

# Israel ends West Bank raid after killing top militant

## 6 others also gunned down

REUTERS, AFP,Nablus

Israeli forces pulled out of the Casbah district of the West Bank town of Nablus at dawn yesterday, a day after killing a senior militant commander and six other armed activists there.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie, also of Fatah, said Israel committed a brutal and ugly crime in Nablus, a militant stronghold. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called the operation another impressive achievement against terrorism.

Uncovering a hideout in a Nablus house Saturday, soldiers killed Navef Abu Sharkh, head of Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the West Bank, and six other gunmen, including local commanders of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups.

The brigades, whose militants have carried out dozens of suicide

bombings and attacks against Israelis in a Palestinian uprising that began in 2000, promised unprecedented retaliation - "like an earthquake," they said in a statement.

Israeli military sources said Sunday the raid, codenamed "Full Court Press" and launched Wednesday by paratroops into Nablus's casbah, a warren of ancient streets, was over.

Residents said soldiers pulled out of the neighborhood and took up positions on hilltops as thousands of Palestinians gathered in the city center for the militants' funerals.

The army commander who led the ambush on the gunmen's hideout said Israel carried out the operation after preventing a bombing in Jerusalem last week planned by militants based in Nablus.

"That's the reason we acted this weekend, but even though we act,

they (the militants) still manage to carry out attacks," said the officer, who could be identified under army regulations only as Lieutenant Colonel Itzik.

The killings overshadowed a visit by US Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, who urged both sides to fulfil commitments and take advantage of the "moment of opportunity" offered by Sharon's Gaza pullout plan.

Israeli troops late last month raided the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza, killing about 44 Palestinians, but have not pushed into West Bank towns with significant force since April.

Earlier Saturday, Israeli troops shot dead another al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades armed militant in Nablus. Military sources said he had confronted soldiers. Friday, soldiers killed two Palestinians, including one gunman in the city.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, a senior

adviser to Arafat, called Saturday's killings "a grave escalation that aims to sabotage the Egyptian and American efforts to revive the peace process."

Egypt has been talking with Palestinian officials about plans to train Palestinian security officers so they can secure control over Gaza after an Israeli pullout. Israeli hard-liners fear militants plan to take over Gaza after a withdrawal.

Sharon has won cabinet support in principle for his Gaza plan, which calls for the gradual evacuation of all 21 Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and another four hard-to-defend enclaves in the West Bank.

A second vote is necessary before any of the settlements, built on land Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war, are uprooted. Sharon included in the Gaza plan a pledge to hold on to parts of the West Bank permanently.

## CIA stops using harsh interrogation tactics

REUTERS, Washington

The CIA has stopped using interrogation techniques such as "stress positions," sleep deprivation and denial of pain medication while the Bush administration reviews their legality. The Washington Post said yesterday.

