

## Two Palestinians killed as war of words flares in ME

AFP, Nablus

Clashes raged across the Palestinian territories and in Jerusalem yesterday, killing two Palestinians, as Israelis and Palestinians exchanged fiery rhetoric on the traditionally violent anniversary of a 1976 Israeli crackdown on Arab demonstrators.

Ayesh Mustafa Zaamel, 19, was killed by a bullet in the head when Israeli troops opened fire on demonstrators throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at them in the West Bank city of Nablus.

Nine other Palestinians were injured. Shortly earlier, in Ramallah, 21-year-old Mohammed el-Wawawi was also shot dead and 11 other Palestinians injured, hospital sources said, when soldiers clashed with some 2,000 Palestinians who burned pictures of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and waved Palestinian and Iraqi flags.

Palestinians and Israeli Arabs had both been called on to demonstrate on Friday, or "Land Day," the 25th anniversary of the Israeli army's killing of six Israeli Arabs during protests over the seizure of Arab lands in northern Israel.

Friday is also another regular weekly "day of rage" to protest Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The protests come two days after Israeli helicopters pounded bases of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Force 17 elite bodyguard unit, killing two, in response to a string of bombings that left four people dead, two of them suicide bombers.

The Israeli operation enraged Palestinians. Arafat, returning Thursday from an Arab summit in Jordan, declared that

the six-month-old Palestinian uprising would continue until "until the Palestinian flag flies over Jerusalem, capital of the future Palestinian state."

US President George W. Bush called on the two sides to take immediate steps to quell the violence, but singled out Arafat as not doing enough to promote peace.

"The signal I'm sending to the Palestinians is stop the violence. ... I hope Chairman Arafat hears it loud and clear," Bush told a White House press conference Thursday.

"Our goal is to encourage a series of reciprocal and parallel steps by both sides that will halt the escalation of violence, provide safety and security for civilians on both sides, and restore normalcy to the lives of everyone in the region," he said. Arafat and the rest of the Palestinian leadership will discuss Bush's remarks at their weekly meeting Friday evening, said information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, who declined to comment himself on the president's statement.

Top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat blasted the United States on another issue, its veto Tuesday of a UN Security Council resolution that would have authorized an international observer force in the Palestinian territories.

"It seems Washington has decided to provide protection for the occupier, that is to say Israel, and to disregard the right to an international protection force for the Palestinian people under occupation," Erakat told Cairo radio.

Bush also said that in meetings with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak next week and Jordan's King Abdullah II the week after he would "seek their help in defusing the tensions."



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, surrounded by bodyguards, look at debris at the destroyed headquarters of Force 17 in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Thursday. Arafat condemned the Israeli overnight air strikes, which killed a member of Force 17 and injured more than 60, as part of a deliberate strategy by Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon against the Palestinians.

## US plane crash kills 18 in Colorado

AFP, Denver

A private plane originating from Burbank, California crashed late Thursday near the town of Aspen, southwest of here, killing 18 people, according to media reports.

"We can confirm that at about 7:00 pm (8:00 BST) tonight mountain time, a Gulf Stream 3 went down just about one mile northwest of Aspen," Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Allen Kenitzer told CNN television. "It was a charter aircraft (with) a total of 18 people on board -- 15 passengers and three crew -- and right now it's reported that all were fatal."

## China detains US scholar

AFP, Beijing

A second US-based academic has been detained by China since February, a US Embassy spokesman in Beijing said Friday.

The spokesman did not specify the reason for the detention and declined to reveal the scholar's name, citing privacy reasons.

But a Hong Kong-based human rights group identified him as Li Shaomin, a 45-year-old professor of Chinese enterprise management at Hong Kong's City University.

## \$ 50 m for Indian quake victims

AFP, Bhuj

Former US president Bill Clinton will be bringing a 50-million-dollar relief fund when he visits the quake-devastated Indian state of Gujarat next week.

An advance team from the American-Indian Foundation, which was set up in the wake of the Gujarat quake, said Friday that the money was earmarked for permanent rehabilitation projects in Gujarat.



PHOTO: AFP

Hugh Peterson, (L) aged 8 months, plays with Bliss Taylor who is 9 months old in a garden in Sydney on Thursday. According to a ground breaking Australian study babies are capable of sophisticated communication among themselves when left up to their own devices. Researches say that the babies they studied demonstrated abilities to socialise within a group much earlier than previously thought.

## Mum not only word in babies world

AFP, Sydney

Babies are capable of sophisticated communication among themselves when left to their own devices, according to a ground-breaking Australian study.

And they may not necessarily focus solely upon their mothers as the centre of the universe, researchers at Charles Sturt University have found.

Toe-pulling, touching and even "talking" demonstrate an ability to empathise and even conspire to

have fun while mum's back is turned.

A study headed by Professor Benjamin Bradley and clinical psychologist Dr Jane Selby involved leaving 35 groups of three unacquainted babies together in specially-designed strollers that allowed each trio to touch and interact.

Adults, including mothers, would then quietly leave them to their own devices for 15 minute periods.

