



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian family wakes up inside a makeshift shelter set up in the Brazil neighbourhood after losing their home which was demolished by the Israeli army during "Operation Rainbow" in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah yesterday. A three-and-a-half-year-old Palestinian girl was shot dead on day five of the Israeli army's offensive as angry residents returned to their ruined homes after a partial withdrawal of Israeli troops.

UN official tours Rafah to see destruction

AFP, Rafah

A Palestinian girl was shot dead Saturday in Rafah on day five of Israel's offensive in southern Gaza, as angry residents surveyed their ruined homes following a partial withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Rwan Abu Zaid, aged three-and-a-half, died of gunshot wounds to the head at her home in Rafah's devastated Brazil neighbourhood, the head of Rafah's main hospital told AFP. The Israeli army said it was verifying the report.

Her death brought to 43 the number of Palestinians killed since the start of Israel's "Operation Rainbow" on Tuesday with the aim of arresting militants and smashing weapons smuggling -- an offensive that has drawn widespread international criticism.

The Israeli army withdrew from several areas of Rafah on Friday in what it called a "redeployment" amid the global outcry, leaving behind streets cluttered with the ruins of dozens of homes razed since the raid began.

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), Peter Hansen, toured the Brazil neighbourhood of Rafah on Saturday, talking with angry residents amid the chunks of concrete that were once their homes.

Coalition troops, Sadr militias quit Karbala

AFP, Karbala

Coalition troops and the militia of Moqtada Sadr withdrew from the centre of the holy city of Karbala yesterday, more than a month after the radical Shia cleric launched an uprising in Iraq.

Ali al-Kazali, a high-ranking member of Sadr's Mehdi Army confirmed that fighters had laid down their arms, following weeks of efforts by Iraqi tribal and religious leaders to negotiate a truce with the militia.

"We have decided to remove all the (Mehdi) army presence from the centre of the city as we are waiting for the agreement with the other side to be finalised this afternoon," Kazali told AFP.

No military presence, either armed militiamen, or coalition troops could be seen in the centre of the city, 110km south of Baghdad.

All that was left was a scene of utter devastation where the heaviest fighting had taken place.

The area around the Mokhayam mosque, next to the shrine of Imam Hussein, one of the world's holiest spots for Shia Muslims, was a skeleton of its past.

Buildings were gutted, walls

blown off and businesses reduced to towering piles of rubble, as twisted wires spewed out of the wreckage.

Hotel owners and businessmen whose livelihoods had been wrecked in intense, almost nightly bombardments, ventured out to sift through the rubble, vainly trying to salvage valuables in the war-zone chaos.

One man, whose hotel was completely destroyed, could barely contain his rage. It was his misfortune that his business backed onto a Mehdi Army bastion.

"I blame both sides. I blame the savage of the Americans and the irresponsibility of the militiamen," Nazem Hamid told AFP.

Amid the debris, he tried to tug mattresses, odd bits of furniture,

pots and pans from the wreckage and turf them into a waiting pick-up truck.

Nowhere could any military presence be seen.

Sadr's militiamen, who had brandished their weapons only days before, now walked obliquely through the streets, trying to blend in with civilians.

The southern gates to the Imam

Hussein shrine, linking it to the Mokhayam area, had also been reopened.

Hopes that a deal would be shored up later Saturday follow weeks of efforts by Iraqi tribal and religious leaders to persuade Sadr's private army to lay down their arms.

The US-led coalition has repeatedly refused to negotiate directly with Sadr, who is wanted in connection with the rival murder of a cleric last year, demanding instead that he face justice and disband his militia.

The retreat comes just one day after nine Iraqis were killed and 10 others wounded in overnight clashes in Karbala and the other main Shia holy city of Najaf, and more than 2,000 people demonstrated here Friday against the militia.

They had left the Imam Hussein mausoleum, led by representatives of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the top Shia cleric in Iraq, with banners saying "Karbala is a city of peace, leave your weapons."

The protestors chanted "no, no to bloodshed" and "yes, yes to the Hawza", the highest Shia religious authority in Iraq.

Congress set to keep 'Big 3' for itself

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New Delhi

In the wake of the continuing game of political brinkmanship involving the Congress and its allies for key ministerial berths, a blurred picture of the Manmohan Singh ministry has emerged.

In its capacity as the leader of the United Progressive Alliance, the Congress is set to keep for its own nominees the Big Three ministries. Pranab Mukherjee is tipped to get the ministry of home affairs while Natwar Singh would get the external affairs ministry, party sources said.

Dr Manmohan Singh might keep the finance portfolio with himself, at least until the budget session of Parliament.

