

Attack on Iran to drag ME into hell: Mussa



Amr Mussa

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Mussa, said yesterday that military action against Iran "would bring the whole of the Middle East into hell."

Speaking to AFP, he said: "I said the war in Iraq would open the doors of hell and it did. This time, it would bring the whole of the Middle East into hell itself."

Mussa added that "any military action now anywhere in the Middle East is to be discouraged."

His comments were echoed by the United Nations nuclear chief Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who said Friday that military action would be "bonkers".

The UN Security Council

imposed sanctions at the end of last year to get Iran to stop uranium enrichment, which produces fuel for civilian nuclear reactors but also the explosive core of atom bombs.

Mussa, head of the Arab League since 2001, also called for a six-month deadline to be imposed for the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, stressing that 2007 was a vital year for negotiations.

"There has to be a time limit and an endgame. Everyone needs to agree to give ourselves six months," he said. "It has to be this year."

He said 2007 was essential because of presidential elections in the United States in 2008, which would paralyse US involvement in the conflict.

The UN Security Council



Prominent HR activist held in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police have detained a prominent human rights activist working for release of suspects picked up by secret agencies in the fight against terrorism, official sources said yesterday.

Plain-clothed intelligence operatives "kidnapped" Khalid Khawaja, chief of an organisation called Defence of Human Rights, from outside his Islamabad home early Friday, his family said.

Khawaja's daughter Rabia said on Saturday that police rang the family to inform them he was being held at a police station in the Pakistani capital but gave no reason of his detention.

"This is blatant violation of human rights, first they kidnapped him and now they say he was in the police custody," she told AFP.

Khawaja's organisation has been leading a campaign to find missing people widely believed to be held by secret agencies in the "war on terror".

Pakistan's Supreme Court recently took up the cases of some 41 missing people after petitions by relatives who believed they were held in the custody of intelligence agencies for undisclosed reasons.

The government later told the court 25 people had been traced and released, but the remaining 16 could not be found.

11 girls killed in Indian school collapse

AFP, New Delhi

Eleven girls were killed and 14 injured when a school in western India collapsed, burying them under rubble, officials said yesterday.

Nine bodies were recovered late Friday from the building in a village in Gujarat state.

Another two bodies were found during the night as rescue workers using cutters and hydraulic cranes shifted the debris, working under floodlights.

"Rescue workers removed two more bodies from the rubble during the night-long search," Surat district official Vatsala Vasudevan told the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency.

"The operation is over as there do not seem to be any more people trapped in the debris. Workers are sifting through the rubble," she said.

The 14 injured schoolgirls were being treated in hospital, she added.

Fresh violence in Nepal as curfew lifted in 3 towns

AFP, Kathmandu

Protesters burnt tyres and hurled stones in new violence in southeastern Nepal yesterday following clashes that left five people dead and dozens injured in the last eight days.

The protests have erupted in a country which only recently saw an end to ten years of civil war between government forces and Maoist insurgents.

The violence flared as authori-

ties lifted a curfew yesterday in three towns in the Terai region and maintained it in two others, including Birgunj.

"Protesters are trying to break the curfew by burning tyres," Shambhu Koital, chief district officer told AFP from Birgunj.

"Some protesters pelted stones (at police) and tried to burn two police posts in the town. The situation is tense and there are reports of clashes between police and

demonstrators but no arrests have been made," he said.

The protests began after a teenage boy was shot dead on January 19 during a fight between Maoists and activists belonging to the Mahadhesi community which is demanding greater political representation.

Mahadhesi leaders have said the group accounts for a third of impoverished Nepal's 27 million people and that the Maoists are over-represented in the nation's new parliament.

The parliament was set up after the Maoist rebels and coalition government signed a peace deal to bring the rebels into government.

The Mahadhesi dominate the Terai plains region, known as Nepal's bread basket, and have long complained of discrimination by highland communities.

The protests, which began in Lahan Bazaar town and spread into four other towns, became ethnic clashes after the Mahadhesi began attacking people from the hill regions.

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has called on the group to begin talks and the Mahadhesi have urged him to name a date.

On Friday, Koirala met with Maoist chairman Prachanda to seek a way to settle the unrest in the Himalayan nation.

The group organising the protests has warned that unless Nepal's government addresses their complaints, the violence would continue.

Nepal's Maoists have said pro-royalists are involved in the protests and are trying to undermine the peace process which has left King Gyanendra facing dismissal.

The UN chief's personal representative to Nepal's peace process called Friday for an end to the violent protests and said such bloodshed could disrupt crucial elections due to be held later this year.

