

# Bush, Blair warn Syria, Iran over Lebanon

## They now favour multinational force

AFP, AP, Washington

The United States and Britain on Friday urged Syria and Iran to be part of the search for an end to the conflict in Lebanon, or risk more opposition from the international community.

President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared Friday that a multinational force should be dispatched quickly to help Lebanon regain control of the southern part of its country from the Hezbollah militia.

However, the two leaders again stopped short of supporting an immediate ceasefire in the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel, which Arab and European leaders have been urging.

As Middle East violence raged for a 17th day, Bush and Blair said at a White House news conference

that the makeup of the multinational force would be discussed at a UN meeting Monday called by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The force would both lead to stability and help speed the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, they said.

Bush said he was sending Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice back to the Middle East this weekend to help negotiate terms for such a force with both Lebanese and Israeli leaders.

"This is a moment of intense conflict in the Middle East," Bush said, standing alongside Blair in the East Room. "Yet, our aim is to turn it into a moment of opportunity and a chance for broader change in the region."

"We agree that a multinational force must be dispatched to Lebanon quickly to augment a Lebanese army as it moves to the



south of that country," Bush said. Both Tehran and Damascus have been accused of supporting, funding and arming the Shia Hezbollah militia in Lebanon in the conflict with Israel while there is continued global disquiet about

Iran's nuclear ambitions.

US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were asked what their message was to both countries after they met for 90 minutes at the White House to discuss the crisis.

"Give up your nuclear weapons and your nuclear weapons ambitions. That's my message to Iran," Bush told a news conference, urging Syria to become an "active participant" in the search for peace.

For his part, Blair said both countries had a "perfectly simple" choice.

"They may think they can avoid those choices. In fact they can't," he said.

"They can either come in and participate as proper and responsible members of the international community, or they will face the risk of increasing confrontation."

## US plans \$4.6 billion in ME arms sales

REUTERS, Washington

The Bush administration spelled out plans on Friday to sell \$4.6 billion of arms to moderate Arab states, including battle tanks worth as much as \$2.9 billion to protect critical Saudi infrastructure.

The announcement came two weeks after the administration said it would sell Israel its latest supply of JP-8 aviation fuel valued at up to \$210 million to help Israeli warplanes "keep peace and security in the region."

The United States also rushed a delivery of precision-guided bombs requested by Israel after launching its airstrikes against Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon 17 days ago, The New York Times reported last week.

In the newly proposed sales to Arab states, UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter gunships worth up to \$808 million would go to the United Arab Emirates, while AH-64 Apache helicopters worth as much as \$400 million would go to Saudi Arabia.



Protesters gather outside Downing Street Friday to protest Israeli carnage in Lebanon and chant slogans against Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George Bush.



A convoy of refugees and foreign media passes through the southern border village of Al-Qawzah on the way to Tyre yesterday. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) condemned the situation of thousands of people trapped by war in south Lebanon as unacceptable and said Israel must do more to spare civilians.

## Situation for civilians in southern Lebanon unacceptable: ICRC

AFP, Geneva

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Friday condemned the situation of thousands of people trapped by war in south Lebanon as unacceptable and said Israel must do more to spare civilians.

The ICRC announced that it was scaling up its emergency relief operations in Lebanon by launching a 100 million Swiss franc appeal (63 million euros, 81 million dollars) to donors.

"We today find the situation for civilians who are trapped unacceptable," said Pierre Kraehenbuehl, the ICRC's director of operations. "International humanitarian law sets out clear rules and the parties in this context are aware of their obligations."

"Much more has to be done by Israeli forces to ensure the respect,

to protect and spare civilians in the conduct of military operations," he told journalists.

The ICRC also reiterated a warning to Hezbollah about rocket attacks on towns in northern Israel, while heavy fighting in southern Lebanon had cut off civilians from urgently needed aid.

"International Humanitarian Law also applies to Hezbollah, both concerning the conduct of hostilities in Lebanon and in relation to attacks against towns in northern Israel which have resulted in the killing and injuring of many civilians," Kraehenbuehl said.

The ICRC said its access to "thousands" of people in villages cut off by fighting was gradually improving, but overall, needs remained enormous while relief convoys and ambulances were still being blocked by fighting.

## Tense Congo heads for first multi-party polls in 46 years

AFP, Kinshasa

The Democratic Republic of Congo geared up yesterday for its first multi-party elections in 46 years of bloodstained post-colonial rule in a key step towards peace in volatile central Africa.

Head of state Joseph Kabila is the frontrunner in the presidential race in which pits him against former rebel leaders who waged a five-year war on the regime with the help of neighbouring states.

World leaders have called for calm after eight people were killed in the last push of a ruthless election campaign that ended on Friday night.

A policeman guarding Azarias Ruberwa, a former rebel chief running for president, was shot dead on Friday night as his entourage exchanged fire with Kabila's security detail outside Kinshasa.

## Israel bombs Gaza border tunnel

REUTERS, AFP, Gaza

Israeli aircraft bombed a suspected Hamas weapons factory and border tunnel in the Gaza Strip yesterday, the army said.

No casualties were reported in the early morning attacks, part of Israel's month-long assault on Gaza to recover a captured soldier and end cross-border rocket attacks.

At least 150 Palestinians, around half of them gunmen, have been killed in the offensive.

