



Members of a leftist group with faces painted, hold locally-made fans with writings during a rally in front of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) headquarters in Manila on Saturday. The protesters are blaming the United States for the country's problems and accused Washington of standing against reforms at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

20 feared dead in Indonesian blast in boat

AFP, Jakarta

Twenty people are believed dead after an Indonesian passenger boat exploded in flames off Sulawesi, a local harbormaster said Saturday.

The KM Kenangan caught fire about half an hour after leaving the southern port of Baubau Friday night, Abdullah Arfah, a manager at the Baubau port, told AFP by telephone.

Arfah said 69 people were rescued and six are still being treated in hospital.

Of the nine crew aboard the vessel, seven are safe but two including the ship's captain remain unaccounted for, Arfah said, citing data gathered by a joint team of port workers, police and local residents.

Veerappan sends second cassette with demands

PTI, Bangalore

Forest brigand Veerappan holding former Karnataka minister H Nagappa hostage, has sent a new cassette which is presumed to contain demands for his release, official sources said on Friday.

It's the second cassette sent by the bandit since his gang abducted Nagappa from his farmhouse at Kamagera village in Chamara Nagar district bordering Tamil Nadu on Sunday night.

In the cassette sent on the day of kidnap, Veerappan had accused both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu governments of "cheating" him by not fulfilling his earlier demands and threatened to kill Nagappa if combing operations to nab him and rescue the hostage were launched.

EU ministers seek to cool US heat on Iraq

Action on Iraq not imminent: Britain

AFP, REUTERS, Elnore/London

EU foreign ministers sought Saturday to cool US sabre-rattling over Iraq, stressing the need for the UN to take the lead and welcoming a reduction of tone by the United States, diplomats said.

Gathered in Hamlet's Danish hometown of Elnore, ministers mostly remained tight-lipped as they arrived for a second day of informal talks in the relaxed atmosphere of a beach-side hotel just along from Hamlet's Kronborg Castle.

But aides said the debate on Iraq would likely focus on support for attempts to get UN weapons inspectors back into the country.

"I think there will be a general discussion and a declaration that we should follow the UN path," said one diplomat in the sidelines of the meeting. "It's important to let the UN work."

Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner was among the few ministers ready to talk to the press before the talks, which came after a first day of discussions Friday centred on EU enlargement.

She notably welcomed a softening of tone in the latest by speech by US Vice-President Dick Cheney.

"I welcome Mr Cheney's speech from yesterday not to proceed in a unilateral way. There has to be a close agreement between the UN

and the EU. It's absolutely necessary to keep the pressure on Iraq," she told reporters.

She added that a reported British proposal to set a deadline for Saddam Hussein did not appear to have garnered much support. "I don't think we will have a deadline that the idea of a deadline will become the common position of the EU."

Italian Minister Silvio Berlusconi also sought to cool concern that the US might act unilaterally against Iraq.

Reuters adds: The British government said on Saturday military action against Iraq was not imminent but pledged to recall parliament from its summer break to discuss the issue if a decision was taken to launch a strike.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw also said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein could act to reduce the threat of a U.S.-led military strike against him and his regime if he complied fully with international obligations set out by the U.N. Security Council.

"Military action is neither imminent, and it can be made far less than inevitable if Saddam Hussein complies with the clear United Nations Security Council obligations upon him," Straw told BBC radio.

"The option of using military force has to be there if there is a failure by Saddam Hussein to comply with the obligations."

EU adopts ME peace 'road map'

AFP, Elnore

EU foreign ministers gave "widespread support" Saturday for a Mideast peace plan notably seeking a Palestinian state by 2005, based on ideas by the EU, the US and Saudi Arabia, a spokesman said.

Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller, whose country currently holds the EU presidency, will travel to the Middle East from Monday to present the plan to regional leaders, said the spokesman.

"There was widespread support for the road map," said the official, adding that Moeller will travel this

coming week to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories, where he will meet Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

The three-stage plan will then be taken to a meeting of the so-called Quartet - the United States, the EU, Russia and the UN - scheduled in New York on September 16.

"A number of ministers stressed that the Israeli-Arab conflict contributes to fuelling some of the Islamic terrorist activities," added the official, speaking during a break in talks by foreign ministers.

"Ministers stressed the need for

Europeans to remain active," he said, adding that: "We hope that it will be adopted as a quartet road map" at the New York meeting.

According to a copy of the plan seen by AFP, the first stage of the EU plan would involve negotiations later this year, leading before the Palestinian elections next January to a security agreement allowing the withdrawal of Israeli forces from re-occupied Palestinian areas.

The second stage of the process "starts after Palestinian election in January 2003 and ends with the conclusion of an agreement on the creation of a Palestinian state with

provisional borders by August 2003."

The third phase of the plan, after August 2003, would involve a final phase of negotiations aimed at the formal creation of a full Palestinian state "with limited arms" by 2005, according to the Danish presidency document.

The EU foreign ministers held a first day of informal talks Friday focussed on EU enlargement. On Saturday they first discussed the Middle East road map, and were then to discuss Iraq and a row with the US over the international war crimes court.

