



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinian young men gather around a car moments after it was detonated by the Israeli troops following clashes in which the Palestinian driver was killed in the West Bank city of Jenin yesterday. The 20-year-old man, a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, loosely affiliated to Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas' Fatah party, was killed and the car was destroyed.

Hamas leaders in hiding as Israel tightens noose

AFP, Gaza City

Hiding in friends' houses with their mobile phones switched off, Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya and his ministers are behaving more like an underground organisation than an elected government.

"We are all taking extra precautions because of the Israeli threats. Our lives are in danger, just as the lives of all Palestinians have been in danger since the start of the occupation," information minister Yusef RizqatoldAFP.

Israel launched a massive onslaught against the Gaza Strip following the June 25 capture of an Israeli soldier by militant groups, including the armed wing of the governing Islamist movement Hamas.

And an air strike Sunday against Haniya's office in Gaza City sent many of Hamas's bigwigs scurrying into hiding.

Renouncing mobile phones for

fear of being tracked down, changing vehicles several times a day, using different routes and avoiding routine appointments are some of the measures adopted by the movement's leaders, said a Hamas minister who asked not to be named.

"Many ministers cannot go to their office because they are afraid of being the target of a missile attack. Haniya asked us to step up all protective measures," he said.

He said Haniya as well as several key ministers and Hamas lawmakers had started sleeping in different locations every night because of the increased threat of Israeli assassination.

"Haniya's house has been empty for days, the prime minister is currently staying with friends who have his full trust," the minister added.

Nevertheless, Rizqa vowed that "all the members of the government are bent on continuing to fulfil their duty to the Palestinian people."

When the Palestinian premier

inspected the damage inflicted by the strike on his office, he was accompanied by Mahmud Abbas, the moderate president of the Palestinian Authority, who has the support of the international community.

Hamas routed the long-ruling mainstream Fatah in the January elections -- internationally acclaimed as fair and transparent -- but the government sworn in two months later has found itself acting like a clandestine organisation.

Last week, Israel arrested 64 Hamas officials -- including eight ministers and several members of parliament -- forcing the cabinet to temporarily redistribute abandoned portfolios.

Coordination between Hamas officials is done essentially by fax and the rare meetings still on the schedule are held in secret locations determined at the latest possible moment.

US soldier charged with rape, murder in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

An American was charged on Monday with raping and murdering an Iraqi teenager after killing her parents and young sister while serving as a soldier in Iraq.

Three other troops may have been part of the crime in March. Revealed last week and denounced by clerics as showing the "real, ugly face of America," the case could be particularly damaging to the US image in Iraq's conservative Muslim society even after several other murder cases in the past few weeks.

Discharged soldier Steven Green, 21, appeared in court in Charlotte, North Carolina, on a charge from a federal prosecutor in Kentucky that he went with three others to a house near Mahmudiya, just south of Baghdad, to rape a woman there.

Israel pins blame on Syria for soldier capture

Olmert asks troops to pursue operations against militants

AFP, AP, Jerusalem

Israel yesterday stepped up the pressure on arch-foe Damascus, accusing it of supporting Palestinian militants behind the capture of an Israeli soldier that has sparked a new crisis in the Middle East.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered security forces to pursue military operations against the militants and those who command and shelter them, in a thinly veiled reference to Damascus.

"I gave the order to continue operations to strike terrorists, those who protect them and those who give them orders," he told a meeting of business leaders in the southern

city of Beersheva.

"We will hit all terrorists. No one who attempts to harm the state of Israel will be spared," he said.

Israel has threatened to kill Hamas leaders based in Damascus and repeatedly demanded Syria take responsibility for sheltering Palestinian militants in the wake of the June 25 capture of its soldier on the Gaza border.

The crisis threatened to boil over on Tuesday, as a deadline set by the soldier's Palestinian captors passed and Egyptian-led mediation appeared to have fallen flat as Israel again rejected any talks with "terrorists".

Israel said yesterday a soldier

seized by Palestinian militants nine days ago was alive after the expiry of an ultimatum set by his captors that was outright rejected by the Israeli government.

"We are sure of our information. As I speak to you, he is alive," Israeli cabinet spokesman Avi Pazner told French television.

Israel had flatly rejected a 6:00 am (0300 GMT) deadline set by three militant groups to free Palestinian prisoners or "face the consequences", and carried out another deadly raid on the Gaza Strip overnight.

"We do not negotiate with terrorists. We act with all the necessary force but we do not give in to black-

mail," Olmert said.

"We will not let anyone believe that the kidnapping is a means of sending Israel to its knees. If we give in today, numerous civilians will be the target of kidnappings because we will be sending a message that these methods pay."

On Monday, Defence Minister Amir Peretz warned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that "all the responsibility falls on him".

His words were echoed by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who said after talks in Moscow that "Syria, which protects (Hamas) and grants asylum to its chiefs must understand that it can not escape responsibility for that."

US losing 'war on terror' Say experts

AFP, Paris

Despite high-profile arrests, security operations and upbeat assessments from the White House, the United States is losing its global "war on terror," experts warn.

Five years after Washington launched its hunt for those responsible for the September 11 attacks, the world has not become a safer place, and a new large-scale strike against America at some point appears likely, they say.