An army spokeswoman said one of the targets overnight was a factory in Gaza City used by the Islamic militant group Hamas, which controls the Palestinian government, to manufacture and store arms.

The army said it also bombed a tunnel along the Israeli-Egyptian border near Rafah.

Israel has rejected demands for a prisoner exchange by the gunmen who captured Corporal Gilad Shalit by tunneling under the border on June 25. Some of the gunmen came from Hamas.

Meanwhile, two Palestinian men wounded during an Israeli raid on Thursday have died, hospital sources said Saturday. One of them was hit by an air raid in the northern town of Beit Lahija, and the second by a tank shell that struck his home in Gaza City.

Three armed groups claimed responsibility for taking the soldier captive.

The military says it aims to free the seized Corporal Gilad Shalit and stop Palestinian militant groups from firing rockets onto Israeli territory from the narrow coastal strip from which it withdrew last year after a 38-year presence.

## India lacks 'passion' for peace: Pak PM

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said India does not share Islamabad's "passion for peace" between the South Asian rivals in an interview published yesterday.

"I believe you must have a passion for peace. We in Pakistan, President (Pervez) Musharraf and I, have a passion for peace. I have yet to see this passion on the part of India," Aziz told Outlook magazine.

He blamed India for slowing down a peace process launched between the neighbours in 2004 after New Delhi put off talks following train blasts in Mumbai earlier this month that left 183 people dead.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh accused "elements from across the border" of helping the Mumbai attackers, warning it would be difficult to pursue peace talks if such "acts of terrorism are not controlled."

In response Pakistan demanded that India supply proof to support its charges and offered to help in investigations into the

blasts.

Aziz said talks were the only way to resolve the nearly six decades of hostility between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

"Let us talk and see what we can do to help each other," he said.

After the bombings that also injured more than 800, the countries have traded barbs blaming each other for the impasse in the dialogue.

Top foreign ministry officials from the two countries are now scheduled to meet in Bangladesh for the first time since the blasts on the sidelines of a South Asian forum on August 1.

The peace process, begun after India and Pakistan came to the brink of a fourth war, has brought greater trade, transportation and people-to-people links.

But there has been no breakthrough on their dispute over Kashmir, trigger of two of three wars between the neighbours since 1947.

The Himalayan region is divided between the two but claimed in full by both.

## Lanka bombs Tigers for fourth day

### 8 rebels killed, monitors in crisis

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lankan Air Force jets bombed Tamil Tiger positions in the island's restive east for a fourth day yesterday in a battle over water supplies, the rebels said, as Nordic truce monitors faced crisis after member-nations quit.

Tamil Tiger rebels told Nordic truce monitors yesterday the air force killed eight of their fighters in a fourth day of aerial bombings, as the military sought to wrest control of a reservoir.

The Tigers had no immediate comment when contacted, but the unarmed Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said the Tigers told them eight cadres were killed when a bomb hit a rebel camp.

Military officials said the air force bombed Tiger targets in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee.

Many observers fear the fighting could spiral out of control, rupture a 2002 truce and restart a two-decade civil war that has already

killed more than 65,000 people.

Military officials said an operation to clear access to a sluice gate, which they accuse the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of blocking to choke water supplies to Sinhalese farmers on government land, was underway but gave no details.

A Reuters photographer in the eastern district of Trincomalee heard the bombers fly overhead and heard the explosions.

"The army started shelling us this morning, and then the bombers arrived," said S. Ellilan, head of the Tigers' political wing in the district. "They bombed near the water tank, but people have already moved away from there, so there were no injuries."

Ellilan said rebel fighters chased away army ground troops as the sides battled with mortars on Friday, but the military denied ground troops had approached the area from a camp 3 miles (5 km) away.

## Coalition forces net 4 al-Qaeda suspects 22 Taliban killed in fighting

AFP, Kabul

US-led troops arrested four suspected al-Qaeda militants in a raid in eastern Afghanistan while at least 18 Taliban rebels and four policemen were killed during the latest fighting in the insurgency-plagued country, officials said yesterday.

There were no casualties on either side during the raid conducted early Saturday in Sal Kalay village in Khost province near the Pakistan border, the US military said in a statement.

"The purpose of the operation was to capture al-Qaeda operatives who have been involved in the planning of attacks against Afghan and coalition forces in eastern Afghanistan."

"The mission was successful," the statement said, without giving details. It did not reveal the names and nationalities of the detained men.

Two AK-47 assault rifles and a briefcase, filled with "extremist-

related" documents were seized from the location where the men were captured, it added.

"Each day we gain greater intelligence and greater ability to find terrorists who offer nothing to the Afghan people but fear and intimidation," it said.

Taliban militants and their al-Qaeda allies have been waging a bloody insurgency since they were driven from power in late 2001 in a US-led military offensive after they refused to surrender al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden following the September 11 attacks.

Meanwhile two policemen guarding an archaeological site in northern Balkh province were killed and another was wounded when unknown assailants attacked them overnight, provincial police spokesman Sher Jan Durani said.

The policemen were part of a 50-man guard who were sent from Kabul in April to protect a historical site in Dawlatabad district of the province, the spokesman said.



A crab covered in oil struggles towards the sea polluted with heavy fuel oil in Beirut yesterday. The Mediterranean is threatened by its worst ever environmental disaster after Israel's bombing of a power plant in Lebanon that sent thousands of tonnes of fuel gushing into the sea, the environment minister charged Saturday.