

Sharon wins Likud leadership

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon used his victory speech Friday after a crucial Likud party leadership election to vow Israel would hunt down those behind a suicide bombing that killed three Israelis at a hotel in Kenya.

"Our long arm will catch the attackers and those who dispatch them," Sharon said in a solemn voice.

He echoed the pledge Israel made after the killing of 11 of its athletes taken hostage by Palestinian gunmen at the Munich Olympics in 1972.

Israel eventually carried out its threat, using its Mossad spy agency to track down and kill those it held responsible for the Munich attack.

Asking supporters to forgo celebrations after his landslide win over hawkish rival Benjamin Netanyahu, Sharon made clear Israel would strike back hard for the bombing in Kenya and an attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner taking off nearby.

Israel vows vengeance

Kenya detains 3 over attacks

REUTERS, Mombasa

Kenyan police were questioning three people on Friday over the attacks on Israelis which killed 15 people. Israel has vowed to hunt down all those behind the bloodbath.

A man and woman held in connection with Thursday's bomb and missile attacks in Mombasa held U.S. passports and said they were from Florida, the manager of a hotel where they stayed told Reuters. Police said they were hunting others of Arab appearance.

Suicide bombers drove a jeep into the lobby of the Israeli-owned Mombasa Paradise hotel and blew it up, killing 15 people, minutes after missiles were fired at a plane full of Israeli tourists taking off nearby early on Thursday.

By Friday, two men and a woman had been detained.

"There was another person, a third person, held for questioning last night," police spokesman Kingori Mwangi told Reuters. "They are all foreigners." Authorities did not give their nationalities.

"They had American passports and they said they were from Florida," Ben Wafula, general manager of Mombasa's Le Soleil Beach Club, said of the first two held.

He said the man and the woman, who appeared in their 20s, checked in on November 26 and had tried to check out of Wafula's hotel on Thursday morning about two hours after the suicide bombing of the Paradise Hotel, about five km (three miles) away.

Wafula said they were held after staff at the hotel made a routine call to police, who had asked all hotels in the area to notify them of any people checking out following the blast.

Israel flew home wounded survivors and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon vowed a swift response.

"Our long arm will catch the attackers and those who dispatch them," he said on Thursday after his Likud party re-elected him as its leader ahead of Israel's January 28 general election.

Israeli and Kenyan officials have been quick to blame Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network for the attack on the Mombasa Paradise Hotel, which killed three Israelis, nine Kenyans and the three bombers. More than a dozen Israelis and more than 60 others were injured.

But the White House said it was too soon to blame the group it accuses of masterminding the September 11 attacks on the United States last year.

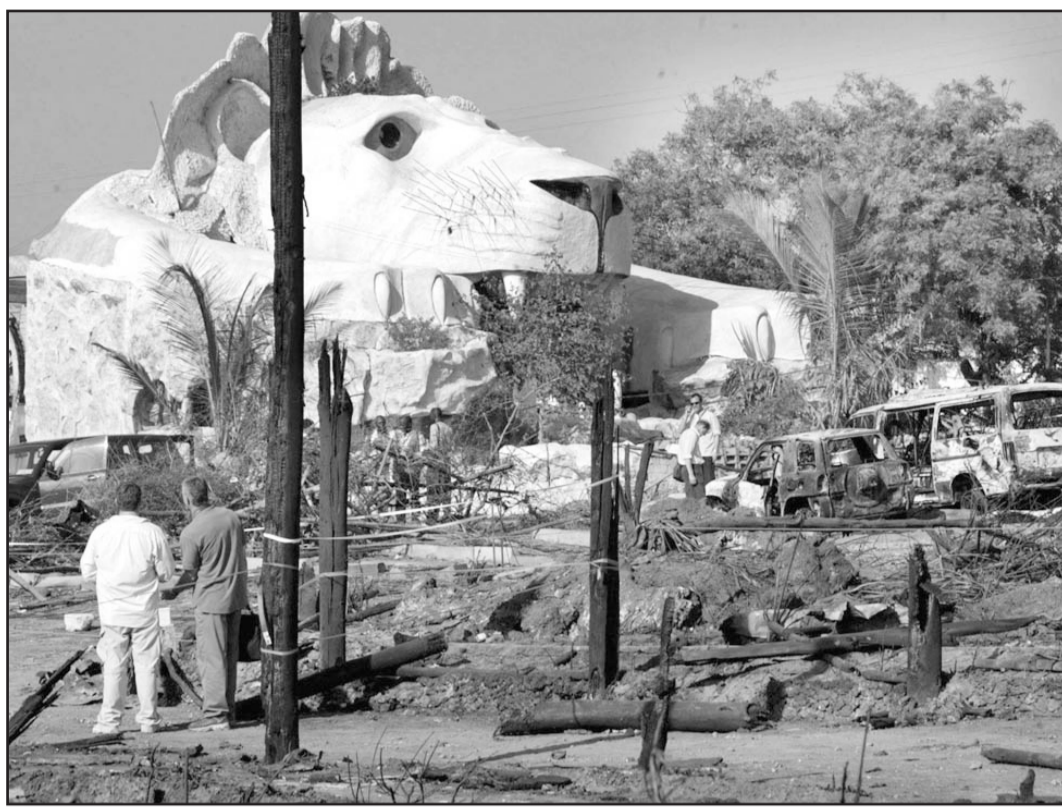
Sharon, who also used his victory speech to respond to the killing of six people in an attack in northern Israel, echoed the pledge Israel made after the killing of 11 of its athletes taken hostage by Palestinian gunmen at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

