

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 Tayyib 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,

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.

AL walks out

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Soon afterwards, senior AL parliamentarian Suranji 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 Khandaker 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-

NAM summit

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213 people left no man's land between India and Bangladesh.

India said the stranded people were Bangladeshi snake charmers and that Bangladesh took them back. Bangladesh denies any of its nationals are illegally in India and has denied taking them back.

The snake charmers had triggered a diplomatic crisis as Advani and other Indian leaders demanded Bangladesh take them.

India announced last month a drive to deport millions of Bangladeshis it said had entered its territory illegally and could pose a security threat.

Singh said more forces have been deployed to the border but that more troops were still needed.

Kiwis fly on Fleming

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bowling of Andre Adams, who shared the new ball with Shane Bond, before unleashing his full array of shots to roars of approval from a packed crowd in the 30,000-seater stadium.

He hit 19 fours and three sixes before being caught on the midwicket boundary off medium-pacer Jacob Oram.

There were good partnerships throughout the South African innings, which was launched by a stand of 60 in the first ten overs between Gibbs and left-hander Graeme Smith, playing his first match of the tournament after replacing the injured Jonty Rhodes.

Smith made 23 after being caught at second slip off a no-ball from Bond in the first over before he had scored.

It was tough going for the New Zealand bowlers, with only Scott Styris, who took one for 44 in ten overs, managing to keep the batsmen in check. Jacob Oram took two for 52 but both of his wickets were to catches in the deep.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the World Cup Group B match between South Africa and New Zealand at the Wanderers Stadium here on Sunday:

SOUTHAFRICA

G Smith c McCullum b Bond 23

H Gibbs c McCullum b Oram 143

N Boje b Styris 29

J Kallis c Vincent b Vettori 33

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-

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

Asle 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).



Chhayana 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 placards.

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.

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."

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.

The proposed Sylhet Auditorium will have 15 representatives, including the head of the organisation and an advisor, and it will be constituted for five years.

The proposed Sylhet Auditorium will 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 Sylhet 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 Sylhet, while the district administration will have the authority to dissolve it for a valid reason.



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

FROM PAGE 1

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

"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 response to the crisis.

Greece 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.

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