

# Israel seals off Al-Aqsa Mosque compound

## Militants threaten to call off truce

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli police sealed off a Jerusalem shrine yesterday to foil a march by ultranationalist Jews which Palestinian militants had warned could scupper their ceasefire.

Israel banned the march, intent on derailing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to pull troops and settlers out of the Gaza Strip, and security forces blocked approaches to the Old City holy site revered by Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif and Jews as Temple Mount.

Only a few hundred far-rightist adherents of the Revava ("Multitude") had shown up by mid-morning for a march they had said would draw 10,000. About a dozen were arrested.

"We came here to show the world we are unable to pray even at our holiest place, the Temple Mount. But if Sharon thinks it will be as easy to

expel Jews from Gaza as he has dealt with us today, he is mistaken," said protester Efraim Cohen, 21.

"The struggle will continue," he told Reuters before being hustled away by Israeli plainclothes police. There was a brief scuffle and rightists shouted "Gestapo" at police.

Palestinian militants threatened to abandon a de facto ceasefire with Israel if right-wing Jews went ahead with the march.

"If the Zionists defile Al-Aqsa Mosque, they will be planting the seeds of the third uprising," said Nizar Rayan of the Islamic militant group Hamas.

Police kept the rightists well away from the Western Wall, a Jewish prayer site abutting the elevated shrine of two ancient mosques, to avoid any possible clash with Muslims praying there.

"Given assessments that such a move on the Temple Mount may

spark a flare-up and disturbances from worshippers there, this (decision) is final and non-negotiable," Jerusalem police chief Ilan Franco told Army Radio.

The Jerusalem compound, housing the 1,300-year-old Al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques, is Islam's third holiest site.

The site is the most sacred for Jews, treasured as the spot where biblical King Solomon built a temple and where a second temple was razed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Tensions were high on Saturday when Israeli troops shot dead three Palestinian youths in a Gaza boundary zone, the first killings since militants agreed with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in March to the truce.

Militants retaliated by firing several dozen mortar bombs and rockets at Jewish settlements and Israeli army bases. Two rockets

were launched toward the town of Sderot on Israel's border with Gaza. No casualties were reported.

Hamas and another leading militant group, Islamic Jihad, said they remained committed to "calm."

Any eruption in violence could complicate the Gaza pullout and trouble a meeting between Sharon and George W. Bush at the US president's Texas ranch on Monday.

US-led mediators regard the Gaza "disengagement" as a catalyst to starting talks on a long-stalled "road map" peace plan for a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Hassan Youssef, a West Bank Hamas political leader, slipped past Israeli police into the shrine on Sunday disguised as an elderly cleric to show Palestinian resolve against the Jewish rightists, sources close to him said.



PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of the radical Palestinian Hamas movement chant anti-Israel slogans during a demonstration in Gaza City yesterday against a plan by right-wing Jewish extremists to stage a rally at Jerusalem's disputed Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, holy to both Jews and Muslims.

# Strong Sumatra quake sparks tsunami panic

AFP, Jakarta

A powerful earthquake measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale struck off the west coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island yesterday sparking panic among people fearing a repeat of the tsunami disaster, officials said.

There were no reports of casualties or damage from the quake which hit at 5:29pm (1029 GMT) near Siberut Island, 109km southwest of the Sumatra town of Painan, according to seismologists.

The tremor comes two weeks after a massive 8.7 earthquake centred on the same Indian Ocean geological faultline killed more than 600 people as scores of concrete buildings collapsed on the Indonesian island of Nias.

Nerves are on a knife-edge following the last big quake, which revived traumatic memories of the December 26 tsunami disaster that killed more than 220,000 people around the Indian Ocean, mainly Indonesians.

The latest tremor, which was felt as far away as Singapore, sparked panic in the Sumatra port city of Padang, with many people fleeing their homes for higher ground.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters march against Japan's dealing with its wartime past yesterday in Guangzhou, southern China. Around 20,000 anti-Japanese protesters took to the streets of Guangzhou and Shenzhen, two cities in southern China, as Japan made a formal diplomatic protest over a violent rally outside its embassy in Beijing a day earlier.

# Anti-Japan rallies rock China cities

## Tokyo demands apology

AFP, Beijing/Tokyo

Up to 20,000 anti-Japanese protesters took to the streets of two southern Chinese cities yesterday, as Japan demanded an apology for a violent rally outside its embassy in Beijing the previous day.

Burning Japanese flags and waving banners demanding the country face up to its wartime past, around 10,000 people marched on the Japanese consulate in the city of Guangzhou, said Japanese embassy spokesman Keiji Ide.

Another 10,000 people gathered outside a Japanese supermarket named Jusco in the nearby city of Shenzhen.

An eyewitness in Guangzhou and a protester in Shenzhen said many protesters were wearing T-shirts and carrying banners reading "Don't buy Japanese products," "Terminate Sino-Japanese relations" and "Don't alter history".

Demonstrators were seen kicking a Mitsubishi car and tearing down a Sony billboard. Eggs, bottles and tomatoes were thrown at a Japanese restaurant. As they marched, the protesters sang the national anthem and wartime resistance songs.

