



PHOTO: AFP
Algerian rescue workers and bomb experts search for survivors under the rubble of a destroyed building near the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) offices yesterday in the Hydra district of Algiers. Hospital sources said at least 52 people were killed, and a number of foreigners injured, in two blasts that rocked the Algerian capital on Tuesday.

Pak Islamist coalition nears collapse

Say party officials

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's main alliance of Islamist parties was near collapse yesterday after cancelling a last-ditch meeting to resolve differences over a possible election boycott, party officials said.

The alliance was formed in 2002 and won control of North West Frontier Province on the back of fierce anti-US sentiment over the toppling of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan.

But the six leading fundamentalist parties that constitute the alliance -- the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) or United Action Front -- are split over taking part in the January 8 election amid fears that the polls will be unfair.

"It is an alliance by name only," the alliance's chief, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, told Geo television.

"We are not dissolving it. We want relations to continue so that at some later stage we could sit

together again, once the drama of the fraudulent election is over," he said.

"This election will strengthen the hands of dictatorship," said Ahmed, who heads the hardline Sunni Muslim Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party.

The principal division is between JI, which wants a boycott, and the pro-Taliban Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), which favours taking part as it has a significant number of parliamentary seats.

JUI chief Fazlur Rehman said his party was making efforts to save the alliance.

"People have a good opinion about us, we have done well in North West Frontier Province (in 2002)," he told state television. "We are trying to save MMA."

Senior MMA leader Liaquat Baloch confirmed that a meeting of the alliance's supreme council scheduled for Tuesday had been called off.

Lanka kills 20 rebels in renewed clashes

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's defence ministry has claimed its forces have killed at least 20 Tamil Tiger rebels in renewed clashes in the north, but came in for a fresh warning against seeking a military solution.

The ministry said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels died in three separate clashes on Monday afternoon, bringing to at least 216 the number of guerrillas it has claimed to have killed since the beginning of the month.

Only a handful of government soldiers have been reported killed or injured in the same period.

No independent confirmation of the defence ministry claims were available, and journalists are barred from frontline areas. There was also no immediate word from the LTTE.

The latest government claim of heavy casualties came as the British high commissioner to Colombo, Dominick Chilcott, urged the government to reconsider its view that the long-running civil war can be won.

4 militants killed in Israeli strikes

AFP, Gaza City

Four Palestinian militants were killed across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday as Israel launched its largest operation in months in the south of the Hamas-run territory, medics and witnesses said.

The raids killed three militants in the south and one in the north and came a day before Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams were due to sit down for the first time since peace talks were formally resumed at a US conference.

In southern Gaza, three members of the radical Islamic Jihad group were killed by an Israeli tank shell as around 30 tanks pushed around two kilometres (more than a mile) into the territory.

The victims were Mohammed Abu Hamra, Ibrahim Barud and Jihad al-Aswad, all of them in their 20s, the groups said.

Shortly afterwards, seven other militants were wounded in an Israeli air raid in the same area, they added.

Earlier an army spokeswoman told AFP that the military had carried out two air raids in the area

against militants who had approached Israeli troops. She said the Israelis identified hitting some of them, but did not provide details.

The troops cut traffic on the main road dissecting Gaza from north to south and encountered fierce resistance from Palestinian fighters on the ground, the medics and witnesses said.

Two Israeli soldiers were lightly wounded when a rocket-propelled grenade hit their tank, an army spokeswoman said.

Dozens of suspected militants were detained by Israeli soldiers as they conducted house-to-house searches in the area, witnesses said.

The incursion was Israel's largest in months in Gaza in terms of the number of Israeli troops and materiel involved and the distance penetrated into the impoverished territory, Palestinian sources said.

The army spokeswoman described the operation as "pretty routine during the latest period, with all the mortar shelling and rocket launching coming from the area... it's not something out of the

ordinary."

Early on Tuesday, an Islamic Jihad fighter was killed in an Israeli air raid near Gaza's northern town of Beit Hanun, medics said.

Israel has conducted regular air raids and limited ground incursions in Gaza since mid-June, when the Islamist Hamas seized power in the territory after routing forces loyal to secular president Mahmud Abbas.

The operations have failed to completely curb fire from militants, with mortar shells or rockets fired from the territory into Israel on a daily basis, mostly without causing casualties.

Hamas, which does not recognise Israel's right to exist, fiercely opposes negotiations which Abbas formally revived along with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at a peace conference in the US city of Annapolis in late November.

The steering committee that is to oversee the renewed negotiations will meet for the first time on Wednesday in Jerusalem, amid uproar over Israel's plans to expand a settlement in the east of the holy city.



