



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian youths check the remains of a destroyed workshop in Gaza City on Tuesday. Israel launched a missile strike on a metal-working district of Gaza City late Monday which the Israeli army has long charged houses workshops used by Palestinian militants to manufacture rockets and other home-made weapons. Hospital sources said five people were wounded in the attack.

'Concerned' UNGA demands immediate Israeli pullout

Peace possible with Palestinians: Peres; Israel, PA in talks as violence surges

REUTERS, AFP, United Nations

The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Monday expressing grave concern over Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian cities and the "dire humanitarian situation" facing the Palestinian people.

The resolution, drafted jointly by European Union and Palestinian envoys and approved 114-4 with 11 abstentions, marked a major victory for the Palestinians, who softened an earlier draft harshly critical of Israel to broaden support among the General Assembly's 189 member-nations.

The resolution repeated calls for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian cities and towns and stressed the need for free access to those areas by medical and humanitarian relief organisations.

While it fell short of an initial EU demand for explicit condemnation of Palestinian suicide bombings, the resolution condemned "all

attacks against civilians on both sides."

The vote, coming amid surging Middle East violence aimed at both Israelis and Palestinians, capped a day-long debate on a U.N. report released last week regarding the March 29 Israeli military thrust into the Jenin refugee camp following a wave of deadly suicide bombings inside Israel.

The report, prompted by Palestinian allegations of a massacre in the West Bank camp, found no evidence that a massacre took place but said Israel had used excessive force in densely populated areas and kept out medical and aid workers.

Prepared from publicly available information at the General Assembly's request after Israel blocked a UN fact-finding mission from visiting Jenin, the report also faulted the Palestinians for letting armed fighters live in civilian homes in the camp.

Palestinian UN Observer Nasser al-Kidwa said the report confirmed that "the Israeli

occupying forces have committed war crimes, atrocities and other serious violations" of international humanitarian law.

While Israel "has been trying to portray all of its policies and practices as simply a response to the suicide bombings, nothing could be further from the truth," he said.

"The reality is that this is a situation of foreign occupation," he said. "As a matter of principle, resisting Israeli occupation, Israeli colonisation and settlements, and indeed the Israeli invasion of our cities and refugee camps is our right if not our duty."

Voting against the resolution were the United States, Israel, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia. Abstaining were Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Honduras, Nauru, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Romania, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Meanwhile, Israel's foreign minister said in remarks broadcast on Tuesday he believed peace could be reached with the Palestinians.

Shimon Peres, who visited Egypt on Monday, said past agreements with other Arabs made under tough conditions showed peace was one day possible.

Peres, Israel's leading dove, told Egypt's Nile TV station he could not say if a deal would be achieved while he was foreign minister, but added: "If you ask me if I am convinced we shall bring peace to the Palestinians, with the Palestinians, my answer is definitely yes."

Moreover, Israel and the Palestinians held high-level security talks on Monday night, keeping dialogue alive after a surge in attacks by Palestinian militants drew tougher Israeli measures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer met Palestinian Interior Minister Abdel Razzak al-Yahya, Mohammed Dahlan -- a security adviser to President Yasser Arafat -- and intelligence chief Amin al-Hindi, Palestinian officials said.

Nepali SC gives go ahead to early polls

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's supreme court Tuesday rejected a lawsuit by rivals of caretaker prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba seeking to cancel early elections in November and to reconvene the disbanded parliament.

The verdict, announced by Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhyay after hours of deliberation, effectively chose sides between warring factions of the ruling Nepali Congress party, which split in two over the decision to call early polls.

The lawsuit, filed in June by supporters of Deuba's predecessor as premier Girija Prasad Koirala, argued that the November 13 election, called two years ahead of schedule, would be nearly impossible when much of the country is ravaged by a Maoist rebellion or under tight army control.

They also argued that Deuba

overstepped his authority by recommending King Gyanendra dissolve the parliament.

But in the ruling, the court said the prime minister "has the prerogative to disband the parliament and does not need to consult with his council of ministers on such a decision."

Lawyer Mithilesh K. Singh, who represented Koirala's position before the court, told AFP all 11 judges on the bench rejected the petition. Koirala supporters have pledged to heed the court judgment.

Gyanendra dissolved the house on Deuba's advice May 22 as it looked set to end emergency rule, which gives authorities sweeping powers to detain and interrogate suspected Maoists and to impose curfews. The king later prolonged the emergency for three months by decree.

