

Israel postpones West Bank withdrawals

Joint security meeting fails

AFP, Gaza City

A planned withdrawal of Israeli troops from two West Bank cities was postponed late Sunday as talks between Israeli and Palestinian security officials over the transfer of security responsibility broke down, a Palestinian official said.

Elias Zanani, spokesman for Palestinian security chief Mohammed Dahlan, told AFP that talks to rubberstamp an Israeli pullback from Jericho and Qalqilya failed after Israel refused to dismantle a checkpoint outside of Qalqilya.

"The meeting ended without any result and without any timetable. There will be no withdrawal tomorrow or the day after," Zanani said following the nearly four-hour meeting.

"Israel said they would withdraw from Qalqilya but they want to maintain the checkpoint at the entrance to the city.

"We reject this completely. It goes against the agreement between Dahlan and (Israeli Defence

Minister Shaul) Mofaz," he said, referring to a meeting between the two Friday when the withdrawals were agreed.

Despite the failure of the meeting, the two sides agreed to meet again Tuesday to continue talking, he said.

Israeli military sources confirmed the talks had ended "without reaching any conclusion" and said there would be no withdrawal from either town Monday as had been planned.

Instead, senior security officials from both sides would meet again "in a couple of days", the source said, without elaborating on why Sunday's talks had broken down.

Israel said Friday it would hand over four West Bank cities to Palestinian security control within the next two weeks -- Jericho and Qalqilya this week, followed by a withdrawal from Tulkerem and Ramallah, with the proviso that calm prevails.

Speaking a day after the meeting, Dahlan stressed the importance of removing army check-

points from the West Bank.

"Any withdrawal must also involve lifting checkpoints from around the cities to guarantee free movement for all the people," he told reporters in Ramallah.

Mofaz said Sunday that the handover in Ramallah and Tulkerem "will be conditional on a resolution of the problem of the fugitives in each city," in a reference to wanted Palestinian militants.

He approved the transfers at Friday's meeting with Dahlan in a policy U-turn after previously saying no such move would take place.

Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr predicted earlier Sunday that the transfers could begin as early as Monday.

While Amr said the cabinet welcomed the pullbacks, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat charged the Israelis were trying to circumvent the US-backed roadmap for peace.



An Israeli soldier checks the ID of a Palestinian woman while others wait to cross through a metal detector at the West Bank checkpoint of Kalandia yesterday. A planned withdrawal of Israeli troops from Jericho and Qalqilya was postponed late Sunday as talks between Israeli and Palestinian security officials over the transfer of security responsibility broke down.

Woman killed in Tel Aviv restaurant blast

AFP, Jerusalem

One woman was killed and at least three people injured in a suspected bomb blast yesterday near the entrance to a popular restaurant in downtown Tel Aviv, police and fire services said.

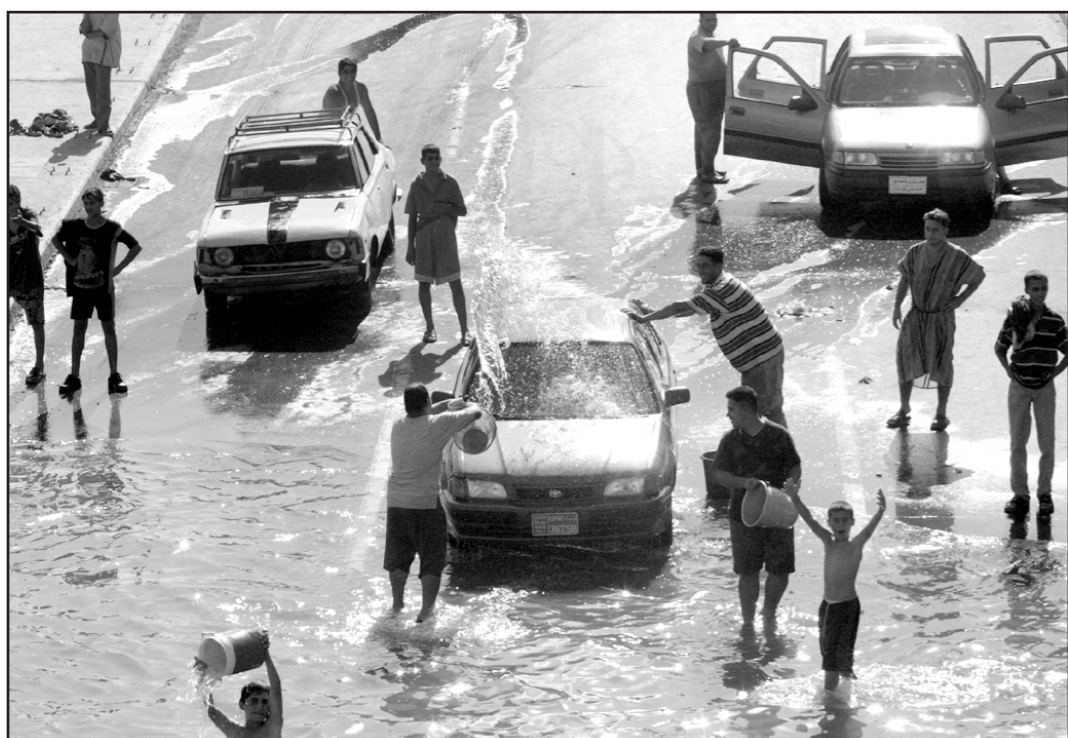
The woman died in hospital after the explosion which blew up either in a lift or on the roof, near the restaurant in Yizhak Sadeh street, a busy thoroughfare in the centre of the city, a police source told AFP.