Israel eventually carried out its threat, using its Mossad spy agency to track down and kill those it held responsible for the attack in Germany.

"Israel will hunt down those who spilled the blood of its citizens. No one will emerge unscathed," the right-wing prime minister and former general said in a televised address.

In a fax sent to Reuters by a Lebanese media organization, the previously unheard-of "Army of Palestine" claimed responsibility for the Mombasa attack.

The United States blamed al-Qaida for 1998 truck bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Those attacks killed 224 people, most of them Africans.



Israeli army investigators inspect the scene where a bomb blast occurred the day before in Mombasa Paradise Hotel on Friday. The death toll has now risen to 16 including the three suicide bombers.

Pak Islamists take control of key region

REUTERS, Peshawar

Hardline Islamists opposed to the US military presence in Pakistan took power on Friday in a strategic province bordering Afghanistan where US agents are hunting Taliban and al-Qaida operatives.

Muhammad Akram Durrani of the six-party Islamic alliance was voted in as chief minister in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) at a time when the fragile pro-military government is trying to woo Islamists after the defection of a key partner.

Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) deputies in the NWFP assembly greeted the success of their candidate with shouts of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest). Durrani secured 78 of the 119 votes polled. His closest rival won 41 votes.

Tripura militants say no to women

REUTERS, Agartala

A separatist tribal guerrilla group in India's revolt-racked northeast has stopped recruiting women because too many male rebels were falling in love with them and eloping, police said on Friday.

The National Liberation Front of Tripura, fighting for a separate homeland, signed up nearly 70 young women over the past year with the aim of creating an all-female force, police said.

But the drive backfired when the male guerrillas started getting romantically entangled with the women recruits, police said.

"The presence of young women in the outfit resulted in relationships and indiscipline," police superintendent Jaidev Das told Reuters in Agartala, capital of Tripura.

Indonesia rights court acquits former Dili military chief

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's human rights court on Friday acquitted a senior Indonesian army officer of crimes against humanity in East Timor in 1999.

Lieutenant Colonel Endar Priyanto is the seventh army or police officer to be cleared by the court over the army-backed militia violence which broke out before and after the territory's vote to separate from Indonesia.

Prosecutors accused Priyanto of failing to prevent an attack on a refugee-packed house in Dili in April 1999 by his men and pro-Jakarta militiamen.

We must talk to Sharon or continue fight: PLO

AFP, Doha

The Palestine Liberation Organisation's deputy head Mahmud Abbas said here Friday that Palestinians had no choice but to negotiate with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon or "continue the struggle" against Israel.

"We have no alternative; negotiate with him or pursue the armed struggle," Abbas told AFP on his arrival here.

His comments followed Sharon's victory in the Likud Party primary vote on Thursday, which paves the way for his likely re-election as PM in January.



