

# Egypt sweeps Sinai for attackers

AFP, Sharm el-Sheikh

Egypt launched a vast manhunt yesterday after the multiple bombings in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh that killed 88 people and fuelled global terror fears after the London attacks.

Egypt's deadliest attacks, that came at the peak of the tourist season and killed at least nine foreigners, drew a barrage of condemnation from around the world and dealt a blow to a regime increasingly exposed to Islamist terrorism just weeks ahead of a landmark presidential election.

The bombings, claimed by an al-Qaeda group, sent chills through a world still reeling from a series of attacks in London.

Egypt's national security forces started sweeping the Sinai peninsula hours after the explosions -- two of them suicide car bombs -- that struck a seafront hotel, a car park and a busy market area, security sources said.

Dozens were arrested and raids were ongoing yesterday, after Interior Minister Habib al-Adly claimed investigators already had leads and suggested the attacks could be connected to deadly anti-Israeli bombings on October 7 further north on the Sinai coast.

"This cowardly and criminal act which is aimed at destabilising Egypt will reinforce our determination to press the battle against terror through to its eradication," President Hosni Mubarak said Saturday. The bombings, which turned the jewel of Egypt's tourism industry into a nightmare of blood and destruction, were claimed by a group citing ties with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

A group calling itself the al-Qaeda Organisation in the Levant and Egypt said it carried out the bombings as a "response against the global evil powers, which are spilling the blood of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya."

The authenticity of its Internet posting could not be verified. Saturday's attacks followed a new terror scare on London's transport system on Thursday after a series of bombings on July 7 also claimed by an al-Qaeda group that killed 52 people plus four suicide bombers.

A videotape showing Egypt's envoy to Iraq, reportedly kidnapped and killed by an al-Qaeda group on July 7, discussing the Israeli presence in the Sinai was posted on the Internet after the attacks. Although the recording was not apparently connected with Saturday's blasts, the statement charged that "Jews have expropriated... Sinai and dominated its Muslims through their servants of the tyrants of Egypt."

Accused by Islamists of being enslaved to its Washington ally, Cairo also came under harsh criticism from Israel for its failure to crack down on militants following the October bombings in the Sinai resorts of Taba and Nuweiba.

The trial of three men -- one of them still at large -- suspected of involvement in the Taba attacks resumed Sunday.

Meanwhile, forensic experts continued to identify the victims of the blasts. The explosions were heard several miles around and the largest attack destroyed the Ghazala Garden hotel, accounting for around half of the victims.

Medics said some of the bodies were burnt or mangled beyond recognition and that the identification process could take some time, while also warning that the death toll could rise further as many wounded were in critical condition. "I've never seen so many eviscerated people and terrible wounds in my life," said Rabab, 19, a nurse at the international hospital in Sharm el-Sheikh.



A woman cries (C) as she is received by relatives upon her arrival from the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, at La Malpensa International airport in Milan Saturday. At least 88 people were killed and some 200 more were injured in the blasts.

## Egyptian polls face bombing blues

AFP, Cairo

The deadly attacks in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt's flagship resort and second seat of power, dealt a blow to the regime six weeks before a landmark presidential election but could also inhibit the opposition, analysts said yesterday.

The multiple bombings, in which medics said 88 people died, sounded a death knell for Egypt's image as a beacon of stability in the region, they said. The attacks "were aimed at discrediting the Egyptian regime by challenging its ability to secure its own stability even as it poses as the guarantor of regional security," said Nabil Abdel Fattah of the Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic Studies.

The bombings were the deadliest targeting foreigners in Egypt and followed two smaller attacks on tourist targets in Cairo in April and triple blasts that killed 34 in the Sinai last October.

Israel was swift to point an accusing finger at President Hosni Mubarak's regime for failing to take appropriate measures following the October attacks and questioned the performance of Egypt's intelligence services.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (3L), president of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Lal Krishna Advani (3R) and former Indian defence minister George Fernandes (2L) attend the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting at Vajpayee's residence as other party members look on in New Delhi yesterday. NDA leaders discussed their political strategy ahead of the monsoon session of the Parliament which starts today.

