



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani security officials examine a bus, which was destroyed in a suspected suicide attack in Rawalpindi yesterday. Suspected suicide bombings tore through a bus carrying Pakistani defence workers in the garrison city of Rawalpindi and a market minutes later, killing 25 people.

Rafsanjani asks Iran to beware of 'US dangers'

Tehran warns US over risks of military action

AFP, Tehran

Former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani yesterday urged Iran to preserve national unity and beware of being provoked in the face of the "dangers" posed by arch enemy the United States.

"They (the United States) made a big issue of the nuclear issue and they are mobilising public opinion, their Greater Middle East plan is still on the table," Rafsanjani told the opening session of Iran's Assembly of Experts.

"Because of the dangers threatening us, we should pay attention to the supreme leader's decree for national unity and Islamic cohesion," Rafsanjani told the body before it elected him its new chairman.

"Now they have started an anti-Shia wave and we should be careful not to fall into their traps," added Rafsanjani. "We should not let ourselves be provoked and give an excuse for the enemy."

Rafsanjani had been acting head of the Assembly of Experts, which supervises the work of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, following the death in July of its chairman Ayatollah Ali Meshkini.

President from 1989-1997, Rafsanjani has always shown a strong pragmatic streak and his pleas for vigilance contrast with the more confrontational rhetoric of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The president has repeatedly in recent weeks dismissed the prospect of US military action against Iran over its nuclear programmeme, saying he

was confident this would never happen.

Washington accuses Tehran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons -- an allegation vehemently denied by the Islamic republic -- and has never ruled out taking military action against it.

Rafsanjani was soundly thrashed by Ahmadinejed in the 2005 presidential elections but made something of a comeback last year by polling the highest number of votes in the Assembly of Experts polls.

Meanwhile, Iran on Tuesday issued a stark warning to the United States over the danger of launching a military attack, saying Washington could never foresee the size of its response against US troops in the region.

"The US will face three problems if it attacks Iran. Firstly it does not know the volume of our response," said General Rahim Yahya Safavi, the new special military adviser to supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

"Also it can not evaluate the vulnerability of its 200,000 troops in the region since we have accurately identified all of their camps," added Safavi, who stepped down last week as head of the elite Revolutionary Guards.

Safavi also warned over how Iran's reaction to a US attack could affect Israel -- Tehran's regional arch foe -- and also crude oil supply from the world fourth largest producer.



Iraq confirms death sentence for 'Chemical Ali'

AFP, Baghdad

A top Iraqi court has confirmed the death sentence on "Chemical Ali" and two other cohorts of Saddam Hussein convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity, a senior judge said yesterday.

"The Iraqi Supreme Court has confirmed the death sentence on Ali Hassan al-Majid, Sultan Hashim al-Tai and Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti," the court head Judge Aref Shaheen told a press conference.

Majid, widely known as "Chemical Ali," was the executed Iraqi dictator's most notorious hatchet man, Tai was his defence minister and Tikriti was armed forces deputy chief of operations.

Taliban vow more abductions Israel must re-route Barrier, says court

Afghan violence kills 15

AFP, AP, Kandahar

Afghanistan's Taliban vowed yesterday to continue abducting foreign nationals, saying the kidnapping of 23 South Koreans showed the tactic was an effective tool against the government.

Kabul meanwhile acknowledged the threat and said all foreign nationals should register with police and inform authorities of their movements.

Separate suicide bomb attacks killed three Afghan police officers while more than a dozen suspected militants died in battles with foreign and local security forces, authorities said yesterday.

The suicide attacks took place Tuesday in Kunduz town in northern

Afghanistan, which has largely escaped surging violence by Taliban fighters, and Monday in Paktika province, a militant hotspot that borders Pakistan.

Officers in Kunduz had been trailing a suspicious vehicle before they challenged the driver as he neared the town's bus station, deputy police chief Mohammed Omar Khail said. As they opened the doors, he detonated his explosives, killing two officers and wounding five others, he said.

In the attack in Paktika, a suicide bomber rammed his vehicle into a police car, killing one officer and wounding two others, said Ghamia Khan, spokesman for the governor of Paktika.

Also Tuesday, suspected Taliban

fighters attacked a joint Afghan and US-led coalition patrol in the central province of Ghazni, a coalition statement said. In the clash that ensued, "several" militants were killed, the statement said.

Suicide attacks have become a routine weapon in the Taliban's war against Afghanistan's Western-backed government. Afghan officials say many of the perpetrators are foreign militants, mostly from Pakistan.