Rescue services said earlier that four people were wounded in the incident.

Initial reports said that the blast could have been caused by an exploding gas canister but fire service chief Aharon Aharoni told military radio that explosive material had been found at the scene.

"It was not caused by a gas fault," the official said.

Police would not comment on the cause of the blast and did not rule out the possibility that it could have been an accident.



Iraqi people wash their cars with water flowing from a hole caused by the sabotage of a water pipeline in Baghdad Sunday. A source from the International Committee of the Red Cross said that sabotage caused huge floods in parts of Baghdad and deprived 300,000 people of running water.

Thousands without water after attack

AFP, Baghdad

Hundreds of thousands of sweltering Baghdadis faced another day without running water Monday after sabotage of a key water pipe in the east of the capital that came amid a spate of deadly attacks across Iraq.

With summer temperatures hovering around 50 degrees Celsius (122 F), up to 300,000 people were without drinking water for a second scorching day.

And with faltering infrastructure and increasing lawlessness in parts of Baghdad, the water shortage was likely to further wear down Iraqi patience with the occupying coalition forces.

The water-pipe attack on Sunday morning sent thousands of litres gushing into the streets of the eastern Baghdad suburb of Rasafa.

Floods in some streets created impromptu swimming pools for many Iraqis basking in the relentless heat.

Although engineers from Baghdad's water company had

stopped the gushing water by Monday morning, supplies had still not been returned to many homes in the area, residents said.

The repair operation was being aided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which lent machinery and pumping tools.

There was confusion over what caused the pipe to blow.

An ICRC spokesman said a rocket-propelled grenade hit the 1.6-metre (5.3-ft) diameter pipe at an open-air section near where the supply links the Sabah Missan pumping station with Rasafa.

But a local police officer said the blast was caused by an explosive placed under the pipe.

"We heard an explosion at 7:30 am (0330 GMT), and when we arrived on the scene we found a 40 centimetre (16 inch) wide hole in the pipe and water flowing out on to the road and around," policeman Majid Hamid told AFP Sunday.

'India operating 55 terror camps along LoC to destabilise Pakistan'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan accused arch-rival India yesterday of allowing more than 55 terrorist camps to operate along its western border to train fighters to "destabilise" Pakistan.

The surprise, detailed charges, echoing accusations usually hurled by New Delhi against Islamabad, come in the midst of efforts to mend ties between the nuclear-capable neighbours.

"We believe there are several terror training camps in India across the Line of Control (LoC) and the Pakistan-India border," foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan told a weekly press briefing. The LoC divides disputed Kashmir between Indian and Pakistani-ruled zones.

"This apparatus, infrastructure of terrorist training camps must be dismantled by India if it's serious in its pursuit of peace in South Asia.

"This is not a secret, the Indians know about it and we know about it."

"According to our estimates there are more than 55 and they target Pakistan directly and they launch sabotage and other anti-state activities. They also fuel and fan sectarianism and this is no secret."

The Pakistani accusations come one day after India's junior defence minister Chaman Lal Gupta said some 4,500 Islamic guerrillas were poised to sneak into Indian Kashmir from the Pakistani zone.

Gupta questioned Islamabad's sincerity in normalising relations with India and repeated New Delhi's long-standing demand that Pakistan dismantle alleged terrorist infrastructure.

India has long accused Pakistan of sponsoring, training, funding and arming Muslim rebels to fight Indian rule in Kashmir.

