

PHOTO: AFP  
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) senior leader and BJP prime ministerial candidate, Lal Krishna Advani (R), BJP President Rajnath Singh (C) and former education minister and BJP senior leader Muralimanohar Joshi (L) hold up copies of the Bharatiya Janata Party Election Manifesto in New Delhi yesterday.

## BJP plays security card

### Advani launches election manifesto

AFP, New Delhi  
India's main opposition BJP party launched its election manifesto yesterday, positioning itself as the guardian of national security and appealing to its Hindu nationalist base.  
With the start of polling just two weeks away, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promised a slew of populist measures, including special loans to farmers and subsidised rice for those living below the poverty line.  
"The most worrisome issue before us today is national security," said the party's official candidate for prime minister, Lal Krishna Advani.  
"Good governance, development and security, these summarise our promises," said the 81-year-old former home minister.  
The BJP governed at the head of a coalition between 1998 and 2004 before being ousted by a Congress-led alliance in 2004 elections.  
Slamming the Congress government's track record on terrorism as a "nightmare," the BJP

manifesto highlighted recent attacks on Indian soil, including a series of bombings in New Delhi and November's militant assault on the financial capital Mumbai.  
"Never before has India been seen so helpless in the face of terror," the manifesto said.  
It also noted the threat posed by Indian Maoists operating in half of India's 28 states and vowed to fence off the border with neighbouring Bangladesh through which illegal migrants enter the country.  
In a bid to lure farmers, whose support had boosted the Congress party win in 2004, the BJP promised loans at low interest rates and a complete waiver of existing loans.  
It also pledged 35 kilograms (77 pounds) of rice per month at two rupees (three cents) a kilo to poor families and tax sops to the estimated 300 million-strong middle class if voted to power.  
The manifesto release was timed to coincide with the birthday of the Hindu warrior god Ram -- a national holiday in India.

