

# Israel okays West Bank pullout

## Troops move to clear remaining Gaza settlements

AFP, REUTERS, Jerusalem/ Katif

The Israeli cabinet gave the final green light yesterday for the evacuation of four small settlements in the northern West Bank as well as for the last three Jewish communities in Gaza, officials said.

The vote to dismantle the West Bank settlements of Ganin, Kadim, Homesh and Sanur was passed overwhelmingly by 16 votes to four. Ganin and Kadim have already been fully emptied of all settlers.

The decision should seal Sharon's place in the history books as the first Israeli leader to sanction the pullout from any part of an area known by Jews as northern Samaria, the heart of Biblical Israel.

The vote also gives the government clearance to evacuate settlers from three settlements in the northern Gaza Strip -- Dugit, Nissanit and Elei Sinai -- as Israel pushes ahead with its operations to dismantle its 38-year occupation of the Palestinian territory.

Dugit and Nissanit are already empty while only a small number of

families are still living in Elei Sinai.

Israel began its occupation of the West Bank after the 1967 war with its Arab neighbours, slowly but surely building settlements across the territory which should form the bulk of the Palestinians' promised future state.

Sharon has made no apologies about the West Bank settlement programme, saying in a speech last week that it will "continue and develop".

Earlier Israeli forces bypassed a burning barricade and marched into one of the last inhabited Jewish settlements in occupied Gaza on Sunday, hoping to completely evacuate the biggest bloc of settlers in the area.

Confrontation loomed as several hundred young radicals, reinforcing dozens of settler families that ignored last week's army directive to leave the Gaza Strip, awaited troops sent to remove them from a cluster of settlements.

Protesters set fire to bales of hay, tyres and wooden crates at the main entrance to the settlement of Katif.

Dozens of soldiers ignored the barricade, which belched black smoke into the clear summer sky, and entered through a nearby fence.

Katif settler Haim Ben-Arieh said he hoped for Divine intervention.

"The great miracle can happen here, in Katif, with God's help," said Ben-Arieh, a religious Jew.

Only four of the 21 Gaza settlements, built on territory Palestinians want for a state, remain after forced evacuations last week, during which settlers were carried weeping from their homes and protesters were pulled screaming from synagogues.

The World Court says Jewish settlements are illegal. Israel disputes this.

President Mahmoud Abbas decreed that the Palestinian Authority would take over all the settlements as the Israelis pull out under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to disengage from conflict with the Palestinians.



A settler stands close to a burning barricade blocking the gate to the Gaza Strip settlement of Katif to prevent the Israeli army uproot operation of Jewish settlers yesterday.

# UK cops foiled gas attack on parliament

## Threat level secretly lowered

AFP, London

British police believe they have foiled a nerve gas attack by the al-Qaeda terrorist network on the British parliament, the Sunday Times reported.

The newspaper said the plot to target the House of Commons, or lower house, was prepared last year and had been discovered in coded emails on computers seized from terror suspects in Britain and Pakistan.

"Police and (domestic intelligence agency) MI5 then identified an Al-Qaeda cell that had carried out extensive research and video-recorded reconnaissance missions in preparation for the attack," it said.

The paper based its report on an internal police document it said it had obtained detailing a meeting of senior police officers held last month.

It quoted an unnamed senior police officer as saying that the plot involved a gas or chemical "dirty bomb" attack against parliament.

"The House of Commons was one of their targets as well as the Tube (Underground subway network)," he reportedly said.

"They were planning to use chemicals, a dirty bomb and sarin gas. They looked at all sorts of ways of delivering it."

The report said police had decoded the emails with the help of an informant from al-Qaeda, which sprung to international notoriety with attacks including the September 11, 2001 strikes against the United States.