Several thousand police ringed the office block housing the consulate and a police van with a loudspeaker later urged the crowd to go

home. Around 100 hardcore protesters tried to break through fences and there were minor scuffles before the four-hour demonstration ended around 1:00 pm.

On Saturday more than 10,000 protesters marched through Beijing, hurling rocks, bottles and eggs in a shouting abuse outside the Japanese embassy and the residence of the Japanese ambassador. They broke a total of 25 windows in the buildings.

The protest were triggered by Tokyo's decision to approve a new school textbook which both China and South Korea say glosses over Japanese wartime atrocities.

The demonstrators, most of whom were university students, were also protesting against Tokyo's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Japanese government on Sunday demanded an apology. It called the violence "extremely regrettable" and requested China take measures to protect its citizens and businesses.

"We formally demanded China's apology and compensation," Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura told reporters after summoning China's ambassador to Japan, Wang Yi.

# Britons want William to be next king

REUTERS, London

Prince Charles' wedding to longtime lover Camilla Parker Bowles may have been a success - but three polls yesterday showed the British want his son William to be the next monarch.

The trio of public soundings could make depressing reading for the couple enjoying their Scottish honeymoon after they married in a civil ceremony that Queen Elizabeth refused to attend as titular head of the Church of England.

The middle-aged divorcees finally tied the knot in the windswept riverside town of Windsor on Saturday after a 35-year romance, prompting tabloids to agree on the same headline: "At Last..."

# Moves in Lanka to salvage peace bid

AFP, Colombo

Tension has escalated in Sri Lanka's restive northeast even as peace broker Norway was set to launch a fresh attempt to keep the two sides engaged in talks, officials and diplomats said yesterday.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) seized a government soldier in Trincomalee district on Saturday, a day after cease-fire monitors said the rebels had attacked a navy craft in violation of a truce.

"There is tension in the region after a spate of attacks last week," a government military official said.

# 'Tareq Aziz will never testify against Saddam at trial'

AFP, Paris

A former top minister in Saddam Hussein's cabinet, Tareq Aziz, will never testify against the ex-Iraqi president when he goes on trial in Baghdad along with other members of the toppled regime, his lawyer said Saturday.

"Tareq Aziz told me that he would never attack Saddam Hussein during his trial, that it would not be right for him to do that," his attorney Badi Aref Izzat said in an interview in Paris.

"But if he is freed, he will write a book where he would tell what he knows. He knows he is innocent. Tareq Aziz is weak physically but strong politically," Izzat said.

# Maoists kill 2 politicians in Andhra

AFP, Hyderabad

Maoist rebels in southern India have shot dead two politicians including an official of the ruling Congress party, police said yesterday.

P. Ramdev Reddy, a district committee secretary for Congress, was shot outside his home on Saturday in Mahabubnagar district, 120km south of the Andhra Pradesh state capital Hyderabad, police said.

A worker of the opposition Telugu Desam Party was also shot dead Saturday by suspected Maoists in the states southern district of Cuddapah.

"We cannot understand why the Maoists are targeting our politicians when we have made it clear to them that we are still ready to hold talks with them," K. Keshav Rao, state Congress president, told AFP.

# Maoists attack prison in Nepal: 2 cops killed

AFP, REUTERS, Kathmandu

Two policemen were killed when Nepalese Maoist rebels attacked a prison east of the capital and freed 33 prisoners including 15 rebels, a district official said yesterday.

The attack occurred Saturday evening in Charikot 180km east of Kathmandu, said Dolkha Chandi Acharya, the region's chief district officer.

Soldiers are hunting the rebels, he said.

"During the attacks from four sides two junior policemen who were in the jail were killed," Acharya said.

The rebels, fighting to replace the Himalayan kingdom's monarchy with a communist republic, also

bombed half a dozen government offices during the raid in Charikot in Dolakha district, 150 km northeast of capital Kathmandu, a police officer told Reuters.

"They broke open the gate of the jail after killing the policemen and escaped with 33 inmates," he said on Sunday.

It was not clear if the rebels also suffered casualties during the midnight raid.

"The Maoists also set fire to seven government buildings including the local revenue office, police posts and the education, electricity and telecommunication offices," he said.

Nepali soldiers recovered 47 more bodies of Maoists killed in a raid on an army base two days ago, taking the toll of rebels to 97 in the

deadliest clash in the country in five months, an army official said on Saturday.

The army said on Friday it killed at least 50 Maoists in the deadly overnight clash after the insurgents attacked their base with rocket launchers and mortars.

The official said on Saturday soldiers combing the forests and ravines recovered 47 more decomposing bodies near the base in Khara in the rebel heartland of Rukum, 520km west of Kathmandu.

The fighting on Thursday was believed to be the largest clash between rebels and police and troops since King Gyanendra sacked the government on February 1, criticising its failure to end the revolt.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani children hold placards as they take part in a walk demonstrating against violence on women and promoting world peace in Lahore yesterday. Some 200 people participated in the walk organised by Aitchison College Lahore and Amnesty International.