

## International

# Israeli blitz undermines peace: Lebanon

BEIRUT, June 25: Prime Minister Salim Hoss warned Friday that Israel's deadly air strikes on Lebanon threatened the resumption of peace talks and the chances of an Israeli pullout from south Lebanon within a year, reports AFP.

"What happened was really atrocious. We don't see that this will [help] the resumption of the peace talks. This will undermine the peace process," Hoss said in an interview with CNN.

"We don't believe that the Israelis will fulfill their promise to withdraw from Lebanon within a year given what has been happening in Lebanon over the past few days, and particularly last night," he added.

Israel's incoming Prime Minister Ehud Barak had vowed to end Israel's 21-year occupation of southern Lebanon within a year by resuming peace negotiations with Syria which have been frozen since 1996.

The Hoss government was

holding an extraordinary meeting early Friday to discuss the Israeli raids which killed 10 people and wounded 54 others and inflicted massive damage on power stations, bridges and communications centres.

Hoss said there had been no contacts with Israel about the escalation of violence. "No, of course not, there are no contacts with Lebanon and Israel at all."

The Israeli raids, the bloodiest in three years, were ordered by outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to launch wide-ranging air strikes against Lebanon overnight in response to a rocket attack on northern Israel by Lebanese guerrillas.

Barak's office said the prime minister-elect was only informed of the attacks afterwards, but Hoss said he believed he was aware of the decision.

"Netanyahu couldn't have done it alone. I think there was a collusion between the two," he said.

## Barak angered by outgoing govt's attack

Lebanese newspapers branded the Israeli assault a new "war" against Lebanon following the 1996 Grapes of Wrath offensive which killed 175 people, mostly civilians.

"Were these raids Barak's grapes of rosy peace promises or Netanyahu's grapes of farewell or maybe just the grapes of the new Israeli coalition in Israel," said the leading An Nahar newspaper.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Barak distanced himself Friday from a decision by outgoing Premier Benjamin Netanyahu to launch wide-ranging air strikes against Lebanon overnight in response to a rocket attack on northern Israel by Lebanese guerrillas.

Barak radio quoted other Barak aides as saying the incoming prime minister was angry about the decision to attack civilian targets, which included two power stations, four bridges and a telecommunications complex in Lebanon.

Netanyahu's government ordered the air raids in retaliation for a rocket attack on northern Israel by the Syrian and Iranian-backed Islamic militia Hezbollah which killed two civilians and seriously wounded another.

The acting government is, under the law, solely responsible for the decisions taken and the actions carried out," David Ziso, Barak's spokesman, told AFP.

The government only informed Barak once the decision to authorize the air strikes was taken," he said.

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Barak is still negotiating with other political parties to form a coalition government and Ziso said the sudden escalation of the Lebanon conflict has added urgency to the talks.

"Barak is accelerating the coalition negotiations so he can take control of things as quickly as possible, notably about Lebanon," he said.

Barak defeated Netanyahu by a landslide in May 17 elections and has vowed to resume negotiations with Syria and Lebanon and withdraw Israeli troops from south Lebanon within a year.

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Lebanese Army soldiers inspect the wreckage of Jamshur power station Friday. The power station located 10 km east of Beirut was bombed Thursday by Israeli warplanes. Lebanon braced for further attacks after Israel unleashed its heaviest air assault in three years, killing 10 people in what media in Beirut branded a new "war" by the Jewish state.

— AFP photo

## US gen meets Sharif to defuse tension

ISLAMABAD, June 25: A top US general met Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif Friday to press home US concerns over the escalating crisis in Kashmir, officials said, reports AFP.

The meeting came just after the US State Department urged Pakistan-backed guerrillas in Indian Kashmir to withdraw to help defuse tensions between the world's newest nuclear powers.

General Anthony Zinni, commander-in-chief of the US Central Command, who arrived on Thursday, has already met Pakistan army chief general Pervez Musharraf.

