

Israeli troops, Palestinian gunmen clash in Jenin

Ahmed Qurie must move against militants: Tel Aviv

REUTERS, Jenin

Israeli soldiers exchanged fire with Palestinian gunmen and demolished the family home of a Hamas suicide bomber yesterday during a house-by-house sweep for militants in a major West Bank city.

A 12-year-old boy standing at the gate to his home and a man inside his house were wounded in the shooting in Jenin, on the second day of the Israeli operation, witnesses said.

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, effectively rejecting a call this week by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat for a cease-fire, pledged to keep up the pressure on militant groups spearheading a three-year-old uprising for statehood.

Mofaz told Israel Radio that Arafat's choice for prime minister, Ahmed Qurie, can prove himself a peace partner only by cracking down on those organizations once he takes office.

"As long as Arafat continues to be the Palestinian leader, I don't think there's a chance to move forward in the peace process," Mofaz said.

"On the other hand, there's a desire to choose a Palestinian prime minister... When (he) is elected, he will have to prove himself by his actions -- first of all, the dismantling of

terrorist infrastructures," the hawkish defense chief said.

Mofaz made the remarks after President Bush said on Thursday a US-backed Middle East peace plan, known as the road map, had stalled. He blamed what he called Arafat's failed leadership for the setback.

Palestinian Labour Minister Ghassan el-Khatib said Bush's comments were "not constructive."

The decision by Arafat's Fatah faction to leave naming the 24-seat cabinet to the president and Qurie ensures Arafat, whom the United States hoped to sideline, will play a major role in shaping the next government.

Arafat and Qurie planned to consult in the coming days on the composition of a cabinet which Palestinian officials said would be formed next week.

The cabinet will include a US favorite, reformist Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, the officials said. A supporter of Hamas, a fundamentalist Islamic group that has killed hundreds of Israelis in suicide bombings, was also slated for a post.

Qurie was named prime minister after Mahmoud Abbas resigned saying his efforts to promote the road map had been undermined by Arafat and Israel.

Last week, Israel issued an open-ended threat to "remove" Arafat after suicide bombings killed 15 people. It accuses him of fomenting violence, an allegation he denies.

With a curfew in effect in Jenin, the army demolished the family home of Shadi Toubasi, a Hamas suicide bomber who killed 15 Israelis in a restaurant in northern Israel last year.

In Jerusalem, Israel took aim at suspected militants of its own, charging a Jewish settler with membership in what it called a terrorist organization that has killed eight Palestinians in a series of attacks. A lawyer for suspect Shahar Dvir Zeligler denied the accusation.

Israeli security sources have said an underground Jewish cell that goes by several names is active in the West Bank. Police announced the discovery of an arms cache near a settlement which they said was used by the cell's members.

But citing insufficient evidence, Israeli authorities recently released nine settlers suspected of involvement in shootings that have killed eight Palestinians, including a baby.

Settlers, living on occupied land in the West Bank and Gaza, have been frequent targets of attacks by Palestinian gunmen.

Meanwhile, Israel's defense minister said yesterday Palestinian Prime Minister-designate Ahmed Qurie can prove himself a peace partner only by launching a crack-down on militant groups once he takes office.

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A curious beachgoer emerges after the storm and walks by a beach front home in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, as it washes out to sea on Thursday in the Outer Banks in North Carolina as a result of Hurricane Isabel. Hurricane Isabel lashed the US East Coast on Thursday killing nine people as winds and floods forced the evacuation of more than 300,000, grounded flights at 19 airports and shut down the US government.

Megawati to call for multilateralism at UNGA

THE JAKARTA POST/ANN, Jakarta

President Megawati Soekarnoputri will highlight the importance of multilateralism and reform of the United Nations body in her coming speech in front of the UN General Assembly.

"We have seen such as in the Iraq case, unilateralism will not benefit any country," spokesman of the ministry of foreign affairs Marty Natalegawa said at the weekly press briefing on Friday.

He said the President will also call for reform inside of the UN Security Council, saying that the agency no longer had moral and political weight in solving conflicts around the world.