# Manmohan faces tough grilling over US trip

Parliament goes into monsoon session today

AFP, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh faces a grilling when parliament reopens today over whether he gave away too much in striking a landmark nuclear technology deal during his trip to the United States last week.

While some experts say President George Bush's decision to allow civilian nuclear sales to India will help solve the vast energy needs of one of Asia's fastest-growing economies, there has been mounting domestic criticism the agreement could hurt national security.

The opposition Hindu nationalists say the accord reached during Singh's visit puts a ceiling on India's nuclear arsenal and New Delhi would lose "flexibility" in deciding its weapons strategy. They vowed over the weekend to make it a central issue during the new parliamentary session.

Former premier Atal Behari Vajpayee said Bush "merely made promises" -- Congress can still scupper the deal pledging US aid for energy-hungry India's fledgling civilian atomic power programme -- but Singh made "long-term and specific commitments" that have security implications for the nation.

India was denied access to large nuclear reactors and fuel as a result of sanctions imposed after it conducted nuclear tests in 1974 and later in 1998.

Singh agreed to separate India's civilian and military nuclear programmes, open its facilities to outside scrutiny and work to prevent nuclear proliferation.

"Though we believe in minimum credible deterrent, the size of the deterrent must be determined from time to time on the basis of our own threat perception. This is a judgement, which cannot be surrendered to anyone," said Vajpayee, who led India through nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

While New Delhi's relations have warmed considerably with rival Pakistan, it is still deeply wary of its nuclear-armed neighbour with which it has fought three wars. India has also fought a brief border war with China in 1962.

India's communist allies on whom Singh's Congress party relies for survival in parliament have also attacked the agreement, saying it could hamper "the pursuit of an independent nuclear technology policy."

Supporters of the deal say it will end India's pariah status since it first tested nuclear weapons and refused to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and shifts it closer to international acceptance as a nuclear-armed nation.

But critics say India has lived long enough without such acceptance and does not need it now.

# Pakistan to try militants under anti-terrorism law

More clerics detained

REUTERS, AFP, Lahore

Pakistan will try over a hundred members of different militant groups, detained in the central Punjab province over the past week in a crackdown on extremists, an official said on Saturday.

Pakistani police detained scores more people, mostly Islamic prayer leaders, over the weekend as part of a continuing crackdown on extremists following the London bombings, officials said yesterday.

At least 210 were detained in Punjab province after Friday prayers and on Saturday, but 125 were freed on bail after pledging not to violate restrictions, said a Punjab province home department official, requesting anonymity.

Among them were 56 people who had been charged with making "provocative speeches" at Friday congregations, while 10 more were being held for selling audio cassettes and CDs of fiery speeches by clerics.

Earlier last week security forces arrested about 300 people nationwide as part of President Pervez Musharraf's campaign to curb militancy. Hasan Waseem Afzal, Home Secretary of Punjab, said 105 men were rounded up in the province since the crackdown began, although some officials put the number at close to 200.

"We have already sent 90 of these men into police custody for three months," said Afzal, adding they would be tried under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act. British diplomats have said that no one detained in Pakistan so far was linked to the London bombings.

Afzal said the other detainees were being investigated and would be tried under the same laws if found involved in any unlawful activity.

Those detained in the crackdown include members of banned militant outlets, including the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, officials said.

Some are members of the opposition religious alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal. Afzal said the government would continue to crackdown on terrorists and those involved in sectarian violence between the Sunni and the minority Shia Muslims.

In a televised address on Tuesday, President Pervez Musharraf called on the nation to wage a holy war against preachers of hate and announced steps to curb militant Islamic schools and groups.

# Sharon vows harsh response to attacks

Israeli couple, 2 Palestinians killed

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon yesterday threatened harsh military action against Palestinian militants after a Jerusalem couple was murdered by gunmen in the occupied Gaza Strip.

After the murder, Israeli forces killed two Palestinian militants in the territory, in violence that underlined the security problems in the countdown to Israel's historic pullout of troops and settlers from Gaza next month.

