

Sharon gives green light to 600 new settlements

3 Palestinians shot dead, 2 collaborators killed

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz have given the green light to the construction of 600 new buildings in the largest of the West Bank settlements, the defence ministry said yesterday.

"Sharon and Mofaz have given their go-ahead to the construction of these buildings" in Maale Adumim, a ministry spokesman told AFP.

Maale Adumim, which is situated close to Jerusalem on the road to Jericho, is home to 28,000 Jewish residents.

Under the terms of the US-backed roadmap peace plan, Israel is obliged to freeze all settlement activity in the occupied territories.

According to the Maariv newspaper,

the housing ministry had received instructions not to publish public tenders to avoid upsetting the Americans.

Meanwhile, three Palestinian militants were shot dead by Israeli soldiers while planning an overnight attack on a Jewish settlement in the northern Gaza Strip, medical sources said yesterday.

Ambulance teams had been sent to the scene of the shootings on the edge of the Eli Sinai settlements and were awaiting clearance to gather the bodies which could be seen between lying between Israeli tanks, the sources said.

Moreover two suspected Palestinian collaborators were also killed yesterday after a grenade attack at Gaza City's main prison, including one who was later executed by five masked gunmen

in his hospital bed.

Mahmud al-Sharif was shot in the head by the gunmen who had burst onto his ward in the city's Al Shifa hospital, sources in the hospital said.

The same sources also said that another of the six wounded prisoners 30-year-old Mussa Auwda, had died of his injuries in hospital.

An Israeli military source had earlier said that troops opened fire on three Palestinian gunmen who had entered an unauthorised area and were approaching a security fence which surrounds the three Israeli settlements in northern Gaza at around 11:30pm (2030 GMT) on Sunday night.

"They were obviously planning some kind of attack and had entered around 100 meters (yards) inside the buffer zone," the source added.

Iran rejects Saudi idea of 'Muslim forces'

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday that a Saudi initiative to send troops from Arab and Islamic states to Iraq was "not appropriate".

"Since Iraq is currently under occupation, we do not consider sending troops there to be an appropriate measure," government spokesman Abdollah Ramez-anzadeh said in his weekly press conference.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, also dismissed the idea in his weekly press briefing held on Sunday.

"The dispatch of these forces to Iraq will get the forces involved in a critical situation there," he said.

"No Muslim or Arab state is willing to dispatch its forces to war-torn Iraq under the present circumstances," he said, urging "the occupying forces to leave Iraq and to let the United Nations supervise the activities of foreign forces."

The Saudi proposal to send Arab or Muslim forces to Iraq was discussed by US Secretary of State Colin Powell with both Saudi leaders and Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi during a visit to the Gulf kingdom last week.

11 questioned for attempt on Shaukat Aziz

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities are questioning up to 11 suspects over the attempted assassination of prime minister-designate Shaukat Aziz, for which an al-Qaeda-linked group has claimed responsibility, a minister said yesterday.

"A few people, nine or 11, are being questioned," Information Minister Sheikh Rashid told AFP.

"The investigation is moving positively and soon we'll be in a position to reach the culprits."

Aziz, a close ally of President Pervez Musharraf who himself was targeted by al-Qaeda-linked assassins twice in December, had just finished addressing a rally west of Islamabad Friday evening when a suicide bomber walked up to his car and blew himself up.

Nine people including Aziz' driver were killed, Rashid said.



PHOTO: AFP

Two Iraqi Christian women make their way through burnt vehicles a day after a car bomb exploded outside the compound housing St. Peter and St. Paul churches in Baghdad's al-Dura neighborhood yesterday. The patriarch of the Chaldean Church in Iraq urged Muslims and Christians to stand shoulder to shoulder, after orchestrated bombings against churches killed at least 11 people and 50 wounded others.

'Arrest of prized al-Qaeda figure led to new US alert'

Attack plan found on detained IT expert's computer

AFP, New York

The capture of an al-Qaeda computer engineer in Pakistan in mid-July led to the most recent terror alert in the United States, the New York Times reported yesterday, quoting senior US officials.

Pakistani officials arrested Muhammad Naeem Noor Khan, a 25-year-old computer engineer, on July 13, according to the Times. The suspect is believed to have used and managed an al-Qaeda communications system where information was transferred via coded messages, according to the Times.

A senior US official told the Times that "documentary evidence" found after Khan's capture showed in detail that al-Qaeda members had been studying the buildings they want to target in New York, Newark and Washington even before the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

A second senior US intelligence

official told the newspaper the information was more detailed than any he had seen during his 24-year career in intelligence work.