Factions close to Liberian peace deal

REUTERS, Accra

Liberia's government and rebels could be close to signing a peace deal on Monday that would set up an interim administration designed to halt a 14-year spiral of violence, officials said.

After drawn-out talks in Ghana's capital Accra, the main rebel group LURD dropped its demand for the number two post in the new government due to take power in mid-October.

The mediators said there were still some points to be agreed, including the exact process of appointing top officials and the size of the parliament, before a final draft agreement could be drawn up.

French heatwave death toll may hit 5,000

AFP, Paris

As many as 5,000 people could have died as a result of the recent heatwave across France, Health Minister Jean-Francois Mattei told RTL radio on Monday.

"The figure of 5,000 was mentioned yesterday. It's one hypothesis. It's plausible but it's just a hypothesis," said Mattei, who has been under fire for not reacting earlier to the crisis.

He said currently available death tolls were "based on estimates", adding: "We won't have definitive and indisputable figures for several weeks."

Before the 5,000-death figure was mentioned, the record-breaking two-week heatwave was already estimated to have killed around 3,000, most of them elderly people unable to cope with persistent temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) and more.

Hoon defends decisions on Kelly case

AFP, London

British Defence Minister Geoff Hoon believes the decisions he took over the Kelly case were right and appropriate, the press here reported Monday as the second week of the Hutton inquiry was to get under way.

The probe under senior judge Lord Hutton into the death of government scientist David Kelly will turn the spotlight on the role of Prime Minister Tony Blair's office, with the careers of several officials including Hoon hanging in the balance.

Kelly, who apparently committed suicide in July days after being grilled by two parliamentary committees, was caught up in a row between Downing Street and the BBC over a report that the government embellished the case for war on Iraq.

Taliban attack on Afghan police post

AP, Kabul

Just hours after a deadly raid on a police station that left 22 people dead, suspected Taliban attacked another police compound in south-east Afghanistan, setting it ablaze and taking four policemen hostage, officials said Monday.

The latest attack took place Sunday night at Tarway, a village in Paktika province a few km from the Pakistan border, provincial police chief Daulat Khan said.

Another Sept 11-style attack on US likely

AP, London

Another Sept. 11-style terrorism attack is "highly likely" in the United States, which ranks fourth in an index assessing the risk to 186 countries, a research company said Sunday.

The London-based World Markets Research Centre ranked Colombia, Israel, Pakistan, the United States and the Philippines, in descending order, as the five countries most likely to be targeted in a terrorist attack in the next year, said Guy Dunn, author of the company's World Terrorism Index.

The index, to be published

Monday, assesses the risk of terrorism to the countries and their interests abroad, he said. The country least likely to be attacked by terrorists is North Korea, Dunn said.

The assessments used five criteria: motivation of terrorists, the presence of terror groups, the scale and frequency of past attacks, efficacy of the groups in carrying out attacks and how many attacks were thwarted by the country.

The categories also were weighted differently. For example, 40 percent was given to motivation and 10 percent to prevention.

"Another Sept. 11-style terrorist attack in the United States is highly

likely," the report states. "Networks of militant Islamist groups are less extensive in the US than they are in Western Europe, but US-led military action in Afghanistan and Iraq has exacerbated anti-US sentiment."

In terms of motivation, Dunn said, "The United States, as a global superpower, is considered a legitimate, high-profile target."

But in terms of the presence of terrorist cells, the United States has relatively few, "although it is probably the most open society in the world," he said.

Settlement may help US-Libya relations

AP, Tripoli

Libya's foreign minister said Sunday his country would welcome the restoration of relations with the United States now that Libya has accepted responsibility for the bombing of a Pan Am jetliner in 1988.

Abdel-Rahman Shalgam said he believes the United States can now lift its sanctions against Libya and remove it from a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"The causes for the disputes between Libya and the United States have ended," Shalgam told The Associated Press. "The two countries need each other to fight the terrorism both nations suffer from, and in the economic and investment fields."

Al-Qaeda tape urges Muslims to fight US

REUTERS, Dubai

Al Arabiya television aired on Monday an audio tape allegedly from an al-Qaeda spokesman saying Osama bin Laden and Taliban chief Mullah Omar were alive and urging Muslims to fight a holy war against US troops in Iraq.

Al Arabiya attributed the recording to Afghan-based al-Qaeda official Abdel Rahman al-Najdi, who it said was on a US list of wanted al-Qaeda members.

"I would like to bring the good tidings to Muslims everywhere that Sheikh Osama bin Laden is well, very well and that Mullah Omar is

also alive," the voice on the recording said, referring respectively to the al-Qaeda chief and Taliban leader who was ousted in a 2001 US-led war in Afghanistan.

