

# 28 killed as car bombs go off at Egyptian resorts

200-kg bomb destroys Hilton hotel, Israel blames al-Qaeda



AFP, Taba

At least 28 people were killed and scores injured when car bombs exploded at resorts packed with Israeli holidaymakers on the Red Sea coast of Egypt's Sinai desert in attacks Israel blamed yesterday on al-Qaeda.

The most powerful of the explosions late Thursday left a trail of carnage and destruction at the 10-storey Hilton hotel in Taba, a town just across the Israeli border, that hosted Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in 2001.

"According to our first information, it appears to be an international terror attack with the hallmarks of al-Qaeda," said Israel's deputy defence minister, Zeev Boim.

The explosions followed official warnings that Israelis should keep out of the Sinai because of possible attacks.

They occurred as Israelis were celebrating the end of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, which commemorates the years that the Jews spent in the Sinai desert on their way to the "Promised Land", and celebrates the way in which God protected them.

Estimates of the number of dead varied through the night as rescuers combed the rubble of the hotel searching for survivors and bodies after the attacks, one of the deadliest on Egyptian soil.

An Israeli army general at the site said yesterday that 23 Israelis and five Egyptians were killed, stressing it was a provisional toll.

"For the moment, 28 bodies have been recovered, including those of 23 Israelis and five Egyptians," General Yair Naveh told Israeli public radio.

"We think there are more dead under the rubble, but work to clear the rubble will take time, no doubt several days," the general said, adding that around 20 people were hospitalised in Israel.

Shamun Romash, the Israeli rescue operations chief at the hotel, added: "There is minimal hope of finding survivors because the explosion was very powerful."

According to Israeli officials, the Hilton attack was carried out by a suicide bomber in a car carrying 200 kilograms of explosives. A second suicide bomber blew himself up by the hotel's pool.

Israeli public radio reported that two car engines were recovered from the site, supposing that two cars were used in the attack. The Egyptian news agency MENA said one of them was a green Ford.

Two people were also killed in attacks in a restaurant in the backpacker resort of Ras Sultan, near Nuweiba further south.

The attack was carried out by a suicide bomber who blew himself up in a parking lot close to a restaurant. A second suicide bomber who tried to enter the same restaurant detonated himself prematurely, killing only himself, an Israeli official told AFP.

Israel's ambassador to Egypt, Eli Shaked, said he had been informed that most of the casualties there were Egyptians, while Moscow said one Russian was killed and eight injured.

London said two Britons were among the wounded in the Sinai blasts.

PHOTO: AFP  
Israeli rescue workers search for bodies amid rubbles at Hilton hotel in Egypt's Taba town after car bombs ripped through the hotel yesterday.

# US airstrikes kill 12 in Fallujah

3 killed in missile attack in Baghdad slum, police officer shot dead

AFP, Fallujah

Twelve people were killed and the bride at a wedding party was among the wounded when US warplanes bombed the rebel-held Iraqi city of Fallujah early yesterday, doctors said.

The US military said it was a "precision strike" targeting leaders of Iraq's most wanted man, the al-Qaeda-linked militant Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi.

"We have received 10 dead and 16 wounded," said Dr Khaled Mohammed, noting that the bride was among nine injured females.

Two more bodies were pulled from the rubble of a house where the wedding party had taken place, which was destroyed in the attack, said a second doctor at Fallujah general hospital, Ali Hayad.

People were still sifting through the rubble, he said.

The US military, for which the Sunni Muslim bastion of Fallujah west of Baghdad has since April become a no-go zone for its ground troops, gave no information on casualties in a statement released after the raid.

"This strike contributed to reducing the capability of the Zarqawi

network and increasing safety and security throughout Iraq," it said. Zarqawi's Unity and Holy War group is blamed for a string of deadly attacks and beheadings of hostages.

"Credible intelligence sources confirmed Zarqawi leaders were meeting at the safe house at the time of the strike," the US Army said in the statement, noting that the "precision strike" took place at 1:15 am (2215 GMT Thursday).

The United States has placed a bounty of 25 million dollars on Zarqawi's head.

A US missile killed three men who an American officer said were planting a bomb in the Baghdad Shiite slum of Sadr City before dawn on Friday.

"It was a precision engagement, it was a missile," said Colonel Abe Abram, who is in charge of US forces in the restive area.

A US military spokesman added that the men had been preparing a roadside bomb.

Doctor Mohammed Khudair at the local Imam Ali hospital said that three civilians had been killed in what he described as an "air strike".

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# Kerry leads in poll ahead of second debate with Bush

AP, Washington

Democrat John Kerry has taken a slight lead over President Bush, according to an Associated Press poll that found him gaining ground with women, boosting his overall popularity and cutting into the president's advantage on national security.

The two candidates remain in a very close race ahead of a second debate Friday night in St. Louis.

Among 944 likely voters, the Democratic ticket of Kerry and John Edwards led Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, 50 percent to 46 percent, in the poll conducted for the AP by Ipsos-Public Affairs. The Oct. 4-6 survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The race was tied at 47 percent among the 1,273 registered voters in the poll, similar to others showing a tight race.

With bloodshed increasing in Iraq, Kerry sharpened his attacks, and Bush stumbled in their initial debate a week ago. Another possible factor influencing the results: consumer confidence has been dropping in recent weeks, according to several measures of attitudes about the economy.

