

'Palestinian territories largest jail in world'

AFP, Jerusalem

The British ambassador to Israel, Sherard Cowper-Coles, has told Israel that the Palestinian territories are the world's largest jail, where harassment and humiliation are rife, the daily Yediot Aharonot said Monday.

An official at the British embassy in Tel Aviv said the report was "generally accurate but also highly selective from a long conversation" which Cowper-Coles held with the Israeli general overseeing the administration of the occupied territories, Amos Gidat.

"The territories are the largest detention camp in the world, in which 3.5 million people live," the daily quoted the British diplomat as assaying.

Islamic parties flexible on US troops in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

The alliance of anti-US Islamic parties holding the balance of power in Pakistan's new parliament said Monday its opposition to the presence of US forces in the country was negotiable.

"We will show flexibility and we will take all the steps in the best national interest," the head of the fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) party Qazi Hussain Ahmed told AFP. "It's negotiable, yes negotiable" he said when asked about his party's policy on US troops operating out of Pakistani airbases and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents helping in the hunt for al-Qaida fugitives.

UK suspends N Ireland govt

AFP, Belfast

Britain suspended Northern Ireland's power-sharing government on Monday after allegations of an IRA spy ring plunged Belfast's fragile peace process into a fresh crisis.

John Reid, the British minister for the province, announced that direct rule of Northern Ireland would be reimposed from London for an undefined period beginning at midnight (2300 GMT). "We've reached an impasse. Hopefully it will be short-lived," he told a press conference.

Attack on Durga Puja Mandaps in Assam: 4 killed

AFP, Guwahati

Four people were killed and at least 22 wounded when militants launched two separate attacks on Hindus celebrating a festival in India's northeastern state of Assam, officials said Monday.

A police spokesman said the assailants arrived on motorbikes late Sunday and lobbed grenades at festival-goers at two religious venues in Assam's Bongaigaon district, some 200 km from the state capital Guwahati.

The first attack took place around 10:20 pm (1650 GMT) followed by another blast some five kilometers (three miles) away 30 minutes later when armed men lobbed grenades into crowds celebrating the Durga Puja, which honours the Hindu goddess Durga.

Several children were among those injured, some critically, in the attacks, a medical source said.

Kashmir CM should be from Cong: Azad

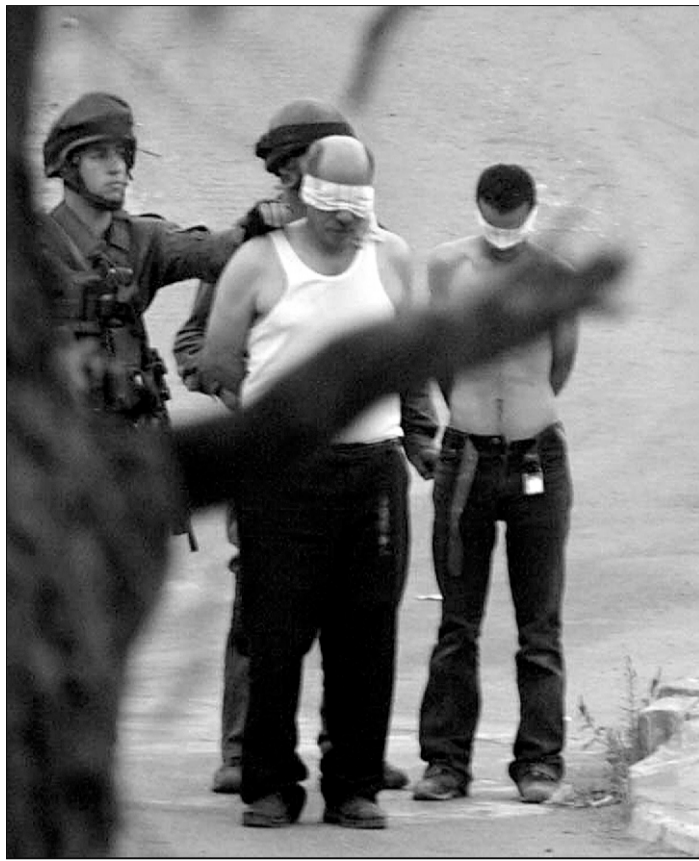
PTI, Srinagar

A day after Peoples Democratic Party chief Mufti Mohammad Sayeed staked his claim to chief ministership in the coalition, Congress on Monday said it wanted to head the government.

