

Israeli air raid jeopardises US truce efforts

Palestinians slam world silence over killings, 5 more killed in missile attack

REUTERS, AFP, Hebron

Israeli soldiers shot dead five Palestinians in two separate incidents in the West Bank on Sunday, raising to 10 the number of Palestinians killed over the weekend.

The violence, including an Israeli helicopter strike on Saturday that killed four young Palestinians along with a militant who was its target, clouded prospects for a renewal of Israeli-Palestinian security talks, suspended twice last week.

In the latest incident, Israeli troops on patrol near the West Bank city of Hebron killed four Palestinians. A military source said the group was carrying wire cutters and a saw.

The source said the army had information of a plan to infiltrate a Jewish settlement in the area and had set up an ambush.

But Palestinian villagers said the four had been working in a stone quarry several kilometres from the Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba.

In a separate incident, Israeli soldiers entered Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank and killed Abdel-Kareem al-Saadeh, aged 16, after gunmen fired at them, Palestinian sources said.

Saadeh was the son of a local leader of the militant Islamic Jihad group. The army confirmed there was an exchange of fire in the camp.

Palestinians expressed anger at the latest deaths, only hours after the Israeli helicopter strike left civilian casualties in its wake.

"All talks with the Israeli side should be suspended after all these massacres," Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo told Reuters.

In Saturday's helicopter assault in the West Bank village of Tubas, a missile destroyed a car carrying a militant, killing him and two 15-year-old boys travelling with him.

A second missile hit a nearby house, killing a boy, nine, and a girl, 10, and wounding seven others.

The Israeli army, which has often targeted Palestinians waging an uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, said the Tubas air strike was aimed at preventing imminent militant attacks and expressed regret at the innocent casualties.

Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer ordered an inquiry, Israel Radio said on Sunday.

The violence coincided with a visit by U.S. Deputy of State David Satterfield, who held talks on Saturday with Palestinian officials on Palestinian security reforms seen as crucial by Washington for reviving talks on a Palestinian state.

Satterfield left for Damascus and Beirut on Sunday.

Earlier, Palestinian Interior Minister Abdel Razzak al-Yahya reported "positive feedback" from the U.S. envoy on sending experts and equipment to restructure security services, aid first broached by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in August.

AFP adds: Senior Palestinian officials on Sunday described Israel's latest killings of Palestinians in the West Bank as "state terrorism" and slammed the world community, and in particular Washington, for remaining silent on the issue. "We call on the international community to stop this bloodshed, this killing in cold blood, this state terrorism. We don't hear the US administration or any other state speaking out about the killing of Palestinian children," said Saeb Erakat, a senior negotiator.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, top advisor to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, called on the Middle East Quartet, made up of the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia, to break off contact with Israel.



Two demonstrators, disguised as a toilet and a tap, march with some 10,000 protesters outside the security zone set around the venue of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Sandton, a luxurious suburb of Johannesburg.

Chandrika opposed to lifting of LTTE ban

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga dropped a bombshell Sunday, saying she opposed a lifting of the ban on Tamil rebels, officials said.

Raising doubts about the Norwegian-backed peace process, Kumaratunga said she was against moves by the government to lift the ban on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) before peace talks start in Thailand this month.

In a statement released by her office she said the 1998 ban on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) should be removed if the peace process succeeds and not before the start of talks.

Her comments came as Norway and Thailand finalised arrangements for the formal face-to-face meeting between the Colombo government and the LTTE at a naval base in Sattahip in Thailand between September 16 and 18.

Tamil Tiger rebels, who have been fighting for an independent homeland in the island's northeast for minority Tamils, agreed to enter peace talks based on a promise that the January 1998 ban on them will be lifted.

The government said last week the ban would be removed 10 days before the first round of talks. Kumaratung was out of the country at the time.

Pak tribal justice system faces fire

AFP, Islamabad

Human rights activists and government officials Sunday slammed Pakistan's tribal justice system as a special court ordered death by hanging of six men for their role in a gang-rape sanctioned by a tribal jury.

"It was a case that shocked the whole country and the world," said Afrasiab Khattak, chairman of the private Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP).

"This case has raised very important issues -- the role of extra judicial tribunals taking the law into their own hands and handing down barbaric punishments.

"The accused have been punished but the issue will not be over until the state takes up the larger issue of the role of feudal lords and the treatment of women in society," Khattak told AFP.

In an unusual midnight verdict announced by a special court in the Punjab district of Dera Ghazi Khan, six men accused of involvement in the gang rape of young Pakistani woman Mukhtiar Mai were sentenced to death.

Two of them were members of the so called panchayat (jury) while eight others were acquitted.

Mai, 30 was gang-raped on the orders of a tribal council in the village of Meerwala 435 km south of the capital Islamabad.

Veerappan Kidnaps doctor to look after his detainee

AFP, Bangalore

India's most wanted bandit who last week abducted a former state government minister Sunday kidnapped a doctor to look after him, a report said.