The contents of the evidence was urgently relayed to Washington Friday afternoon, which immediately increased the importance of other intelligence gathered over the past weeks from al-Qaeda suspects held in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the Times reported.

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge on Sunday raised the terrorist alert level for key financial centers, warning that al-Qaeda may attack the International Monetary Fund and World Bank headquarters in Washington and the New York Stock Exchange.

Ridge said there were reports that Osama bin Laden's group planned to use truck or car bombs against the targets.

Ridge said the terror threat level was

being raised to "high" from "elevated" in each location.

According to the Washington Post, the documents were found after Pakistani and US forces broke up an al-Qaeda cell in Gujrat, Pakistan, on July 25, after a lengthy shoot out.

Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, a Tanzanian wanted for his alleged role in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was arrested in the raid along with five other Pakistani and African al-Qaeda suspects, according to the Post.

One of the men arrested in that raid led authorities to the documents, according to the Post, also quoting anonymous US intelligence officials.

The documents show specific information on the Citigroup Center in Manhattan, the World Bank in Washington and other financial institutions, including parking arrangements and whether guards are armed.

Sudan vows to fight foreign intervention

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan's army has vowed to fight any foreign military intervention in Darfur, even after the government reluctantly accepted a UN demand to end the killing and atrocities in the troubled region within 30 days.

"The Security Council resolution about the Darfur issue is a declaration of war on the Sudan and its people," armed forces spokesman General Mohamed Beshir Suleiman told Monday's official Al Anbaa daily.

"The Sudanese army is now prepared to confront the enemies of the Sudan on land, sea and air," he said.

The general's warning came following the Security Council's decision to pass a watered-down resolution Friday threatening "international measures" against Sudan if it did not rein in its troops and allies in the Janjaweed militia blamed for much of the slaughter in the western area of Africa's largest country.

The resolution, which avoided the term "sanctions", made no mention of

possible use of force, although foreign officials have spoken of sending troops to Darfur to try to force an end to the crisis.

The African Union has said it may transform a planned protection force into a "full-fledged peacekeeping mission" to force the Janjaweed to lay down its arms in line with a ceasefire deal.

The pan-African body already has plans to send some 300 troops to Darfur to protect its team of observers and monitors overseeing the implementation of a shaky ceasefire deal between the militia and rebel groups.

The United Nations estimates that up to 50,000 people have been killed in Darfur and more than a million have fled their homes, 200,000 of them seeking refuge in neighbouring Chad.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, current chairman of the African Union, arrived in Khartoum late on Sunday and went straight into closed-door talks with his counterpart Omar al-Beshir.

Iran not afraid of UN sanctions over nukes

AFP, Tehran

Iran is not afraid of being referred to the UN Security Council over its suspect nuclear programme and could easily withstand economic sanctions, a top national security official said yesterday.

"The most America can do to get its way is to impose economic sanctions, but our experience of these over the past 25 years have proved that they are ineffective," said a top member of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Sayed Hossein Mussavian.

"Even if the case is taken to the UN Security Council, nothing more than that (sanctions) can happen. It will fail. It does not worry us," he was quoted as saying by the official news agency IRNA.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said last Thursday that it was "more and more likely" that Iran would be referred to the UN Security Council as a possible prelude to sanctions.

HARDLINER TAKES HURRIYAT HELM

Move underway to heal APHC splits

AFP, Srinagar

A top hardliner in Indian Kashmir was reappointed yesterday as head of a separatist group as efforts got underway to ease a split among leaders opposed to Indian rule in the Himalayan region.

Syed Ali Geelani, who wants Indian Kashmir to join Pakistan, was in September 2003 declared head of a breakaway headline faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, an alliance of some two dozen separatist groups.

But his party, Jamaat-e-Islami, immediately said Geelani had retired and refused to take sides in the split of the Hurriyat.

A two-day meeting of Jamaat-e-Islami that concluded Sunday decided to revoke the retirement.

"The political wing of Jamaat-e-Islami has been revived and Syed Ali Geelani appointed its head," a party statement said.

Hardliners had opposed moderate separatists' decision to hold first-ever

talks with the Indian government on ways to resolve the dispute over Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region which is divided with Pakistan.

The hardliners last year expressed no confidence in Hurriyat head Molvi Abbas Ansari, a moderate Shia cleric. Ansari stepped down last month to pave the way for the reunification of the Hurriyat.

However, a separate split emerged Monday when former rebel commander Javed Mir announced he was forming a new party, the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Forum, after leaving the pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) last month.

Mir told reporters his party would strive for an independent, reunified Kashmir.