Otherwise, P Chidambaram is a front-runner for the finance ministry. Sources said that Chidambaram could be Dr Singh's choice also for this portfolio. Apart from being the finance minister in the Congress-backed United Front government during 1996-98, Mr Chidambaram was also an architect of the UF government's common minimum programme that was also drafted by the CPI(M) Sitaram Yechury.

Arjun Singh is likely to be allotted the HRD ministry with the civil aviation going to Ghulam Nabi

Azad. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi might get the parliamentary affairs ministry while Kapil Sibal and S Jaipal Reddy are strong contenders for law and information and broadcasting portfolios respectively.

The rough formula for sharing power in the government being 3-4 MPs plus a "leader's stature", Sharad Pawar is likely to get the defence portfolio and a couple of other ministries, given that his NCP has nine MPs.

Laloo Prasad Yadav's hope of becoming the home minister might be dashed, but his RJD with 21 MPs is all set to be richly rewarded with about half-a-dozen ministries, including railways, agriculture, food and civil supplies, coal, and MOS, home.

The Lok Janshakti Party leader, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, is poised to corner the telecommunication ministry.

The DMK with 16 MPs will also get some crucial economic ministries, including commerce, petroleum and natural gas and surface transport. Apart from T R Baalu, who is likely to get environment and forests, Dayanidhi Maran and A. Raja are to be inducted into the ministry. The PMK with six MPs could corner two portfolios, including a MOS for railways.

Iran gives UN second 'full' nuclear dossier

AP, Vienna

Iran said on Saturday it gave the UN nuclear watchdog what it described as a full declaration of its atomic program, which Washington says is a front for building an atom bomb.

Iran, which insists its atomic program is dedicated to the peaceful generation of electricity, gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a similar "full" declaration in October 2003.

However, the October declaration omitted details about potentially weapons-related research, including designs and components for advanced "P2" centrifuges capable of producing bomb-grade uranium.

"Yesterday, we submitted the declaration prior to the due date of June 18," Iran's ambassador to the United Nations in Vienna, Pirooz Hosseini, told Reuters.

Asked if this declaration was full and truthful, Hosseini said: "Yes."

But one Western diplomat, who declined to be named, said IAEA inspections should continue until the declaration can be verified.

"I think the fact that they already submitted a declaration that was supposedly full and complete but clearly wasn't...means that intensive inspections should continue for at least the foreseeable future," the diplomat told Reuters.

Relatives of kidnapped Japanese to return

Koizumi holds summit talks with Kim

AP, Pyongyang

North Korea agreed yesterday to release five family members of Japanese citizens kidnapped by Northern agents, a Japanese government official said after a summit between the two countries' leaders.

American Charles Jenkins, a former US soldier accused of abandoning his unit in 1965, is married to one of the Japanese who were kidnapped and allowed to return home in 2002. He refused to return, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said. He could face extradition to the United States if he leaves the North.

What would happen to two other family members was not known.

The decision came after Koizumi met in Pyongyang with Northern leader Kim Jong Il their first meeting since September 2002. Kyodo had quoted Kim as telling Koizumi that he could take the family members back with him on Saturday or afterward.

After that announcement, a Japanese official said Japan agreed to extend 250,000 tons of food aid to North Korea, and \$10 million worth of medical supplies and humanitarian aid.

The agreement marked a break-

through in relations between North Korea and Japan. Talks on normalising ties have been stalled by a stalemate over the fate of the family members.

Koizumi said Japan and North Korea must normalize their "abnormal" relations.

North Korea admitted in 2002 to kidnapping 13 Japanese citizens in the 1980s and 70s. Pyongyang said that eight had died, but allowed the five survivors to return to Japan without their families in 2002.

Japan had pressed since then for the release of the eight family members left behind: seven children and Jenkins.

The former abductees gathered in Tokyo Friday to prepare to welcome their families home, expressing high hopes that their ordeal was finally coming to an end. They also urged Koizumi to find out more information about kidnapping victims who have died or are still unaccounted for.

At a news conference Saturday, the former kidnapping victims were asked about their preparations to receive their relatives if Koizumi manages to win a quick release.

UN panel seeks US, UK's explanation on abuse

AFP, Geneva

The UN's top anti-torture panel Friday demanded a formal explanation from the United States and Britain about the mistreatment of Iraqi detainees in jails run by coalition forces in Iraq, the panel's head said.

The chairman of the UN Committee against Torture, Fernando Marin Menendez, revealed that Washington was three years late in submitting to compulsory international scrutiny measures taken to prevent torture and mistreatment in the United States.

