

# Hezbollah chief vows to fire rockets into heart of Israel

AFP, Beirut

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed Wednesday that his guerrillas will fire rockets into the heart of Israel and counter Israeli military advances inside southern Lebanon.

"We are entering a new phase in the confrontation, the phase of (striking) beyond Haifa," Nasrallah said in a televised speech referring to Israel's main northern city.

A senior Israeli official said the threat of rockets being fired further into the country's heart was real, but added that Israel was prepared for the eventualities.

"The Hezbollah threats are not new... we know they have longer-range missiles, we are aware of this strategic threat and we're ready," government secretary Israel Maimon told public radio.

Israel has repeatedly said it believes Hezbollah has longer-range rockets capable of reaching beyond Israel's third city, as far as the commercial capital Tel Aviv, or even the southern city of Beersheva.

The radio quoted Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres as saying: "You have to prepare yourselves for Nasrallah's threats as if they're real even if they're lies."

But it also cited another official as casting doubt on Hezbollah's ability to deliver on the threat because of what he said was a continued reliance on advisors from sponsors Iran and Syria.

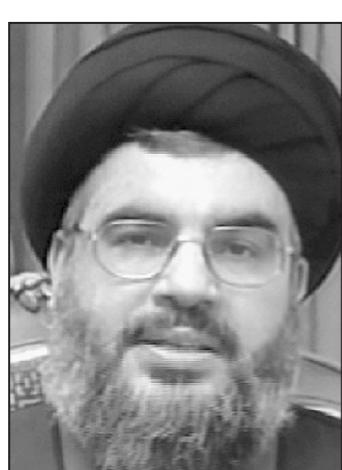
"Firing these longer-range missiles depends on those who sponsor them," the official was quoted as saying.

The Hezbollah chief denied that the border town of Bint Jbeil had fallen. A UN spokesman had said Tuesday that Israeli troops had entered the town, a stronghold of the Shiite militant group.

"They do not control Bint Jbeil. All the city of Bint Jbeil is still in the hands of the resistance," Nasrallah said.

After he spoke, Israel acknowledged that it was still meeting resistance in the town. Public radio said there had been "six casualties" on the Israeli side.

Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera said they comprised one



Hassan Nasrallah

dead, and five wounded who were still awaiting evacuation from the border area amid the clashes.

The Hezbollah leader, who has survived at least two Israeli attempts to kill him in air strikes since the conflict erupted on July 12, called for "further steadfastness and unity on these decisive days."

He said all the foreign delegations which flocked to Lebanon in the past week "only brought American-Zionist diktats... they did not bring solutions or settlements".

"We do not accept humiliating conditions but we are open to political discussions," he said.

After UN and European Union delegations, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise visit in Beirut on Monday where she reportedly presented a ceasefire plan stipulating the deployment of an international force in a buffer zone inside Lebanon for 60 to 90 days.

But Rice's ceasefire plan was rejected by Lebanese parliament speaker Nabih Berri, a key Hezbollah ally, because it did not include a prisoner swap with Israel.

Israel launched its massive onslaught on Lebanon after Hezbollah captured two soldiers in a deadly cross-border raid on July 12.

Nasrallah said the Israeli offensive was not triggered by the capture of the soldiers, but had been planned to take place in September or October.

He said the offensive was meant to crush Hezbollah and put Lebanon under the control of the United States and Israel who want to "impose a new Middle East" in which they would control the region and its resources.

During a visit in Israel on Tuesday, Rice said it was "time for a new Middle East". "A durable solution will be one that strengthens the forces of peace and democracy in the region," she said.

Nasrallah said: "Our fate is to confront this plan... we are waging a war for the liberation of the remaining occupied lands and the liberation of our detainees."

Hezbollah says it is fighting for the liberation of the Shebaa Farms district, a territory captured by Israel from Syria in 1967 and unilaterally annexed with the rest of the Golan Heights in 1981.

The district is now claimed by Lebanon with Syrian blessing in an arrangement not recognized by the international community.



Indian protesters shout slogans as they beat an effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in New Delhi yesterday (left) while Indian and Sri Lankan workers wait on board an Indian Navy ship anchored at Beirut's port as they are evacuated from war-torn Lebanon



PHOTO: AFP

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# Asian workers fear losing jobs more than Israeli raids

AFP, Beirut

As Westerners stream out of Lebanon, tens of thousands of Asian workers have decided that enduring Israeli bombardment is less of a torment than losing their jobs and returning to a life of poverty and hunger at home.

"Of course I am scared, but leaving is a luxury. Going back to Sri Lanka is a greater risk for our lives. The war here is much better than dying from hunger at home," said Sri Lankan domestic worker Shampa.

"What will I do in the Philippines?" cried Filipina Cynthia Madrigal.

