

Suicide bombing kills three in Israel

AFP, Neve Yamin, Israel

Two Israeli teenagers and an apparent suicide bomber were killed in an attack yesterday morning near an Israeli army roadblock at Neve Yamin, near the West Bank village of Qalqilya, police and medical officials said.

The attack occurred at a service station on Israeli territory near the town of Kfar Saba, north of Tel Aviv, and near the "green line" separating it from the West Bank.

Israeli police chief Shlomo Aharonishki said the bomber

walked up to a group of teenagers waiting at the service station, named "Peace Rendezvous."

"Two adolescents were killed and the terrorist was also apparently killed. There are several injured, including one in serious condition," he told Israel public radio.

Israeli media reports said those killed were students attending a Yeshiva religious school in a Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, although the headline Palestinian movement Hamas said the attack represented the pursuit of

Palestinian resistance to the 34-year Israeli occupation.

"This attack is the continuation of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation to force it to withdraw from the Palestinian territories," a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip told AFP.

Israel vowed following the bomb blast that the government will strike against terror soon.

"Israel will go on the offensive in the coming days against the terror, which will probably last weeks or months," Public Security Minister Uzi Landau told Israeli public radio.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat meets with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on the sidelines of the Arab summit in Amman on Tuesday. The meeting, during which the two parties agreed to renew cooperation, was the first between Arafat and a Syrian leader since 1996.

US vetoes UN observer force to protect Palestinians

AFP, United Nations

The United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution to send UN observers to the Palestinian territories late Tuesday, but said its action should not affect relations with friendly Arab states.

"I trust that it will not affect our relations with our Arab friends," the acting US ambassador to the United Nations, James Cunningham, told reporters after casting the first US veto in four years.

But the Palestinian observer to the UN, Nasser Al-Kidwa, said the veto would provoke a negative reaction in Arab countries and "undermine the credibility" of the US role as broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Cunningham voted down a text unexpectedly put forward by the council's seven non-aligned movement (NAM) members after five days of inconclusive negotiations

on an alternative compromise sponsored by the four Western European members.

The NAM draft called for a UN observer force to protect Palestinian civilians, 365 of whom have died in six months of clashes with Israeli security forces. Sixty-seven Israelis, 13 Arab Israelis and a German have also been killed.

China and Russia joined the NAM in voting for the draft, providing the nine votes required for adoption of a resolution and making the US veto inevitable.

The Western Europeans abstained while Ukraine, which holds the rotating presidency of the council, did not take part in the vote.

Israel had already made clear its total opposition to a UN force and Cunningham told the council after the vote that "the United States opposed this resolution because it is unbalanced and unworkable and hence unwise."

But Anwarul Chowdhury, coordi-

nator of the NAM caucus, said they had acted out of "frustration" because other members had insisted on postponing action on the compromise text.

Chowdhury, who is also Bangladeshi ambassador to the UN, said "after five days of protracted negotiations, the NAM caucus decided that the time for action on the text on protection of Palestinian civilians has come."

He said the question was on the agenda of the Arab summit which opened in the Jordanian capital, Amman, on Tuesday and it was "essential" for the council to act before the summit closed.

Cunningham responded by accusing the NAM of pushing a vote in order to cut short negotiations on the compromise text "for reasons that have nothing whatever to do with the search for peace."



PHOTO: AFP

This file photo taken on March 4, 2001 shows Bollywood actress and spokesperson for Swiss watch company Omega, Sonali Bendre during the launch of Omega's De Ville Co-Axial collection at a city hotel in New Delhi. Bendre was arrested yesterday for an "offensive" picture that adorned a magazine cover three years ago.

Oman arrests 179 illegal immigrants

AFP, Muscat

Omani police have recently arrested 179 illegal immigrants, mostly from neighbouring countries, the Oman Times reported yesterday.

The police said the immigrants were caught in different areas of Oman over the past weeks after tip-offs from local people.

Those arrested were from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, the police said, urging citizens to continue to report any other illegal immigrants.

The sultanate, which is an oil and gas exporter, has launched a campaign to replace foreign workers, who account for around a third of the 2.3 million population, with Omani nationals.