Bad policies deprive Indians of clean water

AFP, Mumbai

Millions of Indians lack access to clean drinking water thanks to misguided government policies and serious mismanagement of resources, researchers say.

Around 35 percent to 50 percent of people living in slums get less than 10 litres of water each per day, and India's water reserves are continually contaminated with raw or partially treated sewage and runoff from urban and agricultural areas.

Mumbai, the country's financial hub, houses Asia's largest slum with a population of more than 500,000.

Of the city's 12 million-plus population, nearly 4.7 million

receive less than five litres of water each per day.

"The situation in rural areas is equally worrying," said Shyam R. Asolekar, an environmental researcher associated with the Indian Institute of Technology, a premier engineering institute.

"The availability of drinking water in rural areas has decreased from 82 percent in 1985 to 78.4 percent in 1993," Asolekar told AFP.

India's annual renewable water resources are around 350 million hectare metres (mhm) of which around 160 mhm finds its way into the sea. Of the remaining 190 mhm, 15 or so is stored in reservoirs behind big dams and two mhm in irrigation tanks.

The balance, 173 mhm, is held

within the land-mass as soil moisture and ground water.

Experts feel despite reasonable water resources, the water crisis is largely due to the government's focus on quantity rather than quality.

But the government's first new water policy in 15 years, released in April, does little to change this approach though water scarcity is emerging as a serious hindrance to economic development.

"The policy made in the backdrop of repeated droughts could have been reasonably expected to give a central thrust to long-term drought-prone area proofing. But it ignores this crucial issue," Mihir Shah, a specialist on water policy wrote in The Hindu newspaper.

Risk level	Actions taken
Low	Regular security training and assessment
Guarded	Review emergency response plan, launch public information campaigns
Elevated	Higher security at high-risk venues, coordination of emergency plans
High	Extra precautions at public events, possible venue changes, cancellations, Access to high-risk venues restricted
Severe	More emergency personnel assigned, Special teams mobilised, Greater control of transport network, Public, gov't, facilities closed

Source: US govt.

Laden's army could strike again at any time

AFP, Washington

The United States has delivered decisive blows against al-Qaeda in the year since the World Trade Centre towers were reduced to rubble but Osama bin Laden's terror network remains a force to be feared.

With bin Laden in hiding, US leaders have determined that attack is the best form of defence against the Islamic fundamentalist group which claimed the September 11 attacks and governments that it accuses of sponsoring terrorism.

Destroying al-Qaeda's main

base in Afghanistan and toppling the hardline Taliban government there was a major victory for President George W. Bush. But many al-Qaeda fighters are believed to have gone into hiding on the rugged Afghan-Pakistan border or to have taken refuge in Southeast Asia.

The US-led campaign in Afghanistan did weaken al-Qaeda. One laptop computer seized from the group yielded information on three planned attacks in Singapore.

And the arrest in Pakistan of a bin Laden lieutenant Abu Zubeida apparently gave the US Federal Bureau of Investigation a wealth of

information on the network's operations.

International detective work smashed al-Qaeda cells in Hamburg, Germany and the Italian city of Milan.

But the Bush administration admits that there is much more work to be done.

The enemy is elusive and well organised. Fanatical but patient, it can rebuild itself even when leaders are killed or disappear.

Bin Laden's whereabouts are unknown and a new attack on Western interests is a constant threat.

'US retains trust in Musharraf despite violence in Kashmir'

AFP, Washington

The United States has said it retains confidence in Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's ability to curb infiltration of Islamic militants into Indian-controlled Kashmir, despite new violence in the divided region.

It has also expressed the view that successful state elections planned in the scenic Himalayan region for September and October could pave the way for a resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan.

"Well, we do believe that President Musharraf is a man of his word and we're going to treat him as such and treat his word with all the care which it deserves," said US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, appearing late Friday on PBS's "HewesHour with Jim Lehrer" program.

He added, however, that only Musharraf and his close associates knew for sure what was being done to halt infiltration of Islamic separat-

ists into the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir, an area over which Indian and Pakistan have fought two out of the three wars they have fought since 1947.

The comments came after Armitage returned here from a tour of Asia, during which he visited Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, China, and Japan.

Much of the mission was focus on lowering tensions between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India, which have ebbed and flowed since June, when the two armies came eyeball to eyeball over Kashmir.

Both countries have amassed an estimated one million troops along their shared frontier.

India accuses Pakistan of arming, funding and training Islamic militants battling New Delhi's rule in Indian-controlled Kashmir, a charge Islamabad denies.

More than 36,500 people have died in the region since the beginning of the Muslim insurgency in

1989.

In June and July, a succession of high-level US visitors, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Armitage himself were able to secure from the Pakistani leader a public pledge to put an end to infiltration of militants into Indian Kashmir across the Line of Control.

But on Monday, Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha accused Pakistan of not doing enough to dismantle "terrorist infrastructure" in Kashmir.

