



6 Palestinians killed in Israeli raid in Gaza

Army cracks down on smuggling tunnels under Gaza-Egypt border

AFP, Gaza City

Six Palestinians were killed in a massive Israeli raid in southern Gaza, hospital sources said Friday, as question marks still hung over the future of Palestinian premier Ahmed Qorei amid reports he wants to quit.

Up to 100 armoured vehicles backed by helicopters thrust deep into densely-populated refugee camps in the Gaza Strip town of Rafah on the border with Egypt, Palestinian security sources said.

The Israeli army said the raid launched late Thursday -- code-named "Operation Root Canal" --

was aimed at thwarting weapons smuggling through secret tunnels dug under the border by Palestinian militants.

An Israeli officer at the scene told AFP the army feared militants were trying to smuggle more sophisticated weapons such as Stinger-type missiles, which could threaten Israeli warplanes and civilians aircraft.

But he admitted that so far no tunnels had been found, as the army said it was encountering strong resistance from Palestinians using dozens of home-made bombs, rocket-

propelled and other grenades and automatic weapons.

Two children, aged eight and 12, and a teenager were shot dead by Israeli troops, while three other Palestinians were also killed during the operation, which was still ongoing Friday morning.

Two of them were killed when an Israeli helicopter fired a missile into the Ybna district of the Gaza Strip camp.

At least five houses were demolished and the electricity and water networks heavily damaged, witnesses and Palestinian security sources said.

An army statement said one

soldier had been lightly wounded in the operation, one of the largest in the area since the start of the intifada just over three years ago.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops launched a massive operation to thwart weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip, the army said yesterday in a statement which described how Palestinians have been digging tunnels under the border with Egypt to run arms.

Military sources said the raid was code-named "operation root canal" and added the army's elite units met with fierce resistance.

Jamali seeks US push for Indo-Pak dialogue

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Jamali has said that US President George Bush has promised continued US involvement in reviving the Indo-Pak dialogue.

"I underlined our commitment to improving our relations with India. President Bush assured me of continued US involvement and interest in resuming the Pakistan-India bilateral dialogue process", Jamali told reporters on his discussions with Bush after his return here from the United States on Thursday night.

He discussed Kashmir issue with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in New York on Thursday before leaving for home.

India, Israel, Russia sign Phalcon radar deal

AP, New Delhi

India, Israel and Russia yesterday signed an agreement for the \$1 billion sale of Phalcon airborne early warning systems to India, a defence official told The Associated Press.

India's rival, Pakistan, has said the system would upset the balance of power in South Asia, where the two major powers have fought three wars since 1947 and now have nuclear weapons.

The advanced Israeli-made Phalcon radar systems are to be fitted on converted Russian-made Ilyushin transport plane that India will purchase from Moscow.

The deal, finalised during the visit to India last month by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, was signed on Friday morning, Indian Defence Ministry spokesman Amitabha Chakrabarti told the AP.

Defence Secretary Ajay Prasad signed the agreement with retired Major General Yasi Ben Hanan, head of Sibat, the Israeli defence

ministry's licensing agency for the Phalcon.

Mikhail Denisov, the first deputy chairman of Russia's State Committee for Military Technical Cooperation, also signed, Russian Ambassador Alexander M Kadakin told the AP.

Technical discussion between the three sides were concluded recently and the agreement was cleared, an Indian official told the AP.

India and Israel had been negotiating on the Phalcon for several years.

India has been seeking to strengthen its defences by acquiring the airborne warning and control systems that can detect aerial threats and serve as a platform to direct Indian combat jets to targets.

Pakistan, however, has criticised what it called India's weapons shopping spree, saying it is dangerous for the subcontinent, where the two major powers have fought three wars since their independence from British colonialism in 1947.

"We believe that such defence deals will upset the conventional military balance," Pakistan's Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told the AP in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital. He said the Phalcon deal is "worrying for us," but said Pakistan is capable of defending itself.

Ahmed said during a recent visit to the United States, Pakistan's Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali raised the issue of "Israel and Russia's defence deals with India."

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister, Yosef Lapid, had told Indian journalists last month that the system "will ensure that the skies of your area are under your surveillance in a very effective way."

He said Israel had no animosity toward Pakistan, but "our good relations with India are to do with defence, and every country has the right to defend itself." Pakistan does not recognise Israel.

Japan PM dissolves lower house, calls election on Nov 9

AP, Tokyo

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi yesterday dissolved the lower house of Japan's Parliament and called for national elections that will be dominated by debate over how to reverse a longrunning slump plaguing the world's second largest economy.

Koizumi set November 9 as the date for the balloting, said Takenori Kanazaki, who leads the New Komeito Party, a member of the three-party ruling coalition.

Japan's prolonged economic slowdown is likely to be the central issue of the election. Signs of a recovery have emerged but joblessness remains near a record high, hovering above 5 percent.