Nearly three-fourths of likely

voters surveyed by the AP said they had watched or listened to the first Bush-Kerry debate on Sept. 30. About four in 10 39 percent said they came away with a more favorable view of Kerry, while just 8 percent felt better about Bush.

"I was more comfortable with Kerry after the debate," said Louis Robinson, a 66-year-old retiree and Democrat from Pittsburgh. "I just like the way he carried himself."

Nearly one-third of those who watched the debate said it gave them a less favorable view of Bush.

Bush advisers privately acknowledge that he cost himself in the first debate by fidgeting and grimacing during Kerry's answers and failing to seize upon openings by the Democrat. They felt better about Cheney's performance Tuesday against Edwards, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate.

In the final weeks of the campaign, the president is facing an unsettled electorate.

Nearly six in 10 of all the people questioned said the country was headed down the wrong track, reflecting a gloomy national mood that could jeopardize Bush's reelection bid. His overall job approval rating among likely voters, 46 percent.

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PHOTO: STAR  
The Airport Road in front of Bangladesh Army Stadium is still under knee-deep water. Many streets in the capital, including the one, swamped with rain waters on Thursday.

# Netrakona-2 by-polls today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

The by-election to Netrakona-2 constituency will be held today.

About 3 lakh voters of which 1.45 lakh are women, of the sadar and Barhatta upazila are expected to cast their votes at 147 polling centres. Sources said 103 of these centres are very risky.

The main opposition Awami League (AL) is not taking part saying the by-polls will not be fair under the alliance government. Of the seven candidates, there will be head-to-head contest between Fakir Ashraf of Ershad-led Bangladesh Jatiya

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# DU exams kept out of strike purview

DU CORRESPONDENT

The leaders of the six opposition-backed student organisations yesterday decided to keep all the examinations of Dhaka University (DU) out of the purview of the ongoing strike from today.

They took the decision after a meeting with DU Vice-Chancellor SMA Faiz. Emerging from the meeting, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) President Delwar Hossain said they will consider withdrawal of the student strike after the probe committee on September 11 incident submits its report on October 12.

The BCL president said the VC told them that he would take steps according to the recommendations of the probe committee.

Six student organisations, including the Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), enforced an indefinite strike at DU on September 15 following an attack on their joint rally on the campus on September 11.

# Locals round up 5 robbers at Badda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals yesterday held five robbers redhanded while they were robbing a house at Badda in the capital and handed them over to police after a sound beating.

The gang with firearms and knives rang the doorbell of house No. Sha 95, North Badda of Hazi Abdur Sattar Bari, at around 2:00pm and as the housewife opened the door, they entered into the house at gunpoint, witnesses said.

As the housewife cried for help, one of the robbers stabbed her and locked the door from inside.

A young inmate of the house managed to get out through another room and locked the door from outside.

Hearing his yelp, hundreds of locals surrounded the house. The confined robbers, failing to escape, fired two blank shots in the air.

But people stormed into the house and held the five with two pistols, six bullets, one cartridge and a knife. The mob beat them up and handed over to Badda police.

# A university that never gave away certificates

TAWFIQUE ALI

The People's University of Bangladesh, a private institution, did not award certificates to 400 students of eight batches that graduated since the university went into operation nine years ago.

It published an advertisement on September 13 last year announcing its first ever convocation in December 2003, four years after the first batch of students graduated in 1999.

But the authorities have neither been able to hold the convocation nor have they explained to students why the function to distribute certificates could not be held or when it

would be done.

Students, who passed in English Literature and Business Administration, alleged that they are losing out on job opportunities and have been in great uncertainty for several years because of the dilly-dallying of the university authorities in awarding certificates.

"I lost my place as a part-timer at Notre Dame College as I could not produce my original certificates even after being there for six months," said one student. "Each time I asked for the original certificates, they (the university) said I had to wait until the convocation."

"We are totally in the dark as to when we will get the certificates as

the authorities have not cleared the issue," said Abu Saleh, a first batch student of the university. "This is disappointing."

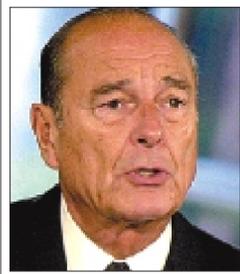
"I have lost several job opportunities for not being able to produce the original certificates," said another student seeking anonymity.

Registrar of the university Gias Uddin said the university could not hold convocations as the Chancellor's Secretariat, the university wing of the education ministry, refused it permission twice.

"We have given up the idea and are contemplating to award certificates without holding convocations," he said. But he could not

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# Iraq war was illegal: Chirac



Jacques Chirac

AFP, Hanoi

French President Jacques Chirac has said the US-led war in Iraq was illegal and expressed his fear for the country's future in the face of a "civil war".

In an interview with China Central TV filmed last month ahead of a visit to China this week, Chirac reiterated his strong opposition to Washington's decision to wage war on Saddam Hussein without United Nations backing.

"I believe it was a bad solution which didn't conform with legality and with international law, and so it was a mistake," he said, according

to a transcript of the interview released here by Chirac's office Friday.

The French president was due to head to China late Friday from Vietnam, where he was attending a summit of Asian and European leaders.

His remarks followed comments by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in mid-September in which he judged the Iraq war "illegal" without UN Security Council backing, provoking fury in Washington.

Chirac said France and China were "very close" in their appraisal

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Prayer Timing		
October 9		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-53	5-56
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

Devotees rebuilding the sheds at Biswa Ijterna at Tongi yesterday. A tornado on Thursday destroyed most of the sheds at Ijterna venue.