



Palestinians cry as they see the evacuation of two bodies of Palestinians killed during an Israeli incursion in the northern West Bank city of Nablus yesterday. Israeli soldiers killed a total of four Palestinians during the incursion according to Israeli military and Palestinian sources.

## 4 Palestinians killed in Israeli West Bank raid

Sharon set for his keynote address

AFP, Nablus

Israeli troops killed four Palestinians in a West Bank raid yesterday, ahead of a much-awaited speech by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in which he could announce unilateral measures as an alternative to the peace process.

During an army incursion into the Old City of Nablus, three armed militants were gunned down after opening fire on Israeli troops from a rooftop, military sources said.

Two of the militants belonged to the military branch of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the third to the armed wing of the radical Islamic movement Hamas, Palestinian sources said.

Israeli military sources said the fourth man was gunned down as he was planting "an explosive device" on the road.

But Palestinian security sources and eyewitnesses said the man whose body bore the impact of 15 bullets, was merely going to work at a local bakery when soldiers opened fire in his direction.

According to witnesses, Israeli troops have also been conducting house-to-house searches since Wednesday in the Nablus refugee camp of Balata, tearing down walls to keep cover when moving from one home to another.

In the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian teenager was shot dead Wednesday by Israeli troops in Rafah in clashes that broke out after an explosive device was planted near an Israeli position on the border with Egypt.

The latest deaths brought to 3,651 the number of people killed since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in September 2000, including 2,731 Palestinians and 854 Israelis.

Although the Intifada is going through a period of relative calm, more than 100 people have died over the past two months, 90 per cent of them Palestinians.

The fresh violence came as a team of mediators from the Egyptian intelligence services left the Gaza Strip Thursday morning after consultations with Palestinian factions on a bid to reach a truce deal.

There was no breakthrough in the latest round of talks, but hopes were high that a visit to Israel next Monday by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher would help break the deadlock.

As Egypt was stepping up its effort to bring both sides back to the negotiating table, Sharon was threatening to take unilateral steps as an alternative to the faltering peace roadmap.

The premier was expected to deliver a keynote address Thursday night at a security conference in the northern Israeli town of Herzliya.

He has recently been hinting that, as part of his plan, Israel could completely relinquish the Gaza Strip and pull out of some isolated Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

The Palestinians oppose non-negotiated decisions that might affect their future state and fear any redeployment would be considered definitive by Israel, whether or not it matches internationally recognised borders.

Silverstein said the cornerstone of the redeveloped site's centrepiece -- a 1,776 foot high "Freedom Tower" -- should be laid before next year's third anniversary of the attacks.

## Putin terms Iraq war unjustified

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking only hours before talks with a US envoy on Iraq's debt, said yesterday that the US-led war in the country was unjustified because it was not authorised by the United Nations Security Council.

"The use of force abroad, according to existing international laws, can only be sanctioned by the United Nations. This is the international law. Everything that is done without the UN Security Council's sanction cannot be recognized as fair or justified," Putin said in an annual live televised question-and-answer session.

"I am being as restrained as I can be when I choose these words," Putin added.

The comments came only hours before Putin was due to meet in Moscow with US envoy James Baker, who is trying to convince the international community to write off Iraq's crushing 120-billion dollar (97-billion-euro) debt.

Putin, who opposed the war in Iraq, described the United States as

a partner, but said the Iraqi campaign should not be lumped in with the broader international war on terrorism.

"We are not wanting the United States to lose their war on terrorism -- we are US partners in the fight against terrorism," Putin said.

"But as for Iraq, this is a separate matter. There were no international terrorists under Hussein. This is a separate problem," said Putin.

He also suggested that the United States may be suffering from over-confidence on the international sphere, warning that "empires" had fallen before from feeling too strong and using their military might indiscriminately.

"I must say that in all times, great countries, empires, always suffered a series of problems that complicated their situation -- this was a feeling of invulnerability, a feeling of grandeur, and a feeling that it never sins," said Putin.

"This always hurt countries that tried to call themselves empires. I very much hope that this does not happen to our American partners."

## US to reduce diplomats in Saudi Arabia

REUTERS, Washington

The United States moved Wednesday to reduce its diplomatic presence in Saudi Arabia by offering free flights home to non-essential diplomats and to all embassy dependents because of "ongoing security concerns."

The State Department also advised private US citizens to consider leaving the country, a standard advice that it gives whenever it makes the offer to pay for non-essential diplomats and dependents who wish to leave.