The Star News television channel said bandit Muniswamy Veerappan abducted the doctor from the same area of Karnataka state where last Sunday he seized ex-minister H. Nagappa, 62.

Nagappa, 62, is a diabetic and Star News said the doctor was needed to treat him.

Earth Summit clears Kyoto hurdle

AFP, Johannesburg

Negotiators at the Earth Summit haggling over an action plan for tackling the world's worst problems cleared a key hurdle late Saturday, leaving around a dozen left before world leaders gather here on Monday.

The deal, centring on references to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, appeared to be a concession by the United States and green campaigners suspected that a secret trade-off lurked behind it as delegates horse-traded into the night.

Earlier, at least 15,000 protesters descended on the summit venue to shake their fists at poverty, capitalism and globalisation.

The protest took them on an eight-kilometre (five-mile) march from the sewage-strewn streets of Alexandra, a crime-ridden shanty town, to the swish white-dominated suburb of Sandton.

They cheered loudly as speakers denounced US President George W. Bush as a "terrorist", branded Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "a war criminal" and rallied at South African President Thabo Mbeki for failing to help millions of his citizens

get jobs, land or basic services.

Steel and concrete barricades, rolls of razor wire and hundreds of armed troops and police turned the sprawling conference centre into a veritable bunker, and overhead a helicopter and spotter plane circled, almost drowning out the speeches.

The deal on Kyoto was one of 14 sticking points that have pitched the United States against the European Union, and the rich world against the poor, in efforts to craft a "Plan of Implementation" for rooting out poverty and protecting the Earth's deteriorating environment.



Tourists on Saturday reflect before the replica of the Statue of Liberty on the Pont d'Alma where Princess Diana died in a car accident five years back.

Frustration ups over Laden, Omar hunt

AFP, Kabul

US President George W. Bush wanted him dead or alive and 25 million dollars remains on the table for his capture, but frustration over the hunt for Osama bin Laden is growing a year on from September 11.

Bin Laden's name is rarely mentioned by Washington or US military officials these days, through an apparent combination of ignorance and embarrassment about his status.

At a recent debate in the US Senate on the campaign in Afghanistan, codenamed Enduring Freedom, Georgia Democrat Max Cleland brought up a subject few members of the Bush administration would like aired these days.

"To me Operation Enduring Freedom has become Operation Enduring Frustration... because we have still not captured or killed (bin Laden)," he said.

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, who was rarely seen in public even before he fled the fundamentalist regime's last stronghold in December, has also proved frustratingly elusive to his

pursuers. Legend has it that Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban, drove away from the southern city of Kandahar on a motorbike after a surrender deal brokered by current Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The United States has put a 10 million dollar price on his head but they appear to be little nearer catching the one-eyed cleric than they are to locating his old ally bin Laden.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has had to admit that he had little clue about bin Laden's whereabouts.

"We do know he is having a great deal of difficulty functioning. He may be dead, he may be seriously wounded. He may be in Afghanistan, he may be somewhere else," he told the US Senate debate.

The coalition was last sure it had located bin Laden was in December during a military assault on the Tora Bora mountains of eastern Afghanistan, but many believe he and other al-Qaida leaders may have taken advantage of a temporary ceasefire to slip away.

Iraq moves to woo Europeans against US war plans

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq is sending envoys to European capitals to rally support against US plots to overthrow the regime, after EU foreign ministers called for diplomacy and not war in dealing with President Saddam Hussein.

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan announced the initiative Sunday after warmly praising the 15-nation bloc for refusing to toe Washington's hard line.

"Iraq is going to send emissaries to several European countries, including France and Germany, to explain the scale of American threats against the Iraqi people and the dangers they pose to world peace and security," Ramadan told the official Iraq News Agency (INA).

He said French and German opposition to US plans to attack Iraq without seeking a new UN mandate "mean that European countries are aware of the dangers of the US policy of hegemony which targets the whole world without exception."

"The European position hostile to the arrogant and aggressive policy of the US administration against Iraq is growing noticeably," Ramadan added.

The Europeans, many of whom have been alarmed by US Vice President Dick Cheney's war talk last week, have sought to cool tempers and urged diplomacy and not belligerency in dealing with Iraq.

However European Union foreign ministers, meeting in Denmark, did press Baghdad on Saturday to re-admit UN weapons inspectors immediately.

"I think that the European role will be yet more important because American arrogance is flagrant," Ramadan had said Saturday night.

"The will of the United States to topple the regime is a new phenomenon,

that could affect all the countries where the regimes do not please Washington," he warned.

Reports from London that Prime Minister Tony Blair has called on US President George W. Bush not to attack Iraq alone but to seek international backing through the United Nations will also have heartened Baghdad.

Blair had "friendly" talks with Bush lasting almost an hour on Thursday, the Sunday Telegraph said.

"Tony told him to re-engage with the UN," an unnamed senior cabinet minister told the weekly.

However Blair did agree with Bush that no new UN resolution was necessary to justify a strike against Iraq, the Sunday Telegraph said.

He tried to convince the president to push for Iraq to accept the return of United Nations arms inspectors, even if he did not believe Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would bow to UN demands.