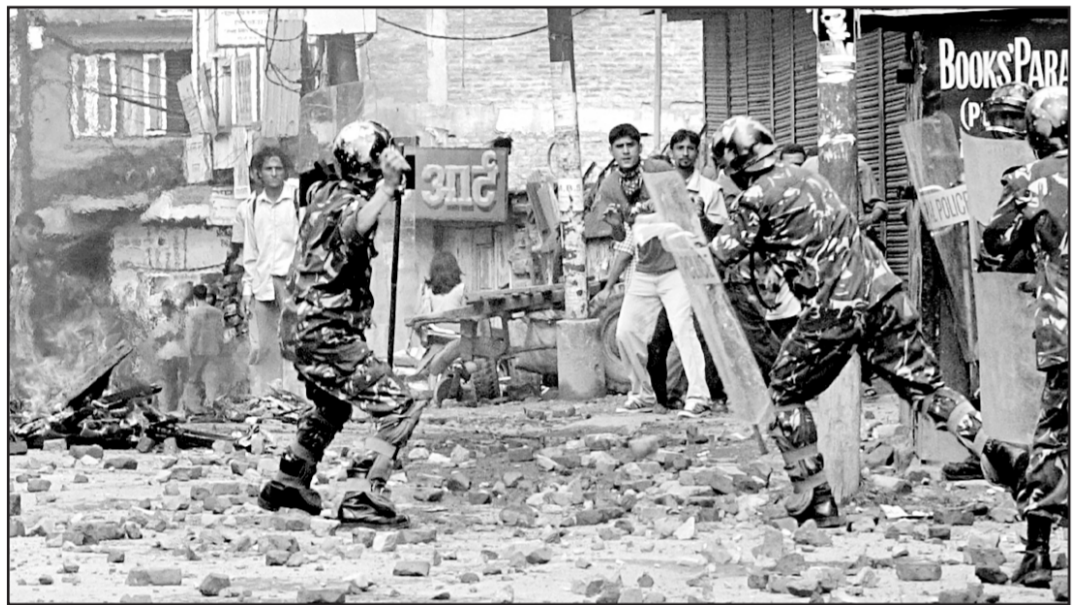
Meanwhile, the official level of threat to Britain from a terrorist attack has been lowered, secretly, for the first time since the July 7 bombings in London, the Sunday Telegraph said.

Intelligence officials have reduced the threat level from "critical" -- the highest rating -- to "severe general" because sources do not have any specific information relating to imminent repeat attacks, it said.

Although the "threat" level is down a notch, the "alert" level remains at its highest, the newspaper said. That level governs how buildings and public transport are guarded.

The move was taken by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre on Thursday, the newspaper said, despite public warnings from Metropolitan Police chief Ian Blair that further attacks remain likely.

Fifty-six people were killed, including four apparent Islamist suicide bombers, in the July 7 attacks on three Underground subway trains and a double-decker bus -- the worst ever on British soil.



Nepalese students come under a volley of rocks thrown by riot policemen during a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday which was held to protest the price hike of petroleum products. Students shouting anti-monarchy slogans burned tyres and logs demanding immediate withdrawal of the price rise.

# Manmohan asks Naxals to give up arms, contest polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

Asserting that no society could pardon killing of innocent people, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday urged Maoists to give up arms and propagate their cause by fighting elections.

In a democracy, power flows through the ballot rather than the barrel of the gun, the prime minister said at a function in Hyderabad.

"Extremism of any form, based on any divisive ideology, cannot be tolerated in any civilised and democratic society," he said while inaugurating the silver jubilee celebrations of Telugu daily

Prajashakti, a mouthpiece of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M).

"Faced with such terror tactics, the government will have no option but to fight such groups and their ideology of hatred."

Manmohan Singh's remarks come after the Andhra Pradesh government's re-imposition of a ban on the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) and its frontal organisations.

The ban was re-imposed two days after Maoists gunned down Congress legislator C Narsi Reddy and eight other people in an attack during Independence Day celebrations on August 15.

# Bush defends cost of Iraq war

AFP, Crawford

US President George W. Bush, besieged at his ranch by relatives of US soldiers killed in Iraq, launched a five-day campaign on Saturday to defend the war to an increasingly sceptical US public.

In his weekly radio address from his Prairie Chapel property, Bush said that the war would help avert another attack like the September 11 terrorist strikes and that the best way to honour fallen US troops was to defeat global terrorism.

"We must finish the task that our troops have given their lives for and honour their sacrifice by completing their mission," said Bush, whose approval ratings have slipped to some of the lowest levels of his presidency.

# 4 US soldiers killed in Afghan attack

AFP, Kabul

Four US soldiers were killed and three others wounded in a bomb blast in southern Afghanistan yesterday, the US military said.

"Four US soldiers were killed today and three were wounded in an improvised explosive device attack south of Deh Chopan," in southern Zabul province, the military said in a statement.

"They were conducting offensive operations with Afghan forces against suspected militants in the area when the attack occurred, it said.

"These soldiers were operating and fighting alongside Afghan national security forces," said Major General Jason Kamiya.