## Manipur extends truce with rebel groups

AFP, Guwahati

India's insurgency-hit northeastern state of Manipur has extended its unilateral ceasefire with rebel groups, despite continuing attacks by separatists.

"We want to give peace a chance and the underground groups to respond positively and hence decided to extend the ceasefire until April 30," a government spokesman told AFP by telephone Friday from the state capital Imphal.

Police said unidentified militants exploded a powerful bomb Thursday at Ichum Lairembi village -- 23 kilometers (15 miles) north of Imphal -- killing two army soldiers

and critically wounding two more.

"The militants were trying their best to derail the peace process but we are equally determined not to allow them to sabotage the fragile peace," a top police official said.

The newly installed Peoples Front government had announced a month-long unilateral cease-fire from March 1, raising hopes for an end to four decades of separatist insurrection in the region which have left more than 10,000 people dead.

Army, police, and paramilitary soldiers have been "withdrawn" from all counter-insurgency operations across Manipur with most of the troops being confined to their barracks.

## Pakistan denies major changes to constitution

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military government Friday denied widespread reports that it plans to change the constitution, which have generated concern that it is seeking to cement its place in power.

Officials said media reports of this week's cabinet debate on the 1973 constitution, suspended after the 1999 military coup, were premature and speculative.

The Associated Press of Pakistan reported Thursday that ministers had "unanimously supported steps for good governance, political restructuring and constitu-

tional amendments if necessary but this should be done within limits of the (supreme court's) decision."

Major daily newspapers have also reported that the cabinet on Wednesday discussed changes to the constitution but was told to move with "extreme caution" by military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

"We have seen the disastrous consequences of impulsive constitutional amendments in the past and would, therefore, move with extreme caution and care," The News quoted Musharraf as saying during the meeting.

Afrasyab Khattak, chief of the

independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said he feared the general could abuse his power to prolong his "illegal" rule.

The supreme court last year gave Musharraf until October 12, 2002 -- or three years from the coup -- to complete his ambitious reforms, hold general elections and step down.

It said any fundamental changes to the constitution during this period would be illegal.

"The military dictator's desire to tamper with the constitution will lead to further derailments and distortions in the political and social set up," Khattak told AFP.

## Two of four UN hostages released in Somalia

AFP, Mogadishu

Two of four western United Nations employees held by Somali gunmen were released here on Friday after three days in captivity, an AFP journalist saw.

"The hostages are free to leave Mogadishu unconditionally... and fly from Gezira airport to Nairobi," said Omar Muhamud Mohamed "Finish", right hand man to warlord Musa Sudi Yalahow, whose men had been holding the pair.

Finish added that he expected the aid workers to fly from Mogadishu to Nairobi around noon (15:00 BST).

The AFP reporter saw the pair -- Belgian Pierre-Paul Lamotte and

Frenchman Mohamed Mohamedi -- being released by Yalahow's gunmen at around 10:30 a.m. (13:30 BST).

"They were released on humanitarian grounds. No money was paid, or demanded," said Finish, to whose house in the capital's southwestern Medina district the pair were taken pending their departure.

Yalahow himself is in Ethiopia, where this month he helped found a council of Somali faction leaders fiercely opposed to the Somali transitional government (STG) set up in Mogadishu last year.

"The hostages were treated humanely ... after our faction intervened on the matter," Finish said.

## Islamabad took no steps for talks with Delhi

AFP, New Delhi

India claimed yesterday that Pakistan had stepped up cross-border terrorism in the past year and taken no steps to create the necessary environment for a resumption of bilateral dialogue.

"Pakistan stepped up its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of India. This was indicated by the qualitative improvement in weapons, communication equipment and training given to Pakistan-based terrorist groups," the Indian Foreign Ministry said in its 2000-01 foreign policy report.

The report, produced every year, is a summary of India's relations with all major countries and indicates general trends in foreign policy.

Despite a relative calm on the disputed Indo-Pakistan border in Kashmir, following India's November suspension of counter-insurgency operations in the region, the report said Islamabad had failed to promote a suitable atmosphere for dialogue.

"An appropriate environment free from terrorism and propaganda is an obvious requirement for the resumption of dialogue. Pakistan took no action to facilitate such an

environment."

Bilateral dialogue has been frozen for nearly two years following a 10-week border conflict between Indian troops and Pakistan-backed forces in Kashmir.

Indian security forces suspended operations against Muslim militant groups in Kashmir on November 28 for one month. The ceasefire has been extended three times and is due to expire at the end of May.

Pakistan responded with a pledge to exercise "maximum restraint" along the disputed Kashmir border, a partial troop

withdrawal and an invitation to Kashmir separatist political leaders to visit for talks.

New Delhi blocked the visit by refusing to issue travel documents to certain separatist leaders.

Muslim-majority Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947 but remains claimed by both. A Muslim separatist rebellion on the Indian side has claimed more than 34,000 lives since 1989.

India has refused to resume direct talks until Pakistan stops sponsoring "cross-border terrorism" -- a charge Islamabad denies.