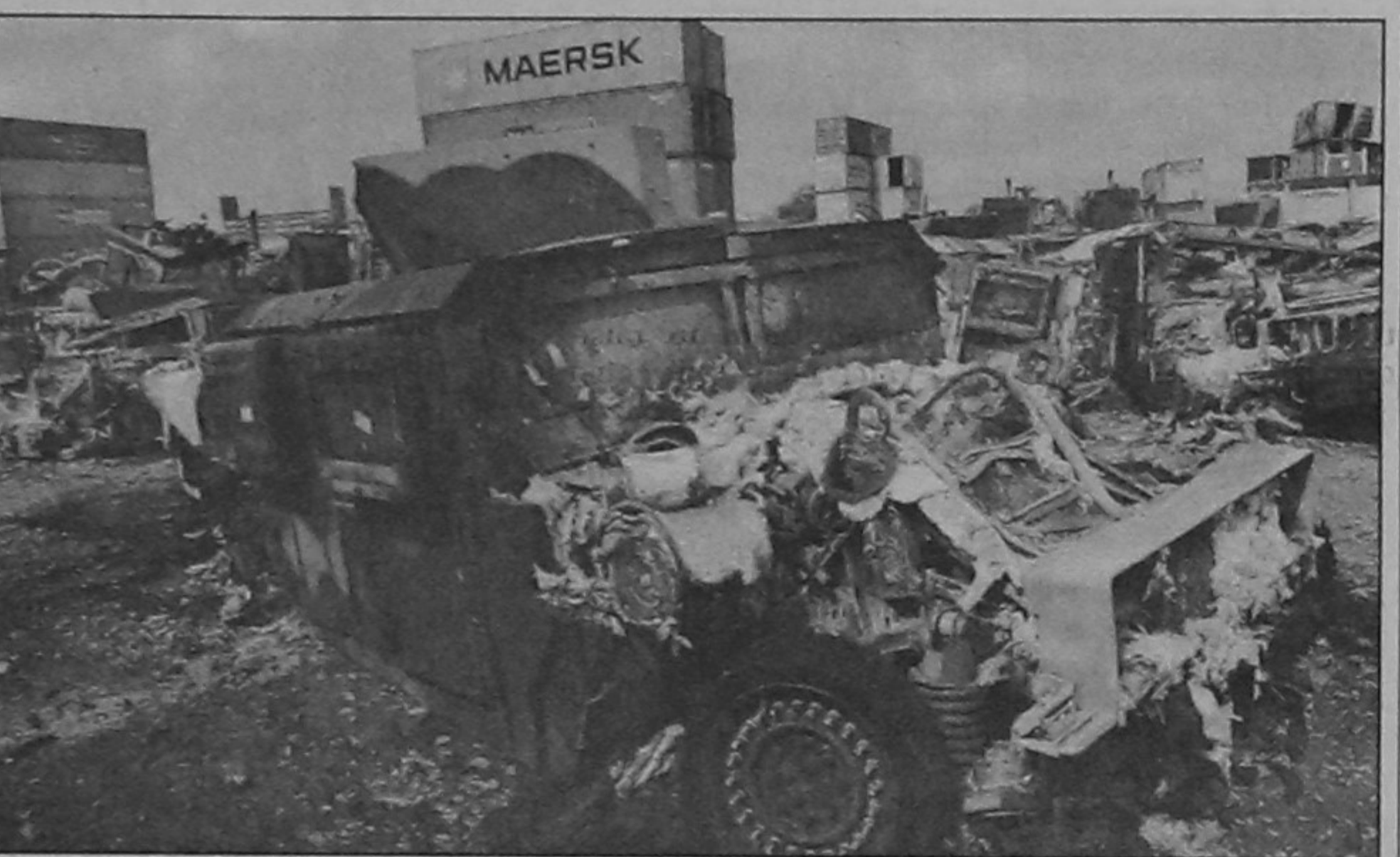


PHOTO: AFP  
Destroyed Nato vehicles are parked at the Port World Logistic terminal targeted by rebels on the outskirts of the northwestern city of Peshawar yesterday. Suspected Taliban militants in Pakistan destroyed nine parked Nato force vehicles after attacking the terminal.

## Militants destroy 9 Nato vehicles in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar  
Suspected Taliban militants in Pakistan destroyed nine parked Nato force vehicles after attacking a terminal, officials said Friday.  
Rebels targeted the Port World Logistic terminal on the outskirts of the northwestern city of Peshawar with petrol bombs and rockets, the latest in a series of strikes against supplies for foreign forces across the border.  
"There were no casualties in the attack early Friday, but the fire destroyed nine Nato vehicles, including firefighting vans and four-by-four jeeps," local police official Fazal Wahid Khan told AFP.  
He said militants traded fire with police until the attack was repulsed and rebels fled into the darkness.  
Another police official Anwar Khan confirmed the

## Afghan battle kills 12 militants

AP, Kabul  
Coalition and Afghan forces killed 12 militants and one civilian in a province next to the Afghan capital in a mission that included airstrikes, an Afghan official said Friday, while a member of the Nato-led force was killed in violence in the east.  
The joint coalition-Afghan mission late Thursday killed the 12 militants in Logar, one province south of Kabul, said Mustafa Mosseini, the provincial police chief. He said that militants forced their way into a civilian home and that a civilian woman was also killed during the battle.  
Militants commonly use civilian homes for cover, a tactic that puts innocent Afghans in the line of fire. Nato's top general in Afghanistan, Gen. David McKiernan, has ordered his ground commanders to consider breaking away from a fight if they think civilians are in danger.  
Civilian deaths are a huge source of friction between Western military forces and President

Hamid Karzai, who has pleaded with Nato and the US to cut down on the number of civilians killed in combat.  
The Nato-led force, meanwhile, said one of its troops died in a "hostile incident" in eastern Afghanistan, where the overwhelming majority of troops are American. Nato did not release the service member's nationality or any other details of the incident.  
In the central Ghazni province, a roadside bomb killed four construction workers, while a battle between militants and police elsewhere in the province killed two militants, said Ghulam Zekria, a police official.  
US commanders have said they expect violence in Afghanistan to spike this year. Last year was the deadliest year for American troops since the 2001 US invasion to oust the Taliban for hosting al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.  
President Barack Obama has ordered 21,000 more troops to the country to bolster the 38,000 Americans already fighting in an increasingly violent insurgency.