"Congress is in favour of heading the new government as it is a national party and could play a more positive role in restoring peace in the state", state congress chief Gulam Nabi Azad told reporters ahead of the newly elected party MLAs meeting to discuss PDP's insistence that it should head the government.

Congress has governments in 14 states and is the main opposition in Parliament, he said.

However, Azad said his party's efforts to work out a coalition with the People's Democratic Party to form the government in the state has not reached a deadlock.



Israeli soldiers lead Khaled Bakir (L), a senior official of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and another unidentified PFLP member upon their arrest in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Sunday. The army arrested Bakir after surrounding his house with a large number of military vehicles.

Palestinians asked to forget Arafat

Washington rebukes Tel Aviv

AFP, Paris

Israeli Defence Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer said Monday it was time to offer a new political perspective to the Palestinians - but not to Yasser Arafat who he described as a man of the past.

Speaking to Le Figaro newspaper at the start of a visit to France, Ben Eliezer said peace talks should be based on proposals made by former US President Bill Clinton which would see "97 percent of the territories" returned to Palestinian control.

"It is the moment for the Israeli government to offer a political horizon to the Palestinians. This will encourage everyone to come back to the negotiating table. Everyone except Arafat, because he won't agree to it," the minister said.

Ben Eliezer represents the Labour Party in the coalition government of Ariel Sharon, and is campaigning for the party leadership with an eye on elections due in November next year.

He told Le Figaro that Arafat was "the only one who has blocked everything over the last two years."

"He should be discarded. He is a man of the past. He will not abandon

the right of return of refugees, which would mean the end of Israel," the minister said.

Ben Eliezer admitted he had been frustrated in his efforts to allow Palestinian security forces free rein to control the Gaza strip. As a result Israel has been staging regular incursions into the territory.

"There are two choices. Either we get out of Gaza or we go in. I prefer to get out. To go in I need three divisions to clean up Gaza house by house. That could turn into hell. We wouldn't be going in to drink coffee, but to destroy the infrastructure of terror," he said.

Meanwhile, the White House has rebuked Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for the deaths of Palestinian civilians during recent Israeli military operations and for restricting movement in the occupied territories, the New York Times reported Monday.

The criticism, in a letter delivered on Friday by the US ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, comes just days before Sharon's planned visit to Washington later this week.

The letter, was reported in the Israeli press and confirmed by senior Israeli officials, according to the newspaper.

Bush's Iraq coalition lacks broad base

AP, Washington

President Bush promises to be at the helm of a "vast coalition" against Iraq. Unlike his father's 31-nation force for the Persian Gulf War, however, it is a coalition slow to gather and lacking in marquee players.

Bulgaria has anted up an airport. Romania guaranteed air bases and airspace rights to US fighter jets. Qatar is upgrading its al-Udeid air base and letting the Pentagon set up a command centre and pre-position armoured brigade equipment there.

If the lineup looks like small-fry now, some experts expect it not to be for long.

With Congress' overwhelming vote to authorise a military strike if necessary to disarm Iraq and remove President Saddam Hussein, the UN Security Council and skittish would-be coalition members will fall into line, said Bill Taylor, former director of National Security Studies at West Point.

"The ones who pay any attention to our democracy understand that the hand of the president is strengthened enormously by Congress going along," Taylor said.

"You're seeing the trickle right now, and he's having a much tougher time than his father, but he's going to pull it off."

Today's big bench-warmers Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Canada and others can be counted on to enlist if and when Bush commits the full force of the U.S. military to wiping out Saddam and his weapons programs, agreed Ivo Daalder, who was an adviser to President Clinton's National Security Council.

"Nobody wants to be left behind in a sure victory," Daalder said. For months, lawmakers in both parties, as well as Republican Party

elders, publicly worried over what looked like a go-it-alone strategy at the White House. The president has since underscored a group effort by the United States and "a lot of our friends."

"My intent is to put together a vast coalition of countries who understand the threat of Saddam Hussein," Bush said. "Many, many countries share our determination to confront this threat. We're not alone."

Pressed to name names, Bush and his aides say only that time will tell. No less than Canada suggests it will take some convincing.

