

## Holiday turned nightmare in Egyptian resort

AFP, Sharm el-Sheikh

"They are mad. What's the point of all this," cried a young British barmaid after a succession of massive bomb blasts transformed Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh from a holiday-makers' paradise into an inferno of blood and destruction.

"They won't go to heaven. No religion can accept such a thing," said Carol, who works in a bar on the glitzy Naama Bay strip near a luxury hotel that was bombed early Saturday.

The explosions shattered the night in Egypt's most popular resort where thousands of tourists from Europe, Russia and Gulf Arab countries, as well as Egyptians marking a national holiday, were vacationing.

According to medical sources, at least 83 people were killed, including foreign tourists, and more than 110 wounded when at least three

explosions went off within minutes of each other shortly after 1 am (2200 GMT).

The deadliest attack was carried out by a suicide bomber who rammed his explosives-laden car through the security barrier of the Ghazala Garden hotel and into the reception lobby.

At least 30 people were killed in this blast alone and medics feared more would be found dead in the rubble of the badly damaged structure.

"The explosion was so strong that it shook the building I was in at the other end of the road, almost a kilometre (half a mile) away from the Ghazala," said taxi driver Nagay Teema.

As the sun rose to reveal scenes of destruction across the popular strip of hotels, restaurants and clubs known as Peace Road, an Italian tourist was desperately trying to find his missing son.

"My wife and I were strolling near the shops, not far from the hotel, and our 17-year-old son stayed behind, in his room," said Giuseppe Pasquale.

"When the explosions went off, we rushed back to the Ghazala but he was not in his room. I don't know what to do. They wouldn't let me in to the hospital," the distressed father told AFP.

The attacks occurred at the height of the tourist season and proved to be even deadlier than the 1997 attack in the Nile town of Luxor that killed 62 people including 58 foreigners.

Panicked tourists poured out of the many night spots dotting the Naama Bay strip and small groups of haggard foreigners were seen dragging their luggage among the debris to board buses leaving the resort on Egypt's "riviera."

"Lots of people have already warned us they were leaving in the

morning," one hotel receptionist told AFP.

Issam Ibrahim runs the Layali al-Helmiya cafe near the old market area of Sharm that was also hit.

"It was hell, the explosion sent balls of fire flying around. There were two children playing football, they were torn to shreds," he said, adding that there were few tourists in this area at the time of the explosion.

Doctors were being dispatched from Cairo to assist the medical staff at the local hospital. Residents and tourists were also invited to donate blood as emergency services were overwhelmed by the number of casualties.

The attacks were likely to deal a fatal blow to the tourism industry so crucial to Egypt's economy as it was recovering from the aftermath of deadly October bombings in resorts further north on the coast of the Sinai Peninsula.



Foreign tourists leave the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh after a bomb attack early yesterday. At least 83 people were killed, including eight foreigners, in a string of bomb attacks that rocked the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh early Saturday, medics and officials said.

## Blast rocks Beirut hours after Rice's surprise visit

AFP, Beirut

A bomb blast rocked central Beirut Friday evening just hours after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise visit to pledge her support for the "new Lebanon" ushered in by Syria's April troop pullout.

Three people were wounded in the explosion near the Rue Monot, a street popular with weekend revelers, the director general of internal security, General Ashraf Rifi, told the privately run Future TV.

Two vehicles were torched in the blast caused by a bomb placed under a car parked on a sidestreet, close to the privately run Saint Joseph University on the edge of Christian east Beirut, Rifi said.

The rival LBC television said six people had been wounded, mainly by flying glass.

It was not immediately clear if the motive of the bombing was political or a personal settling of accounts, although it came just hours after Rice flew out to Israel after her lightning visit.

LBC said the bombed vehicle

belonged to local resident Joseph Nadim.

Lebanon has been rocked by no fewer than eight previous bombings already this year, most notoriously a February blast that killed billionaire five-time premier Rafiq Hariri and is currently being investigated by a UN team.

Rice had visited Beirut to pledge her support for the new government of prime minister-designate Fuad Siniora, the first formed since Syria ended its three-decade troop deployment under US-led pressure.

Addressing a joint news conference with Siniora, Rice promised strong US cooperation with his government, although she insisted there would be no change in policy towards Shia militant group Hezbollah following its inclusion in the cabinet.

