

Violence in Nablus, Gaza kills 6 Palestinians

AFP, Nablus

Two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli army raid yesterday to snatch a senior official of the PLO in Nablus, while four militants of the radical Islamic group Hamas were blown up in a mystery blast in the Gaza Strip.

As the violence claimed more lives, a hardline splinter group of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah threatened to use force against any Palestinian prime minister "imposed" by the international community.

Fearing new threats from militant groups, Israel sealed off the territories indefinitely, with some security officials saying the total blockade will not be lifted until after a US-led war on Iraq.

The clashes in Nablus erupted as Israeli troops and tanks moved into the centre of the northern West Bank city to arrest Taysir Khaled, a member of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Palestinian security sources said.

Khaled, who is also a leading

member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), was captured after a gunfight erupted around his offices, where a crowd of around 100 stone-throwing youths gathered.

Two Palestinians, aged 20 and 35, were killed in the clashes after being shot in the head. Another 29 were wounded, including three listed in critical condition. The younger slain man was identified as a civilian.

In Gaza, meanwhile, at least four Palestinian militants from the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' armed wing, were killed when an explosion ripped through a house belonging to a group member.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniya said the group was looking into whether the men blew themselves up while preparing explosives or if they were killed by the Israelis.

An Israeli army spokeswoman refused any immediate comment on the blast. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, made up of radical Fatah members and largely a decentralised network of grassroots militants,

said in a statement it would fight against the imposition of a Palestinian "Karzai," a reference to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, appointed after the US campaign to oust the Taliban.

The statement lashed out at the "conspiracy of terrorist parties" who aimed to force Arafat to name a prime minister to circumscribe his power.

Arafat finally agreed to the appointment at the weekend after coming under pressure from the United States, the international community and Israel.

"We will fight strongly against any Karzai imposed by these international terrorist parties under the name of a prime minister," said the group, which has ignored calls by Arafat to end its deadly attacks inside Israel.

Despite the threat, Palestinian international cooperation minister Nabil Shaath said in Cairo that Arafat would name a premier "in two or three weeks."

Palestinian officials have denied the move was prompted by international pressure.



PHOTO: STAR

Chhayanaut artistes render songs at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday as part of the Amar Ekushey programme.

Blair on tightrope

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stroy the world." America, he said, was "a country run by a bunch of criminals ... with Tony Blair as a hired Christian thug."

No serious incidents were reported, as more than 4,500 police officers lined the streets packed with protesters of all ages and backgrounds who shouted slogans, blew horns, banged drums and waved placard.

Blair was well away from London, opting instead to speak to Labour's spring conference where he accepted that chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix and his team would have more time to pursue their work inside Iraq.

But he sought to hang on to the moral high ground, saying the prospect of a war that might lead to Saddam's downfall made it possible for war to be fought "with a clear conscience".

"If the result of peace is Saddam staying in power, not disarmed, then I tell you, there are consequences paid in blood for that decision too," the prime minister said.

"Ridding the world of Saddam would be an act of humanity. It is leaving him there that is, in truth, inhumane."

Blair has committed 30,000 troops and marines, 120 tanks, a 17-ship naval task force led by the

aircraft carrier Ark Royal, and some 100 fighter jets and support aircraft to a possible US-led attack on Iraq.

He is also seen at home as having the power to influence US President George W Bush, though critics still like to brand the prime minister as "an American poodle".

Opening the newspapers on Sunday, Blair could console himself with the fact that the political right in Britain remains firmly on the side of military intervention.

Under the headline "Give war a chance", the Sunday Telegraph editorialised that it was "insulting that the marchers assume that those who accept the necessity of war do so with anything other than a heavy heart".

"There are those on the anti-war marches and the Security Council who naively believe that Saddam can be made to behave," echoed the Sunday Times newspaper. "They are wrong, dangerously so."

Rajpunnah

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Larma, Deputy Minister for CHT Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan, Chairman of Rangamati Hill District Council Dr. Manik Lal Dewan and Deputy Commissioner Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan attended the function.



PHOTO: AFP

US Marines with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, from Camp Pendleton, California, march in the northern Kuwaiti desert near Iraq on Saturday.

