

Captured Palestinian officials to be tried

Says Peres

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said Sunday that his country would prosecute Palestinian government officials captured in connection with the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier. "They will be put to trial," he told CNN's "Late Edition" on Sunday. "And they will be accused of participating, supporting terrorist acts against the civilian government," he said. Israel last week detained scores of Hamas members in the West Bank, including eight ministers and more than 20 lawmakers and revoked the Jerusalem residency of four others in a new wave of air raids, and warning it would use all its power to free a soldier captured by militants a week ago. Peres spoke after Israel struck at

the heart of the Palestinian government on Sunday, dispatching helicopters which hit the Gaza office of the Hamas premier Ismail Haniya, setting the building ablaze. However, he told CNN, Israel was not trying to kill the Hamas leader when it attacked the office. "It was attacked in the middle of the night, where no one would be in the office," he said. "It was a clear warning," he said. "So it was not an attempt on his life, but it was a clear warning to stop this double behaviour," he told CNN. Peres also said Israel was not trying to topple the Hamas government. "We are trying to topple down the policies of this so-called government, which are policies of terror. "It is a government that was elected properly, but behaves like a terrorist organisation. So we didn't

disturb the elections, but once we see the way they behave, we cannot consider them a government," he told the cable broadcaster. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed not to bow to "black-mail." The armed wing of Hamas threatened resumed attacks inside Israel, sinking the region in a "sea of blood" if the Israeli offensive continued. The chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erakat, told CNN that Israeli airstrikes are only escalating the crisis. "I'm afraid that every hour that passes we're going to lose the ability to solve the crisis," he said. "Maybe the situation is out of hand now. I don't want to sound pessimistic, but I'm really afraid that every hour that passes, in this line of thinking, this line of action, I'm afraid that we're going to

lose the ability to solve the crisis, diplomatically and politically," he told CNN. He also said the Hamas-led government does not know where the soldier is. "It's a needle in a haystack," he said of the ongoing search for the soldier in the densely-populated territory. Palestinians cautioned that Egyptian-led mediation efforts were faltering to free the 19-year-old corporal, Gilad Shalit, captured on June 25. Asked if more detentions of members of the Hamas government, which took office in March, were possible, Peres said answered in the affirmative. "If there will be more people participating in acts of terror, yes," he told CNN.



PHOTO: AFP

A column of Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers rolls into the northern Gaza Strip from a stretch of farmland near the Israeli Kibbutz Mefalsim early yesterday. Israel sent troops and tanks into northern Gaza Monday and carried out a sixth night of air raids after warning it would use all its power to free a soldier captured by militants eight days ago.

Nepali Maoists asked to stop extortion

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist leader said yesterday that rebel cadres should stop extortion, but that "voluntary donation schemes" such as collecting money from businesses to feed troops would continue. "The party central office has ordered all the district committees to make all donation campaigns completely voluntary, and not to open new revenue offices," rebel leader Prachanda said in an emailed statement. The rebels made the move amid criticism from political parties that extortion from businesses was not in the spirit of a landmark agreement to draft an interim constitution and share power after a decade of insurgency that has left more than 12,500 people dead. The two sides led bloody protests in April that forced King Gyanendra to reinstate parliament after seizing absolute power in February 2005. Last week, in an interview with AFP, he said that the rebels would not go back to war and the two sides had agreed to hold elections to a body that would redraft Nepal's constitution.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan policemen look at the wreckage of a three-wheel taxi following a bomb explosion targeting a military check-point in the north-eastern Sri Lankan port town of Trincomalee yesterday. Three policemen and three civilians were killed and dozens of people wounded in the explosion at the checkpoint.

Iraqi Shias divided over amnesty to insurgents

2 GIs, 9 Iraqis killed in attacks, bombing

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Iraq's dominant Shia leaders appeared divided yesterday over Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's much-touted national reconciliation plan that aims to curb violence by offering amnesty to rebels. Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, the powerful head of parliament's largest bloc, told AFP he favoured extending an amnesty to insurgents who may have killed US troops -- an idea strongly opposed by Maliki. "Yes they should be covered regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations," Hakim said when asked if he would support extending the reconciliation and amnesty plan to those who may have attacked or killed US-led troops. On the ground, the US military reported that two of its servicemen had been killed in attacks, while nine Iraqis lost their lives in bomb and mortar attacks. In violence on the ground, nine Iraqis were killed in two separate attacks in the northern city of Mosul and in Mahmudiyah, south of Baghdad. A number of MPs have hit out at

The US military also reported the death of two of its troops, bring the death toll since the 2003 invasion to 2,529, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures. Hakim's comments came a day after the Iraqi government issued a new list of 41 "most wanted" including exiled members of the family of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein. His position contradicts the stance of Maliki, who said Wednesday there would be no amnesty for those who killed US troops, foreigners and journalists. Hakim, head of the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq, told AFP however he would oppose any dialogue with "Saddamists and takfeeris," terms used to refer to Saddam loyalists and extremist Sunni Arab militants who regard the country's majority Shias as apostates. A wide debate is currently raging in Iraq as to who would be eligible for the amnesty especially as Maliki, also a Shia, has also said that those who have killed Iraqis were not eligible for pardon.