The Sunday Times said Blair tried to persuade Bush not to take pre-emptive military action without giving Iraq an ultimatum to accept the return of inspectors. It said Blair stressed it would be advisable to get a UN mandate for strikes against Baghdad.

"The prime minister pressed the need for a co-ordinated effort to get the UN to back us," said a "senior British government figure" quoted by the paper.

And Turkish Foreign Minister Sukru Sina Gurel arrived in Tehran on Saturday and urged a "peaceful settlement" of the Iraq crisis.

"The Iraqi people must decide their own future ... Turkey advocates a peaceful solution rather than recourse to force," Iranian radio quoted Gurel as saying.

Swedish hijacker planned Sept 11 type attack on US embassy

REUTERS, Stockholm

A Swedish man of Tunisian origin, arrested on suspicion he was about to hijack a plane, was planning to crash the aircraft into a US embassy in Europe, Swedish intelligence and police sources said on Saturday.

A top police official said the man had taken flying lessons in the United States -- adding to fears of copycat attacks as the first anniversary of the September 11 suicide attacks on New York and Washington approaches.

However, intelligence sources and police were at odds over the incident, which began when a gun was found in the man's hand luggage as he boarded a flight to Britain from Vasteras, west of Stockholm. One police official flatly denied the embassy plan.

A highly-placed intelligence source said police were hunting four more men, including an explosives expert, who were believed to have worked on the plan with the suspect, identified by Swedish media as Kerim Chatty and aged 29.

"We know for sure that the plan

was to crash the plane into a US embassy in Europe," the source told Reuters.

The report was certain to unsettle Western governments who have already ordered extra security precautions ahead of September 11, the anniversary of attacks by hijackers who killed more than 3,000 people by crashing four seized airliners into buildings in New York, Washington and a field in Pennsylvania.

The hijackers that US officials suspected of flying the planes had learned to fly on courses in the United States.

But a source in Sweden's Sapo security police said Sapo had been instructed by the government to play the incident down at a politically sensitive time, two weeks before an election.

Margareta Linderoth, a Sapo official responsible for several departments including the one handling international terrorism, denied that police believed the arrested man was planning to attack an embassy or that four more men were being sought.

Sharif's withdrawal from race too little, too late

AFP, Islamabad

The withdrawal of ex-premier Nawaz Sharif from Pakistan's October 10 polls may have been a strong gesture of solidarity with other opposition parties, but it came too late to have any tangible effect on the post-election balance of power, analysts said Sunday.

The exiled two-time ex-premier announced the withdrawal of his nomination late Saturday in a statement read to journalists by the chairman of his Pakistan Muslim League (PLM-N).

"This decision is aimed at lodging my strong protest against the unethical, illegal and unconstitutional measures of (Pakistan's) military regime under the garb of restoring true democracy," said party chairman Raja Zafarul Haq.

PLM-N spokesman Siddiqui Farooq told AFP the decision was an expression of solidarity with ex-premier Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) against President Pervez Musharraf's military government.

On Friday election authorities declared Benazir -- who has also

twice served as prime minister -- ineligible to run for a seat in Larkana in southeastern Sindh province because she has been convicted of absconding from two corruption trials.

Two more applications for Benazir were rejected on Sunday leading to angry protests from supporters in her political stronghold in the south of the country.

Benazir's spokesman in Islamabad, Farhatullah Babar, lauded Sharif's decision Saturday as an expression of the shared resolve of the former political arch-rivals to banish the military from Pakistani politics.

But Ayaz Amir, a political columnist with the English language Dawn daily, said the show of solidarity had come too late, adding Sharif was well aware his successful nomination would soon have been disqualified.

"He knew his own chances were not very bright, but he was testing the military government's resolve. He waited for Benazir's nomination to be rejected and then offered solidarity with her," he said.

"It was a deliberate strategy, but

it was executed too late -- both the PML-N and the PPP should have combined their forces against the military government a lot earlier than this," he said.

Sharif's announcement came just hours after the government said it would contest his successful nomination.

Sharif was convicted of tax evasion and plane hijacking in 2000, several months after Musharraf overthrew and jailed him in a bloodless coup in October 1999.

The Musharraf regime has said Sharif's conviction was set aside after he signed an agreement to stay out of Pakistan for 10 years as part of a confidential deal.

The PML-N denies any such deal exists, but Sharif remains in exile in Saudi Arabia with some 20 members of his family.

Professor Khalid Mahmud, an analyst with the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, said despite the apparent solidarity that now exists between Sharif and Benazir it remained a foregone conclusion that Musharraf would retain effective power in post-election Pakistan.



An elderly supporter of the Bhutto family, dressed in the three colours of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party flag, sits next to the grave of Benazir's father, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, at their ancestral graveyard in Garhi Khuda Bux, some 20 km from Larkana on Sunday. Angry Benazir supporters took to the streets in Larkana after a second application by Benazir to contest October polls was rejected on grounds that the former prime minister had been convicted for "absconding" from two graft trials earlier this year.