## IAEA split over new chief, Iran, Syria

AP, Vienna  
An ideological split at International Atomic Energy Agency is slowing the search for a new chief at a time the organisation tasked with keeping nuclear arms away from rogue states needs a firm hand at the rudder.  
The longer the delay, the greater the fear that Iran, and possibly Syria, could forge ahead with allegedly illicit nuclear activities with more impunity.  
For months, the IAEA's hands have been tied in its probes of the two nations' nuclear programmes as internal bickering and the agency's weak mandate prevent it from taking effective action. The hunt is on for a leader who can help unite the fractious 35-nation board for joint decisions on crucial nonproliferation issues.  
But the same North-South divisions that have hobbled the IAEA's investigation of Iran and Syria are encumbering the search for a successor to Mohamed ElBaradei, who steps down as director general in November. The developed world believes tough action is needed to block rogue nations from acquiring nuclear weapons; emerging economies argue that countries like Iran and Syria have a right to develop nuclear programmes to help them catch up with the West.

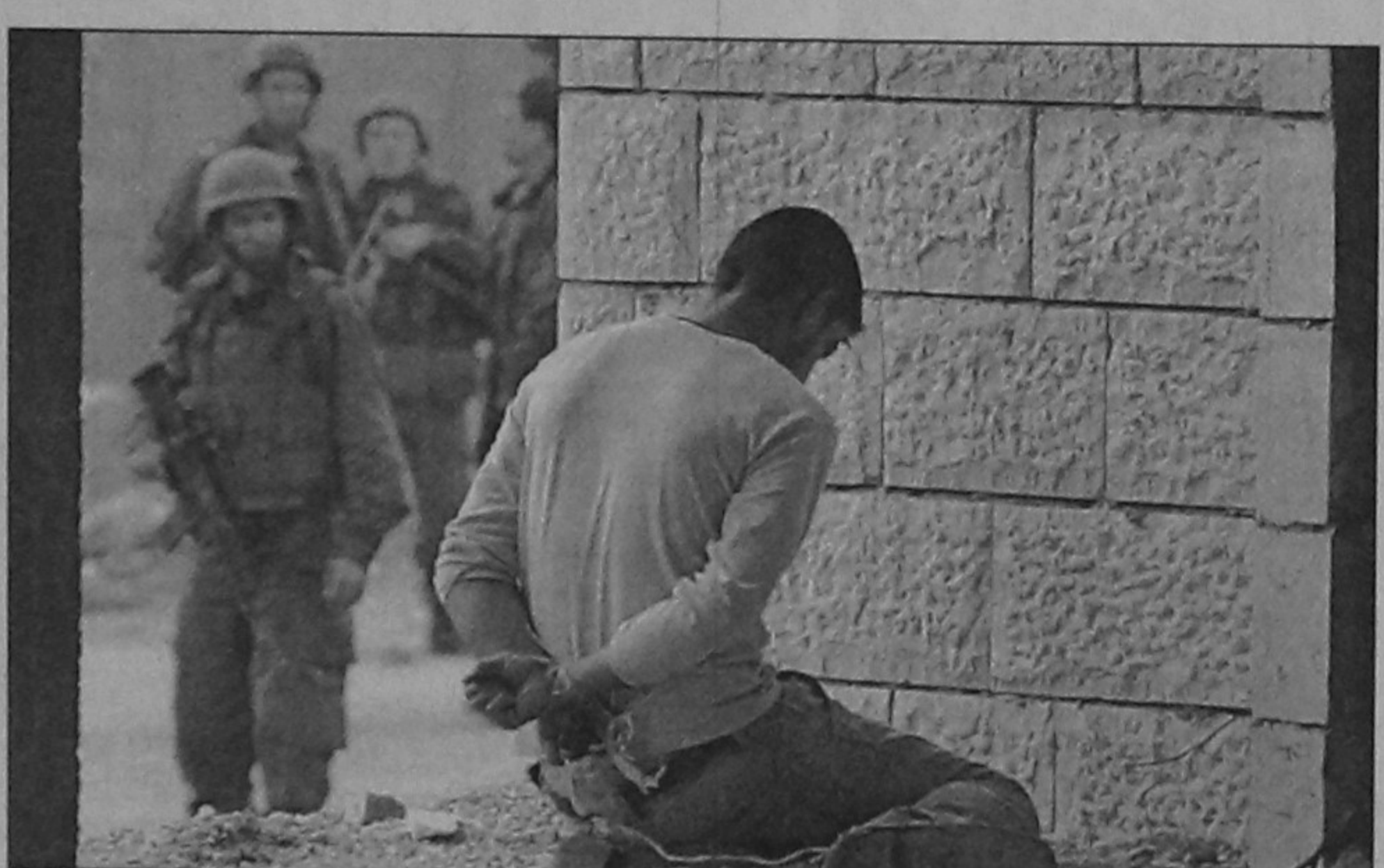


PHOTO: AFP  
Israeli soldiers guard an arrested Palestinian man from the West Bank village of Safa as troops search for the Palestinian who attacked two young Jewish settlers with an axe in a West Bank settlement earlier on Thursday.

## UN team in Pakistan to probe Benazir killing

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad  
A United Nations team has arrived in Pakistan to probe the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto.  
The UN team, which arrived here Thursday, has summoned senior police officials of Rawalpindi to collect information regarding Benazir Bhutto's killing, the Online news agency reported Friday.  
The police officials are to meet the UN team in Islamabad Saturday.  
Benazir Bhutto -- the first woman prime minister in an Islamic state -- was killed when a gunman shot her in the neck and set off a bomb while she was leaving an election rally in Rawalpindi Dec 27, 2007. At least 20 other people died in the attack and several more were injured.

## Indian PM sets terms for talks with Pakistan

THE DAWN, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London  
Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India has said his country was prepared to discuss with Pakistan all outstanding issues, but added "we cannot proceed if our people keep getting killed."  
The Indian prime minister who was answering questions while speaking to the media immediately after the closure of G20 was asked if he was prepared to enter into dialogue with Pakistan on Kashmir and if he was satisfied with the progress so far made on the Mumbai attack investigations by Islamabad.  
He said India expected Pakistan to bring to book the perpetrators of the Mumbai tragedy and convince New Delhi of its sincerity on this score.  