The tape also praised and urged Muslims to continue their resistance against US troops in Iraq, saying: "The Americans are begging the world to stand by their side in Iraq."

"I would also like to congratulate our brothers in Iraq for their valiant struggle against the occupation, which we support and urge them, to continue," it added.

"To our brothers in struggle in Iraq: the whole world has witnessed the collapse of the regime in Iraq

and your steadfastness and victory against the invading US and British troops."

"They came to invade and no one could stop them occupying Iraq. But when the young men of Jihad (holy war) started fighting in the name of God and the killing began day and night, they began looking for someone to help them and stand by their side."

"The group of believers carrying Jihad in the name of God planted fear and terror in the hearts of the Americans, who have violated all international laws and human conventions," the speaker added.

N Korea to dismantle nukes only after change of US policy

AFP, Seoul

North Korea warned again yesterday it would not dismantle its nuclear arsenal unless the United States changed its policy towards the communist state at next week's six-nation nuclear talks.

"If the US does not express its will to make a switchover in its policy towards the DPRK (North Korea), the DPRK will have no option but to declare that it can not dismantle its nuclear deterrent force at the talks," the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

North Korea is due to meet the United States, Japan, China, Russia and South Korea in Beijing on August 27-29 for talks resolve a 10-month crisis over its nuclear weapons program.

KCNA said Washington could prove it had changed its policy towards North Korea by agreeing to a non-aggression pact and diplomatic normalisation, and pledging not to hinder Pyongyang's international trade.

A foreign ministry statement released on KCNA last week said Pyongyang would make these demands at the talks, which are the result of weeks of Chinese-led active diplomacy.

Foul weather holds up Nepalese peace talks

AFP, Nepalgunj, Nepal

Foul weather was delaying the restart Monday of peace talks between Nepal's Maoist rebels and government negotiators, following a bruising first session in which both sides conceded little progress had been made.

The talks were due to get under way mid-morning in the western town of Dang, a rebel stronghold, but a government minister said rain was preventing a helicopter ferrying the government team from Nepalgunj, where Sunday's first round was held.

The venue of the talks was changed, according to government negotiator Kamal Thapa, who is communications and information minister, because the rebels wanted to hold the talks "in secrecy and away from the media".

Sunday's first session at Nepalgunj, on the Indian border about 420 km southwest of Kathmandu, made little headway on key issues, with the rebels rejecting government-proposed constitutional reforms.

The government said in a bid to make peace with the rebels, who have been waging armed actions for the past seven years in pursuit of their goal of a communist state, it was ready to form an interim government that would include the Maoists.

Power grid put to test as US, Canada return to work

AFP, New York

North America began a new work-week yesterday amid fears that a sudden surge in demand for electricity could trigger new blackouts in the northeastern United States and Canada, where the power grid failed so dramatically late last week.

The timing of last week's blackout -- the biggest the continent has ever seen -- was fortuitous in that it struck Thursday afternoon, just before the weekend, giving officials breathing space to put the system back in order.

Millions in the United States and Canada saw electricity and water services gradually restored over the weekend but officials warned of more potential blackouts as the working week got under way.

"We're not out of the woods," Pat Wood, chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission told NBC's "Meet the Press" program Sunday.

New York Governor George Pataki said all six of the state's nuclear power plants should be back online by Monday morning bringing them back to near full-capacity generation.

grid would only disappear once the precise cause of Thursday afternoon's massive outage had been located.

"On Monday, millions of New Yorkers will set foot back in the subways," he said. "We know that our system will be up and running but we cannot say with 100-percent certainty that this can't happen again until we know what happened and what steps are being taken to prevent it again."

Officials in Toronto, Canada's largest city, said the subway system there, which carries more than a million passengers a day, would be up and running Monday.

But Ontario Premier Ernie Eves made a televised appeal to everyone in the province, "to operate at approximately 50 percent of the power they normally use."

"It won't be 'business as usual'," he warned.

The city of Cleveland, Ohio, lifted an advisory calling on residents to boil water late Sunday. But officials warned that beaches in the area were still unsafe for swimming because of untreated sewage pouring into Lake Erie.

The same was true in the New York region after sewage plants that failed during the blackout dumped huge amounts of raw sewage into city waterways.



Greenpeace activist intercept a trainload of US maize as it tries to enter Mexico on Sunday in response to fresh evidence that the US was dumping Monsanto genetically engineered crops across the border contradicting international agreements.