Deuba, touring the country

ahead of the vote, has said Nepal will not be under emergency rule when it goes to the polls.

But in its ruling, the supreme court said there would be no problem holding the election during an emergency.

Observers had feared that a supreme court ruling against the elections would plunge Nepal deeper into crisis, as it would mean reconvening a badly fractured parliament.

After the early elections were called, Koirala, as president of the ruling party, expelled his arch-rival Deuba from the Nepali Congress for three years as punishment for not consulting his colleagues.

Deuba shortly afterward called a general convention of the party that in turn expelled Koirala.



PHOTO: AFP

Proud father, Wenceslao Quije (C) is all smiles as he lifts up his two conjoined twin daughters Maria de Jesus Quije-Alvarez, and Maria Teresa Quije-Alvarez in their hospital room at the Mattel Children's Hospital on the UCLA campus on Sunday in Westwood, California. Surgeons on Monday were apparently successful in separating the Guatemalan Siamese twins joined at the head in a delicate operation, said a spokeswoman for the University of California's Mattel Children's Hospital where they were being treated.

Bush reviews Iraq attack options

Baghdad should change agenda before arms talks: Annan

AP, Washington

The general who would command an invasion of Iraq has presented President Bush and his key advisers the latest Pentagon scenario for a US attack.

Gen. Tommy Franks, who oversaw the war in Afghanistan, delivered the plan Monday at the White House.

But there was no indication Bush was about to make a decision on how to accomplish "regime change" in Baghdad.

Bush has raised the threat of a military assault to depose President Saddam Hussein, but has said other tactics were under consideration.

Possibly anticipating a decision, Saddam invited the chief U.N. weapons inspector, Hans Blix, to Baghdad for talks, with the hint a search for illicit weapons may be permitted after a suspension of more than 3 1/2 years.

Also, Iraqi Foreign Minister Najib Sabri flew to Jordan with a letter from Saddam for King Abdullah, one

of many Arab leaders who have tried to persuade the United States not to use force.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration rejected the invitation to the United Nations for talks as well as one to members of Congress to tour suspected biological, chemical and nuclear weapons sites.

Iraq's parliament speaker, Sadoun Hammadi, invited the lawmakers, accompanied by arms experts of their choice, for a three-week visit.

Administration officials said that would not satisfy the president's demand for rigorous inspections in Iraq.

Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld stressed the difficulty of locating Iraq's weapons caches since some are underground and others mobile.

"I can't think of anything funnier than a handful of congressmen walking around. They'd have to be there for the next 50 years trying to find something. It's a joke," he said in an interview with a group of jour-

nalists. Administration officials also dismissed an Iraqi offer to meet with Hans Blix, the head of the UN inspection team.

Iraq's obligations go beyond permitting inspections to fulfilling a commitment to disarm, State Department deputy spokesman Philip T. Reeker said.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan intends to tell Iraq on Tuesday to propose an agenda compatible with UN Security Council procedures before new technical talks on weapons inspectors could take place.

Annan told reporters he would view Iraq's invitation for chief U.N. arms inspector Hans Blix to visit Baghdad "in a different light" if Iraq agreed to a 1999 Security Council resolution that outlined a work program for the arms experts, out of Iraq for nearly four years.

Pak attack seen targeting West, not Christians

REUTERS, Islamabad

An attack on a school for children of foreign missionaries in Pakistan that killed six Pakistanis appears to have been aimed at Westerners rather than Christians, school officials and diplomats said on Tuesday.

None of the 146 children of missionaries from countries including the United States, Britain, Canada, Germany, Australia and New Zealand was hurt, but a Filipino missionary visiting her son was shot in the hand. All 30-35 foreign staff were unharmed.

But a small arsenal of weapons found by police at the Murree Christian School after the raid northeast of Islamabad on Monday suggested the carnage could have been far worse had armed guards not succeeded in driving off the masked attackers.

School director Russell Morton told Reuters police found a cache of grenades, daggers, rifles and ammunition clips over a fence at the side of the school in the hill resort of Murree after the attackers fled following a 15 minute gun battle.

They killed six school employees, including two guards.

No group has claimed responsibility for the school attack, but the

English-language newspaper The News said police had found a bag at the scene containing a note saying it was to avenge brutalities against Muslims worldwide.

