

Hamas threatens third Intifada for statehood

Two more Palestinians killed in Gaza

AFP, REUTERS, Cairo/ Gaza City

Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal warned yesterday of a third Intifada unless there is an international agreement for a Palestinian state within 1967 borders within six months.

"We give the international community six months for real political horizons... There is a historic opportunity for a Palestinian state within 1967 borders," Meshaal told reporters in Cairo.

"Our national demands, and these are not the demands of Hamas, are the end of the occupation, the creation of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders without settlements, big or small, real sovereignty over and under the territory" he said.

"We reject what others have



Khaled Meshaal

proposed, such as phases or phased negotiations, declarations of principles," he added.

"All Palestinian forces have agreed unanimously to a state

within 1967 borders. Arab States have also agreed to this position," he said.

"Seize this opportunity," he said in comments addressed to the international community. "We will not be patient for longer than we have been."

"If our demands are not met, the Palestinian people will close all political files and launch a third Intifada. The conflict will be open and the victory in this conflict will be ours," he said.

Meshaal, who is based in Damascus, has been holding talks with Egyptian officials in Cairo on the problems facing the formation of a Palestinian unity government and securing a prisoner swap deal with Israel.

Earlier Israeli soldiers clashed with Palestinian gunmen in the

northern Gaza Strip on Saturday, killing one militant, hospital officials said.

In a separate incident overnight, an unidentified Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli troops while approaching the strategic Karni border crossing.

The fresh violence came amid signs of further trouble in unity government talks between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas.

Senior Palestinian officials said Abbas had planned to announce on Saturday that he was naming a US-trained academic, Mohammad Shbair, to replace Haniyeh as prime minister.

But Haniyeh has refused to step aside until a final agreement on a unity government is reached.



PHOTO: AFP

Chinese President Hu Jintao (R) waves as he walks with his wife Liu Yongqing (L) upon their arrival at Allama Iqbal International airport in Lahore yesterday. Chinese President Hu Jintao arrived in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore for cultural and business visits after signing a free trade deal and pledging to boost strategic ties.

China distancing itself on Kashmir: Media

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

China has distanced itself from committing, at least overtly, to a "substantive" and "meaningful" role that it could play towards the resolution of the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India, the influential Daily Times said yesterday.

While the Kashmir issue has remained on the backburner during the current visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao, sections of Pakistani media felt that Hu was not forthcoming, as it might have been expected on the Kashmir issue where the Chinese support has been traditionally unequivocal.

Asked what role China could play in resolving the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India, Hu, addressing a joint press conference with President Pervez Musharraf, said that Pakistan and India were "China's close neighbours and Beijing sincerely hoped to see peace and stability in the subcontinent," the newspaper said.

Hu told the questioner that China supported efforts by Pakistan and

India to resolve their disputes through dialogue.

"China will continue to view its relations with Pakistan from a strategic and long-term perspective. China is ready to work with Pakistan to raise their strategic partnership to a new level," the Chinese president said.

According to The News, Musharraf said there was a need to focus on conflict resolution and Kashmir happens to be the core issue. He said there is light at the end of the tunnel and there is sincerity on both sides to resolve the dispute. People of both the countries desire peace.

Musharraf said he was optimistic about the future because he interacted with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and he saw a desire towards resolution of disputes between the two countries.

He said there is a realisation on both sides that resolution of disputes and bringing peace and harmony between the two countries would lead to economic development, mutual economic benefits and prosperity of peoples on both sides.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka army special motorcycle unit soldiers conduct a search operation at an army check point at a key entry point into Colombo yesterday as security was stepped up amid remembrance celebrations by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Lanka jets bomb rebel suicide fighter camp

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lankan air force jets bombed a Tamil Tiger suicide fighter camp near the rebels' northern stronghold on Saturday, the military said, adding it believed it had inflicted heavy losses.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said the air force had dropped bombs a few kilometres away from their nerve-centre of Kilinochchi, but had no details of any damage or casualties.

"The air force has hit a Black Tiger (suicide fighter) base," a military spokesman said. He said jets had dropped bombs over the village of Iranamadu, around 6 km south of Kilinochchi. "It is reported there were heavy losses inflicted."

The bombing comes after days of air force raids on rebel positions, and is the latest in a string of military clashes and battles that have killed more than 3,000 civilians,

troops and Tigers so far this year alone.

In a separate incident earlier on Saturday elite police commandos said they killed four rebels in a gunfight in the eastern district of Ampara, while police arrested a man with seven Claymore fragmentation mines and 10 kg of high explosives in the capital overnight.

Claymore mines have been used in a string of deadly ambushes in the north and east and in Colombo in recent months.