US gets lonely as peace movement peaks

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His British counterpart Tony Blair again also insisted action must be taken against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"If there are 500,000 on that march, that is still less than the number of people whose deaths Saddam has been responsible for. If there are one million, that is still less than the number of people who died in the wars he started," he said.

Possibly staking his career on the alliance with Washington, Blair added: "I do not seek unpopularity as a badge of honour. But sometimes it is the price of leadership and the cost of conviction."

NATO chief George Robertson convened the Defence Planning Committee (DPC), on which France does not sit, in a new bid to end the crisis centred on US proposals to help Turkey in the case of war on Iraq.

France said it was hoping for a solution that would involve France staying out of military measures but reaffirming its political solidarity with Ankara.

As for the European Union, the split is so great, with Britain, Italy and Spain leading calls for war, that one senior EU diplomat said the talks Monday risked compounding the divisions.

"This could be a bomb that explodes in our faces," he said. Said another: "The best we can expect is that everybody at least smiles for the family photo."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who said Saturday that the Security Council might need a new resolution on Iraq but that war could still be averted, will address the summit, as current EU president Greece tries to keep the United Nations at the centre of the Union's response to the crisis.

Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou joined a meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo yesterday, in the first non-Arab presence at such talks.

"It reflects the keenness of Arabs to consult with the EU in supporting international efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement to the Iraq crisis and avoid war," an Arab League official told AFP.

An emergency Arab summit will be held on February 27 to address the Iraq crisis, the state-run Egyptian daily Al-Ahram reported, amid predictions that the Arab leaders would offer Saddam the chance to go into exile or face a US-led war.

US officials meanwhile declined to indicate their next move, with White House spokeswoman Jeanie

Mamo saying Bush "still hopes for a peaceful resolution, and that is up to Saddam Hussein."

Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated the administration was now uncertain it would seek a second resolution to approve use of force against Iraq.

But if Iraq has still fails to disarm, Washington is ready "to lead a coalition of nations that would be willing to join the United States in the disarmament," Powell said.

Official Iraqi media said the global anti-war demonstrations, coupled with Friday's Security Council session, were proof of US isolation.

"The administration has failed and the Security Council session was a defeat for the US logic of aggression in full view of all citizens of this world," said Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of Saddam's ruling Baath party.

The United States has some 150,000 troops in place in the Gulf, bolstered by troops from Australia and Britain.

The New York Times, citing US intelligence and military sources, yesterday said Iraq's war defence plans include blowing up dams, destroying bridges and igniting oil fields.

Analysts say the cost of war in

Mahathir disappointed as Qatar rejects OIC summit in Malaysia

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has voiced disappointment over Qatar's reluctance to support the staging in Malaysia of an emergency session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on the Iraq crisis, a report said yesterday.

Malaysia has proposed to host the summit after the upcoming Non-Aligned Meeting (NAM) which would be held from February 20-25. It will bring together leaders or representatives from NAM's 114 member states.

"We are disappointed because so many heads of governments of OIC countries who are also members of NAM will be here and it is a good opportunity for us to meet and discuss informally so that we can have a common stand," Mahathir was quoted as saying by the Sunday Times newspaper.

"Foreign Minister (Syed Hamid Albar) had in fact contacted Qatar before this but they were not agreeable to having such a meeting here."

Qatar now holds the presidency of the 57-member pan-Islamic body. Mahathir said Iranian President Mohammed Khatami had suggested t him that a special session of the OIC be convened after the NAM summit.

Saifur

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Ahmed Kamran and other AL leaders.

Shafique said AL extended support to the incumbent mayor in the ensuing polls. Sensing his victory, the ruling party stalwart is trying to influence voters, he alleged.

The AL leaders further alleged that the finance minister had influenced the police administration to arrest another mayoral candidate from the court area but it was foiled by lawyers. Two police officials were transferred for failing to arrest the candidate.

Another mayoral candidate is also under a "serious pressure", they alleged.

The finance minister also changed the name of decades-old Sylhet Auditorium into Saifur Rahman Auditorium and renamed the Sylhet Government Girls College Auditorium after his wife, they said.