Police could not be reached to confirm the report.

It was the latest strike on a foreign target in Pakistan since the military government of General Pervez Musharraf incensed militant Muslim groups by siding with the U.S.-led war against terror after the September 11 attacks.

The targeting of the Murree Christian School, not schools in the town for Pakistani Christians, was significant, Morton said.

"The fact that they chose to attack us is clearly, I would have thought, because we are Western rather than just Christian."

A Western diplomat in Islamabad agreed.

"It does fall into a pattern, unfortunately. It's not good news, it appears to be one of a series and one has to wonder how far it will go."

Previous attacks have included a car bomb blast that killed 11 French engineers and three Pakistanis in the southern city of Karachi on May 8 and another

outside the U.S. consulate on June 14 that killed 12 Pakistanis and wounded 20.

Mysterious red rain baffles scientists

AFP, Hanoi

Scientists in Vietnam are baffled why red coloured rain fell from the skies last week over the central province of Nghe An.

The downpour, which lasted 30 minutes, followed a large whirlwind that swept across the coastal Yen Thanh district earlier in the morning of July 29, said Nguyen Tri Hung, head of district's agricultural department.

"We don't know why it happened or what caused it. It is the first time it has ever happened here," he told AFP.

Around 3,000 people living in the area where the red-tinted rain fell were forced to clean out their tanks collecting rain water for drinking, fearing the droplets were toxic.

Water samples have been sent to laboratories in the provincial capital Vinh for further analysis, with results expected within a week.

India says no to talks with Pakistan at SAARC meet

AFP, New Delhi

India Tuesday ruled out talks with Pakistan on the sidelines of a regional meeting in Kathmandu later this month but said the upcoming polls in Indian Kashmir would be "the litmus test" of Islamabad's commitment to rein in Islamic militants in the disputed Himalayan region.

"Not a chance," a senior Indian government official said when asked if Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha would meet Pakistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Inamul Haq on the margins of a South Asian meet in Kathmandu on August 20-21.

"We are going to watch carefully. For us the litmus test will be what happens during elections in Kashmir," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said.

Other officials earlier this week said such a meeting between Sinha and Haq was a distinct possibility.

If elections are peaceful, "Islamabad will then have to provide evidence on the ground that it has ceased promoting terrorism in India," the official said, adding that this entailed Pakistan dismantling militant training camps and their communication networks.

India would look at the develop-

ments in "totality" and then decide about talks with Pakistan, he added.

"We are no longer prepared to hold talks if the attempt by Islamabad is to hold negotiations and at the same time reserve its option of aiding and abetting terrorism on Indian soil," the official said.

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

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.

The official however said he saw "no other way out" of India's present stand-off with Pakistan than through talks, but made it clear that Islamabad would first have to permanently end the infiltration of Islamic militants into Indian Kashmir and also dismantle their training camps.

"These are the pre-conditions for a dialogue," the official said, adding that Pakistan would have to implement these "visibly and decisively before we move towards de-escalation and dialogue."