German N-waste transport to retreat in face of protests

AP, Dannenburg

A train delivering waste from reprocessed nuclear fuel to a German storage site was forced to retreat Wednesday after protesters blocked the rails and engaged in clashes with police they said left dozens injured.

Riot police sent reinforcements to this northern German town about 20 kilometers from the waste dump after militants threw stones and fired flares Tuesday night at the police, who replied with water cannon and baton charges and water. A police car was set on fire. Clashes died down overnight, partly because bitter cold forced the militants to retreat, police said.

Police decided early Wednesday to have the train reverse a few kilometers to the next station for unspecified maintenance while trying to clear the track. It was unclear when the train would arrive at Dannenburg, where the six waste containers are to be loaded onto flatbed trucks to complete the last leg of the 600-kilometer trip from a French reprocessing plant to Germany.

The train carrying 60 tons of nuclear waste from France to Germany was stuck for hours some 25 kilometers outside a railway depot in this North German town as police laboriously removed three protesters who had chained and cemented themselves to the rails. A fourth remained attached as dawn broke.

Police said five officers were injured in the clashes, one seriously. Some 600 protesters were taken into custody. The protesters said dozens on their side were injured. About 20,000 police were in action in Germany's biggest security operation in years after militants turned the last transport in 1997 into chaos.

The protesters object to what they say is highly dangerous radioactive waste being transported through Germany, and hope to make the transports so costly the government will call them to a halt.

Wahid apologises to parliament

REUTERS, AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, responding to a censure that threatens his shaky rule, today apologised to parliament and the country for any "in appropriate behaviour".

Wahid also called for an end to political conflict in Indonesia, which is keeping the country locked in crisis.

"At this moment, I personally ask for the forgiveness from parliament and the people of Indonesia for any inappropriate behaviour," the nearly blind Wahid said in remarks read out by the justice minister to applause from MPs.

Wahid insisted he was innocent of involvement in two financial scandals and rejected the contents of a parliamentary censure motion.

But major parties rejected his response and said they would push ahead with a second censure that could lead to impeachment by August.

"Allow me, with an apology, to say that I do not accept the contents of the memorandum (of censure) for constitutional reasons," Wahid said in his reply to the charges.

The censure was issued by the lower house, the People's Representative Council, in February over Wahid's alleged role in two scandals, known as Bruneigate and Bulogate.

Bruneigate concerns a two million dollar donation from the



PHOTO: AFP

An adjutant helps Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid at the start of his address to parliament in Jakarta yesterday. Wahid rejected the contents of a parliamentary censure motion over his alleged role in two financial scandals.

Sultan of Brunei which is unaccounted for. Bulogate centres on the embezzlement of 3.5 million dollars from the state food agency Bulog, for which Wahid's former masseur is awaiting trial.

"I am certain that in these cases, legally, I am not guilty," Wahid said.

"If I had wanted to make a personal profit from the funds related to these cases, of course it would not have been difficult for me," Wahid said.

"I did not do it because it never crossed my mind."

In his brief introduction, the clinically blind Wahid said: "This reply, because I cannot see, will be read out by Baharudin Lopa, the minister for justice and human rights."

Wahid said the censure was "a political reality which cannot be avoided."

But he said there had been insufficient reason to issue it.

Population of China 1.26 b

AP, Beijing

China said yesterday its first nationwide census in a decade put the mainland's population at 1.26 billion, and its growth is slowing.

The population grew by 132.2 million since 1990, an increase of 11.7 per cent, said Zhu Zhixin, director-general of the National Bureau of Statistics. Annual growth was 1.07 per cent down 0.4 percentage points from the rate in the 1980s.

That showed that China's compulsory birth-control policies were effective in holding down population

growth, Zhu said at a news conference. China has since the late 1970s restricted urban couples and many rural families to just one child to reduce the strain on food production and other resources.

The reported population was lower than independent estimates that put the number of Chinese as high as 1.5 billion.

Local officials are often accused of underreporting population figures in order to meet birth-control quotas. Ordinary Chinese are reluctant to cooperate with census takers for fear of being punished for having unauthorised children.