"We found this a very effective tactic against the Kabul administration and the invading forces," Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP, referring to the international military forces here.

"We'll continue kidnapping foreigners," he said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

AP, Jerusalem

In an embarrassing blow to the Israeli government, the Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the state to redraw the route of its West Bank separation barrier near a Palestinian village that has come to symbolize opposition to the enclosure.

Residents of the village of Bilin went to court arguing that the current route, built on village land, kept them from their fields and orchards,

which remained on the other side of the barrier. Villagers and their Israeli and foreign supporters have protested at the barrier every Friday for the past 2 1/2 years, routinely sparing with police in clashes that wounded dozens.

The Israeli government argued that the route was necessary to protect residents of the nearby settlement of Modiin Illit, and completed the section of fence that cut through Bilin despite the protests.

10 dead in rebel clash in restive northeast India

AFP, Guwahati

At least 10 tribal separatists were killed in a clash with a rival group in India's restive northeastern Manipur state, police said Tuesday.

Heavily armed militants of the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and the Kuki Liberation Army (KLA) clashed Monday in Ukhrul district, about 70km north-east of state capital Imphal.

"The KLA rebels were ambushed by suspected NSCN-IM militants resulting in the death of 10 KLA cadres," Ukhrul's police chief Dorji Lahiri told AFP.

Nukes in safe hands Says Pakistan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan on Monday said that its nuclear assets are secure in a multilateral structure and termed as "baseless" reports that they may land in wrong hands.

Foreign Office spokesperson Tasneem Aslam at her weekly briefing strongly rejected the claims published in a book titled A Major Threat to International Peace that nuclear assets of Pakistan can go into insecure hands.

"Pakistan has effective command and control systems and we know how to defend our nuclear assets," the spokesperson said.

Aslam said, "we have categorically stated a number of times that

Pakistan's nuclear assets are in safe hands, and we are determined to ensure their protection at every cost".

She observed that Pakistan detonated nuclear devises in response to the Indian nuclear tests to maintain the balance in the region.

She said the clandestine international network run by Pakistan's nuclear scientist Abdul Qadir Khan for nuclear technology transfer has been eliminated.

Answering a question, she said Pakistan does not want to join arms race with India. "However, we have reservations on purchasing of new defence, armed equipments and airplanes by India," she said.



PHOTO: AFP
Anti-Bush protesters take part in a demonstration in Sydney yesterday, hours before US President George W Bush arrives in the Australian city for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit.

Israel threatens to cut Gaza supplies

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Haim Ramon yesterday threatened to cut electricity, water and fuel supplies into Gaza if militants in the Hamas-ruled territory continued to fire rockets into Israel.

On the eve of a meeting of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's security cabinet to discuss the situation in Gaza, other senior ministers also called for stepping up pressure on Gaza residents in a bid to stop the fire.

"It is unthinkable to continue to furnish Gaza with electricity, water and fuel while Israeli citizens are live targets of these rockets," Ramon, a close ally of Olmert, told the mass-selling Yediot Aharonot daily.

"We have to draw a line for the Palestinians. We have to make it be known that for any rocket fire, we will cut for two or three hours the sup-

plies of water, electricity and fuel to the Gaza Strip," he said.

Environment Minister Gideon Ezra told public radio that he was also in favour of such a measure.

Israel, which withdrew settlers and troops from Gaza in 2005 after a 38-year occupation, continues to provide nearly all utilities for the impoverished territory.

Militants in Gaza regularly fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel, with most of the projectiles falling in open spaces.

On Monday, seven rockets were fired from Gaza, with one exploding near a nursery school in the southern town of Sderot, which has borne the brunt of the fire.

Trade and Industry Eli Yishai said Israel should exert growing pressure on Gaza's impoverished population in order for them to hamper the rocket launchers.

"We should make it clear to the population that firing rockets against Sderot in fact damages the Palestinians. If the rocket launchers are not bothered by pressure from the outside, they should worry about inside pressure," Yishai told AFP.

The ultra-Orthodox minister said Israel should use "an orderly and gradual plan" to stop the rocket fire and weapon smuggling into Gaza, but nevertheless rejected an extensive military operation.

Gaza has been ruled since mid-June by the Islamist Hamas movement, whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel, after its fighters overran security forces loyal to moderate president Mahmoud Abbas.

Israel has been unable to stamp out rocket fire from Gaza, despite regular military operations in the overcrowded coastal strip.