The reconciliation proposal unveiled by Maliki on June 25, saying it was ambiguous and did not provide enough incentive for rebels to give up arms. The reconciliation plan is aimed at ending the insurgency and sectarian violence that has killed thousands of Iraqis, as well as US and British troops, following the US-led invasion of March 2003 that toppled Saddam. Meanwhile, Maliki headed to United Arab Emirates on Monday after a two-day visit to Riyadh to gain support from Gulf Arab states for his peace plan. On Sunday he met with Saudi King Abdullah and businessmen in the oil-rich kingdom to encourage them to invest in his violence-torn country. He assured them that "the major security concerns are centred on Baghdad but there are plenty of other opportunities elsewhere," Iraqi state television quoted him as saying.

Metro train derails in Spain: 30 killed

AFP, Madrid

More than 30 people were killed yesterday when a metro train derailed in the eastern Spanish city of Valencia in an apparent accident, as pilgrims gathered ahead of a papal visit, regional officials said. An interior ministry spokesman said any terrorist link had been "completely ruled out" after the derailment, one of the worst metro accidents in the past 50 years. "Everything indicates that it was an accident, that the train derailed and was hurled against the walls of a tunnel," the spokesman told AFP. A fire brigade spokesman said earlier that two carriages of the train had come off the rails in a tunnel. "We are still in the process of identifying the dead, but according to an initial estimate there are more than 30," regional government spokesman Vicente Rambla told local reporters, radio Cadena Ser reported. Authorities said there were around 15 people seriously injured. The fire brigade spokesman said that rescue services had evacuated all the remaining passengers trapped in the metro train between the Jesus and Plaza de Espana stations in the city centre. The accident happened as Valencia was filling up with participants for the Roman Catholic Church's fifth World Family Meeting this week, which is due to be closed by Pope Benedict XVI at the weekend. According to the Valencia metro website, the regional government-run company was distributing half-a-million passes to pilgrims and organisers of the event to permit them to travel freely on the system's four lines. "It seems it was an accident that was apparently brought about by speed and a failure at the wheel level," Luis Felipe Martinez, a government official in Valencia, told Cadena Ser radio. It was a passenger on board who alerted emergency services at 1:03 pm (1103 GMT). Access to the area was sealed off and a security cordon installed.

Mistrust of Muslims on the rise in Britain

MI5 spying on 8,000 al-Qaeda 'sympathisers'

AFP, London

In a picture recently published in British newspapers, a Muslim woman wears an England flag headscarf as she cheers on the England football team. But far from this image of integration, malaise and mistrust are on the rise in Britain between the majority and the Muslim minority, a year on from the London bombings. On July 7, 2005, Islamist extremist suicide bombers killed themselves and 52 others in co-ordinated attacks on London's transport network. The discovery that the four bombers were British and three were born and raised here was met with stunned disbelief. Worse, they seemed almost untraceable -- integrated into the mainstream of British society among the everyday folk of the Muslim community. Britain is home to 1.65 million Muslims (2.8 percent of the population), mostly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. Half were born in Britain. "Muslims are seen as dangerous and not loyal to the country," professor Muhammad Anwar, from the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick, told AFP. The surge in attacks against Muslims and mosques in the weeks following the London bombings quickly died down. But newly-strengthened anti-terror laws have "caused further insecurity due to random arrests and searches," said Elviena Malik, from the Commission for Racial Equality. Continuous police operations, searches and arrests, and the extended period which security suspects can be held without charge, has entrenched the fear in the Muslim community that it is being targeted. Meanwhile, Britain's internal intelligence agency MI5 is spying on some 8,000 sympathisers of the al-Qaeda terror network in a bid to identify future terrorists. The Independent newspaper reported yesterday. Operation "Rich Picture", also aims to recruit agents within the Islamist movement, the report said.

20 militants killed in Afghanistan

American dies as chopper crashes

AP, Kabul

US soldiers battled insurgents who ambushed a military convoy in southern Afghanistan, killing up to 20 militants, the coalition said yesterday. A US helicopter also crashed in an accident in southern Afghanistan, killing an American soldier, the US military said. Enemy fire was ruled out as the cause of the downing. The ambush occurred Sunday in southern Helmand province's Sangin district, which has become a hotbed of militant activity, particularly for the 3,300 British soldiers in the region. Four British troops were killed in attacks in Sangin last week. The military said up to 30 extremists, firing guns and mortars, attacked a coalition patrol that had just found a weapons cache in Sangin. About 20 militants were