Many analysts and ordinary Sri Lankans fear a conflict that has killed more than 67,000 people since 1983 could escalate and spread across the island.

President Mahinda Rajapakse has flatly rejected rebel demands for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the north and east, and many fear the conflict could rumble on for years.

Nepal vigilantes destroy arms after peace deal

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepali vigilantes set up to protect villagers from Maoist rebels began destroying their weapons days after a peace deal formally ended the country's decade-old civil war, a human rights official said on Saturday.

Dozens of government-supported vigilantes, also called the village defence forces, had been active since 2005 and set up to protect rural populations from attacks by Maoists battling to overthrow Nepal's monarchy since 1996.

But human rights groups say their presence had actually increased violence in the impoverished Himalayan nation where more than 13,000 have been killed since the conflict began in 1996.

Tej Man Shrestha, protection officer of the National Human Rights Commission, said some members of a vigilante group in the southern town of Nawalparasi, 100 km southwest of Kathmandu, handed over their weapons, which were then set on fire.

"We have destroyed seven rifles,

one pistol and other crude weapons belonging to the vigilante groups in Nawalparasi," Shrestha told Reuters by telephone from Nawalparasi.

"This is not a big number, but symbolically it is a very important step towards peace in villages."

Dozens of people have been killed in violence linked to the vigilantes, who established themselves after King Gyanendra seized absolute power in February 2005 claiming he was acting to crush the Maoist rebels.

300 Thai schools to close amid attacks

AP, Bangkok

Hundreds of schools in Thailand's restive south will shut their doors in response to increasingly vicious attacks by suspected Muslim insurgents against teachers and schools, an official said Saturday.

The closure, which begins Monday, affects all 336 primary and secondary schools in the province of Pattani, where two teachers were fatally shot by suspected insurgents in the past two days.

In one of the killings, attackers shot a school principal Friday, and then set his body on fire. The principal became the 59th teacher or school official killed in three years of violence, said Bunsorn Thongsripai, president of the Teachers' Association in Pattani.

"Teachers can't bear what has happened," Bunsorn said. "They are paranoid, worried and afraid." He said the province's schools, which teach about 100,000 students, will reopen

when teachers feel safe.

More than 1,800 people have died from violence in Thailand's three southernmost, Muslim-majority provinces Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat since an Islamic insurgency flared in January 2004.

Teachers have always been occasional targets, seen by insurgents as representatives of the government and easy targets. But recently, teachers and schools have been attacked on an almost daily basis.

On Thursday, 96 schools across Yala were ordered closed as a safety precaution after a school was burned down the day before. It was one of several schools in the province recently targeted by arsonists.

The Yala schools were initially scheduled to reopen Monday but school authorities have decided to keep them closed until further notice, said Sanya Suwannapho, head of the Association of Teachers in Yala province.

Britain tries to unravel mystery behind ex-Russian spy's death

AFP, London

British police were working out Saturday how former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko might have been poisoned with a highly toxic radioactive substance, and who could be behind it.

British newspapers put Vladimir Putin in the spotlight, after Litvinenko accused the Russian president's regime of murdering him in a message from his deathbed, as the affair threatened to escalate politically.

A "large quantity" of radiation probably from polonium 210 had been found in Litvinenko's urine, while checks were made on people who had contact with him.

And the British government confirmed it had formally asked Moscow for any information it had on Litvinenko, a critic of the Kremlin who moved to London six years ago and took British citizenship.

PLAN TO SET UP JOINT TERROR PANEL

Indo-Pak FMs meet tomorrow

REUTERS, New Delhi

Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee said on Friday he would hold informal talks with his Pakistani counterpart next week, the first meeting between foreign ministers of the old rivals in more than a year.

Monday's talks between Mukherjee and Khurshheed Mehmood Kasuri would come almost two weeks after top diplomats of the neighbours held their first talks in nearly a year and finalised a plan to set up a joint panel to tackle terrorism and curb tensions.

Kasuri was due in India over the weekend for a private visit and Mukherjee said a meeting had been fixed for Monday.

"I have invited him for lunch, so I will have some discussions," Mukherjee told reporters on the sidelines of a book launch.

Kasuri and Mukherjee's predecessor, Natwar Singh, held peace talks in Islamabad in Oct. 2005, a month after which Singh resigned after he was named in an investigation report into Iraq's oil-for-food scandal.

The foreign minister's post was vacant until veteran Mukherjee was shifted from the defence ministry last month.

The India-Pakistan peace talks -- launched in 2004 after the two countries pulled back from the brink of what would have been their fourth war -- have made slow progress, particularly on their central dispute over Kashmir.

New Delhi had suspended the dialogue after the deadly Mumbai train blasts in July, blamed on a Pakistan-based Islamist terrorist group.