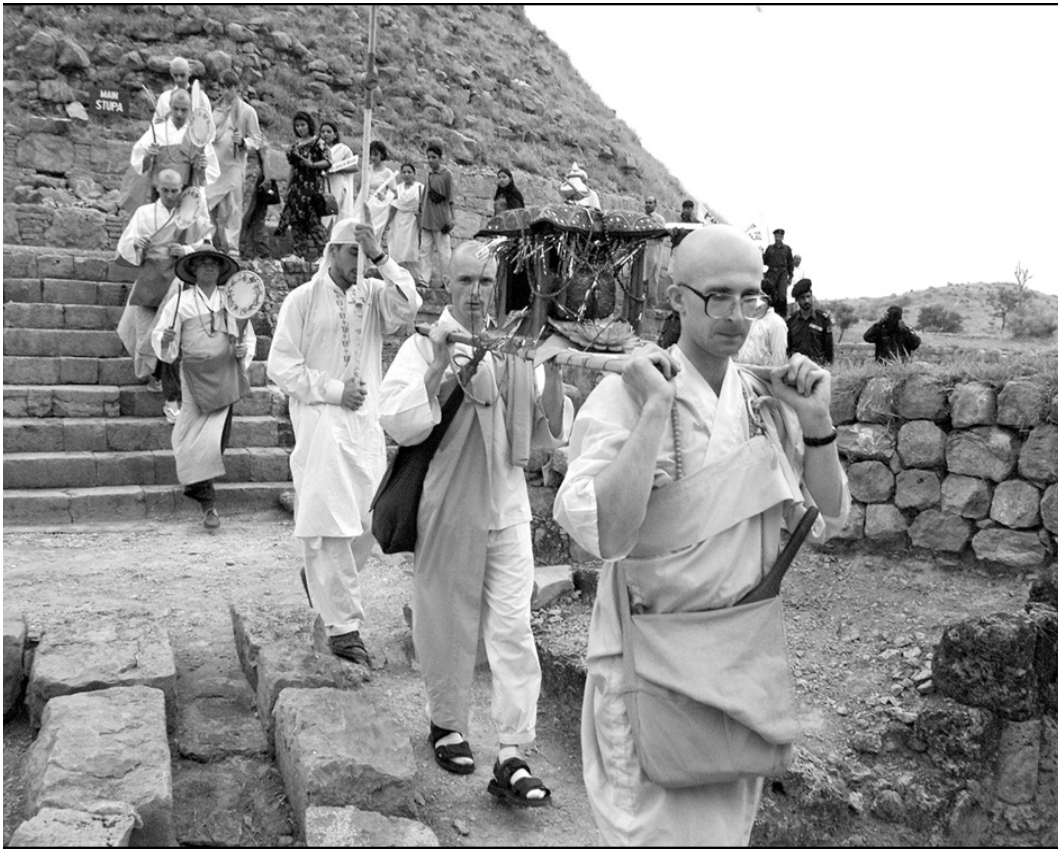


PHOTO: AFP

A group of Buddhist monks start their march for peace from Pakistan's historical Taxila city, a site of an ancient Buddhist centre, some 35 km from Islamabad on Tuesday. The Buddhist monks from Japan, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan started their three-month long peace march on the 53rd anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb, to urge the two arch rivals and nuclear capable India and Pakistan to avoid the horrors of atomic war.



PHOTO: AFP

Relatives of A-bomb victims who died in the atomic-bomb attack offer flowers at a monument in front of the A-bomb Dome in central Hiroshima on Tuesday. The 57th annual memorial service for the two hundred thousands victims was held at the Peace Memorial Park near the Dome.

Benazir down but not out

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf may have won the legal battle against Pakistan's self-exiled ex-premier Benazir Bhutto, but the country's charismatic first woman prime minister is far from finished politically, analysts said Tuesday.

"In legal terms the government has won and succeeded in keeping her out," political commentator Imtiaz Alam told AFP.

"It's dead," analyst Anees Jilani said of Benazir's much-vaunted bid to return from four years' exile to contest October 10 elections.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) announced Monday it was forming a new wing to contest the polls without her, but with her blessing in what analysts called an "11th hour decision" in order to qualify for the polls.

The move came after the latest in raft of "Benazir-specific" laws stumped her proclaimed defiance to contest the polls -- the first since a 1999 military takeover.

A law announced by military ruler President Pervez Musharraf on August 2 barred absconders from running for election or holding party office.

Benazir, twice-elected and twice-dismissed as prime minister between 1988 and 1996 and in self-



Since coming to power Musharraf has pledged to keep Benazir and fellow exiled prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who he deposed in 1999, out of politics, accusing both of plunder and misrule during their turbulent regimes.

Earlier laws including a July 6 decree forbidding former premiers from a third term in office, and a law requiring defendants to appear in person for trials, were also seen as "Benazir-specific" but the PPP had been confident of getting around them.

The ban on absconders meant, however, that the Election Commission would refuse to register the party, PPP officials said, hence they formed a "separate entity" called the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians. It registered on Tuesday.

Bhutto, 49, is still insisting from London she will return to contest the polls, but unless the PPP succeeds in its planned legal challenge to overturn the absconders ban, she is out of the election race, analysts agreed.

"Legally she will be disqualified," Jilani, a human rights lawyer, told AFP.

"Whether this law is upheld by the courts is up to the courts, but it's likely that it will be upheld, keeping in mind the past records of the courts."

But both said the legal hurdles would have little impact on her political future, citing Pakistan's chequered political history of civilian tussles with military dictatorships.

"During military regimes politicians had to work in very difficult conditions and by adopting very novel tactics to meet the requirements imposed by dictators," Alam said.

"Yet we've found that in the end they survived all the hurdles."