No details of the talks between Sharif and Zinni were given by Pakistani officials.

US diplomatic sources said the discussions were "informal and confidential" taking in various aspects of the crisis including calls for the withdrawal of rebels from the Indian side of the divided Himalayan state.

The high-level US mission, which includes Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gibson Lanphier, came amid fears the current tensions may escalate into a fourth war between the arch rivals.

The United States has pressed Pakistan to withdraw alleged intruders from the Indian side of the territory while the Group of Eight powers last week urged the two rivals to stop fighting and respect the dividing Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.

"We want to see withdrawal of forces supported by Pakistan from the Indian side of the Line of Control," State Department spokesman James Rubin said in Washington.

India says the fighters in the Kashmir heights infiltrated from the Pakistan side of the border and include regular Pakistan soldiers.

Pakistan insists its forces have not crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and that it has no control over what it calls "freedom fighters" in the Indian zone.

After Zinni met the Pakistan

army chief, a foreign office spokesman said Washington should adopt a "balanced" approach as a "narrow" view of the crisis in Kashmir would encourage India to widen the conflict.

If the tensions in Kashmir escalated into a war it would cause "irreparable" losses to both sides, he said during a visit to frontline troops.

"India should try to extinguish the big fire engulfing the whole of Kashmir instead of focussing on the Kargil issue,"

Sharif said referring to Indian accusations the Kashmiri militants are backed by Pakistani army regulars.

He reiterated the occupation of Kargil peaks by the freedom fighters was part of the 11-year old separatist struggle.

Sharif said the world com-

munity has acknowledged that South Asia was now a nuclear flashpoint, accusing New Delhi of creating a war-like situation on the LoC.

Meanwhile thousands of Kashmiris staged an anti-India rally here Friday.

Led by leaders of several Kashmiri parties, the marchers demanded the withdrawal of Indians forces from Kashmir and hailed the separatist cause in Indian Kashmir.

They handed a memorandum to UN coordinator Robert Englund, condemning what they called India's "brutal suppression" of the Kashmiri movement.

In recent weeks the (US) State Service has received a number of threats against US embassies in those countries, so we have decided for the safety of American and other citizens in those areas to close them for the moment," he said.

It "remains to be seen" when the embassies will reopen, he said.

He declined to confirm reports that Washington was fearing attacks on its embassies by followers of suspected international terrorist Osama Bin Laden, saying the State Department never discloses the nature of threats.

In his speech Friday, he said:

"We cannot accept that war, violent conflict and rapine are a permanent condition of existence for us as Africans."

Mbeki addressed in his maiden state-of-the-nation address to a joint sitting of both houses of parliament here.

As part of the world community of nations, we will make our due contribution to the construction of a new world order that will be responsive to the needs of especially the poor of the world."

In a wide-ranging speech, Mbeki also promised speedier delivery of services to the poor and tougher measures to combat crime.

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Kashmiri women chant anti-India slogans during a large rally organised by all political parties of Pakistan-administered Kashmir to condemn Indian military activities in Kargil sector Friday. Thousands of people participated in the rally and shouted slogans against Indian troops and demanded quick withdrawal of forces from India-held Kashmir.

— AFP photo

## US closes 7 embassies in Africa

PRETORIA, June 25: The United States has closed seven of its embassies in Africa because of security threats, a spokesman at the US embassy in Pretoria said Friday, reports AFP.

The missions have been closed for an indefinite period in the capitals of Namibia, Liberia, Senegal, Madagascar, Togo, the Gambia and Ghana since Thursday, the official, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

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## Red alert in Assam, Tripura

NEW DELHI, June 25: The northeastern Indian states of Assam and Tripura declared security alerts Friday, warning citizens to be on the lookout for bombs and acts of sabotage, which officials said are being planned by Pakistani agents, reports AP.

Both states, where militant tribal groups have been fighting for independence, put their security forces on alert and warned of possible activities by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence unit, the United News of India reported.