The day before Bush spoke of leading a vast coalition, Canada split with the United States over the question of ousting Saddam and said the verdict was still out on whether Canada would take part in any US-led offensive.

In Operation Desert Storm, Canada deployed two destroyers and a supply ship to the Persian Gulf, and Canadian fighter jets flew bombing raids alongside the United States, Britain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, France, Italy, Bahrain and Qatar.

Then, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and an almost-instantaneous denunciation by the UN Security Council made coalition-building easy work for the first President Bush.

In the end, he had 31 nations helping to push back Saddam. Aside from the United States, the largest armed contingents came from Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and France. Turkey tied down Iraqi troops by deploying some 100,000 of its soldiers along the Turkish border with Iraq. Germany and Japan, legally barred from offensive warfare, provided billions of dollars to help defray war costs.

This time, U.S. allies are telling the current president they want proof Saddam is capable of a nuclear attack. And, led by France, most insist on the cover of a UN resolution demanding disarmament or else.

Asteroid blast could have sparked off Indo-Pak war

AFP, Washington

An asteroid which burned up in the earth's atmosphere in June could have triggered a mistaken nuclear war between India and Pakistan had it detonated over South Asia, a report said Sunday.

The New York Times quoted Brigadier General Simon Worden, deputy director of US Strategic Command, as saying that the asteroid sizzled with a burst of energy comparable to the Hiroshima atomic bomb over the Mediterranean.

He was quoted as saying that US early warning satellites detected the flash of energy released by the small asteroid, a so-called near earth object, or NEO, on June 6.

Had the detonation taken place over South Asia, where nuclear armed rivals India and Pakistan were poised on the verge of war, it could have sparked disaster, Worden was quoted as telling a House of Representatives Science subcommittee.

"Imagine that the bright flash accompanied by a damaging shock-wave had occurred over India and Pakistan," he was quoted as saying.

Families search for loved ones in Bali

REUTERS, Bali

Anxious families and friends hunted for loved ones on the Indonesian resort island of Bali on Monday after bomb blasts killed at least 183 revellers, mostly young Westerners, in a popular nightclub strip.

The worst act of terror since the September 11 attacks on the United States heightened fears the al-Qaida network, scattered from Afghanistan, was regrouping and planning more assaults.

It raised pressure on Indonesia to respond to repeated urgings from the United States, Australia, Singapore and other Asian neighbors to drop its complacency and crack down on militant Islamic groups.

Many Indonesians appeared stunned at the carnage on the "island of the gods" -- a Hindu enclave in a moderate Muslim nation that had been cocooned from the violence and unrest that has engulfed the country since former strongman Suharto was toppled nearly five years ago.

"Innocence Lost," mourned a headline in the Jakarta Post.

Australian C-130 Hercules

Bali death toll		
Reportedly among the more than 180 killed in Saturday's car bomb attack		
	Australia	14 dead
	Britain	33 dead
	Ecuador	1 dead
	Germany	1 dead
	Indonesia	9 dead
	Netherlands	1 dead
	Switzerland	1 dead
	United States	2 dead

Other countries with missing and injured nationals: Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan

airforce planes flew through the night to evacuate injured

Australians, many of them burned and maimed after a suspected car bomb outside the Sari nightclub on Kuta Beach ignited an inferno late on Saturday night. Some 200 were

airlifted to the northern city of Darwin.

Kuta is a playground for young Australians who flock to its white beaches for the sun and surf, and spend the night partying in a row of bars and discotheques.

India to pull back troops from Kashmir border

AFP, New Delhi

India is likely to pull back some troops from its mountainous Kashmiri frontier with Pakistan to the north while keeping defences high along its western desert border, analysts said Monday.

Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani announced Sunday that India's National Security Council advisory board was to meet Wednesday to review the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops on India's volatile borders with Pakistan following an attack last December by gunmen on India's parliament.

"There is no surprise in Advani's announcement as a de-escalation of troops was on the cards after the Kashmir elections," said Rahul Bedi, an expert from Jane's Defence Weekly.

Defence Minister George Fernandes had repeatedly said the

troops would remain in Kashmir at least until the end of elections in the Indian zone of the restive Himalayan region.

"However, India is unhappy with the fact that there has been no let-up in militant activity on the ground as borne out by the violence seen during the elections," Bedi added.