The attacks cast a shadow over a visit to the Middle East by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who spoke of progress between the two sides over the withdrawal.

The Israeli husband and wife were shot dead overnight when Palestinian gunmen raked a convoy of cars carrying civilian visitors to the Jewish settlements in Gaza that are to be dismantled, military sources said.

Another five Israelis, including one soldier in a serious condition, were wounded in the attack near the main border crossing between Gaza and Israel.

Sharon told a weekly cabinet meeting that Israel would not tolerate militant violence and that he had spent out his position during talks with Rice at the weekend.

"I explained to the secretary of state that there would responses of a another type that will amount to very harsh measures, both during the withdrawal and after the evacuation from Gaza if there are terrorist attacks," he said.

"Israel will not put up with terrorism. I told the American secretary of state that instructions have been given and the Israeli army will respond with toughness against terrorism," he added.

Last week, Israeli authorities threatened a wide-scale ground offensive into the Gaza Strip unless the Palestinian Authority brought an end to militant rocket attacks.

## Americans say World War III likely: Poll

AP, Washington

Americans are far more likely than the Japanese to expect another world war in their lifetime, according to AP-Kyodo polling 60 years after World War II ended. Most people in both countries believe the first use of a nuclear weapon is never justified.

Those findings come six decades after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war claimed about 400,000 US troops around the world, more than three times that many Japanese troops and at least 300,000 Japanese civilians.

Out of the ashes, Japan and the United States forged a close political alliance. Americans and Japanese now generally have good feelings about each other.

But people in the two countries have very different views on everything from the US use of the atomic bomb in 1945, fears of North Korea and the American military presence in Japan.

Some of the widest differences came on expectations of a new world war.

# Pro-west policies put Egypt in al-Qaeda's sights: Analysts

AFP, Cairo

Multiple bombings that killed at least 88 people Saturday in Sharm el-Sheikh are the latest evidence that Egypt's pro-western policies have made it a target of choice of the al-Qaeda network, analysts said.

A group citing ties to Osama bin Laden's international terror organisation claimed responsibility for the bombings that wreaked unprecedented carnage in Egypt's flagship holiday resort.

The group, calling itself the al-Qaeda Organisation in the Levant and Egypt, claimed the bombings in an Internet statement, describing them as a "devastating blow to the Crusaders and the Zionists and the infidel Egyptian regime."

The authenticity of the statement could not be verified but several analysts said the claim was credible.

"I believe that these attacks were masterminded by al-Qaeda," said Makram Mohammed Ahmed, an editorialist for the government-owned Al-Ahram daily and an expert on terrorism.

"Following the assassination of the Egyptian envoy in Iraq, Ihab al-Sharif, and the al-Qaeda statement claiming the murder and accusing the Egyptian regime of being under the 'orders of the Crusaders', it is clear that Egypt is being targeted because of its regional and international policies," he said.

Cairo's top diplomat in war-torn Iraq was kidnapped earlier this month and reportedly executed by his captors, who labelled him the "ambassador of the infidels".

"al-Qaeda considers Egypt an integral part of the US-led coalition," Ahmed said.

# Musharraf squeezed between global terror and local anger

AFP, Islamabad

Caught between Western demands to fight Islamic terrorism and protests from headline Muslims at home, Pakistan's leader faces a dilemma that will only grow with each new attack, analysts say.

President Pervez Musharraf, a key Western ally since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, has earned praise abroad but criticism at home for ordering the arrests of some 300 suspected militants after it emerged the London bombers had ties to Pakistan.

The latest bloody attacks in Egypt are only likely to heighten international pressure on him to uproot Islamic extremists in a country many see as a breeding ground of global terror and the likely hideout of Osama bin Laden.

"He is caught between the devil of the West, which wants him to crush religious extremism, and the deep blue sea of taking on the entire religious community," said Lahore-based political commentator Mohammed Afzal Niazi.

General Musharraf, who once led troops in Kashmir, pinned his fate to the 'war on terror' after September 11 and allowed US forces to launch the 2001 Afghanistan invasion to unseat bin Laden and the Taliban from Pakistani soil.