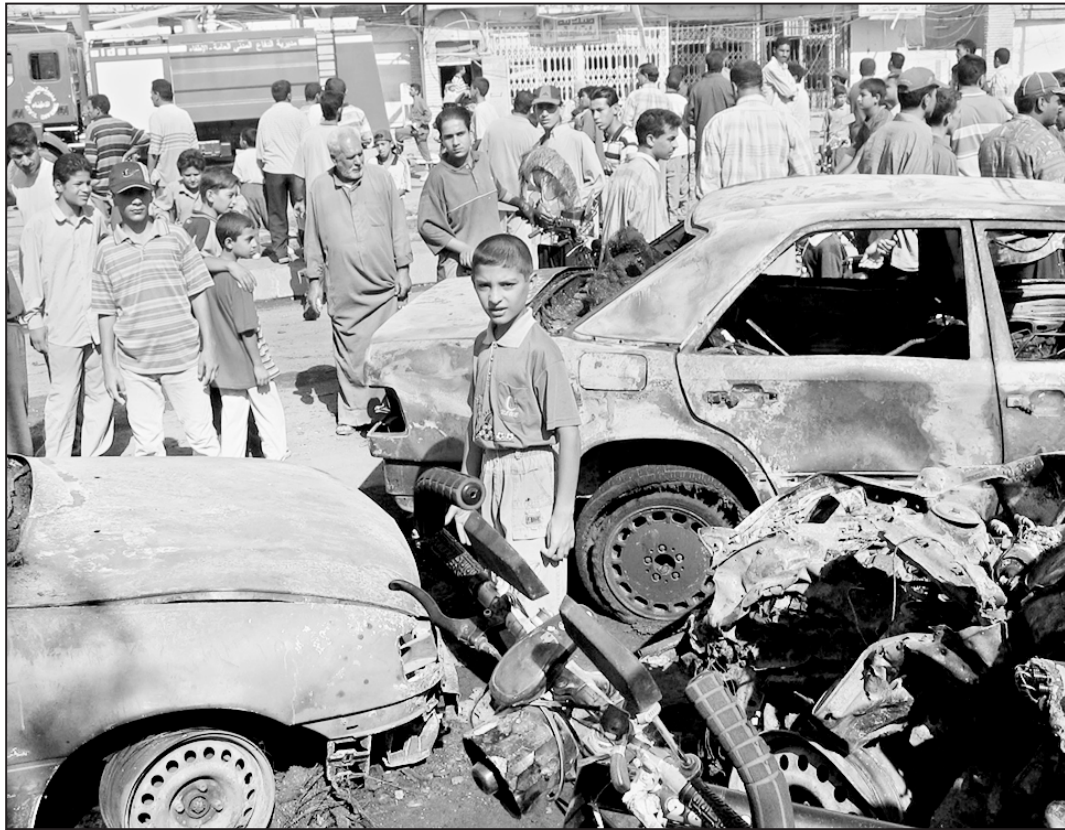
"The whole thing's been stopped until we can sort out whether we are sure we are on legal ground," the Post quoted a former senior CIA official as saying.

The newspaper said the so-called enhanced interrogation techniques have been used in questioning al-Qaeda leaders. The suspension applies to CIA detention facilities around the world.

Questioning of prisoners will continue, the newspaper said, but without use of the techniques.

A CIA spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

The suspension follows a White House decision to review an Aug. 1, 2002, memo that detailed how to avoid violating US and international terror laws while interrogating prisoners.



Iraqis check the site of a car bomb attack yesterday which took place late Saturday in the town of Hilla, 100km south of Baghdad. Twenty-three people were killed and 58 wounded in the explosion, which occurred in a busy shopping area away from Iraqi security forces or patrols by the US-led coalition. All the victims were civilians.



Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank (L) shakes hands with his Pakistani counterpart Riaz Khokhar before a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. Top diplomats from India and Pakistan began talks on finding a solution to the Kashmir dispute that has bedeviled their relations for more than five decades.

# Iran, European 'big-3' to hold talks on nukes

## Tehran shrugs off criticism over uranium enrichment

AFP, Tehran

Iran and the big-three European Union states are to hold new talks this week in the wake of Iran's decision to resume making parts for centrifuges used to enrich uranium, officials said yesterday.

Foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said the talks with Britain, France and Germany - which last year brokered Iran's cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog -- would take place "in the coming days".

"The Islamic republic will have discussions with the Europeans this week," top national security official and nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani was quoted as saying by the official news agency IRNA.

"We are ready for dialogue and we accept the invitation from the three Europeans," he was also quoted as saying by the student

news agency ISNA.

Iranian television said the talks would begin on Tuesday at the experts level, and then move on to meetings at the ministerial level.

Details on the content or aim of the discussions were not given.

The United States and the European Union Saturday called on Iran to go back on its decision to resume the construction of centrifuges, announced by Tehran in retaliation to a critical resolution passed this month at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

A halt on centrifuge work had been one of several "confidence-building" measures Iran agreed to while the UN nuclear watchdog investigated allegations the country is seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, Iran yesterday shrugged off yet more international criticism over its nuclear

programme, refusing to back down on the construction of centrifuges for the highly sensitive process of enriching uranium.

"Nothing very important has happened," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters, trying to play down fresh alarm over an atomic energy programme the United States sees as a cover for weapons development.