(R-L) Princess Hisako, widow of late Prince Takamado, her daughters Tsuguko, Noriko, Ayako, Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako attend the funeral ceremony for Prince Takamado at the Toshimagaoka cemetery in Tokyo on Friday. Prince Takamado, 47, died of heart failure after collapsing while playing squash at the Canadian Embassy on November 21.

'Advani should be tried in spl court over Babri Mosque demolition'

PTI, New Delhi

Putting an end to a controversy as to which court should try cases pertaining to demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya in 1992, the Supreme Court on Friday said all the cases along with the one against Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani and other Cabinet Ministers should be tried at the Special Court at Rae Bareilly.

The controversy arose as the Allahabad High Court had quashed a Uttar Pradesh Government notification of October 1993 assigning the trial of the case against Advani, Murl Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti to a Special Court at Rae Bareilly.

The State Government on September 28 this year had issued

another notification in consultation with the High Court assigning the trial of all Ayodhya cases including that against Advani and others to a Special Court at Rae Bareilly.

Disposing of a bunch of petitions challenging the High Court order quashing the October 1993 notification, a Bench comprising Chief Justice G B Pattanaik, Justice K G Balakrishnan and Justice Arun Kumar said now that the trial had been assigned to the Rae Bareilly court, "We see no justification in the petitions."

When counsel for one of the petitioners, Mohd Aslam alias Bhure, insisted that the trial should be held at Lucknow, the bench said "No person much less the petitioners in public interest can claim for a special court at a special place for the trial of the case".

UN inspects more Iraqi sites

US jets rain leaflets over Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

UN experts inspected an animal vaccine production lab and an active munitions factory near Baghdad on Thursday, the second day of a hunt for suspected weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The inspections proceeded mainly smoothly, just as they did Wednesday when the weapons inspectors resumed work in Iraq after a four-year gap.

But taking no chances the inspectors ordered electronic debugging equipment to make sure the Iraqi authorities were not eavesdropping on their headquarters.

Russia expressed satisfaction at the "successful start" of the inspections and hailed the "mood of constructive cooperation" between Iraq and the United Nations experts.

An Iraqi military spokesman said U.S. and British planes patrolling a "no-fly" in northern Iraq bombed

civilian targets in Nineveh province, killing one civilian. There was no immediate word from Washington or London on the report.

Western planes dropped leaflets on a previously attacked communications site in southern Iraq, warning Iraqis to stop repairing the facility, the US military said.

The unmanned facilities between Al Kut and Al Basrah, in the southern no-fly zone, were attacked on November 22. US officials have repeatedly warned that continued firing by Iraqi defences at US and British jets patrolling the no-fly zones was a direct violation of the November 8 UN resolution on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The White House has stopped short of saying that shooting at the planes would be a trigger for war against Iraq or that Washington has any plans to lodge a formal complaint with the Security Council.

The United States has threat-

ened a military assault on Iraq if President Saddam Hussein obstructed the arms inspections. Iraq has denied possessing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction, a stance Washington has questioned.

AFP adds: US planes dropped 360,000 leaflets over southern Iraq on Thursday warning that attacks on US and British war planes patrolling no-fly zones could lead to air strikes, military officials said.

With pressure mounting on Iraq as UN inspectors start checks for weapons of mass destruction, this was the fifth leaflet drop in two months over southern Iraq.

Three different leaflets were dropped over unmanned communication facilities between Al Kut and Basra, about 160-240 km south of Baghdad, the US Central Command said in a statement.

NC threatens to opt for republic in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

A former prime minister and the leader of Nepal's oldest political group has warned that his party might be forced to support a republican system after the king sacked the prime minister, reports said Friday.

Girija Prasad Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress (NC), said the party had been a long-time supporter of the constitutional monarchy which is in place in the Himalayan kingdom.

"The NC, which has long been in favour of constitutional monarchy, could change its stance in favour of a republic set up," the English-language Kathmandu Post quoted Koirala as saying at a meeting in Birjung, 120 km south of Kathmandu on Thursday.

Koirala's comments came nearly two months after King Gyanendra sacked the elected prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, calling him "incompe-

tent."

He took power himself for a week before installing a government headed by staunch royalist Lokendra Bahadur Chand.

The king also postponed parliamentary elections which were due to take place in November and has not yet set a date for new polls.