Since taking office in April 2001, Koizumi has vowed to do away with pork-barrel politics and wasteful public works spending, and to deliver on economic reforms.

Although he has capped government spending and pushed through laws to deregulate industry and

privatise government institutions like the post office, those policies have yet to usher in an era of prosperity.

Supporters say Koizumi, who took office in April 2001, needs more time to carry out his agenda. But Japan's largest opposition bloc which merged in anticipation of elections has blamed him for the country's economic woes and slammed him for backing the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The dissolution of Parliament which was expected places the 480 seats of the lower house the more powerful of the legislature's two chambers up for grabs.

The elections offer the popular prime minister a chance to solidify his leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, after his landslide re-election to a second three-year term as party president last month. The LDP hopes the poll will help extend its dominance over Parliament in the face of a more unified opposition.



Japanese Prime Minister and ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Junichiro Koizumi (C) raises his arm yesterday with LDP Vice President Taku Yamazaki (L) and Secretary General Shinzo Abe (R) to face the November 9 general elections in Tokyo.



This picture taken July 5, 2000, shows a Russian jet on the tarmac at Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv, in which an Israeli-made Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) is installed. India and Israel, signed a deal yesterday for the sale of three Phalcon airborne early warning radar systems to the Indian air force.

Iraq war needed to protect US from 'madman' Saddam: Bush

AFP, Manchester

President George W. Bush stepped up his new offensive against Iraq critics Thursday, insisting that the war was needed to protect the United States from the "madman" Saddam Hussein.

Bush is stepping up effort to get across his message as signs of confusion emerge within the administration on Iraq policy and the United States confronts repeated setbacks in its attempts to persuade allies to agree on a new UN resolution on Iraq.

At home, Bush has faced questions about the failure to find the banned chemical, biological or nuclear weapons he made the centerpiece of his case for military action and the toll on US troops and public finances.

But the administration also got some good news when a key House of Representatives committee approved Bush's request for 87 million dollars to finance operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In a speech to servicemen and

their families in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Bush reaffirmed that he had toppled Saddam Hussein to defend the United States.

"I acted because I was not about to leave the security of the American people in the hands of a madman. I was not about to stand by and wait and trust in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein," he declared.

Aides billed Bush's remarks as part of a fresh public relations offensive at a time when the president has accused mainstream media of feeding discontent by reporting mostly the bad news from Iraq.

"We're making good progress in Iraq. Sometimes it's hard to tell it when you listen to the filter," he said this week.

Bush and top aides planned to take their message to regional media and other unconventional sources of news -- national security adviser Condoleezza Rice reportedly plans to appear on Oprah Winfrey's daytime talk show.

There are also signs of trouble within the administration however. Defence Secretary Donald

Rumsfeld acknowledged he was not consulted about a White House shakeup in the US reconstruction effort in Iraq.

But he said at a NATO meeting Wednesday that he was "quite surprised by all this fruffra" over a memo by Rice laying out the re-organisation.

The memo established an National Security Council-led Iraq Stabilisation Group to oversee the US-led occupation, which previously was directed almost exclusively by the Pentagon.

The move was widely seen as an attempt by Rice to assert direct presidential control over Iraq, diminishing Rumsfeld's authority over an operation that has been dogged by resistance and rising US casualties.

Rumsfeld insisted however that "the National Security Council's responsibility is to do exactly what this one-page memo says."

Asked whether his authority had been diminished in any way by the memo, Rumsfeld said, "Not that I can see."

Ebadi defies history with Peace Prize

AFP, Oslo

Shirin Ebadi, who was awarded the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize yesterday, defies Nobel history, as the odds for winning the coveted award are heavily stacked in favour of American or European men.

In the 83 Nobel Peace Prize awards since 1901, only 11 women were deemed worthy of the prize, compared with 79 men, most of whom hail from the United States, France or Britain.

The short list of female laureates begins in 1905, when Austrian writer and peace activist Bertha von Suttner took the honour.

American sociologist Jane Addams, who headed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, was next, in 1931.

More recent female winners are Mother Teresa, a nun working in the slums of Calcutta, in 1979, Burmese opposition figure Aung San Suu Kyi, in 1991, and a Guatemalan Indian Rigoberta

Menchu, in 1992.

The United States heads the countries list with 20 awards, followed by France with nine, Britain with eight and Sweden with five.

Germany, South Africa, Belgium and Northern Ireland have each taken four awards, Switzerland three, and there are two laureates each from the former Soviet Union, East Timor, Israel and Argentina.

Some 20 countries have won the coveted prize once, including Vietnam, Japan, Burma, Poland, Egypt, India, Tibet and, now, Iran.

International organizations have had a large share of peace prizes, taking 19 awards. They include the United Nations, in 2001, the UN Peacekeeping Forces, in 1998, and the Red Cross, in 1963.