A time bomb made of chemical explosives blasted the New

Jalpaiguri Railway Station in another northeastern state, West Bengal, on June 22, killing 20 people and injuring up to 80.

Two of the dead and at least 16 of the injured were soldiers on their way to fight an incursion into Kashmir, and officials have said they suspect possible Pakistani secret service involvement in the bombing.

The agency quoted a statement issued from the Assam state capital, Guwahati, as saying,

"In the context of ongoing hostilities in Kashmir and the success achieved by the Indian armed forces in driving out Pakistani regulars and intruders from across the Line of Control, the possibility of Inter Services Intelligence aiding and abetting violence is high."

## Mbeki promises greater role in African affairs

CAPE TOWN, June 25: New President Thabo Mbeki on Friday spelled out a more assertive role for South Africa in continental affairs, telling parliament that Pretoria will "contribute whatever we can towards the resolution of conflicts on our continent", reports AFP.

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## Reconciliation talks between rival E Timorese factions begin

JAKARTA, June 25: Reconciliation talks between pro and anti-independence East Timor camps opened here three hours late today after the delayed arrival of jailed resistance leader Xanana Gusmao, reports AFP.

Gusmao, accompanied by two lawyers, arrived at 12:30 pm (0530 GMT), after participants in the meeting agreed to wait for him to be released from his house jail in Central Jakarta before opening the talks.

The talks, closed to the media, were to be opened by the two Roman Catholic bishops of the former Portuguese colony.

The Dili dialogue and reconciliation conference, will involve 60 participants from East Timor and abroad.

## US offers reward for Milosevic, others

PRISTINA, June 25: Brushing aside NATO appeals, ethnic Albanians torched Serb houses in western Kosovo and looted Serb-owned shops as Washington offered a \$5 million dollars reward for help in convicting Slobodan Milosevic and others wanted for war crimes in the Balkans, reports AP.

In Belgrade, the Yugoslav parliament votes Friday on measures to give the Milosevic government power to crack down on dissent and keep its wartime controls over banking and the economy, despite the assembly's decision to lift the state of war imposed after NATO began bombing March 24.

North Korean negotiators ended the first session in 90 minutes Tuesday after chief delegate Pak Yong Su demanded South Korea apologize for last week's naval skirmish in a disputed part of the Yellow Sea.

The highest level contact between the two governments in 14 months, the talks on neutral ground in Beijing are supposed to focus on reunifying families separated by the division of the Korean peninsula into the communist North and the capitalist South 54 years ago.

North Korean negotiators agreed to withdraw troops from the disputed area of the Yellow Sea.

North Korea's autocratic rule has been shaken by the Kosovo conflict, in which Serb-led Kosovo forces sustained heavy bombing damage and was forced to withdraw from the city.

The fires started before daybreak, and columns of smoke rose into the sky over the city throughout the day. A dozen homes burned by early evening, one in sight of a Serbian Orthodox church where increasing numbers of the city's Serbs are taking shelter.

Fires were set by ethnic Albanians leveled Serb homes and much of the Gypsy quarter.

In the western Kosovo city of Pec, Serbs complained of

being driven from their homes.

In addition to Milosevic and

four colleagues indicted last month for alleged crimes in Kosovo, the tribunal also has indicted former Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.

They were charged in the massacre of 6,000 Bosnian Muslims in 1995.

FBI forensic experts have been

conducting work in the southern city of Djakovica to some of the

most horrific ethnic killings

and brutality during the Kosovo conflict.

This is Kosovo. You have no place here now," Gojkovic claimed the KLA fighters told him.

In an effort to bring justice to the thousands of victims of the Serb crackdown, the US State Department announced the 5 million dollars reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of people sought by the UN tribunal trying war crimes cases from the conflict in Bosnia and Kosovo.

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Between the making of law, whether domestic or international, and its effective implementation, falls a shadow. And that shadow persists in respect of torture, the minds of those who practice it and the lives of those who are its hapless victims," he said.