CJA confce

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Secretary General Don Mckinnon, World Bank Country Director Frederic Temple, Director of Commonwealth Foundation Colin Ball and Director of Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat Matthew Neuhaus will also address the conference.

The main objective of the conference is to bring together the Commonwealth journalists to draw international attention to the role of journalists in relation to civil society and good governance.

The delegates at the conference will especially examine how responsible, fair, accurate and unhindered reporting is crucial to the operation of a democratic society.

Editors, civil society members and business leaders will take part in at least 10 working sessions of the conference..

The delegates will visit Central Shaheed Minar in the early hours of Feb 21 to pay homage to the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement.

"We will try to convene a meeting of OIC members in Kuala Lumpur, either formally or informally," he said.

The proposal to convene an emergency meeting in Malaysia comes at a time when the United States is engaged in a massive military buildup in the Gulf as a prelude to an anticipated attack on Iraq.

Qatar, a close US ally, is likely to serve as the command center of a military campaign.

Mahathir said there was no clear evidence that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

"All they (weapons inspectors) are saying is that Iraq is not cooperating. How the Iraqis must cooperate, I don't know," he said.

Mahathir had said that Malaysia will not support a war against Iraq even if the United Nations Security Council gives the go-ahead.

Mild tremor shakes Rangpur BSS, Rangpur

A mild tremor shook Rangpur town and its adjoining areas in the early hours of yesterday.

The tremor hit the areas at about 3.40 am and lasted about 10 seconds.

The magnitude of the tremor could not be measured due to non-availability of Richter Scale, Met office sources said.

No injury or damage to property was, however, reported.

Gram Sarkar

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ated it in chorus. The objection was nullified by voice vote.

"It would give birth to confrontation at the grassroots level because the proposed Gram Sarkar representatives would not be elected," said Mohammed Nasim of the Awami League.

A Gram Sarkar organisation will have 15 representatives, including the head of the organisation and an advisor, and it will be constituted for five years.

The proposed Sarkar would undertake development projects like construction of roads and culverts on a priority basis and review their progress and financial aspects from time to time.

It would also report to the Union Parishad about law and order, literacy movement, school enrolment, immunisation, family planning activities, and collect preliminary information on birth, death, marriage and divorce.

The Gram Sarkar would be empowered to supervise VGF and VGT programmes.

It would take necessary measures to stop repression on women, theft, robbery and other criminal activities, and help the civil administration to settle local disputes through negotiations.

It would inspire village people to send their children to school, encourage tree plantation and environment protection and set up village co-operatives, small scale industries, poultry and fisheries firms etc.

Chairmen of the Upazila Parishad and the Union Parishad would be empowered to oversee the activities of the Gram Sarkar, while the district administration will have the authority to dissolve it for a valid reason.

NGO fund blockage

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the PRIP Trust is facing a financial crisis on the second phase of its Towards a Just Society project. It has been giving technical assistance to small NGOs in 52 out of 64 districts for capacity building.

Aroma Dutta, chief executive of the Trust, said the government's decision created a difficult situation for her organisation.

"We cannot think of our next course of action as the project plan, it is supposed to run 23, 400 non-formal schools in the fourth year (2002-2003) and expand the programme further on the following year.

Similarly, support staff, teachers and students of non-formal education and adult education programmes, and people depending on the project, launched in 1999, would face a serious financial setback.

Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS), another organisation facing fund crisis, claimed that it has targeted mobilizing some four million poor women in order to improve their socio-economic condition.

This programme was designed for three years under three project heads, costing over Tk 12 crore.

"Women in rural Bangladesh have been getting benefit of NGO activities. Now they can think of their economic prosperity on their own and need more support to turn themselves into social capital," said Rokeya Kabir, executive director of the BNPS adding that this process has been halted due to fund blockage.

493 promoted

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the administration, they had argued.

Meanwhile, highly placed sources claim that the SSB could not get its recommendations through in three previous attempts because of some junior officials at the Prime Minister's Office.

The officials with links to some political leaders tried to block the promotions because they were not on the SSB list, they said.