Cristina becomes Argentina's president

AP, Buenos Aires

Cristina Fernandez was sworn in Monday as Argentina's first elected female president, completing a rare husband-wife transfer of power that the nation hopes will ensure continued recovery from an economic meltdown.

Cristina Fernandez, whose husband Nestor Kirchner is credited with leading Argentina out of its 2001-2002 economic meltdown, vowed to increase his centre-left economic programmes, create jobs and reduce high poverty levels.

During her hour-long inaugural speech, Fernandez's voice rose in anger as she demanded faster progress from dozens of slow-moving court investigations of human rights abuses of the country's 1976-83 dictatorship.

BJP picks Advani for premiership in 2009 election

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced that Lal Krishna Advani will be its prime ministerial candidate in next general elections due in 2009.

The announcement was made, by BJP President Rajnath Singh at a news conference here on Monday evening, just a day ahead of elections to the legislative assembly in Gujarat whose Chief Minister Narendra Modi is becoming increasingly prominent in the party.

Singh said the decision to project Advani as the party's prime ministerial candidate was taken "unanimously" by the BJP Parliamentary Board and was endorsed by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Advani, 80, is at present the leader of the Opposition in Parliament and was deputy prime minister during the prime ministership of Vajpayee from 1999 to 2004 when the BJP-led alliance was voted out of power in parliamentary elections that brought Sonia Gandhi-led Congress party back to power at the head of a coalition.



PHOTO: AFP
South Korean demonstrators hold a plastic globe at the venue of the UN Climate Change Conference 2007 in Nusa Dua, Bali, yesterday. The worldwide forum on climate change marked the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol but the celebrations were shadowed by doubts on a new pact to tackle global warming.



NOTICE

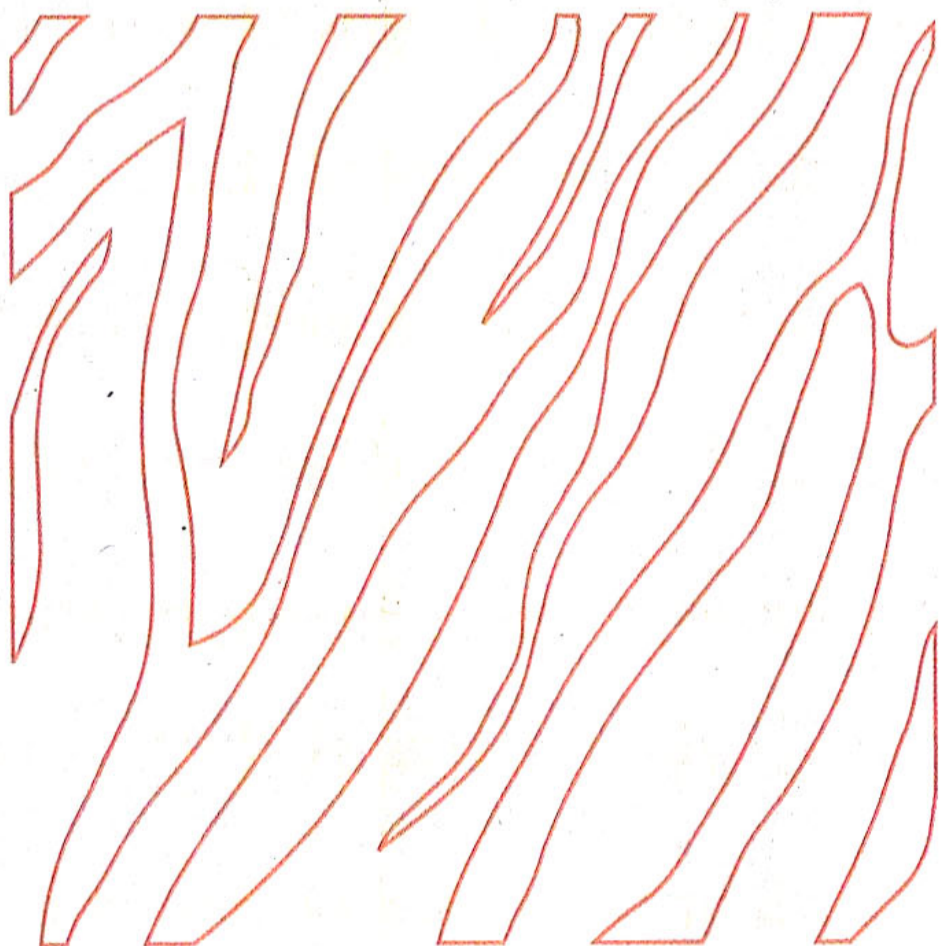
BRAC UNIVERSITY 3rd CONVOCATION

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