While the offer falls short of ordering diplomats out, it reflects the acute US security worries in the kingdom, which has seen several residential compounds for expatriates attacked this year. On May 12, suicide bombers killed about 35 people, including nine Americans, at housing compounds in Riyadh.

"The decision to authorize voluntary departure is based on the reality that the terrorist threat in Saudi Arabia remains at a critical level," said State Department spokesman Lou Fintor, adding that

several dozen people were eligible for the flights out. The decision to offer free flights home to non-essential diplomats and embassy dependents was announced in a State Department travel warning that largely echoed previous statements about threats in Saudi Arabia.

"Due to ongoing security concerns... the Department of State authorized the departure, on a voluntary basis, of family members and non-emergency personnel of the US Embassy and Consulates in Saudi Arabia," the travel warning said. "Private American citizens should evaluate their own security situations and should consider departing the country."

"The US government continues to receive indications of terrorist threats aimed at American and Western interests, including the targeting of transportation and civil aviation," it added in language identical to its last warning on Dec. 8.

"Credible information indicates that terrorists continue to target residential compounds in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Riyadh

area, but also compounds throughout the country."

Earlier this month the US embassy said it had confined US diplomats and their families to the diplomatic quarter of Riyadh because of security concerns and it urged Americans to defer non-essential travel to the kingdom.

Meanwhile, the United States issued a new warning Wednesday that terrorists may be plotting attacks against hotels used by Westerners, foreign embassies and other facilities in Uzbekistan.

The State Department said al-Qaeda and allied groups were active in the region, and US citizens should carefully weigh risks to their safety before deciding to travel to the country.

"The US government has received information that terrorists may be planning attacks against hotels in Uzbekistan frequented by Westerners, and against foreign embassies and other organizations, facilities, and institutions associated with or representing foreign interests," the department said.

## Putin to run for reelection in 2004

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin went on national television to confirm widespread expectations that he will run for a second term in presidential elections in March 2004.

"Yes, I will stand, and I plan to make an official announcement about this in a few days," Putin announced in a live televised question-and-answer session with Russian television viewers.

Putin has teased Russian about his re-election plans for months even as his second term in power is viewed as all but assured.

The Russian leader has an approval rating that approaches 80 percent according to recent polls.

His nearest potential rivals -- including Communist Party boss Gennady Zyuganov -- draw a rating of a maximum rating of around five percent.

## Iran 'owed billions for Saddam-led war'

BBC ONLINE

The head of Iraq's Interim Governing Council says Iran should be paid reparations for the war that Saddam Hussein waged against it in the 1980s.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim said further discussion was needed to decide what if anything Iraq would pay itself.

Iran claims \$100bn in reparations for the brutal eight-year war that claimed about one million lives.

Hakim's remarks may augur improving Iran-Iraq relations now Saddam Hussein is in custody.

The prominent Iraqi is also the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri) the most important Shia Muslim party represented on the governing council.

Sciri has close ties with Tehran,

where the party was based during Saddam Hussein's years in power.

Analysts say that with Iraq's Shia majority likely to dominate in any future democratic government, it is logical that Baghdad should now develop warmer relations with its Shia neighbours in Iran.

In 1980, after a series of border skirmishes following Iran's Islamic revolution, Iraq invaded Iran.

The ensuing war claimed the lives of at least one million people and during the conflict, Iraq used nerve gas against the Iranians.

The Iranian Government is preparing a comprehensive complaint against Saddam Hussein for "crimes" against the Islamic republic, calling for the captured former Iraqi leader to be tried before an international court.

Some Iranian observers say the US should also be in the dock with Saddam Hussein, as Washington

supported him at the time of the war.

An estimated 20,000 Iranians were killed by Iraqi mustard gas or by nerve agents during the conflict.

Iran points out that Kuwait has already received billions of dollars through the UN's Iraqi oil-for-food programme in compensation for the invasion of that country.

Hakim said: "According to the UN, Iran deserves reparations. She must be satisfied. Whether we will pay or not is something which we need to discuss further."

The council leader was speaking after talks with UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in London.

Hakim also told a news conference that Saddam Hussein would be tried in a special Iraqi court.

International monitors could observe the trial, which would take global legal standards into account, Hakim added.