International organisations' leaders have sometimes been singled out. Current UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan won the prize in 2001, and one of his predecessors, the late Dag Hammarskjold, was given the prize posthumously, in 1961.

Pak tribesmen under pressure to handover al-Qaeda harbourers

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani authorities yesterday intensified pressure on tribesmen near the Afghan border to hand over three compatriots who harboured Taliban and al-Qaeda suspects, arresting another 10 people.

The number of tribesmen rounded up in a three-day sweep has now reached 52, said administrator in the South Waziristan tribal agency headquarters Wana, Anwar Ali Shah.

"We will carry on with the operation in South Waziristan area until the men we are looking for are handed over to us," Shah told AFP.

The three men are accused of sheltering a band of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in their sprawling mud-walled homes near Angoor Ada in South Waziristan, five km from the Afghan border.

The wanted men are hiding among fellow tribesmen.

Pakistan's military besieged the tribesmen's homes in a massive air and ground operation last week, killing eight Taliban and al-Qaeda suspects and arresting 18. Two Pakistani troops were killed.

Paramilitary forces have barricaded the villages of the Pashtun tribesmen of the Karikhel, Zalikhel and Yirgakhel sub-tribes, and warned that anyone seen in the market or moving around will be detained, Shah said.

Shops and petrol stations have also been shuttered, Shah said.

"Our objective is very clear. We want to put them under maximum pressure so that they handover the wanted men," Shah said.

Sympathy for the Taliban runs high among the Pashtun tribes, which share the Taliban's ethnicity,

their religious fervour and anti-US hostility.

Shah on Thursday warned that the homes of tribesmen who did not cooperate in the hunt for the three men would be demolished.

Angoor Ada faces Afghanistan's Shkin district and is just 15 km from the Taliban-controlled Afghan town of Barmal.

US troops hunting Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants in Afghanistan have frequently been thwarted by the fugitives escaping over the border into Pakistan's tribal areas, often through Angoor Ada.

An intelligence official in north-west frontier city Peshawar said the 18 arrested in last week's raid were Uzbeks, Afghans and Pakistani nationals.

They are being interrogated by military intelligence officials at a secret location.

Taiwan president rejects 'one China' principle

AFP, Taipei

President Chen Shui-bian said yesterday that Taiwan would not be forced into accepting the "one China" principle and called on Beijing to withdraw its military threat against the island.

Addressing a National Day rally, Chen disputed claims Taiwan would have a greater presence on the international stage if it accepted the "one China" principle.

"Only those who do not believe in themselves and do not believe in Taiwan will succumb to hegemony, make concessions for peace, or try to convince us that China's military intimidation and impervious coercion compels us to accept the so-called 'one China' principle," Chen said.

Taipei has repeatedly rejected Beijing's "one China" principle, which regards the island as part of its territory waiting to be unified by force if necessary.

"If we compromise our stance on sovereignty and relinquish our

existing democracy and freedom, we will waive our right to join international organisations, and it will be impossible for us to ever have a voice in the global community," Chen said.

Chen, concurrently the head of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), also dismissed adopting China's "one country, two systems" mechanism under which Beijing grants limited autonomy to Hong Kong and Macau.

The statement came two days after China described Chen's recent speeches as "extremely immoral and very dangerous" and that his attempts to achieve independence for the island were doomed.

"Chen Shui-bian begins with his own election needs and has selfishly usurped the representation of his party and people," a spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council said, according to China's official Xinhua news agency.



Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian gestures with the crowd during his speech to mark the island's National Day outside the Presidential Palace in Taipei yesterday. China on October 8 described Chen's recent speeches as "extremely immoral and very dangerous" and said attempts by him to achieve independence for the island were doomed.

Fighters retreat after truce in Afghanistan

AFP, Mazar-i-Sharif

Militia fighters began withdrawing from frontlines near Afghanistan's main northern city yesterday, witnesses said, after rival warlords agreed to a ceasefire in heavy fighting which has claimed 80 casualties.

An uneasy calm settled over Mazar-i-Sharif, 310 km north of Kabul, the morning after Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali and British ambassador Ron Nash struck a deal between warring strongmen Atta Mohammad and Abdul Rashid Dostam.

Mohammad's mostly Tajik Jamiat faction and Dostam's mainly Uzbek Junbish faction both profess loyalty to President Hamid Karzai, but are rivals for control of the north.

The latest clashes, among the worst in six months, erupted Wednesday on the main road west of Mazar-i-Sharif towards Shibergan, Dostam's stronghold 120 km away.

Both sides used tanks and mortars in "very intense" fighting, a United Nations spokesman said, and by Thursday the clashes had moved to within 20 km of the city.

Mohammad's side reported 70 dead and injured fighters among its forces, while Dostam's side reported three dead and six wounded.