The three soldiers were wounded

trying to pull their comrades to safety as secondary blasts were triggered by a fire started by the initial explosion, the statement said.

The three wounded were evacuated for treatment of shrapnel wounds and were in a stable condition.

Deh Chopan has been the scene of heavy fighting in recent weeks with more than 200 militants killed in the area of the southern province.

However, Taliban loyalists and their al-Qaeda allies have also stepped up their attacks on US troops with crude homemade but increasingly effective bomb devices.

In a separate attack northwest of Kabul a roadside bomb hit a US embassy vehicle travelling in convoy in Paghman district. The embassy said two Americans suffered minor injuries.

# 'Police who tailed Brazilian didn't think he was a threat'

AFP, London

Police who followed an innocent Brazilian shot dead on suspicion of being a suicide bomber did not believe he was an immediate threat, The Observer newspaper reported yesterday.

Quoting senior police sources, it said three surveillance officers who followed Jean Charles de Menezes into a south London subway station where he died on July 22 did not feel he was armed or about to set off a bomb.

They wanted to detain the 27-year-old electrician, but were instructed to hand over the operation to a team of armed police who then shot him dead in a carriage full of horrified commuters, the newspaper said.

"There is no way those three (surveillance) guys would have been on the train carriage with him (De Menezes) if they believed he

was carrying a bomb," a police source was quoted as saying.

"Nothing he did gave the surveillance team the impression that he was carrying a device."

In a similar report, the Sunday Mirror newspaper said the surveillance officer who restrained De Menezes inside the carriage was "totally shocked when the suspect was repeatedly shot while he was holding him".

The reports added to a furore over the death of De Menezes in the tense days after the July 7 bombings in the British capital in which 56 people were killed, including four apparent Islamist suicide bombers.

In an interview with the News of the World, London's police chief Ian Blair said 24 hours passed before he learned that De Menezes was innocent, after he publicly linked the incident to the ongoing anti-terrorist operation.

# Iran's new president says 'no' to liberalism

AFP, Tehran

Iran's new hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad presented his proposed cabinet to parliament yesterday, lashing out at the West and liberalism and vowing a culture that "promotes virtue and prohibits vice".

Signalling his election would bring a clear break from the previous reformist administration of Mohammad Khatami, Ahmadinejad pledged to fight off liberalism that he argued threatened Islamic values.

"Currently we are importing from some countries billions of dollars whereas they are not buying our oil and they are also not buying our products," Ahmadinejad, who took office on August 3, told parliament.

"These countries should be thankful to us because we are helping their economies boom, but they are not thankful and are looking at us as if we were indebted to them," he told the conservative-controlled assembly.

"The international community

they go so far as to condemn us. What sort of balance is this? This is injustice and oppression, and our nation will not accept this in international affairs."

It was a clear reference to threats against Iran in the wake of the Islamic republic's decision to resume sensitive nuclear work. The clerical regime has refused to return to a full freeze of nuclear fuel work -- the focus of fears the country is seeking atomic weapons.

The speech to parliament, carried live on state television and radio, opened a debate of several days on Ahmadinejad's proposed 21-member cabinet. Although right-wingers dominate the assembly the procedure may not be a mere formality.

Of those nominated, only two have previously held ministerial posts, and the others are mostly unknowns -- even to conservative MPs who dominate the Majlis.

# POPE TO MUSLIMS

## Help defeat terrorism



Pope Benedict XVI celebrates Sunday's mass at the Marienfeld in Kerpen yesterday as part of the World Youth jamboree. The mass at Marienfeld park was attended by more than one million Roman Catholics.

REUTERS, Cologne

Pope Benedict, in his first major address to Muslim leaders, said on Saturday they had a duty to help defeat terrorism and turn back the "wave of cruel fanaticism" that falsely uses religion to instigate hate.

"Terrorism of any kind is a perverse and cruel decision which shows contempt for the sacred right to life and undermines the very foundations of all civil society," he said in the prepared text of an address for leaders of Germany's Muslim communities.

In the most straightforward and forceful language he has used on the topic since his election in April, the Pope said the world would be exposed to "the darkness of a new barbarism" unless religions worked together to combat terrorism.

"I am certain that I echo your own thoughts when I bring up as one of our concerns the spread of terrorism," he said.

"Terrorist activity is continually recurring in various parts of the world, sowing death and destruction, and plunging many of our brothers and sisters into grief and despair.