

Nuclear terrorism a real threat: IAEA

World faces race against time to prevent attack

REUTERS, Sydney

The world faces a "race against time" to prevent nuclear terrorism, the United Nations nuclear watchdog chief said yesterday, citing an extensive illicit market in nuclear and radioactive materials after the Sept. 11 attacks.

More than 24 companies or individuals were engaged in the sale of nuclear materials and more than 60 incidents of trafficking in nuclear or other radioactive material are expected this year, said Mohamed ElBaradei, who heads the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"The threat of nuclear terrorism is real and current," he told reporters at a Sydney conference on nuclear proliferation and terror.

"We need to do all we can to work on the new phenomena called nuclear terrorism, which was sprung on us after 9/11 when we realized terrorists had become more sophisticated and had shown an interest in nuclear and radioactive material," ElBaradei said.

Undeclared nuclear programs discovered in Iran, Libya, Iraq and North Korea proved the existence of an extensive illicit market for the supply of nuclear items, he said.

There were 60 trafficking incidents last year, bringing the total in the past decade to 630, and the annual tally was expected to rise this year, ElBaradei said.

"We have a race against time because this was something we were not prepared for."

Much of the nuclear hardware in question had dual uses outside of nuclear weapons so trying to control exports of technology was not

enough to control proliferation, he said.

"Clearly it is time to change our assumptions regarding the inaccessibility of nuclear technology. The technical barriers to mastering the essential steps of uranium enrichment, and to designing weapons, have eroded over time," ElBaradei said.

ElBaradei urged the international community to adopt measures to control sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle, which he listed as enriched uranium and the reprocessing of plutonium.

The IAEA saw four potential nuclear terror threats: the theft of a nuclear weapon; the creation of a nuclear bomb using stolen materials; the spread of radioactive material; and an attack on a nuclear facility or transport vehicle.

India ready to look at all options for peace in Kashmir: Manmohan

AFP, New Delhi

India is willing to "look at all options" to resolve New Delhi's bitter dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in an interview published yesterday.

"So long as Pakistan remains committed (to ending cross-border terrorism) we are willing to look at all possible ways of resolving issues including Jammu and Kashmir," Singh told the Financial Times.

"I think we are willing to look at all options to think about a new chapter and a new beginning."

His comments follow a formula outlined publicly by Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf last month to resolve the Kashmir dispute which has triggered two of the three wars between the nuclear rivals since 1947.

It involves determining the

ethnic and geographic make-up of Kashmir, demilitarisation of all or some of these regions followed by changes to their "status."

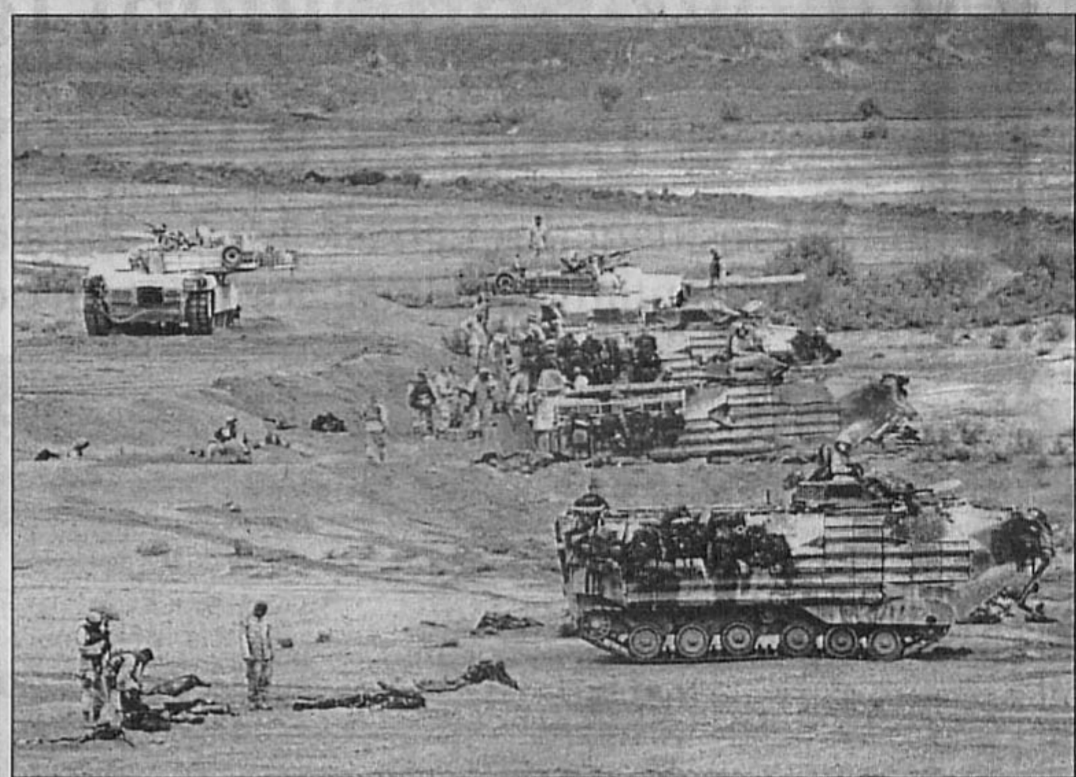
"Change in status could be independent status, condominium which includes joint control, it can be UN mandate also," Musharraf said.