"The Security Council is no longer representative, as it is no longer has any moral and political weight in settling international conflict," Marty said.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, has consistently supported multilateralism and the idea of enhancing the UN's role in settling international conflicts.

In international issues such as Iraq and Palestinian, Jakarta continues to be a strong opponent of the United States that tends to sideline the UN.

Marty said the US's recent veto on the resolution on the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was again another example of the ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council.

Megawati will leave for New York on Sunday morning as she will make a stopover in Singapore for a few hours, before continuing the journey to New York.



Two Swedish girls with flowers in their hands stand by the mountain of flowers in memory of Foreign Minister Anna Lindh outside the NK department store in Stockholm yesterday while the memorial service for Lindh is taking place in the City Hall just a kilometer away. Some 1,300 high-profile guests, among them lots of foreigners, attended the memorial service for Lindh, just over a week after the popular and charismatic foreign minister died of stab wounds inflicted by an attacker in the department store.

Europe's powers seek to end Iraq deadlock

AFP, Berlin

With instability and attacks on US troops on the rise in Iraq, the leaders of Germany, France and Britain meet here today to try to end the diplomatic impasse over the war-torn country's future.

The summit between German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair could prove pivotal for the Gulf region and the results in Berlin will affect the European Union.

It could also have repercussions for Schroeder, who wants desperately to improve Germany's relations with the United States, and any breakthrough would give Blair a personal boost after the pressures of the Hutton inquiry.

At issue is whether a compromise can be reached on a viable UN resolution that would put a multinational force into Iraq and share the heavy financial burden of rebuilding the country, five months after a US-led coalition toppled Saddam Hussein's regime.

The United States, which went to war with Britain without the approval of the United Nations, refuses to share any control of Iraq.

It has accepted demands, notably from war opponents France and Germany, to bring the UN back to prominence, but a stalemate has arisen over the timetable for restoring sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

The gulf was obvious after the failure of last weekend's talks in Geneva between foreign ministers of the UN Security Council's five permanent members.

But since then, signals have emerged of a possible breakthrough.

At a press conference here Thursday, Chirac called for "the rapid transfer, under the control of the UN, of the responsibilities of

government to the current governmental bodies in Iraq."

While it appeared to be a new demand for a tight time frame, he backed away from previous French demands for the handover of sovereignty within one month.

"And when I say as rapidly as possible, it is for us a question of months and not years naturally."

In a further concession, Chirac said France would also be willing to help train new Iraqi police officers and military personnel if Germany went ahead with its offer to do so.

"It goes without saying that if the chancellor confirms that position, France will also do so for the same reasons," he said.

Across the Atlantic, US President George W. Bush remained pessimistic about a breakthrough being made before he attends the UN General Assembly next week.

"The question was: 'Will we have a UN resolution by the time I get to New York?' No, I don't think so," he told reporters at Camp David on Thursday.

For Schroeder it is vital to go to New York with a peace offering.

The chancellor and Bush are due to meet on the sidelines of the assembly in their first face-to-face talks in about 15 months, potentially making Saturday's summit the start of a new era in ties between Washington and Berlin.

According to press reports, the foreign minister in Berlin thinks the timing for the tripartite summit with Blair, the first of its kind in two years, is perfect.

"The British are seeking more contact with continental Europe again" because London feels it is not being treated as an equal partner by the Bush administration, one official told Friday's Die Welt newspaper.

Isabel wreaks havoc in US

3.5 million people in darkness, 14 killed

AP, Richmond

Hurricane Isabel knocked out power to more than 3.5 million people as it weakened into a tropical storm and raced up the Eastern Seaboard yesterday, swamping tidal communities along Chesapeake Bay, uprooting trees, disrupting air traffic and shutting down the nation's capital.

The massive storm was blamed for at least 14 deaths: seven in Virginia; one in North Carolina; one in Pennsylvania; two in Maryland and one in New Jersey.

The storm plowed into North Carolina's Outer Banks on Thursday night with winds of about 100 mph and moved across Virginia early Friday as it continued losing strength. It began moving into western Pennsylvania and was expected to sweep through western New York state before dissipating in Canada by Saturday.