Mir was among a dozen Kashmiris who in 1988 launched the insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir that has since claimed tens of thousands of lives. He gave up violent tactics after his release from jail in 1996.

al-Qaeda at war with Pak leaders: Analysts

AFP, Islamabad

Three al-Qaeda-linked attempts to kill Pakistani leaders in eight months show the terror network has declared war on Islamabad as the key US ally sweeps up prize al-Qaeda terror suspects, analysts said Monday.

"The lines have been very clearly drawn between the Pakistani military and the al-Qaeda," retired general Talat Masood told AFP.

"al-Qaeda perceives that the Pakistani army is pursuing the goals of the Americans, so it is targeting the Pakistani army's top leadership and those civilian leaders who are supporting the military government," Masood said.

An al-Qaeda-linked group claimed responsibility for Friday night's suicide bomb attack on prime minister-designate Shaukat Aziz, who narrowly escaped death when the bomber walked up to his car after an election rally and blew himself up.

The attacker struck less than 24 hours after Islamabad announced the arrest of a key suspect in the 1998 east Africa US embassy bombings, the latest

prize catch in the booty of 500 al-Qaeda suspects caught by Pakistan and mostly handed over to the US.

"This strike was a message to the Pakistani government, headed by the hypocritical traitor Pervez Musharraf, who is still handing over the Mujahedin to America in order to please her," was the grim message from "Al-Islambouli Brigades, al-Qaeda organisation" on its website.

Aziz, currently finance minister, is a favourite ally of President Musharraf, who was nearly killed twice in attacks in December. General Musharraf says al-Qaeda funded and masterminded the assassination bids, using local militants and junior air force officers as executors.

One of the Pakistani army's top commanders Lieutenant General Ahsan Saleem Hayat survived a massive gun, grenade and bomb attack June 10 by some 14 al-Qaeda trained militants native to Karachi, the southern commercial hub favoured as a hideout for al-Qaeda fugitives.

The world's second largest Muslim country, hemmed by volatile insurgency-wracked borders to its west and east, is a dichotomy.

Schroeder bows to Warsaw anti-Nazi heroes

REUTERS, Warsaw

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder paid tribute on Sunday to thousands of Poles killed in a failed rebellion against Nazi forces 60 years ago, making a landmark gesture of reconciliation toward a new EU partner.

Historians call the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, in which outnumbered and ill-equipped Polish insurgents fought some of Nazi Germany's toughest troops, one of the most tragic episodes of World War II. Poles see it as a symbol of suffering under German occupation which laid Poland open to Soviet domination.

Schroeder, the first German head of government to attend an uprising anniversary, twice bowed low in front of a monument to the insurrection under the gaze of elderly Polish survivors who stood at attention as they marked their bloody 63-day battle.

"On this spot of Poland's pride and Germany's shame we hope for reconciliation and peace," Schroeder said at the closing ceremony for the Uprising's biggest ever anniversary.



PHOTO: AFP

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (R) bows in front of the memorial dedicated to the victims of the Warsaw Uprising 1944 Sunday in Warsaw. Schroeder came to Warsaw with one-day visit for the ceremonies of the 60th anniversary of Warsaw Uprising 1944.

US set to shift 3,600 troops from S Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

A brigade of 3,600 US troops prepared Monday to depart for Iraq from their base near South Korea's border with communist North Korea, officials said.

No plans have been announced for their replacement in South Korea but it was not immediately clear if the move was part of US plans for a global realignment of its troops. The plans include reducing the 37,500 troops in South Korea by a third.

Foreign media were invited to attend the departure ceremony for the 2nd Brigade of the US 2nd Infantry Division at their base north of the South Korean capital, Seoul.

Under plans announced in May, the troops would be leaving "soon" for Iraq, a spokesman for the division said. He declined to give deployment details, citing security concerns.

The 2nd Infantry Division is a key combat component of the US troop presence in South Korea under an alliance that dates back to the 1950-53 Korean War.

Powell testifies in CIA leak investigation

REUTERS, Warsaw

US Secretary of State Colin Powell has spoken to a grand jury probing whether Bush aides leaked the name of a CIA agent to retaliate against her husband, an Iraq war critic, the State Department said Sunday.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Powell spoke to the grand jury on July 16 about the case of CIA officer Valerie Plame, whose name surfaced in a piece written by columnist Robert Novak after her husband raised questions in public about the intelligence used to justify the Iraq war.

Boucher declined specific comment on the testimony but he stressed Powell had not talked to Novak about Plame. He said the secretary of state was not a subject of the investigation.

Revealing such classified information is a federal crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Connecting the leak to any of President Bush's senior aides would be an embarrassment to the president in an election year.