Armitage acknowledged that incidents of violence were "on the upswing" in the region but expressed doubt as to whether Pakistan had the ability to establish an airtight security zone along the Line of Control.

He said that during his most recent talks with Musharraf, the Pakistani president reiterated his pledge to curb the infiltrations.

Farooq makes way for Omar in state politics

HINDUSTAN TIMES, Srinagar

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah said on Friday that he will not be a candidate in the forthcoming assembly elections in the state, effectively marking his retirement from state politics.

His son, Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah, will contest the elections from Ganderbal his father's constituency and will be the National Conference's (NC's) chief ministerial candidate.

Omar Abdullah said on Friday that his father will now try to get a Rajya Sabha seat.

Farooq Abdullah has thrice been elected from Ganderbal, which has been represented by the Abdullans since 1975.

Farooq Abdullah had first announced his plans for retirement at the end of July. He had then been persuaded by party leaders to rescind his decision and contest once more.

But Farooq Abdullah finally decided to quit politics to show his

colleagues the party could do without him. "(I quit) to give confidence to party men who felt that my quitting politics would harm the party," he said.

The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister will, however, be active in the election campaign. "Yes, I will campaign," he said.

Farooq Abdullah's decision to withdraw from active politics in the state is being seen as the logical culmination of a process that began on June 23 with Omar Abdullah taking over as NC president.

The first sign of Farooq Abdullah's retirement came when his name was dropped from the list of NC candidates for the second phase of polling, which was released on Friday.

Apart from the chief minister, the only minister whose name does not figure in this list is Agha Mahmood, the Minister of State for Education. He was dropped as the candidate from Beerwah, but is still being considered for the Budgam constituency.

No link between mobile phones, tumours

REUTERS, Sydney

A three-year study has found that radio emissions from mobile phones do not trigger the growth of tumours in mice and therefore probably do not do so in humans either, Australian researchers said on Friday in Sydney.

The research on 1,600 mice, by the Adelaide-based Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science, follows another Australian study on mice five years ago that concluded cellular phones could foster tumour growth.

The 1997 study fuelled consumer concern about the safety of mobile phones but the Adelaide scientists said they could not replicate the findings in their mice, half of which were genetically engineered to be extremely susceptible to tumours.

24 members of a family sentenced in India

PTI, Hisar

A local court has sentenced 24 members of a family, including five women, to various terms on the charge of murdering a resident of Bithmara village on July 12, 1998.

The court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Dharam Pal yesterday sentenced six persons to life imprisonment while 18 others has been sentenced to three years imprisonment in the case.

The court after hearing the case sentenced Mukesh, Sajjan Singh, Balwant Singh, Miyan Singh, Jagdish and Shishpal to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1000 each and in case of default of payment of fine they would further undergo imprisonment for six months.

Those sentenced to three years imprisonment are Munge Ram, Krishen Lal, Bhole, Sadhu Ram, Gheesa Ram, Lahu, Rampal, Raja, Banta Singh, Dheera, Teg Ram, Tek Chand, Bharte Devi, Chameli, Reshma, Kela Devi, Ram Piari and Sudha.

Sophia Loren makes triumphant return

AP, Venice

After years away, the elegant Sophia Loren returned to the Venice Film Festival, not as just another glitter-celebrity wagging for the paparazzi, but in the role she holds dearest of all: dotting mom.

The 67-year-old actress, whose looks and grace have seduced generations of fans, was on hand Friday to promote the feature-film debut of her director son, Edoardo Ponti. His picture "Between Strangers" also gets a boost from leading lady Mira Sorvino and French actor Gerard Depardieu but it's his mother's star turn in the picture that grabbed the attention here.

Working together was very emotional for me," Loren said Friday. "When I saw him on the first day of shooting and I was looking at him, I thought: I brought him to life and there he was, my best friend giving me the most beautiful judgment about how I should do a scene."

The thin-haired, bearded 29-

year-old Ponti offspring of Loren and her husband, producer Carlo Ponti smiled when his mother started sounding a little too motherly, noting how "terribly young" he is, then listing off her boy's fine traits: "very healthy, good principles, very eager to express himself, very intelligent, great sense of humor," she told a news conference.

"Always a mom," Ponti said with a grin.

Ponti's film, which he also wrote, tells the story of three women. Loren plays a frustrated artist thwarted by her husband, and she agonizes over having given up a baby for adoption when she was younger. "Between Strangers" is not in competition for any award, but nonetheless had much of the attention Friday on the second day of the festival.

"I was just trying to portray my mother as I saw her," Ponti said. "I don't know her as a movie star, I know her as the woman who woke me up for school."



Kathy Martin of central London cries as she lays flowers by the gates of the former home of Diana, Princess of Wales, Kensington Palace, in London on Saturday on the fifth anniversary of her death.



Italian actress Sophia Loren toasts with her son, movie director Edoardo Ponti in Venice, Italy, on Friday. Sophia Loren and Edoardo Ponti are in Venice to compete in the 59th Venice Film Festival with the movie "Between Strangers".