More than 830 people were killed during the four-phased poll in Indian Kashmir that began September 16 and ended October 8, with militants New Delhi claims are sponsored by Islamabad daily attacking polling stations, candidates, security forces and civilians.

Other analysts believe India would now begin withdrawing troops from Kashmir to show its commitment to de-escalating tensions with its arch-rival that almost spilled into full-scale war in May when militants massacred Indian soldiers and their families in the

south of Kashmir.

They also pointed out that with winter starting to set in, the ability of militants to use Himalayan mountain routes to infiltrate India would be severely reduced, enabling a lesser deployment of those trying to keep them out.

Violence also spilled last month into India's western state of Gujarat, where two militants attacked the Akshardham Hindu temple in the city of Gandhinagar on September 24, killing 31 people before they were gunned down by security forces.

Officials in Jodhpur in the desert state of Rajasthan said the attack on the temple and upcoming polls in Gujarat would ensure the army "keep a vigil" on India's 1,050-kilometre (650-mile) western border with Pakistan.

KSA won't assist US in Iraq attack

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia, Washington's main ally in the Gulf, will not render "any assistance" to a planned US military offensive against neighbouring Iraq, the defence minister said in remarks published Monday.

"Saudi Arabia will provide no assistance in any strikes against Iraq," Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz said in comments published in the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper.

"The kingdom has a special status in the Arab and Muslim worlds as it is home to the two holy mosques (in Mecca and Medina) and will not sacrifice this status for the sake of anyone," the prince said.

Prince Sultan however urged Baghdad "not to provide the opportunity to anyone to find the justification for launching a military offensive against Iraq."

Laden hails operations in Kuwait, Yemen

AFP, Dubai

Osama bin Laden, head of the al-Qaida terror network, congratulated the Islamic world on Monday over the "heroic operations" undertaken by "fighters" in Kuwait and Yemen, two Islamist websites reported.

"We congratulate our Islamic world for the heroic operations of courageous jihad carried out by its pious fighter children in Yemen, against the tanker of the crusaders, and in Kuwait, against the American invasion and occupation forces," said a message signed "Osama bin Mohammed bin Laden, your brother."

It referred to the October 6 blast that crippled a French supertanker off the coast of Yemen and Tuesday's attack on the Kuwaiti island of Failaka by two Kuwaitis that left one US marine dead and another injured.

Rebels kill 52 villagers in Uganda

AFP, Kampala

At least 52 villagers were massacred in northern Uganda at the weekend by rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a military spokesman told AFP on Monday.

Northern Uganda-based army spokesman Lieutenant Paddy Ankuda said LRA rebels attacked the village of Laponi, in Pader district's Agago county, and hacked to death some 18 people.

The rebels then herded another 34 villagers their grass-thatched huts before setting them ablaze.

No independent sources could be reached to give details on the incident, which occurred Saturday night.

Kuwait uncovers al-Qaida cell following attack on US troops

AFP, Kuwait City

US forces in Kuwait were involved in a shooting incident Monday for the third time in a week as the Gulf emirate uncovered an extremist cell with links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network following the killing of one marine.

"Shots were fired from two unidentified civilian sports utility vehicles at a United States military units near a northern Kuwait training area today," the US embassy here said in a statement.

"The incident was reported to occur at approximately 7:50 am (0450 GMT). The US military units did not return fire; the units reported no injury," the embassy said.

Ivory Coast rebels capture another city

AP, Bouafile

Rebel fighters captured a major city in Ivory Coast's cocoa belt Sunday, dealing a heavy blow to the government even as peace envoys reported progress in talks to end the fighting.

The fall of Daloa, a western city of 160,000 people, was a key victory for the rebels because it is the heartland of embattled Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo's Bete tribe. Frightened residents said rebels told them they planned to continue south toward Gbagbo's home village.

Residents reported heavy gunfire and one man said he saw heavily armed rebels riding around in four-wheel-drive vehicles. The French military, stationed in Ivory Coast to protect foreign nationals and provide logistical support to Ivorian forces, confirmed that Daloa had fallen.



Newly appointed Ambassador of Bangladesh to Japan Serajul Islam is presenting his credentials to Japanese Emperor Akihito in a recently taken picture.