Earlier this month, a junior official of the PMO met an important SSB member and asked him not to place the recommendation before the PM until the 1991 batch officials were included in the promotion list, they added.

AL walks out

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Soon afterwards, senior AL parliamentarian Suranjit Sengupta took floor on a point of order and proposed formation of an 11-member parliamentary committee headed by the Speaker.

He also thanked the home minister for his objective comments on the incident but expressed concern over repeated bomb explosions.

The article 189 of the Rules of Procedure of parliament has the provision for such a committee formation, Sengupta said.

But Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain opposed the proposal.

The Chair disapproved of the proposal with the observation that the home minister had already given a statement on the matter and cases were lodged as well.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in parliament Abdul Hamid led the AL lawmakers in the walkout at 7.00pm.

However, the AL rejoined the House five minutes later, after a brief press briefing accusing the ruling alliance of harbouring fundamentalists and criminals.

The Speaker did not accept the AL proposal, as the government did not want him to do so, alleged Sengupta.

Experts are investigating the Dinajpur bomb incident and civilians like parliamentarians cannot do much, the senior member of the Treasury Bench, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, told the House.

The government will make public the expert findings after investiga-

tion, he assured.

A bill on Gram Sarkar, a proposed local government tier, was tabled in the House.

JS debates

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branded as numberone corrupt country," said Alamgir Kabir.

Young BNP lawmaker Elias Al added fuel to the fire taking the floor for a supplementary question. He asked the minister whether action would be taken against the former housing minister who had "illegally allocated plots to his housemaids and relations".

In reply Alamgir Kabir said during Awami League rule, 52 bighas of land were grabbed by Hasan Imam, Kabir Chowdhury and some others "in the name of freedom fighters' cooperatives".

He said all lands occupied or allocated illegally would be recovered.

Joyal Abedin Faruk, also of ruling BNP, however, had something different to raise in the House.

He wanted to know where the money had been deposited "and at what interest, as only Tk 65 crore was allocated for acquired lands against a Tk 220 crore loan sanctioned by a bank.

Alamgir Kabir informed the House that the entire loan was yet to be released. So far, Tk 65 crore has been distributed to the affected people following the land acquisition by RAJUK.

NAM summit

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bours. In less than a month, Islamabad and New Delhi have expelled nine officials each from each other's missions on charges of spying.

The NAM summit will mark the fourth time that the top Indian and Pakistani leaders share a dais since both countries came to the brink of war following a terror attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001. India blamed Pakistan-backed terrorists for the attack, which Pakistan has denied.

The last NAM summit was held in Durban, South Africa, in 1998. Vajpayee and Pakistan's then foreign minister Sartaj Aziz represented their countries in that meeting and used the forum to restate their known stands on Kashmir.

M Boucher c Cairns b Oram	10
L Klusener not out	33
S Pollock c Oram b Adams	10
G Kirsten not out	5
Extras: (lb-6, w-11, nb-3)	20
Total: (For six wickets in 50 overs)	306
Fall of wickets: 1-60, 2-126, 3-193, 4-243, 5-260, 6-287	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Bond	10	0	73	1
Adams	9	0	57	1
Oram	8	0	52	2
Styris	10	0	44	1
Vettori	10	0	58	1
Astle	3	0	16	0

NEW ZEALAND	
C McMillan c Boucher b Donald	25
S Fleming not out	134
N Astle not out	54
Extras: (lb-8, w-8)	16
Total: (For one wicket in 36.5 overs)	229

Fall of wicket: 1-89				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Pollock	8	0	36	0
Ntini	8	1	33	0
Donald	5.5	0	52	1
Kallis	8	0	47	0
Boje	2	0	16	0
Klusener	5	0	37	0

Result: New Zealand won by nine wickets (Duckworth-Lewis method).

Man-of-the-match: Stephen Fleming.

Toss: South Africa

Umpires: Steve Bucknor (Wls) and Peter Willey (Eng).

TV umpire: Daryl Harper (Aus). Match referee: Wasim Raja (Pak).

G Smith c McMillan b Bond	23
H Gibbs c McMillan b Oram	143
N Boje b Styris	29
J Kallis c Vincent b Vettori	33