He further said that Pakistan had the opportunity to establish that it was sincere in its stated resolve never to allow its territory to be used by terrorists to stage their activities in neighbouring countries.

"That is the minimum condition for talks," he declared.  
Earlier, in his opening remarks he said that he and US President Obama had discussed a range of issues, including energy security, protectionism and terrorism, with special emphasis on counter-terrorism strategies.  
He said the US and India were "global strategic partners" and there were enormous opportunities to promote this partnership in diverse fields.  
Manmohan and US President Barack Obama Thursday held their first bilateral talks and agreed to intensify strategic partnership in all areas, including fighting terrorism.  
Developments in Pakistan and Afghanistan figured prominently in the discussion between the two leaders.  
During the talks, Manmohan Singh made clear that Pakistan must show absolute sincerity in bringing the perpetrators of the Mumbai attack to book before the talks can be resumed between the two countries.  
"We discussed development in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We both agreed that our two countries must work together to counter the forces of terror," Manmohan Singh replied when asked about his first meeting with President Obama on the sidelines of the G20 summit here.  
"We have a global strategic partnership with the US. We both have agreed that there are enormous opportunities to strengthen this relationship and to make it more productive and durable."  
He described the discussion as "useful and productive" that focused on development of bilateral relations and how problems of the region can be resolved by interaction between the two countries.  
Apart from the global financial meltdown, the two leaders discussed the entire array of bilateral, regional and global issues, including terrorism, energy security, climate change and the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## India imposes tight security for polls

AFP, New Delhi  
India has tightened security and is ready to deal with any militant attacks during campaigning for general elections set to start in mid-April, a cabinet minister said Thursday.  
"There is no need for panic and alarm as the country has been put on a high level of security to ensure peaceful polls," Home Minister P. Chidambaram told a news conference in New Delhi.  
At the same time, he said the overall security situation in South Asia had deteriorated "so we have to be on guard."  
India has assigned more than two million security personnel and police officers for the elections, which begin April 16 and end May 13.  
Many candidates contesting the world's biggest exercise in democracy have demanded tighter security amid warnings about possible attacks by Islamic militants from Pakistan during the five-phased polls.  
However, "much of that is not true," Chidambaram said, referring to the warnings.