The United States and the European Union Saturday called on Iran to go back on its decision to resume the construction of centrifuges, announced by Tehran in retaliation to a critical resolution passed this month at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

But Asefi insisted that while Iran would go ahead with making centrifuges as of June 29, it was still sticking to its pledge to suspend enriching uranium.

## Taliban kill 10 Afghans for having voter ID card

BBC ONLINE

Taliban fighters in Afghanistan have shot dead at least 10 people after finding them in possession of voter registration cards on Friday, officials say.

The reported attack in the central Uruzgan province appears to be the latest case of violence against anyone involved in September's elections.

The former ruling Taliban group has been accused of trying to wreck the country's first democratic poll.

Two women died on Saturday in a bomb attack on female election workers.

Local police officials said the Uruzgan killings happened after a group of suspected guerrillas stopped a van carrying civilians.

There are differing accounts as to how many occupants there were and whether they were shot dead immediately or whether the van was taken to a neighbouring province before the killings.

## Tigers warn govt of 'war or peace' option Norway moves to salvage talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's peace broker Norway will make a fresh attempt this week to salvage its faltering efforts amid fears that the country could return to war, diplomats and officials said yesterday.

Norway's special peace envoy, Erik Solheim, was due here today to launch a renewed attempt to jumpstart the negotiations process that has been on hold since April last year, diplomats said.

They said Solheim's work was complicated by Tiger charges that the army provided sanctuary to a renegade Tiger commander to wage a covert war against them despite the ongoing truce that has been in place since February 2002.

The Tigers had warned that the "war or peace" option was with the government while security forces

and the police have been finding bombs and jackets of the type used by suicide bombers left in the capital.

The defence ministry has ordered the stepping up of security in key state institutions amid fears of attacks, but the government has also been keen to play down threats of a Tiger strike.

The Tigers on Saturday boycotted a meeting to review the truce and sort out problems with the police and security forces in the island's troubled eastern province, the Scandinavian truce monitoring team said.

A spokeswoman for the truce monitors said the Tigers gave no reason for the pull-out but the guerrillas had told local residents last week that their action was to protest military backing to a break-away leader known as Karuna.

# Iraqi insurgents better coordinating their attacks: Powell

AFP, Washington

Coordination among insurgent fighters in Iraq is increasing ahead of the June 30 power handover, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said in a television interview yesterday.

"If you look at the insurgency and what they are doing in recent weeks ... there does seem to be a level of coordination, a level of command and control that we need to target and go after," Powell told the CBS News program "Face the Nation."

In the months after the fall of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein officials, the US-led coalition authority dismissed the roadside bombs and sporadic ambushes aimed at coalition forces as the work of a handful of thugs and diehard Saddam loyalists.

"Earlier we did not see the kind of

coordination that we're seeing now," Powell said, "but now we're seeing a higher level of coordination."

"It changes the nature of the enemy. We have to go after it."

Powell cautioned that not all the insurgents are part of one organization. Some of the fighters are linked to group of fugitive Jordanian Islamist Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi's group, while others belong to the militia of radical Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr.

And whether the different organizations "are linked or not remains to be seen," Powell said.

"I wouldn't go that far. Certainly we're seeing a level of command and control and a level of coordination that seems to me is a little bit different than what we've seen months ago," he said.

## Assam minister asks Ulfa to set free his son

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, Guwahati

Running out of options, Assam hill areas development minister GC Langthasa today appealed to the Ulfa to release his abducted son Nirmalendu, who has been in the militants' custody since 27 April.

The minister's family lodged an FIR about the abduction only on 25 May after their efforts to secure Nirmalendu's release came a cropper. Police suspected that the minister's son was taken hostage for ransom.

But on 27 May, the outfit had demanded release of five of its senior leaders who, they alleged, were in custody of the Indian Army after being handed over by Royal Bhutan Army during its crackdown on Ulfa camps in the Himalayan kingdom in December.

Langthasa issued a statement asking the Ulfa to be humane and release his son without delay.



Turkish leftist protesters chant slogans yesterday at Kadikoy square "We don't want Nato", during a demonstration against the two-day Nato summit beginning today in Istanbul. Tens of thousands of protestors gathered yesterday in Turkey's largest city to demonstrate against the summit and the arrival of US President George W. Bush.