All the main political parties in Nepal have protested against the king's action, which they have called unconstitutional, and demanded that parliament be reinstated or elections be held.

Koirala said the issue of a republic would not be decided by the party leadership, but by the party's general convention.

Political observers said Koirala's remarks were designed to push the king into action, rather than a real threat.

In Nepal the king is revered by many as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

The constitutional monarchy has been in place since 1990 when the then king Birendra gave up many of his powers following a mass popular uprising.

Birendra was killed along with nine other members of the royal family in June 2001 by a drunken crown prince Dipendra and his brother Gyanendra, who was seen as being more hardline, took the throne.

Nepal is currently fighting a Maoist rebellion, which has killed 7,300 people in the past six years. The Maoists are fighting to overthrow the monarchy and install a communist republic.

Koirala also announced that his party would launch street protests against the king's actions.

"As a democratic party, we will not run away from the elections. But the chances of holding elections at present are almost nil," he said.



Spaniard Lola Alcocer, Miss Seville 2001, addresses a press conference in Seville to announce her participation as Spain's representative in the Miss World beauty contest in London on Thursday. Alcocer had refused to participate in the pageant in Nigeria in solidarity with Amina Lawall, a Nigerian woman sentenced by an Islamic court to be stoned to death for an alleged adultery.

Was the first man born in India?

PTI, Dehra Dun

Notwithstanding the common belief that human life originated in Africa, a senior anthropologist on Monday called for researches focussing on the second theory, which holds that the evolution of man began in Shivalik range of the Himalayas.

Presiding over a two-day seminar on "bio-cultural profile of central and western Himalayas" here, Deepak Tyagi, Director-in-charge of Anthropological Survey of India, said there are chances "that the first man was in Shivalik range."

He said a human skull has been found in the Shivalik ranges, which might further prove this theory and pointed out that a former professor SRK Chopra has done a lot of work on the theory of evolution of man beginning in Shivaliks.

During the two-day seminar, the scientists representing different science institutes of the country would discuss cultural, biological and health aspects of the people inhabiting the Himalayan region.

Kashmir CM to 'reorient' counter-insurgency cops

Cong-led panel to oversee govt

AFP, Srinagar

Kashmir's new leader said Friday said there was a need to "reorient" counter-insurgency police in the restive region as the force was "creating 10 militants while assisting in nabbing one."

"There is a need to reorient the Special Operations Group (SOG)," Mufti Mohammed Sayeed said in a statement issued overnight.

The SOG was set up in 1996 and mainly comprises local policemen and surrendered militants.

It is widely hated in Kashmir, with residents accusing it of abuses ranging from extortion to murder.

"It is being felt that by assisting in nabbing one militant, they (the SOG) are in fact creating 10 more militants," he said.

Sayeed's regional People's Democratic Party, which along with India's main opposition Congress formed a coalition in the state after September/October elections, had

promised to disband the force if it came to power.

However, under pressure from New Delhi and its security agencies, Sayeed has decided rather to "reorient" the counter-insurgency police.

"I want militancy to be tackled firmly," said Sayeed, "but at the same time unnecessary harassment of civilians will not be accepted, human rights violations the least."

Sayeed emphasised the need for reforms in the police force, saying it would have to become more people-friendly.

"Since a cop comes in daily contact with the people and becomes a deciding factor about the image of the entire force, people with higher qualification and merit needed to be inducted at cop's level," he said.

"They can make a better appreciation of the situation and deal with people with greater responsibility." Sayeed also condemned militants for killing innocent people.

"I do not find any justification in killing of innocents and political workers by militants," he said, urging the security forces to "act with firmness."

PTI adds: Almost a month after formation of a government in Jammu and Kashmir, the PDP-led coalition constituents are close to setting up a Coordination Committee to oversee the functioning of the government.

The Committee, to be headed by a Congress representative, would provide a forum for discussions on important matters to help the government take collective decisions.

"Groundwork has already been done and I have informally discussed the matter" with Chief Minister and PDP president Mufti Sayeed and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, state Congress chief Ghulam Nabi Azad told PTI here.



Bollywood actor Johnny Lever (C) interacts with people affected by HIV during an AIDS awareness campaign in Mumbai on Friday. India had an estimation of about 3.8 million children and adults of its one billion population living with HIV/AIDS in 2001.