



PHOTO: AFP

Relatives and neighbours look at the destroyed family home of Palestinian militant Hamzeh Samudi, in the West Bank town of Jenin after it was flattened by the Israeli army on Sunday. Samudi carried out a car bomb attack in the northern Israeli town of Meggido in which 18 people were killed on June 5. The Israeli army is carrying out house demolitions of Palestinian militants across the self-rule West Bank as a form of deterrent to other militants.

## Israel, Palestinians in war of words over bus bombing

### Tel Aviv dynamites 9 homes of militants

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli and Palestinian officials traded blame Sunday over a bus bombing that killed at least eight and wounded 50 in northern Israel.

Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner vowed the Jewish state would fight "without mercy" against the Palestinian militants who blew up the bus, while a Palestinian official held Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon responsible for the attack.

"It is clear that after this particularly murderous attack that Israel must continue to fight without mercy against these terrorist organisations who are behind these atrocities," Pazner told AFP.

"This is a long-term fight we are in to prove to these organisations that they will not shake our determination to conquer this scourge," he added, saying that while the cost of the conflict was terrible, "the Palestinians will end up realising they have more to lose than to win."

A senior advisor to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Nabil Abu Rudeina, said that the headline policies of Sharon were to blame for the blast.

"Ariel Sharon's government bears the responsibility for this violence because it continues its

aggression against the Palestinian people and refuses to return to the negotiating table," Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP.

"We demand that the United States stop backing the Israeli government so that it puts an end to its aggression. We demand that Israel withdraw from our cities and go back to the negotiating table, for it is the only way we will achieve security, peace and stability," he added.

The blast which wrecked the bus near the town of Safad was claimed on behalf of the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas in an anonymous call to AFP.

The Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades also claimed the attack in a statement read on al-Manar television, the satellite channel of Lebanese Shiite fundamentalists Hezbollah.

The Brigades said the attack, which it described as a "martyr operation" or suicide bombing, came in retaliation for the death of Salah Shehade, the group's military commander whom Israel killed in an air strike in Gaza City on July 22.

Hamas also carried out Wednesday's bombing at Hebrew University in Jerusalem that left five Americans and two Israelis dead. That attack was also to avenge

Shehade. Meanwhile, the Israeli army early Sunday blew up nine houses in the West Bank belonging to families of Palestinians who carried out anti-Israel attacks, the army and sources close to the families said.

Witnesses said eight homes had been demolished belonging to families of members of militant groups, but the army later said it had destroyed nine houses.

"The destruction of terrorists' homes is a message to suicide bombers and those who would send them. It is meant to make them understand that their terrorist acts have a price that will make everyone involved pay for it," the army said in a statement. In Qabatiyeh, south of Jenin, the army demolished the home of Mohammad Mahmoud Bakr Nasr, from the radical Islamic Jihad group who carried out a suicide bombing in the northern Israeli town of Haifa on August 12, 2001 that left 15 wounded.

North of Jenin, in Silat al-Harasiyeh, the army flattened the home of Abdel Karim Issa Khalil Tahayneh, a Jihad member who carried out a suicide attack that killed one other person on a bus in Afula in northern Israel March 5.

## Aishwarya most admired Asian in Britain

PTI, London

Bollywood star and former Miss World Aishwarya Rai has been adjudged the top Indian role model in Britain while Chennai-born



England cricket captain Nasser Hussain takes the second slot.

Keith Vaz, former Europe Minister, who was suspended for breach of MPs' code of conduct, was one of the five top role models, according to an opinion poll conducted for Channel 4.

The others who figure in the top ten are Meera Syal, comedy actress and writer; 12-year old Kavita Brahmabhatt, BBC young achiever; Reuben Singh, millionaire entrepreneur; Lord Alli, media mogul and

# Deployment to go on along Kashmir borders: Fernandes

PTI, Srinagar

Ruling out pull back of troops from the country's western borders with Pakistan, Defence Minister George Fernandes on Saturday said deployment was in response to the challenges thrown before the nation following the terrorist attack on Parliament last year.

"There is no possibility of de-escalation as of now. We can talk about it when the overall situation normalises", Fernandes told reporters after addressing the Jawans of Kilo-force, a counter-terrorism group of the Army at Shariefabad, about 10 km from here.

"After the attack on Parliament, we decided to deploy the troops along the border so that we can be ready for any aggression from the enemy. We accepted the challenge thrown before us in the form of the attack on the Parliament," he said.

Fernandes said "the main aim of the Parliament attack was to eliminate the political leadership of the country including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and now Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani."

"One terrorist was gunned down while heading towards the gate number five which means his target was the Prime Minister. Three others were killed in front of gate number nine indicating that Home Minister, and now

the Deputy Prime Minister was also targeted.

"In fact, the timing of the attack suggests that the terrorists wanted to wipe out the entire leadership and destroy the country. Most of the MPs gather for discussion during question hour, but fortunately Parliament was adjourned just before that," Fernandes said.

Fernandes said the intentions of the intruders were very clear in terms of the amount of arms they were carrying with them at the time of the attack.

On the possibility of war between India and Pakistan, the Defence Minister said "there is no war because our Army is posted at the borders."

