



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis gather at the site where a car exploded targeting a bus with Iranian pilgrims visiting a religious shrine in the town of Kufa, south of Baghdad yesterday. At least 13 people were killed and 22 others injured in the attack.

UN rights body slams Israeli military action in Gaza Strip

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations Human Rights Council on Thursday voted to condemn Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip and called for the release of Palestinian officials and civilians arrested during the offensive.

In a resolution adopted by 29 votes to 11, the 47-member Council demanded a halt to Israel's military operation and decided to "dispatch an urgent fact-finding mission by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

Five countries abstained in the vote, which came as Israeli tanks and troops pressed deeper into Gaza in their biggest thrust since Israel pulled out of the territory last year.

The resolution brought by Islamic states expressed "grave concern at the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli occupation, including the current extensive Israeli military operations".

The Council urged "Israel, the occupying power, to immediately release the arrested Palestinian ministers, lawmakers and "all other arrested Palestinian civilians".

The text also called "for a negotiated solution to the current crisis".

The flare-up in the Middle East split the newly-formed Human Rights Council in its first ever special session as attempts to broker a consensus failed.

Despite concern about the impact of the offensive, Western countries opposed the resolution or abstained, complaining of bias because it failed to consider the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier that led to military action, or to urge a halt to attacks by Palestinian militants on Israelis.

In text added at the last moment in an unsuccessful bid to placate European concerns, the resolution urged "all concerned parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and to refrain from violence against civilians".

Iran won't give early reply

REUTERS, Brussels

Iran defied international calls for an early reply to an offer of incentives aimed at ending a nuclear stand-off, insisting on Thursday it would use a key July 11 meeting merely to raise questions on the package.

The European Union is due to hold preliminary talks with Iran on Thursday and more detailed discussions next Tuesday in which it

expects a formal response to a package of technology, trade and other incentives to halt uranium enrichment.

"The Tuesday meeting is just for removing ambiguities. Iran will not give its definitive answer at this meeting," an Iranian official, who requested anonymity, told Reuters.

Major powers have said they want a reply from Tehran by a July 15 Group of Eight summit in St.

Petersburg at the latest. Tehran insists it will not give its answer before August 22.

Iran postponed talks with EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Brussels on Wednesday in apparent anger at an exiled opposition leader's visit to the European parliament.

But Iran said its chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larjani would meet Solana for a private dinner on

Thursday.

"What we are looking for (on Thursday) is the first feedback -- the start of the process of getting a reply," an EU diplomat said of the Thursday meeting.

"The more they (the Iranians) wait, the more the countries who made the offer will feel impatient," said the diplomat, who requested anonymity.

LONDON BOMBING ANNIVERSARY

'Many challenges remain intact'

ANSAR AHMED ULLAH, London

Britain is still facing many challenges as Londoners get ready to remember the victims of the July 7, 2005 bombings today that awoke the country to the reality of home-grown terror threat.

To mark the day, Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford organised a discussion meeting on "The state of British Islam - one year after the London bombings" on July 2. Leader of the Muslim Parliament and Director of the Muslim Institute Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui in his speech said, "British police must engage with the Muslim community in a meaningful way if we are to succeed in dealing with extremism and terrorism. The Muslim community is as much sick and tired of fundamentalism as everyone else."

"Our security services helped to promote this madness during 80's and 90's for short-term gains but now refusing to recognise their role", he added.

In his view there were lessons for the Muslim community to be learned.

"After 9/11 and 7/7, Muslims have lost their credibility and their innocence with law enforcement agencies and decision-makers. No longer Muslims are given the benefit of the doubt because they are no longer assumed to be a reliable, trustworthy, law-abiding and rational people. Muslims must wake up to this new reality and accept the challenge of winning hearts and minds of ordinary people within the British society."

"Events of 9/11 and 7/7 have also raised new questions about identity, citizenship and multi-culturalism, and the Muslims' ability to integrate and live in harmony with others. A major debate on these issues is yet to take place within the Muslim community."

Dr Siddiqui went on saying, the influence of the intolerant ideology of militant Islamism that espouses the virtues of a military interpretation of Jihad, that caused 9/11 and 7/7 atrocities, is still thriving. Mosques and madrasas have remained immune to the change.