"I believe that we can support, both through international organisations and through direct support, the economic and political reforms that will be undertaken," said Rice, on the first visit by a US secretary of state to this Arab country in two years.



Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas shakes hand with the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during their joint press conference at the Palestinian Authority headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday.

## Rice hails progress on Gaza pullout

### Israel asked not to seal off the territory

AFP, Ramallah

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday reported progress in efforts to coordinate the Israeli pullout from Gaza, as she urged Israel not to seal off the territory after its departure.

Just weeks before the historic pullout of Israeli troops and settlers is to begin on August 17, Rice flew to the region to ensure that next month's pullout is carried out successfully and not marred by militant violence.

The two sides were looking to balance three conditions: freedom of movement inside the Gaza Strip, between Gaza and the outside world, and security, she told a news conference with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

"I think they are making some progress, I think we can close

many of these issues very expeditiously with enough will, perhaps a change in mood here or perhaps a change in mood there," she said.

Rice however bristled when pressed on concrete details of the negotiations between the two sides.

"These are negotiations and discussions. I am not going to have them in the press."

Alluding to Palestinian fears that the pullout could turn Gaza into a giant prison, she cautioned Israel not to seal off the narrow slither of territory in a bid to facilitate desperately needed economic recovery.

"When the Israelis withdraw from Gaza, it cannot be sealed off or isolated, with the Palestinian people closed in after the withdrawal," Rice added.

The Palestinians have insisted that there are provisions for a "safe

passage" into the West Bank as well for a new sea port and the reopening of Gaza airport.

Amid further Palestinian complaints that the pullout was heading for disaster without answers to numerous questions on key issues, Rice reiterated calls for greater coordination and a "further sharing of information".

"We will continue to make sure that we're moving forward in a way that both sides understand what is coming. There needs to be coordination and there needs to be sense of predictability," she added.

The Palestinian Authority president, whose late predecessor Yasser Arafat was boycotted by the Bush administration, said a successful pullout could lay the foundations of the creation of a democratic Palestinian state also incorporating the West Bank.

## US equates war on terror with major world conflicts

AFP, Washington

The administration of US President George W. Bush unveiled yesterday a new vision of its war on terror, casting it as a "war of ideas" comparable to the fight against Nazism and Communism rather than a hunt for a network of radical "evil doers."

The analysis delivered by national security adviser Stephen Hadley and Frances Fragos Townsend, the top presidential homeland security aide, followed a series of new bombing attempts in London, which produced no victims but set the British capital further on edge.

The incidents echoed the attack on three subway stations and a London bus two weeks ago that claimed at least 56 lives.

Writing in The New York Times, Hadley and Townsend said the London attacks had made it clear that radical Islamists were "deter-

mined to destroy our way of life and substitute for it a fanatical vision of dictatorial and theocratic rule."

They said this vision was reminiscent of Nazi and Communist totalitarian systems, in which a radical few subjugated the helpless many.

"At its root, the struggle is an ideological contest, a war of ideas that engages all of us, public servant and private citizen, regardless of nationality," the Bush advisers went on to say.

Distancing themselves from previous statements about winning the war on terror, the officials acknowledged that the "ideological contest" at hand "can be a long and difficult one" because, as they put it, "even bankrupt ideas have attracted followers for a time."

They insisted a successful war on terror will require force of arms as well as strong allies in the Muslim world.

## MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN SAYS Iraq war radicalising young Muslims

AFP, London

The Muslim Council of Britain on Friday called for the government to recognise the role that the Iraq war is playing in radicalising young Muslims, in the wake of the London bombings.

"There is no doubt that Iraq is an important factor in the disenchantment that we have seen among some Muslim youths," said council spokesman Inayat Bunglawala.

"It's about time that the government acknowledged, that the government must not completely ignore the Iraqi factor," he said.

"There are also other factors to do with unemployment, underachievement in education, religious discrimination, a feeling that their faith is demonised continuously."

Police believe four young British Muslims became suicide bombers on July 7, committing a series of attacks in the London transport system that left at least 56 people dead and 700 injured.

The British capital was jolted again on Thursday — exactly two weeks after the deadly attacks — by a series of failed bomb attacks.