Isabel's top sustained wind had eased to around 50 mph early Friday.

Michael Brown, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Isabel inflicted the worst damage along the Outer Banks.

"Our concern down there is we have about 4,000 people who refused to evacuate we're getting in to make sure they're OK," he said on ABC's Good Morning America.

Brown cautioned that residents in Isabel's path should keep their guard up, with flood waters moving into tributaries throughout the day. "So people just because they see blue skies should not think, 'Oh this storm is gone and the aftermath is over with.'"

In Washington, the federal government shut down for two days. Offices, monuments and subway tunnels were all but abandoned, frustrating tourists. Some were

surprised that monuments and museums were closed Thursday hours ahead of the storm.

"I think it's a little overkill," said Sandra de Dubovay, who was visiting from the Los Angeles area. "Some people only have a day here. It is frustrating."

With mid-Atlantic states left sodden by an unusually wet summer, the winds toppled trees and rains flooded creeks and low-lying areas.

In Middletown, New Jersey, Isabel sent a tree crashing through the roof of Jean Paul Zammit's house.

"It was a just a big bang and crack, and the ceiling falling down and everything falling down," said Zammit, who was sitting in his living room when the roof caved in.

At 5 a.m., Isabel was 80 miles south of Johnstown, Pa., moving northwest at around 21 mph, down from 24 mph Thursday as it moved up the coast.

Up to a foot of rain was possible in West Virginia's hilly Eastern Panhandle and 6 to 9 inches was forecast for parts of Pennsylvania, where authorities in Lancaster County said a motorist was killed early Friday when a tree fell on his car.

In Virginia alone, more than 1.5 million people lost power by late Thursday and more than 16,000 people filled evacuation shelters. Six people were killed in a pair of weather-related traffic accidents in the state; another was killed by a falling tree.

"Virginians need to realize that they're in for a tough couple of days," said Gov. Mark R. Warner.

Some of the worst flooding on Thursday was along the Chesapeake Bay, where an 8.2-foot storm surge sent water into low-lying areas, particularly Norfolk and Portsmouth.

Along the York River in Gloucester County, authorities rescued eight people stranded on a small island surrounded by raging currents. Water around the island started to recede Thursday, lessening the danger to others who remained stranded.

The Potomac River was forecast to see a 5- to 6-foot surge by early Friday morning. Streets were flooded in Alexandria's colonial Old Town district in Virginia.

Maryland Gov. Robert Ehrlich said flooding, whether from storm surges on the Eastern Shore or heavy rainfall, was "the No. 1 danger." Two Marylanders were killed in separate weather-related traffic accidents.

In Baltimore, the storm blew down three buildings that would have to be demolished and downed trees and utility lines. The storm knocked out generators at two water treatment plants and one sewage treatment plant.

Anne Arundel County Executive Janet Owens urged residents to be patient and conserve water until power was restored.

"Putting it bluntly, please don't flush," Owens said. "It buys us some time."

The storm spared much of North Carolina the kind of flood damage is experienced from Hurricane Floyd in 1999. The storm flooded some low-lying areas and knocked out electricity for hundreds of thousands, but it didn't appear to pack the same destructive punch as Floyd, which left 56 dead and a wide swath of the state underwater.

On isolated Ocracoke Island along the Outer Banks, about 15 people gathered at Howard's Pub to ride out the storm.

Best Bakery case Gujarat govt admits witnesses coerced

PTI, New Delhi

Chastised by the Supreme Court to observe "raj dhama", the Gujarat government yesterday admitted before it that witnesses in the Best Bakery case trial could have been "coerced or won over" to turn hostile leading to acquittal of all the accused but pledged to do "everything possible" to bring the guilty to book.

Shaken by the Apex Court's severe criticism of the manner in which the state had filed the appeal before the High Court, Gujarat government through Additional Solicitor General Mukul Rohtagi said it would amend its appeal challenging the acquittal of the accused, seek retrial of the case and a direction for further probe into the case to collect more evidence.