The 135 countries that have ratified the International Convention Against Torture are obliged to report to the United Nations committee every four years. It then holds public

hearings cross-examining officials from the country.

The panel of 10 experts oversees the treaty, which outlaws torture or cruel humane and degrading treatment.

The United States last appeared before the committee in 1999, and had failed to submit a report due in 2001, Marino Menendez told journalists.

In a letter to the US ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Kevin Moley, the committee demanded that Washington submit its periodic report by October 1.

"This report must contain up to date information on the situation on places of detention in Iraq," the letter read out in Spanish by Marino Menendez said.

C'wealth FMs debating Pakistan's return

AFP, London

Foreign ministers and officials from nine Commonwealth nations resumed a two-day meeting in London yesterday that could see Pakistan back inside the 53-nation club after five years in the diplomatic cold.

The Commonwealth's Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) was debating whether to readmit Pakistan, the world's second largest Muslim country, after it was suspended over an October 1999 bloodless coup by army chief-turned-president General Pervez Musharraf.

It began its work Friday over dinner. The outcome was expected to be announced later in the day, diplomats involved in the meeting told AFP.

'Muslims upset with US over treatment'

AFP, Washington

Islamic nations are upset with the United States for alleged shabby treatment of Muslim tourists and students as Washington stepped up anti-terror measures, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said Friday.

He said he raised the matter with US Secretary of State Colin Powell during talks in Washington.

"I said: 'Mr Secretary, the time will soon come when Muslims will not wish to enter the United States as tourists, the time has come when Muslim students do not wish to come to the United States'."

"So are you going to do something about it?"

He said Powell told him he understood the problem and was striving to resolve it.

Kasuri said he had also raised the issue with Powell previously and that the Secretary of State had brought it to the attention of President George W. Bush.

"I, as a friend, pointed out that, you know, it is humiliating to visit the United States these days."

Kasuri said his government might come under pressure at home to "treat the Americans the way they treat Pakistanis when they land at American airports."

The Pakistan minister was answering a question at a forum where a Muslim US citizen complained about rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States.

Kasuri said he had received feedback from Muslim leaders they were upset about the treatment accorded to their citizens visiting the United States.



Editors of the leading newspapers from Asia and Europe held a meeting with Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra at his office in Bangkok yesterday. Picture shows Thai PM making a point to the editors.

'Dog use was approved at Abu Ghraib prison'

AFP, Washington

The use of dogs to intimidate Iraqis during interrogation at Abu Ghraib prison was approved by military intelligence officers and was one of several tactics they used even without approval from their commanders, The New York Times reported yesterday.

Citing interviews gathered by US Army investigators and a Red Cross document, the newspaper said intelligence officers also demanded strict limits on Red Cross access to prisoners as early as last October, delaying for a day what the military had previously described as an unannounced visit to the cellblock where the worst abuses occurred.

The documents assembled by Army investigators starting in January and obtained by The Times cite accounts by US dog handlers who say the use of military working

dogs in interrogations at Abu Ghraib was approved by Colonel Thomas Pappas, commander of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade.

Previously, Pentagon and Army officials have said that only the top American commander, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, could have approved the use of the animals for interrogations, the paper said.

A "memorandum for the record" issued on October 9 by the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center at the prison listed as permissible a number of interrogation procedures that Army officials have said were allowed only with approval from General Sanchez, the report said.

Among other things, the memorandum said the use of dogs in interrogations and the confining of prisoners to isolation cells was permitted in some cases without a prior approval from General Sanchez, The Times said.

Spain's royal wedding sparkles in the rain

REUTERS, Madrid



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish Crown Prince Felipe of Bourbon stands next to his bride former journalist Letizia Ortiz during their wedding ceremony at Madrid's Almudena Cathedral yesterday.

Spain's Crown Prince Felipe married former television presenter Letizia Ortiz yesterday in a glittering ceremony symbolising a new dawn for Spain two months after the deadly Madrid train bombings.

A torrential downpour began just as Letizia prepared to enter the cathedral in a fitted wedding gown with a 15-foot train, a conservative V-shaped neckline and a high collar. The tiara had been worn by Felipe's mother Queen Sofia at her wedding.

The heavy rain forced the bride to arrive in a Rolls Royce rather than walk along the red carpet from the Royal Palace to the adjacent Roman Catholic Almudena Cathedral, as others in the wedding party had done.

"Letizia, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity to you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," the dashing prince said, at one point forgetting his lines, in a traditional exchange of vows.

The televised ceremony was beamed to more than a billion people worldwide.