Musharraf withdrew Pakistan's long-held demand for a plebiscite for the Kashmiri people to decide their own fate.

India accuses Pakistan of stoking a 16-year-old insurgency against New Delhi's rule in Kashmir that has killed more than 40,000 people.

New Delhi says hundreds of Islamic militants regularly cross the border from Pakistan into Indian-controlled Kashmir, a charge Islamabad denies.

Both sides are now in the midst of peace talks which started this year after coming to the brink of war in 2002.



US soldiers gather on the outskirts of the restive city of Fallujah yesterday, 50 kms west of Baghdad. US and Iraqi forces rolled into the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah early yesterday, taking a hospital and two bridges as US warplanes struck rebel targets around the city.



Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Ben Bot (L) and Dutch Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende (C) greet Indian Premier Manmohan Singh yesterday in The Hague. Singh arrived in the Hague yesterday for a summit with the Dutch EU presidency and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana intended to firm up the strategic partnership between the European Union and India.

EU-India summit starts in Netherlands

AFP, The Hague

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh arrived in The Hague yesterday for a summit with the Dutch EU presidency and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana intended to firm up the strategic partnership between the European Union and India.

Counter-terrorism efforts and trade were also in focus at the fifth India-EU summit.

The EU wants to bring its relationship with India to "the same parity, density and quality" as it has with the United States, Canada, China, Russia and Japan, an EU official said last week.

On Sunday before leaving for the Netherlands Singh said the EU's hopes for closer relations showed that it recognized India's growing stature and influence.

"Our relations are based on shared values -- democracy, pluralism, rule of law and free press," Singh said Sunday.

"Our partnership has evolved over the years from economic and development cooperation to a

broad-based engagement on a wide range of issues -- globalisation, terrorism, proliferation, energy and environment," he added.

A senior European Commission source told journalists last week that the strategic partnership was a sign that India is gaining real importance for the EU.

"Before we looked more to China, and saw India rather as a leader in the developing world. Now it's an equal partner," the source said.

The EU also hopes that by taking its partnership with India to a higher level, it can indirectly encourage progress on India's Kashmir dispute with Pakistan and other regional headaches such as Nepal's Maoist rebellion.

"If you encourage India towards modernisation... you push India towards stabilising its region," the source explained.

Singh was also due to hold talks separately with his Netherlands counterpart Jan Peter Balkenende and call on Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.

Series of attacks on Muslim targets in Netherlands

AP, Amsterdam

Arsonists and vandals angered over the alleged Muslim-inspired slaying of a controversial Dutch filmmaker have conducted a series of attacks on Islamic targets, including attempts to burn down two mosques, Dutch media reported Sunday.

Eight suspected Islamic extremists have been arrested in connection with Tuesday's slaying of Theo van Gogh, who earlier this year released a film critical of Islam's treatment of women. Among those arrested was the alleged 26-year-old killer, identified only as Mohammed B.

Though mainstream Muslim groups condemned the killing, it has caused an outpouring of anger in the Netherlands.

Vandals threw red paint Saturday night on an Amsterdam center that assists immigrants, many of them Muslim. Abdou Menebbi, director of the Emceco center, several blocks from the spot where Van Gogh was killed, told AT5 television he "assumed the vandalism was done by a racist group of some kind."

US forces ban men's entry or exit from Fallujah

AFP, AP, Near Fallujah

US troops yesterday banned men aged from 15 to 50 from entering or leaving the Iraqi rebel-held city of Fallujah, warning they could become a target, ahead of an expected all-out military offensive.

Women and children will be allowed to leave the city but cannot return until "order is restored," the US military said, according to an AFP photographer with the troops.

"Attention, attention! All men aged between 15 and 50 are forbidden from entering or exiting (the area)," loud-speakers on top of US military vehicles declared in Arabic as they drove around the outskirts of the city.

"If they do, they will become a target," the military warned. "Only women and children are allowed to leave on condition that they do not return until order is restored."

About 20,000 US and Iraqi troops are outside the city poised for an expected full-scale assault to wrest control of the rebel enclave, which the "American forces" claim "is an operating base for insurgents such as top al-Qaeda militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

The US military has sealed off all entrances to Fallujah, which lies west of Baghdad, and the surrounding areas.

Combat helicopters were flying over the city to detect anyone violating the rules, which were imposed after the interim government declared a state of emergency in most of Iraq on Sunday.