## Ex-Illinois governor indicted

REUTERS, Chicago

Former Illinois Gov. George Ryan, nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for halting capital punishment and emptying the state's death row, was indicted Wednesday on corruption charges.

A federal grand jury handed up a 22-count indictment against Ryan and an associate charging racketeering conspiracy, mail fraud, tax fraud and making false statements. It came after a five-year investigation into allegations that workers under Ryan when he was secretary of state sold driver's licenses for bribes to fill his campaign chest.

"Ryan sold his office," said Patrick Fitzgerald, the US attorney in Chicago.

The indictments allege he had betrayed "the citizens of Illinois for over a decade on state business both large and small... by giving friends free rein over state employees and state business to make profits, and by steering those profits to his friends, and at times, his family," he added.

## New WTC will take 10 years, cost \$12b

AFP, New York

Rebuilding New York's World Trade Center -- destroyed in the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks -- will take 10 years and cost some \$12 billion dollars, leaseholder Larry Silverstein, said Wednesday.

He estimated the redevelopment effort would generate up to 19 billion dollars in economic activity and provide 10,000 construction jobs for each year of the work.

Upon completion, the new trade center complex will have an estimated annual economic impact of 15.7 billion dollars and generate 75,000 full time jobs in Lower Manhattan.

Silverstein said the cornerstone of the redeveloped site's centrepiece -- a 1,776 foot high "Freedom Tower" -- should be laid before next year's third anniversary of the attacks.

The tower -- to replace the

destroyed twin towers that had been a landmark of the Manhattan skyline -- will be topped out at the end of 2008 and the last of four other office towers is slated for completion on 2013.

"What we have to accomplish, is to achieve nothing less than greatness," Silverstein told a luncheon hosted by the New York Building Congress.

"This is going to be the most spectacular community to live and work in once the World Trade Center has been rebuilt," he added.

The cost of the redevelopment will be met through five billion dollars in federal aid and seven billion dollars in insurance payments, the property developer said, drawing a wry laugh from his audience.

Silverstein is currently locked in a bitter legal battle with the insurers, who say they will pay only half of his seven billion dollar claim.



Italian soldiers of the 151 regiment "SASSARI" question an Iraqi man during a night patrol in the southern city of Nasiriyah Wednesday. On November 12, a truck bomb attack in Nasiriyah killed 28 people, including 19 Italian soldiers in the worst attack on Italian troops since World War II and the deadliest anti-coalition attack since the fall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

## Fliers fail to match Wright brothers' first flight

REUTERS, Kill Devil Hills

Modern-day aviators failed on Wednesday to duplicate the pioneering flight of the Wright brothers a century ago as a replica of their primitive 1903 flying machine flopped into the mud in the birthplace of powered human flight.

On a rain-soaked field in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, where the bicycle mechanics from Ohio achieved the age-old dream on Dec. 17, 1903, an exact copy of the wood-and-cloth Wright Flyer trundled down a wooden rail but failed to generate the speed and lift it needed to fly in an unreliable breeze.

On another attempt hours later, the engine was cranked but the wind died and the aircraft did not try a takeoff.

The two attempts, part of a celebration of the first century of flight that lured astronaut Neil Armstrong and a host of luminaries to North Carolina's Outer Banks, came hours after President Bush lauded Orville and Wilbur Wright's achievement as a triumph of American ingenuity.

"The Wright brothers' inven-

tion belongs to the world but the Wright brothers belong to America," Bush told a crowd of soggy spectators at the Wright Brothers National Memorial.

Downpours hit Kill Devil Hills early Wednesday and light winds that followed forced organizers of the weeklong event to postpone its highlight, an attempt to re-enact the Wrights' original 12-second, 120-foot flight in the muddy field where they made history.

The Wrights made four flights that day. The last, by Wilbur, measured 852 feet and lasted 59 seconds.

The re-enactment was to have been made at 10:35 a.m. EST, the same time Orville Wright lifted off, but was delayed for nearly two hours by light winds. Organizers said the replica needed 10-22 mph of wind to fly.

Following a series of unsuccessful attempts to crank the balky engine, the Flyer's twin propellers came to life. Kevin Kochersberger, a 42-year-old flight instructor and engineering professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, guided the replica across the field.



Amanda Wright Lane, a great grand-niece of the Wright brothers, attends a reenactment of the brother's historic first flight in a replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer during Centennial celebrations at the Wright Brothers National Memorial on Wednesday in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. The reenactment marked the finale of the six-day celebration.