The comments by the council spokesman came as other prominent Muslims said the threat to Britain would not disappear so long as British troops remained in Iraq.

"7/7, 21/7 and God knows what will happen afterwards, our lives are in real danger... so long as we are in Iraq and so long as we are contributing to injustices around the world," said Azzam Tamimi of the Muslim Association of Britain.

## Nepal jails six peacekeepers for sex abuse in Congo

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Six Nepali soldiers have been jailed for sexual abuse in Congo where they were serving as United Nations peacekeepers, an army officer said on Saturday.

Over the past year, the United Nations has probed 150 allegations of sexual abuse, including gang rape of women and girls, against some 50 soldiers of different nationalities in Congo.

"Each of the six soldiers has been sentenced to three months in jail after a general court martial found them guilty of sexual abuses," the officer told Reuters. He gave no other details.

The six soldiers were recalled in May to face investigation into the allegations of abuse.

## East London Muslims fear backlash

AFP, London

At a mosque in east London's run-down Whitechapel district, Muslims fear a growing hostility towards them in the wake of a second wave of bomb attacks in the city by suspected Islamic extremists.

"We have received three bomb threats in the last two weeks," said Diloyar Khan, director of the East London Mosque, not to mention more than 20 insulting telephone and e-mail messages.

There was another bomb scare Friday as the mosque prepared to welcome the faithful for weekly prayers, a day after four bungled bombings on the British capital's transport network.

"There is a bomb in the mosque. You have half an hour to evacuate the building," the man on the phone told the centre.

The mosque was immediately cleared, and after an hour-long police search the building was

allowed to reopen.

"I rushed here because my son was attending a lesson of religious teaching," said 35-year-old Nizam Ul-Haq. The ethnic Pakistani man is a regular at Friday prayers at the mosque.

According to the Islamic Human Rights Commission, nearly 200 incidents of an "Islamophobic" nature have taken place since the July 7 suicide bomb attacks that killed 56 people, a 20-fold increase over normal times.

The Whitechapel mosque is situated in London's East End, an area that has traditionally played host to poorer immigrants into the city and is now home to a large ethnic Bangladeshi and Pakistani population.

Among the worshippers were fathers with their children, youths, and some women, who enter via a special door and have their own prayer room.



The body of a dead pilot (R), who crashed his ultralight plane in front of German Reichstag, the seat of German Parliament, lies on the ground next to the debris of his plane Friday. The pilot died in the crash and the plane burnt down.

## G4, AU fail to agree on UNSC expansion

PTI, United Nations

United Nations ambassadors of India, Japan, Germany and Brazil and African Union (AU) failed to find a common position on expansion of the Security Council and decided to return the issue to their foreign ministers who had charged them with drawing up a draft resolution acceptable to both.

The failure of G-4 ambassadors' talks with their AU counterparts came even as Pakistan and Italy-led "Uniting for Consensus" (UFC) group was preparing to move in the General Assembly its own resolution. The UFC draft calls for expansion of the 15-member Council in only the non-permanent category with addition of ten new members, to take its strength to 25.

AU ambassadors were unable to agree on a common position with G-4, which would have led to substantive discussions, diplomats said. G-4 presented AU with their options but the latter were unable to agree on any one position though they considered several options.

All the options would now be presented to the foreign ministers of G-4 and African Union who are scheduled to meet on Monday in London instead of Geneva.

African diplomats said that the joint G-4-AU meeting could be preceded by discussions among African foreign ministers and top officials in an effort to arrive at an agreed position.

Though several diplomats, including India's UN ambassador Nirupam Sen said they were leaving for London today ahead of Monday's meeting, no one was prepared to speculate whether the meeting would actually be held.

Diplomats were tightlipped over various options drawn up by the groups, saying they would submit them to their political masters and not hold discussions through the press.

According to G-4 sources, one of their options is to make a strong political statement on veto, the main point of contention between two groups, and leave the current formulation more or less intact.

The G-4 draft accepts in principle the right of veto for new permanent members but defers its exercise for 15 years when the General Assembly would review the situation again. AU however, would like the new permanent members to enjoy veto right from day one to be on par with the existing permanent members— US, UK, Russia, France and China.