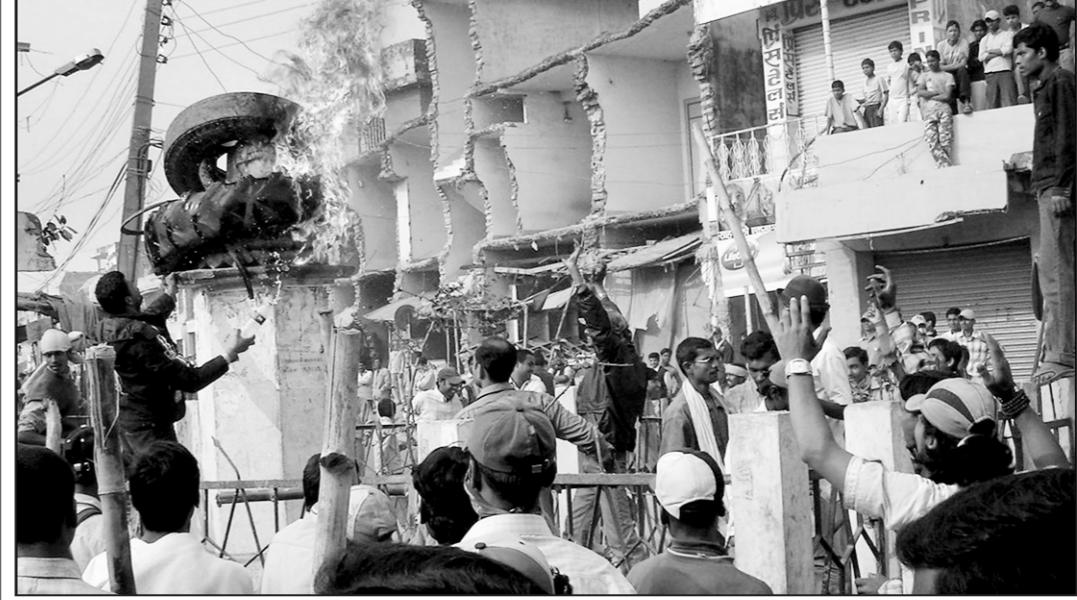


PHOTO: AFP

Demonstrators belonging to Nepal's Madhesi Janadikar Forum, representing the country's Mahadhesi ethnic group, burn tyres during protests at Jaleswor, Mahottari, 375 kilometres south of Kathmandu on Friday.

Men in American uniform kidnap, kill 4 US troops in Karbala

AFP, Baghdad

Four of five US soldiers killed in a raid by militants last week in Iraq's shrine city of Karbala were abducted and executed by men wearing "American-looking uniforms," the military revealed yesterday.

The grim details of the January 20 attack were released for the first time by the US military after the new Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, made a surprise visit to Iraq.

Pelosi pressed Baghdad to take "primary responsibility" for the country's security, even as Iraqi and US officials said they were targeting Iranian agents in Iraq under a tough new policy aimed at depriving sectarian violence of outside support.

"It makes sense that if somebody's trying to harm our troops, or stop us from achieving our goal, or killing innocent citizens in Iraq, that we will stop them," US President George W. Bush told reporters in Washington Friday.

A US military statement said the Karbala raid had been "well rehearsed", with gunmen getting past Iraqi checkpoints in a convoy consisting of at least five sport utility vehicles.

One soldier was killed in the

initial assault while four others were shot dead after being kidnapped by the insurgents, who fled with them in the SUVs.

Iraqi police later found the vehicles near the town of Al-Mahawil, east of Karbala.

"Two soldiers were found handcuffed together in the back of one of the SUVs. Both had suffered gunshot wounds and were dead. A third soldier was found shot and dead on the ground," the statement said.

"Nearby, the fourth soldier was still alive, despite a gunshot wound to the head." He was rushed to a nearby hospital but died on the way.

In an initial statement released on January 21, the military had said five US soldiers were killed and three wounded "while repelling the attack."

The Internet site icasualties.org, which tracks US losses in Iraq, identified the five as Captain Brian Freeman, Lieutenant Jacob Fritz, Specialist Johnathan Chism, Private 1st Class Jonathan Millican

and Private Shawn Falter.

Saturday's statement said "an estimated nine to 12 armed militants" with US-type weapons had

stormed the SUVs.

Iraqi

police

vehicles

by-passing

the

Iraqi

police

in

the

compound," Bleichwehl said.

"We are looking at all the evidence to determine who or what was responsible for the breakdown

in the

country.

The delegation's view is that

American

forces

should

quickly

begin

the

transition

from

a

combat

role

to

one

focused

on

training,

counter-terrorism,

force

protection,

and

controlling

Iraq's

borders,"

their statement said.

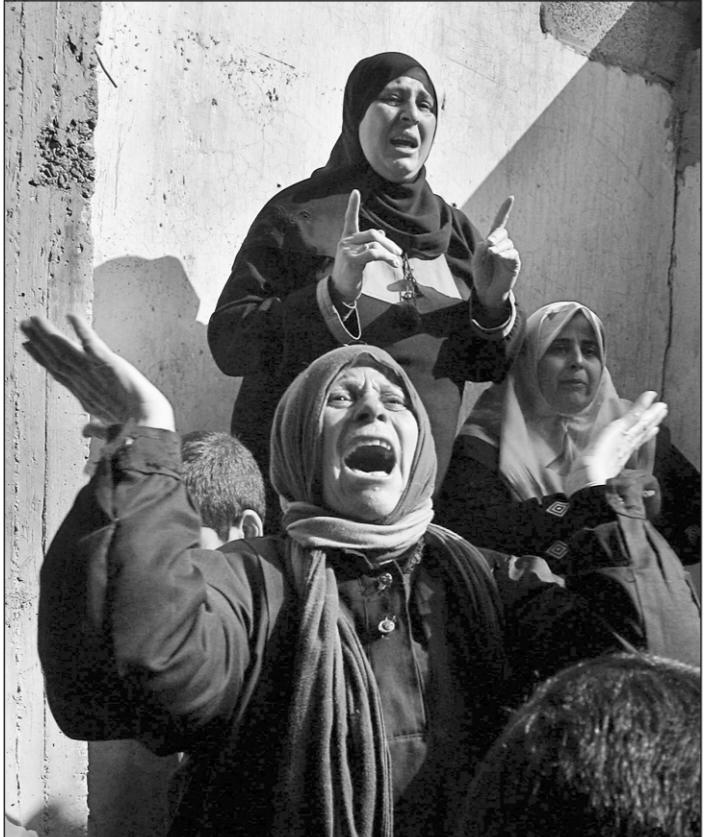


PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian women mourn during the funeral of a relative as factional clashes flared anew in the Gaza Strip yesterday between the ruling Hamas movement and leader Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party, killing 17 people in barely 48 hours.

Tensions had flared after Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, had called on December 16, 2006, for early elections.

Hamas, which won a resounding