"I cannot leave. I am the only bread-winner for my mother, two young children and two nieces," she said, sitting on the balcony of a mountain house to which she fled with her employers in northern Lebanon away from the Israeli strikes.

As wealthy nations dispatched

their final ships to evacuate citizens in Lebanon on the 15th day of relentless Israeli bombardments, less fortunate authorities across Asia have struggled to reach their nationals stranded in the war-torn country.

Amid complaints of slow evacuations, Asian countries like Sri Lanka have even asked nationals to stay put. But with the largest contingent of expatriate workers in Lebanon, only a fraction of the 80,000 Sri Lankans in Lebanon has asked to be evacuated.

Filipino officials, facing sharp criticism for failing to do enough for their 30,000 stranded nationals in Lebanon, have conceded they are unable to carry out evacuations and have asked foreign governments for help.

The International Office of Migration (IOM) said it is to airlift some 450 Filipino workers from Beirut via Damascus after President Gloria Arroyo issued an appeal to the international commu-

nity for help with repatriation.

But many Asian workers are prepared to ignore the chance of rescue and stick out the bombardment, even though they are painfully aware that several compatriots have been killed in the south when their employers' houses were hit by Israeli missiles.

Filipino Merle Lincieno's employers wanted to take her with them to Geneva, but she had to stay behind because she could not board the French boat which evacuated them to the neighboring island of Cyprus, even though she had a travel visa.

She was staying with her employer's cousins who live in a house perched on a cliff overlooking a thick pine forest in the summer mountain resort of Brumana, east of Beirut.

So far, she has been away from the bombardments but she could still hear and see the explosions in Beirut's suburbs further down, especially at nighttime.

where they fly back home. The government pays for the trip," he said.

"Our main problem is to be able to evacuate the Filipinos who are stranded in the south and cannot flee because of the bombardments," he said.

"We have also had a few cases where employers exerted pressure on domestic workers to stay. We call them and tell them that they have to let them go for security reasons," he said.

"Many employers feel that they have moved with their domestic workers to safe areas and so there is no danger and do not want to lose costly contracts," he said.

Advincula also said that dozens of Filipinos who had been detained in jail because they did not have legal residences have been released by Lebanese authorities in order to allow the embassy to evacuate them.

# Hopes rise for North Korea nuclear talks

Beijing, Seoul make joint push

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Hopes rose Wednesday for a breakthrough in efforts to disarm North Korea as China and South Korea made a united push to bring Pyongyang back to stalled six-nation talks on its nuclear ambitions.

North Korea has stayed silent on whether it will respond to the flurry of diplomacy and join its dialogue partners on the sidelines of a regional security conference, which the issue is expected to dominate.

But in a sign of the growing optimism, Chinese deputy foreign minister Wu Dawei said late Monday that a session of the six-way talks had been provisionally scheduled for Friday in Kuala Lumpur.

"The time currently being planned is the afternoon of the 28th, but it is still under negotia-

tion," he said. "At the moment, all sides are still making efforts but whether it will happen or not, nobody can tell yet."

China is seen as the biggest influence on North Korea, although the hermit state snubbed Beijing's appeals earlier this month and launched a volley of ballistic missile tests that inflamed the region.

"We have agreed that we will encourage together the resumption of six-party talks," Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said Tuesday after a meeting with his South Korean counterpart Ban Ki-Moon.

"We both feel that we should treasure the consensus reached at the six-party talks. That is, the nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and its peace and stability. That is the aim of our joint efforts."

The alliance of China and South Korea represents a new strategy in attempts to get communist North

# 'Shoot me if I'm convicted'

AFP, Baghdad

Deposed Iraqi president Saddam Hussein demanded in court Wednesday that he be shot by firing squad rather than hanged if he is found guilty of crimes against humanity.

"Remember that Saddam was a soldier and that therefore, if he is condemned to death, he should be shot and not hanged," he declared, speaking of himself in the third person during his trial in Baghdad.

Judge Rauf Abdel Rahman replied simply that the Iraqi High Tribunal had not yet delivered its verdict.

Earlier, Saddam Hussein was forced on Wednesday to listen to a court-appointed lawyer defend his role in the deaths of 148 Shiite civilians, after he was brought to court against his will.

The former strongman, showing no ill-effects from his 18-day-old hunger strike, praised the insurgents fighting US forces in Iraq and refused once again to accept the authority of the Iraqi tribunal prosecuting him.

"I was brought here by force by the Americans, but I did not resist them because I have too much self-respect," he said, urging the court to excuse him, and adding that he had been brought directly from hospital.

"I refuse the lawyers that have been assigned to me, they will be considered enemies by the people," he declared. Saddam's defence team is boycotting the trial and the court has named replacement counsel to represent him.

