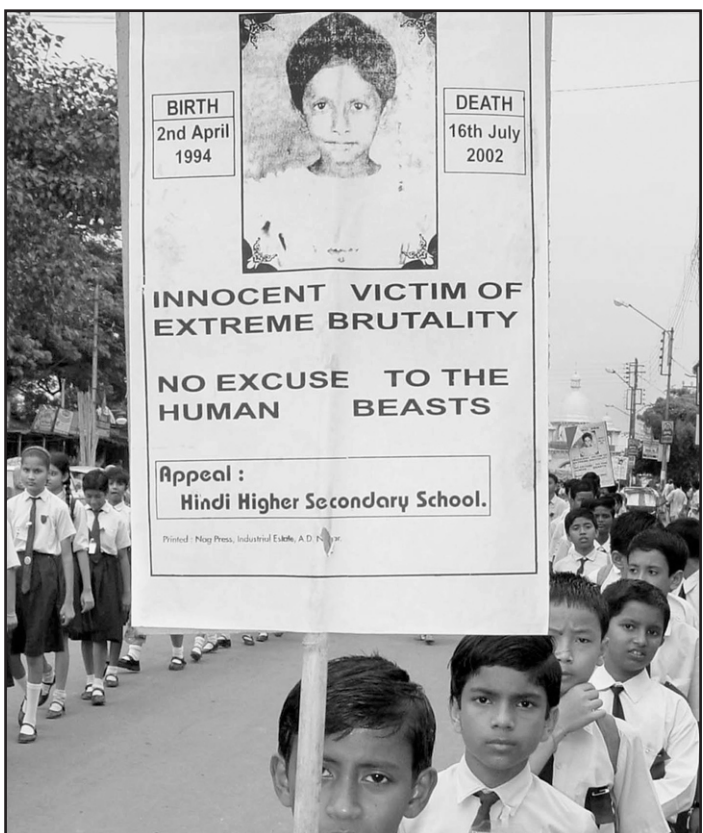


PHOTO: AFP

Hundreds of schoolchildren hold a silent march in Agartala on Tuesday to protest against the rape and murder of eight-year-old schoolgirl Barnali Devi in Guwahati. Barnali was abducted in the presence of her parents, residents of Tripura, by four employees of a private bus service on July 12, raped and strangled to death. Loud protests in Assam and Tripura continue over the gruesome and sensational incident even after the arrest of the culprits.

Foreign envoys to tour Kashmir

AFP, New Delhi

Defence attaches of about 15 foreign embassies were to begin a three-day visit to Indian Kashmir against the backdrop of tensions between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan, diplomatic and army sources said Tuesday.

"Defence attaches from a number of countries including the United States, Britain, South Africa and Japan are on a visit to Kashmir," the source said.

"During their stay, the attaches are expected to visit forward areas,

defence formations and interact with senior Indian military and civilian officials," the source said.

The envoys were also expected to visit the Line of Control, the de facto border dividing the disputed Kashmir region into Indian and Pakistan administered regions.

The defence attaches' visit comes days after a trip by British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw to South Asia to push India and Pakistan towards resuming a dialogue on Kashmir, the cause of two of their wars since independence from British rule in 1947.

It also comes ahead of a visit by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who will be seeking to lower tensions which have seen India and Pakistan amass about one million troops on their borders for the past seven months.

Cross-border infiltration of Islamic rebels battling New Delhi's rule in Kashmir is at the heart of the seven-month-old standoff, sparked by an attack on parliament in New Delhi by gunmen India claims were sponsored by Pakistan. 1

US tightens noose on foreigners

AP, Washington

The Immigration and Naturalisation Service is stepping up enforcement of a 50-year-old law requiring foreign residents to alert the government within 10 days when they change addresses.

The new policy was signalled by a proposed rule change announced Monday by Attorney General John Ashcroft. The rule will require the government to update nearly three dozen immigration forms to better explain and give notice to foreigners that they must report a change of

residence to the government.

"By clarifying the existing requirement that noncitizens report their addresses to the INS, we are able to increase our ability to locate quickly an alien if removal proceedings must be initiated," Ashcroft said.

The government did not announce an increase in INS agents or employees to help accommodate the change.

A Justice Department official said the rule change was meant to "shift the responsibility from the government to the immigrant for

making sure the government knows where the person is located." The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the rule is meant as a warning that foreigners who fail to comply could face deportation.

Immigrant advocacy groups said the policy is overreaching. "The attorney general is threatening to put people in jail and have them deported for the equivalent of having an overdue library book," said Angela Kelley, a director of the National Immigration Forum in Washington.