Washington has since been a strong political and economic backer of Musharraf despite the fact he took power in a military coup and turned Pakistan into a declared nuclear state in its arms race with India.

Yet at home, Musharraf faces both open and silent opposition to each new crackdown he orders, both from Muslim clerics and the government and security apparatus over which he presides, said political scientist Hasan Askari.

Muslim protesters on Friday, the Muslim day of prayer, condemned Musharraf, who has escaped two assassination attempts for his pro-Western stance.

# Suicide blasts give new urgency to ARF meet

AFP, Vientiane

The attacks in London and Egypt have given new urgency to the annual meeting here this week of Asia's main security forum, which will adopt measures to boost the region's defences against terrorism.

The 24-member Asean Regional Forum (ARF), which includes many Muslim nations, is also expected to emphasise that terror attacks, mostly blamed on Islamic extremists, are not associated with religious groups.

"The attacks in Egypt and London have given a sense of urgency to the ARF meeting in Laos," a senior foreign ministry official from a member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) told AFP.

"Similar attacks have happened in our region and although we have increased cooperation, we certainly need to do more to combat these kinds of threats," said the official, requesting anonymity. Most members of the ARF --

including the United States, Russia and the Philippines -- have been struck by terrorism, with many attacks blamed on affiliates of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terror network.

Many are also allies in the US "war on terror" including the ARF's newest member, Pakistan, which launched a crackdown on militants groups after the July 7 suicide bombings which killed more than 50 people in London.

"To have this happening in London, in Europe, I think is a reminder that this kind of threat is not the monopoly of our region," said Marty Natalegawa, spokesman for the foreign ministry of Indonesia, which has been the target of several attacks including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people.

"So what's important in this meeting is to provide the solutions so that... countries which have been affected by this sort of calamity can share their experience and share what kind of steps they have taken," he said.

# ANALYSTS SAY Attacks in UK, Egypt linked by ideology

AFP, Paris

The close timing of the attacks which have killed more than 130 people in London and the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh was largely coincidental, with no mastermind behind the planning, experts said Saturday, while stressing that the perpetrators were driven by the same ideology.

"Terrorism without borders", headlined the Paris daily Le Monde, with a cartoon of a weeping globe wearing a "suicide belt" of bombs bearing the flags of Britain, Egypt, Morocco, Spain and the United States, the locations of the deadliest attacks attributed to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network since September 11, 2001.

"We have no specific information to make an (operational) link between London and Sharm el-Sheikh," Sri Lankan Rohan

Gunaratna, considered one of the leading experts on al-Qaeda, told AFP.

al-Qaeda assumed a global dimension immediately after September 11, and dispersed very significantly after the US intervention in Afghanistan aimed at striking at its roots, Gunaratna said, "and more than that, al-Qaeda endorsed so many other groups."

"There are cells all over the world," he said, adding, "some of those cells are operationally linked, but all are ideologically linked."

Magnus Ranstorp, head of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of Saint Andrews in Scotland, said it was impossible to have planned and carried out the Sharm el-Sheikh blasts in reaction even to the first explosions in London on July 7, let alone those of last Thursday.

# Dawood stays away from daughter's wedding

Pti, Dubai

The much talked about wedding of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim's daughter with former Pakistani Test cricketer Javed Miandad's son was solemnised at a five star hotel amid a cloak of secrecy and high security.

While Miandad and his wife attended the late night ceremony on Saturday, it was not clear whether Dawood, who is based in Karachi and wanted by India in connection with the Mumbai serial bomb blasts, has attended the wedding.

According to sources, Indian intelligence agencies kept a close watch at the venue of the wedding of Dawood's daughter Mahrukh and Miandad's son Junaid, especially to know who all are attending from India, especially from Mumbai.

However, it is believed that no big shots from either Bollywood or from the sports circuit were present at the lavish ceremony.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese riot policemen baton-charge opposition activists outside the cordoned off Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC) building where former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and former minister for physical development and construction Prakash Man Singh appeared for a hearing as part of their ongoing trial on corruption charges in Kathmandu yesterday.