"And if the enemy dares to commit any aggression, our officers and Jawans are there (along the borders) to give them befitting reply with all their might," he added.

On the shelling from across the Line of Control, Fernandes said "it has always been there. There will be ups and downs but it continues with occasional breaks".

However, Fernandes said he had not been briefed yet about the shelling in Macchil sector in Kupwara district, where three Jawans and a JCO were killed last evening.

"There were three attempts recently to push in terrorists from across the border under the cover of heavy firing," he said.

## Algerian army kills 40 militants

AFP, Algiers

Algerian soldiers have shot and killed 40 armed Islamic extremists during operations in mountains in Relizane region west of the capital Algiers, newspapers reported Sunday.

The dailies El Watan, La Nouvelle Republique and Er-Rai said the shootout occurred on Friday in the latest of ongoing clashes between army and insurgents.

The newspapers described those killed as being members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, a dissident wing of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and said they included two unidentified Salafist leaders.

In the reports, which were not confirmed or denied by the security forces, El Watan said the army used heavy weapons and air support, and that operations were still in progress.

The newspapers also reported the discovery of a mass grave near Sidi Moussa, about 30 kilometres (18 miles) southeast of the capital Algiers, but gave no further details.

On July 30, several newspapers reported that Rachid Abou Tourab, leader of the GIA was believed to have been killed by security forces.



PHOTO: AFP

Congress President Sonia Gandhi (R) attends a meeting of chief ministers of six party-ruled states in New Delhi on Sunday to discuss the drought situation in their states. Thirteen of India's 29 states have been declared drought-stricken, including the country's breadbasket northern states where crops in many fields have been destroyed.

## Koreas to resume talks Aug 12

AFP, Seoul

South and North Korea agreed Sunday to resume high-level dialogue, shaking off a conflict of sentiment over a deadly naval clash in June and territorial disputes.

The talks will be held in Seoul for three days from August 12, according to a joint statement issued at the end of three-day negotiations at the North's Mount Kumgang resort.

South Korean chief negotiator Rhee Bong-Jo said the minister-level talks would help jumpstart inter-Korean reconciliation events, which were suspended last year.

"I am very glad to see our working contact bear good fruits far beyond earlier expectations," he said.

The Stalinist North also gave an unexpected gift to South Korea by agreeing to participate in this year's Asian Games, which start in the southern city of Busan on September 29.

"It is a very meaningful agreement for the North to send its athletes to the Busan Asiad," said Rhee.

The agenda at next week's talks will cover further reunions of families parted by the separation of the Koreas, cross-border transport links, and economic cooperation.

The statement did not mention the June 29 skirmish between South and North Korean navies in the Yellow Sea but the North expressed regret and promised to prevent such incidents, Rhee said.



PHOTO: AFP

South Korean chief negotiator Rhee Bong-jo (L) shakes hands with his North Korean counterpart Choi Sung-ik before returning to the high-level talks at the Kumgangsan Hotel on Mount Kumgang on North Korea's east coast on Sunday. North Korea agreed to resume high-level dialogue with South Korea, shaking off a conflict of sentiment over a deadly naval clash in June and territorial disputes.

## Bush sticks to plan to oust Saddam

### Baghdad slams US for rejecting disarmament talks

AFP, Kennebunkport

The United States continues to support a regime change in Iraq and will use all means at its disposal to obtain it, despite Baghdad's indication that they would welcome new UN weapons inspections, President George W. Bush told reporters here Saturday.

"I am a patient man," he said. "I'll use all the tools at our disposal. Nothing's changed."

Bush was in Kennebunkport spending the weekend with his extended family.

Earlier Saturday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell emphatically rejected an invitation by Iraq to the chief UN weapons inspector to visit Baghdad to discuss the resumption of inspections halted in December 1998.

The initiative came amid growing speculation that Bush is considering military action to overthrow Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, whose country has been under crippling sanctions since its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

"Our task and our responsibility

to history is more than just an Al Qaeda network. We owe it to the future of civilisation not to allow the world's worst leaders to develop and deploy, and therefore blackmail freedom-loving countries with the world's worst weapons," Bush told a political fundraising meeting in a clear reference to Hussein.

Meanwhile, the state-run Baghdad media Sunday slammed the United States for rejecting Iraq's invitation to the chief UN weapons inspector to visit Baghdad to discuss the resumption of inspections halted in December 1998.

"It was anticipated that the (George W.) Bush administration and his lackey (Tony) Blair would adopt this position since they constantly seek to doubt Iraq's stance and the usefulness of dialogue with the United Nations," said Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath party.

"Their position on Iraq's new initiative surprises no-one because these two countries will continue to doubt the usefulness of inspections, whatever Iraq's stance."

## Sharif bows out from race

### PPP won't follow PML-N move

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan is headed to October elections with one exiled ex-premier and the brother of another exiled premier at the head of its main opposition parties, after deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif bowed out of the campaign at the weekend.

Nawaz Sharif, 53, stood aside for the election of his younger brother Shahbaz Sharif, 51, to the presidency of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), ending a leadership which began with the party's inception in 1993.