Even the killing last month of al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, hailed by the White House as a major blow against the terror network, has not dented its ability to recruit new militants or mount attacks.

In May the influential US magazine Foreign Policy and a Washington-based think-tank questioned 116 leading US experts -- a balanced mix of Republicans and Democrats -- on the progress of the US campaign against terrorism.

Among others, they consulted a former secretary of state, two former directors of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and dozens of the country's top security analysts.

The result? Eighty-four percent believe the United States is losing the "war on terror", 86 percent that the world has become a more dangerous place in the past five years, and 80 percent that a major new attack on their country was likely within the next decade.

"We are losing the 'war on terror' because we are treating the symptoms and not the cause," argued Anne-Marie Slaughter, head of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.

"Our insistence that Islamic fundamentalist ideology has replaced communist ideology as the chief enemy of our time feeds al-Qaeda's vision of the world," boasting support for the Islamic radical cause, she said.



PHOTO: AFP
A group of Filipino anti-war demonstrators with protest signs printed on their body rally near the US embassy in Manila yesterday to mark the 60th anniversary of the Philippine-American Friendship Day by denouncing the US war on terror campaign.

Western states are facing homegrown terror threat

AFP, Paris

As the London bombings and other recent arrests make clear, Western governments now face the very real threat of homegrown terrorists -- undetectable second- and third-generation immigrants totally assimilated into the societies they want to destroy.

And the so-called "Generation Jihad 2.0" has no need to attend training camps in the hills of Afghanistan since much of the necessary information and propaganda is freely available on the Internet, police and experts said.

"Like the terrorists responsible for both the London and the Madrid bombings, the Toronto suspects lived in the area they intended to attack" FBI Director Robert Mueller said after 17 young Muslims in Canada were arrested in June.

"They were not sleeper operatives sent on suicide missions; they were students and business people and members of the community. They were persons who, for whatever

reason, came to view their home country as the enemy", Mueller said.

"These homegrown terrorists may prove to be as dangerous as groups like al-Qaeda, if not more so."

The Toronto suspects, including five minors, were arrested after purchasing three tons of ammonium nitrate fertiliser, which can be used to create a powerful bomb when mixed with fuel. They allegedly planned attacks in Toronto and Ottawa.

"They are virtually indistinguishable from other youth", said Jack Hooper, deputy head of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). "They blend in very well to our society, they speak our language, and they appear to be, to all intents and purposes, well-assimilated."

Anne Giudicelli from the Paris-based terrorism consulting group Terrorisc said that for terrorism groups it is a "massive coup to have second and third generation recruits, because they have nationality, they are already on location".

1st UK Muslim to fall in Afghanistan hailed as 'true Brit'

AFP, London

The first Muslim soldier in the British army to die on active duty in Afghanistan was hailed Tuesday in his adopted country's popular press as a "hero" and "a true Brit".

Lance Corporal Jabron Hashmi, 24, died with Corporal Peter Thorpe, 27, in a Taliban attack on Saturday, bringing to five the number of British troops killed in Helmand province since their deployment in April.

His portrayal in patriotic terms came three days ahead of the first anniversary of the London bombings, in which four British Muslims killed themselves and 52 others in Britain's worst-ever terrorist attack.

"British Muslim, British hero... Asian immigrant died in Afghanistan, proudly serving the country he loved," read the page-one headline in the Daily Mail, self-styled voice of the conservative English middle class.

Activists reach North Pole in summer

AFP, Chicago

Two environmentalists became the first people to reach the North Pole by canoe and on foot in summer, in an expedition aimed at drawing attention to how global warming is threatening polar bears with extinction, they said in a satellite telephone interview Monday.

When they got there on Saturday, the Pole was covered with water.



PHOTO: AFP
US explorers Lonnie Dupre (L) and Eric Larsen (R) make history as they become the first-ever to complete a trek to the North Pole in summer on July 2.

EU awaits '1st response' from Iran on its offer

AFP, Brussels

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana holds key talks today with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator as Europe and the United States await a response to an offer to end a growing nuclear standoff.

Washington is pushing the Islamic Republic to state clearly by mid-July whether it will accept the offer -- a package of economic, trade and political incentives -- and suspend its controversial uranium enrichment activities.

Some Western countries fear that Iran is trying to covertly develop

nuclear weapons under the guise of a civilian atomic programme, but the government in Tehran maintains that it only wants to generate electricity.

Amid the heated rhetoric, Solana's talks with Ali Larjani -- their first face-to-face since Europe's top diplomat submitted the offer on June 6 -- are expected to provide a first real indication about Iran's intentions.

"We want tomorrow's meeting to be one that allows us to advance toward negotiations with Iran," Solana's spokeswoman, Cristina Gallach, said Tuesday.

The offer -- made by Britain, France and Germany (the so-called EU-3) as well as China, Russia and the United States -- was first received with optimism but senior Iranian officials have since suggested that it might be turned down.

For Solana though, Larjani's reaction is the one that counts.

"It is important to know officially what they think after all the various public declarations," Gallach said.

"We need a first official response from Iran, so that this response can allow us to move forward," she said.

"We will see if it's a first response, a last response, final or temporary."