killed, the military said. Two soldiers were also wounded and airlifted to a medical facility where they were in stable condition, the military said. In a separate incident, Afghan police killed seven insurgents that attacked a police checkpoint Sunday night in Nawzad district in southern Helmand province, the Interior Ministry said. No Afghan police suffered casualties, it said. The battles were part of a massive anti-Taliban offensive in southern Afghanistan involving more than 10,000 Afghan and coalition soldiers. The campaign was launched in earnest last month to halt the deadliest spree of militant violence since the Taliban regime's 2001 ouster. The commander of British forces in Afghanistan said he has asked for more equipment, and hinted that he may also ask for additional

troops. "In terms of force levels, we constantly keep those under review and I am confident that if I asked for more and there are some requests which are in staff in process London would listen to those requests," Brig. Ed Butler said in an interview with British Broadcasting Corp. radio. "I have put in requests, which are being considered back in London as we speak, to take account of the changing circumstances," he said. The AH-64 Apache attack helicopter plunged to the ground shortly after taking off from the coalition-run Kandahar Air Field, a military statement said. The cause of the crash was being investigated. In western Afghanistan, a small explosion Monday wounded eight female students in an English class at Herat University.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Shia Muslim women march during a demonstration in Islamabad yesterday. Some 150 women protesters of Shia students wing Imamia Students' Organisation (ISO) staged a protest rally against the Western electronics media for spreading 'obscurity'.

Britons tired of cruel, vulgar US: Poll

AFP, London

People in Britain view the United States as a vulgar, crime-ridden society obsessed with money and led by an incompetent president whose Iraq policy is failing, according to a newspaper poll published yesterday. The United States is no longer a symbol of hope to Britain and the British no longer have confidence in their transatlantic cousins to lead global affairs, according to the poll in The Daily Telegraph. The YouGov poll found that 77 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that the US is "a beacon of hope for the world". As Americans prepared to celebrate the 230th anniversary of their independence on Tuesday, the poll found that only 12 percent of Britons trust them to act wisely on the global stage. This is half the number who had faith in the Vietnam-scarred White House of 1975. A massive 83 percent of those questioned said that the United States doesn't care what the rest of the world thinks.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse hands over a souvenir to the visiting Bangladesh Naval Chief Rear Admiral M. Hasan Ali Khan (L) yesterday at the president's official residence in Colombo. The Bangladesh navy chief is on a goodwill tour of Sri Lanka.

N Korea warns of nuke war if attacked

AP, Seoul

North Korea will respond to a pre-emptive US military attack with an "annihilating strike and a nuclear war," the state-run media said yesterday, heightening its antagonistic rhetoric. The Korean Central News Agency, citing an unidentified Rodong Sinmun newspaper "analyst," accused the United States of increasing military pressure on the isolated communist state. The North Korean threat of retaliation, which is often voiced by its state-controlled media, comes amid US official reports that Pyongyang has shown signs of preparing for a test of a long-range missile. "The army and people of the

DPRK are now in full preparedness to answer a pre-emptive attack with a relentless annihilating strike and a nuclear war with a mighty nuclear deterrent," the report said. DPRK stands for the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The report accused Washington of escalating military pressure on the country with war exercises, a massive arms buildup and aerial espionage by basing new spy planes in South Korea. The US routinely accuses the North of aerial espionage, issuing a tally of such flights at the end of every month. The US military doesn't comment, although it acknowledges monitoring North Korean military activity.

Rains flood homes, rail lines in Mumbai

REUTERS, Mumbai

Monsoon rains flooded homes, submerged rail lines and forced hundreds of thousands of people to wade through muddy streets in India's financial capital yesterday. The city's antiquated drainage system is struggling to cope with the downpours, prompting civic workers to use spades and crowbars to open clogged manholes to flush out the rainwater. "Our locality looks like a sea. There is knee-deep water and rainwater is also entering many houses," Sylvester Nato, a resident of Bandra, among several neighbourhoods in the city's west badly affected by the overnight rains. The downpours inundated several arterial roads in central and northern Mumbai and rainwater submerged rail tracks at some places. Air services were also running a little late.

Bombing of Iran would fail

US military warns admn

AFP, New York

Senior military officers have warned the US administration that bombing raids against Iran would likely fail to destroy the country's nuclear programme due to a lack of reliable intelligence, the New Yorker magazine reported Sunday. Pentagon officers "have told the administration that the bombing campaign will probably not succeed in destroying Iran's nuclear programme," Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh wrote in the magazine's latest edition. The military officers are concerned about contingency plans to launch air strikes against Iran because of the absence of actionable intelligence or concrete evidence of bomb making, the magazine said, citing unnamed active duty and

retired officers and officials. The article also alleges that the White House had advocated the possible use of a nuclear device to attack Iran's uranium enrichment plant in Natanz but that the military leadership ultimately succeeded in having the option dropped in late April. The military's experience in Iraq, in which US intelligence on weapons of mass destruction proved "deeply flawed," has made senior officers wary in the case of a possible air campaign against Iran, the New Yorker said. "The target array in Iran is huge, but it's amorphous.... We built this big monster with Iraq, and there was nothing there. This is son of Iraq," one high-ranking general told the magazine.