The party elected Shahbaz on the direction of Nawaz, who felt his own re-election "might result in disqualification of the party from upcoming elections due to new electoral laws and constitutional amendments," chairman Raja Zafar-ul Haq said.

The new laws ban two-time former premiers from a third term, and rule out anyone with criminal convictions.

They are seen as directly aimed at Nawaz Sharif and his traditional nemesis, ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto.

Both have been elected prime minister twice and dismissed, and both have a criminal record. Sharif was found guilty of hijack-

ing, terrorism and tax evasion in 2000, while Bhutto was twice convicted for refusing to return from exile for graft trials. A 1998 graft conviction against Bhutto has been set aside.

Nawaz Sharif dominated Pakistan's tumultuous political landscape for 13 years, as a provincial premier and twice as prime minister, until his overthrow and imprisonment in 1999 by then army chief and current president, Pervez Musharraf.

He and his brother Shahbaz have been living in exile in Saudi Arabia since late 2000, when Musharraf freed Nawaz from jail and banished the party industrialists and 15 family members into 10 years' exile.

Nawaz had had earlier been disqualified from politics for 21 years.

While he has decided to step aside, Bhutto has vowed to return this month from four years' self-imposed exile in Dubai and London to contest the polls in defiance of the restrictions.

Bhutto was re-elected leader of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) last week, setting the scene for a showdown with Musharraf.

Benazir and Sharif followed each other in and out of power in the

four governments that preceded Musharraf's 1999 coup, as successive presidents sacked them for corruption and dissolved their parliaments.

The PPP said it would not follow PML-N's move, despite a law passed Thursday specifying that absconders could neither run for election or hold party office.

The party's defiance will be tested Monday when all parties must register with the Election Commission. The Commission has ruled that it would refuse to register parties which have not complied with the electoral laws.

Musharraf has vowed repeatedly to keep Bhutto and Sharif out of politics, charging that their regimes were riddled with graft and misuse.

Furious critics say the new laws are "Bhutto- and Sharif-specific."

Analyst Imtiaz Alam said Musharraf's blatant targeting of Bhutto and Sharif would backfire.

"The more Musharraf tries to hound them, the greater is the public support... even if they are scoundrels," he told AFP.

Shahbaz Sharif told PML-N members by phone from Saudi Arabia Saturday that his imminent return to politics was not based on any deal with the government.

# Countdown for Kashmir polls begins

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian Election Commission's announcement of the schedule for crucial assembly polls in militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir state set off the countdown for a new phase in the search for a solution to the Kashmir problem.

The free and fair conduct of the staggered elections beginning in late September will hopefully be the first decisive step towards restoration of peace in the state. This is something on which India and the entire western world are unanimous.

Chief Election Commissioner J.M Lyngdoh has outlined certain measures, including use of electronic voting machines for the first time in the state, to ensure the entire exercise is a free and credible one.

But what will be of more importance is the large turnout of voters in

an atmosphere free from terror and a broader participation of forces in the elections apart from the traditional players like ruling National Conference, opposition Congress and BJP.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell and European Union's high representative for foreign affairs Javier Solana have recently made it clear that free and fair elections in

## News Analysis

Jammu and Kashmir will mark the first step towards resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan.

The Indian government hopes some moderate components of separatist conglomerate Hurriyat Conference will finally agree to join the elections even though Hurriyat Chairman Abdul Gani Bhat only

yesterday said election is not the solution to the Kashmir issue.

Analysts feel announcement of the election schedule for Jammu and Kashmir puts the ball in the court of the moderates in the Hurriyat to take a decision.

Indian government's formal and informal interlocutors have for the last two years interacted with the Hurriyat constituents in a bid to persuade them to join the elections but the response from the separatists have so far remained largely lukewarm.

The assassination of former Hurriyat chief Abdul Gani Lone some time back has come as a setback to efforts to rope in the moderates. Leaders like Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and Shabbir Shah and their paries considered moderates, are as of now unwilling to stick out their necks and take part in the elections.

## Independent Taiwan won't be tolerated: China

AFP, Beijing

China said Sunday it would never tolerate an independent Taiwan in response to a call by Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian for a referendum on the future of the island that Beijing considers a renegade province.

"There is only one China in the world and the mainland and Taiwan are both a part of China," a foreign ministry spokesman told AFP.

"The separation of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity will never be tolerated."

The spokesman was commenting on defiant remarks made by Chen on Saturday in which he maintained the island's right to hold a referendum on possible Taiwan independence.

"Taiwan's future and destiny can only be decided by the 23 million people living on the island,"

Chen said in a teleconference with the pro-independence overseas Taiwanese association in Tokyo.

"But how to make the decision when the time comes? The answer is what (we) have sought after -- referendum," he told the group.

He also stressed Taiwan's statehood and independent sovereignty, saying that "each side (of the Taiwan Strait) is a country."

"Taiwan can not be bullied, dwarfed, marginalised or regionalised. Taiwan is not part of another country, nor is it a regional government or a province."

The foreign ministry spokesman added that a more formal response would be issued by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, China's cabinet.

Officials at the Taiwan Affairs Office were not immediately available for comment Sunday.