According to the US military, only 10 to 20 percent of Fallujah's 300,000-strong population remain in the city after a mass exodus by residents fearing a military onslaught.

Earlier US forces stormed into the western outskirts of Fallujah early yesterday, seizing the main city hospital and securing two key bridges over the Euphrates river in what appeared to be the first stage of the long-expected assault on the insurgent stronghold.

An AC-130 gunship raked the city with 40 mm cannon fire as explosions from US artillery lit up the night sky.

Peace talks may resume in post-Arafat era: Mofaz

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel could resume peace talks with a "pragmatic" Palestinian leadership which could emerge in the event of Yasser Arafat's death, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said yesterday.

"In the light of the developments that are unfolding before our eyes, I cannot rule out the possibility of seeing a new and pragmatic leadership emerging in the Palestinian camp in the next few months," Mofaz told public radio.

This new leadership should be "legitimate in the eyes of the Palestinian people, get results from its policies against terrorism and carry out reforms, as the roadmap requires it to do," the minister said.

Israel "could open a dialogue with such a leadership," he concluded.

"It may be possible that disengagement creates the conditions for a resumption of negotiations, and co-existence in the future," Mofaz said, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan.

While the plan has proved con-

tentious in Israel for its proposal to pull out of the Gaza Strip, Sharon also sees it as a way of strengthening control over parts of the West Bank where the vast majority of 250,000 Jewish settlers live.

The United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations -- the so-called Middle East diplomatic quartet -- are the sponsors of the troubled roadmap that foresees the creation of a Palestinian state in 2005.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom expressed hope yesterday that a more moderate Palestinian leadership would emerge if Yasser Arafat dies, and said his government would be waiting to work with it.

At a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing, Shalom reaffirmed Israel's commitment to the "road map" towards a Middle East peace settlement. But he blasted the Palestinian authorities for what he called their failure to curb terrorism.

"I reaffirmed to my colleague Israel's commitment to the road map and to find a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict," Shalom told reporters.

'Moral values a surprise factor in Bush victory'

AFP, Washington

Conservative "moral values" played an unexpectedly decisive role in President George W. Bush's victory in the US presidential election, experts say.

According to exit polls, moral values topped the list of issues that most influenced voters, beating out the topics most bandied about by pundits in the lead-up to the vote -- the economy and terrorism.

And the voters who cited values as their top priority overwhelmingly voted for Republican George W. Bush over Democrat John Kerry, by 80 to 18 percent, the figures showed.

Bush's political strategist Karl Rove said Sunday Bush would continue to push for a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage during his second term in office, giving back to the conservative voters who helped keep him in the White House.

For conservatives, the term "moral values" is code for opposition to abortion and gay marriage, among other issues. Observers were surprised by the extent to which those issues rallied voters.

"I think a lot of us who do political analysis just missed it entirely," said Eric Davis, professor of political science at Middlebury College in Vermont.

"I think we were using conventional frames of reference, economic policy, foreign policy. The Bush campaign did a very good job of mobilizing voters who are concerned about gay marriage, abortion, prayer in the schools and gun control," he said.

The movement was invisible to political scientists following the election because "it was based in churches," he said.

"That was probably the biggest surprise of the election. What it turned out to be was Bush's two issues, which were terrorism and moral values, trumping Kerry's two issues, which were Iraq and the economy," said Stephen Hess, a political expert at the Brookings Institution.

"Protestant evangelicals and pentecostals voted in much heavier numbers than they had in the past," he said. Overall, turnout was heavier than at any time since 1968, with close to 60 percent of eligible voters casting ballots.



A pillager with his loot on his head passes a French soldier from Operation Licorne, part of a UN peacekeeping force in Ivory Coast, as he guards Sunday the De Gaulle bridge in Abidjan during operations to evacuate French and foreign nationals to the United Nations peacekeeping mission (ONUC) headquarters following the pillaging of French properties by "Patriot" partisans of Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo. Gangs attacked French properties after French peacekeeping forces retaliated for an airborne attack by government forces on a rebel stronghold in Bouake that killed nine French troops and a US citizen.

UN mulls arms ban against Ivory Coast

AFP, United Nations

UN Security Council experts Sunday examined a French draft resolution proposing tough sanctions, including an arms ban against Ivory Coast, following the deaths of nine French soldiers and a night of anti-French rampages in the west African nation, officials said.

A vote was not expected until Monday at the earliest, and it was unclear if a final text would be ready by the end of the day.

Senior UN officials were not expected to make public statements on Sunday, the UN press office said.

The French draft resolution calls for "individual and collective new measures," including an arms embargo, to be imposed on the country which was again teetering on the brink of war, French UN Ambassador Jean-Marc de La Sabliere said Saturday.

"This resolution should include individual measures against those who block the peace process or who violate human rights," de La Sabliere said.

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