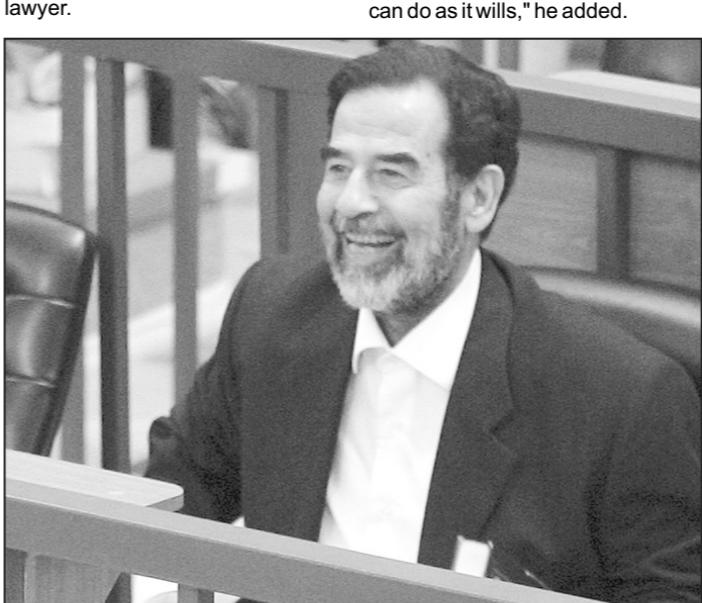
Judge Rauf Abdel Rahman refused his request, and insisted the 68-year-old defendant remain

to hear the defence case prepared on his behalf.

Saddam and seven former aides face charges of crimes against humanity relating to a crackdown on the Shiite town of Dujail following an assassination attempt on Saddam in 1982. They face the death penalty if convicted.

The ousted dictator appeared in his trademark grey business suit and did not seem to have been weakened by his protest, begun after his evening meal on July 7 in protest at the conduct of the trial and the recent murder of a defence lawyer.

"Your honour, I refuse to appear before this tribunal, but this tribunal can do as it wills," he added.



Saddam Hussein laughs during his trial held in Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone yesterday.

# Arrests in Mumbai bombings rise to 6

AFP, Mumbai

Indian police said Wednesday that the Mumbai train bombers had probably left the country after the number of arrests in the inquiry rose to six.

Janab Sheikh, 31, and Sohail Sheikh, 38, were arrested late Tuesday after being questioned for several days over the blasts that killed 183 and injured more than 800. They were being probed for providing support to the bombers.

"They are from the core group that gave support to the terrorists," Singh alleged.

"They had training in 2004/5. They told us and we have evidence for it. That was explosives training, how to make bombs. There will be more arrests."

The men were being questioned in Mumbai and the DNA newspaper said they had allegedly confessed to being members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, the pro-Pakistan militant group fighting Indian control in Kashmir.

Police have said that the seven coordinated blasts that ripped through packed first-class train carriages on July 11 bore the hallmarks of Lashkar-e-Taiba but have stopped short of directly blaming the group.

"We don't have conclusive proof but we believe it's true that the

people who have done it are out of the country," said Singh.

Singh declined to name any country.

Tensions have risen between Pakistan and India since the Indian premier Manmohan Singh said within a week of the blasts that "elements" across the border had a role in the attacks.

Slow-moving peace talks between the two countries over Kashmir have been delayed because of the attacks.

Police have also said others arrested in the inquiry had links with Nepal and Bangladesh.

Indian media said the two arrested men were allegedly part of the same militant cell led by Tanvir Ansari, a doctor, who has been accused of conspiracy and was under suspicion of having trained abroad in handling arms, ammunition and making bombs. He was arrested earlier this week.

The two men were suspected to have visited Pakistan through Iran and went on a 28-day training camp to learn how to handle sophisticated weapons and manufacture bombs, the Press Trust of India said, quoting unnamed sources.

Sohail Sheikh's family, at their home in the western Indian city of Pune, denied he was linked to terrorism and told reporters he had travelled to Iran to investigate the dry fruit business.

"He was showing me how to do my exercises when we first heard about the blasts. How can he have had anything to do with them?" his mother Hazra told the Hindustan Times.

# Thailand reports first bird flu death in over seven months

AFP, Bangkok

The victim was 17-year-old boy, who caught the virus from one of his fighting cocks in northern Thailand.

"The victim failed to report the death of his fighting cock because he was afraid that authorities would slaughter his birds," Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said.

"He died of bird flu after touching the dead bird that had been sick," he said.

The announcement came just one day after Thai authorities confirmed a new outbreak of the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus in Pichit province. The boy also lived there, but not on the farm where the disease was found.

Thawat Suntrajarn, head of Thailand's disease control department, said the victim suffered from a deadly combination of dengue fever and bird flu, which he said was common in people who die from H5N1.

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# Two suspected rebels killed in Indian Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Two suspected Muslim rebels were shot dead in separate gunbattles with troops and nine people on a