PHOTO: AFP  
(L to R) US President Barack Obama, first lady Michelle Obama, France's first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy are pictured on their arrival at the Palais Rohan for the Nato summit in Strasbourg yesterday.

## Obama asks N Korea to halt 'provocative' missile launch

AFP, Strasbourg  
US President Barack Obama demanded yesterday that North Korea halt a "provocative" missile launch, as tensions flared on the possible eve of a test sure to spark a dangerous new foreign policy crisis.  
Obama spoke sharply and directly to the Stalinist state during a joint press conference with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, after South Korea predicted the aggressive North Korean move could come within hours.  
"We have made very clear to the North Koreans that their missile launch is provocative," Obama said, ahead of the 60th anniversary Nato summit here.  
"It puts enormous strains on the six-party talks ... they should stop the launch," he said, referring to the negotiations aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear programme.  
"The response so far from the North Koreans has been not just unhelpful, but has resorted to the sort of language that has led to North

Korea's isolation in the international community for a very long time.  
"Should North Korea decide to take this action, we will work with all interested parties in the international community to take appropriate steps to let North Korea know that it can't threaten the safety and security of other countries with impunity."  
Earlier, South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak said in London that the North was on the verge of firing the rocket, which it says is carrying a satellite, but which its foes see as a test of the long-range Taepodong-2 missile.  
Lee told reporters that Seoul would be ready to send an envoy to its northern neighbour if the reclusive state's leaders were willing to accept one.  
Asked when South Korea expected the rocket to be fired, Lee said it depended on weather conditions.  
"If tomorrow's weather is suitable for them, if they think it's suitable for them to test fire this missile then it's going to be tomorrow," he said.

## New antibiotic clears hurdle in TB treatment

AFP, Paris  
A new antibiotic has passed a key phase in a test of drugs aimed at shortening the time to cure tuberculosis, offering a potential boon in the fight against TB, according to a study reported in The Lancet today.  
The standard treatment for TB is a course of drugs that takes up to six months -- a time that is so long that many patients, believing they are cured because they no longer feel symptoms of the disease, abandon the therapy.  
As a result, they may not have been completely cleared of the germ that causes TB, and this enables the microbe to mutate into a drug-resistant form or be passed on to other individuals.



PHOTO: AFP  
Malaysia's new Prime Minister Najib Razak waves as he enters the prime minister's office after seeing off the former premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in Putrajaya yesterday.

## Thai-Cambodian troops clash in border: 3 killed

AFP, Phnom Penh  
Cambodian and Thai troops fought heavy gunbattles along their disputed border yesterday, leaving three soldiers dead in a major flare-up of a long-running feud over an ancient temple.  
Soldiers traded rocket, machinegun and mortar fire near the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple on the frontier, following a brief exchange of shots earlier in the day, officials from both sides said.  
The same area was the scene of several clashes last year after Cambodia successfully applied for United Nations world heritage status for the ruins in July, with four soldiers killed in a battle there in October.  
"We are fighting with each other, it is serious gunfire. Two of our soldiers have been killed," Cambodian government spokesman Khieu Kanharith said. "The gunfire is continuing in at least two areas," he added.  
One Thai soldier was also killed, Seni Chittakasem, the governor of Thailand's Si Sa Ket province, told AFP. Hospital officials said the dead man was shot in the chest and that 10 others were wounded, two of them critically.  
Military commanders later held talks to ease tensions near the flashpoint temple, ownership of which was awarded to Cambodia in 1962 by the International Court of Justice, although the land around the ruins remains disputed.  
But a war of words continued between the two sides after the clash, coming just one week before the prime ministers of the neighbouring countries are due to meet at a key regional summit in Thailand.  
"This is an intended aggressive invasion by the Thai military," said Cambodian foreign ministry spokesman Koy Kuong. "The foreign ministry will... write a protest letter about the invasion by Thailand."