A bench comprising Chief Justice V N Khare, Justice Brijesh Kumar and Justice S B Sinha, which was hearing a petition filed by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) alleging miscarriage of justice and transfer of trial of four riot cases outside the state, warned the state that it would "not allow the mistake committed before the trial court to be repeated

before the High Court". It allowed the state two weeks time to file an affidavit detailing the steps it was taking in the case and posted the matter for further hearing on October nine.

To assuage the Apex Court, Rohtagi said the state would within a week appoint seasoned advocates as special public prosecutor to conduct the riot cases pending before various trial courts.

Both the officers were examined by the court without putting them on oath and probed as to how the state could remain silent when such a serious lapse was taking place in the trial court. It was the DGP who was questioned more incisively by the Bench and at one point conceded that he had sought to know from the Commissioner of Police of Baroda district as to why so many witnesses were turning hostile. "The commissioner had told me that the witnesses appear to have been either coerced or won over."

Laheri said the grounds of appeal filed before the High Court would be suitably amended to bring out specifically the prayer for retrial in the case as many witnesses have turned hostile.

By-election hands Blair a bitter post-war blow

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair suffered a painful mid-term blow at the polls this week when a stronghold of his Labour Party fell to the Liberal Democrats in a closely fought by-election, the first since the Iraq war.

It was the first time since Blair swept to power six years ago that Labour has lost a by-election anywhere, let alone in the ethnically diverse north London constituency of Brent East.

Liberal Democrat standard bearer Sarah Teather defeated Robert Evans, a Labour member of the European Parliament, by a 1,118-vote margin to become at 29 the youngest member of the British parliament, the House of Commons.

"Tony Blair, I hope that you are listening tonight," said Teather as the results of Thursday's ballot were announced in the early hours of Friday.

"The people of Brent have spoken for the people of Britain. They want you to listen. They want you to deliver."

Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy said the outcome was due in large part to Blair taking the nation into the US-led war against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The inva-

sion of Iraq was opposed by the Liberal Democrats -- Britain's third political party -- and by a great many Britons.

"In a way, Iraq has really led to an awful lot of questions being raised in terms of trust, motivation, how they are being managed, not led, by the government," Kennedy told BBC radio.

"It has led to an awful sense of doubt both about Tony Blair personally and about this (Labour) administration. I think that is going to be difficult for the government."

Political analysts agreed. "He (Blair) is certainly paying the price for Iraq," Patrick Dunleavy, a professor of government at the London School of Economics, told AFP. "I think he has become a polarising figure in British politics."

The Brent East by-election -- called after the death in June of 45-year-old Labour MP Paul Daisley and contested by no less than 16 candidates -- was the first since US and British troops invaded Iraq six months ago this weekend.

It was also the first since the BBC aired allegations in May that Blair's government had "sexed up" an intelligence report to boost the case for tough action against Saddam Hussein's regime.



An Iraqi youth celebrates before a burning US army vehicle following an ambush on a US army convoy in the town of Khaldiya, 80 km west of Baghdad Thursday. The Dubai-based Al-Arabiya television station said in an unconfirmed report that eight US soldiers were killed in a series of attacks on the US convoy.

Charles Sobhraj arrested from Kathmandu casino

AFP, Kathmandu

Charles Sobhraj, a notorious criminal accused in a string of murders of young Western tourists around Asia, was arrested last morning at a casino in Kathmandu, a police official said.

Sobhraj, a French national who spent 20 years in a maximum-security prison in India, had been hunted by Nepalese police since a Kathmandu newspaper spotted him this week and splashed his picture, with his trademark beret, on its front page.

Police found Sobhraj at 4:00 am (22:15 GMT Thursday) in the casino of the Yak and Yeti luxury hotel, a police inspector involved in the arrest told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Sobhraj, nicknamed "The Serpent" for his cunning escapes from the law, is wanted in Nepal for the 1975 murders of two women from the United States and Canada, police said.

Sobhraj, the son of an Indian father and a Vietnamese mother who remarried a Frenchman, finished a 20-year sentence at New Delhi's Tihar prison in 1997 for drugging, robbing and killing tourists.