



PHOTO: AFP  
Palestinians, foreign and Israeli peace activists look at an Israeli bulldozer working on Palestinian land early yesterday for the expansion of Efrat settlement.

# Peres urges Arabs to talk ME peace plan

## Israel warplanes bomb Hamas positions

AFP, AP, Shuneh/ Gaza City

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres urged Arab governments yesterday to hold talks with the Jewish state on their revived Middle East peace plan.

The Nobel peace laureate told Arab officials at a World Economic Forum in Jordan that Israel would come up with a counter-offer to the Saudi-drafted blueprint first adopted in 2002 and relaunched at an Arab summit in March.

But he gave no firm timeframe for delivery of the counter-proposal, drawing questions from Arab League chief Amr Mussa about the

Israeli government's seriousness.

"The Arab League has proposed. Fine. We shall make a counter-proposal," Peres said during a panel discussion on Arab-Israeli relations also addressed by Mussa.

"Let's sit together, air out our differences.

"If you are serious and we are serious, let's sit together."

The Arab peace plan offers Israel full normalisation of relations in return for a full withdrawal from Arab lands occupied in 1967 and resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue.

Israel rejected the blueprint wholesale when it was first unveiled but has since warmed to the draft as a basis for negotiation, provided there are changes on the refugee issue.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes sent missiles slamming into a car carrying Hamas militants early yesterday, then demolished arms factories belonging to two Palestinian groups, the army said, in a widening of reprisals against Gaza rocket squads.

In Jerusalem, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert threatened tougher action if the intensified rocket fire on Israeli border communities didn't cease.

# Bomber kills 14 in Afghanistan

## Fighting claims 30 more Taliban

AP, AFP, Gardez/Kandahar

A suicide bomber on foot detonated himself in a crowded market in eastern Afghanistan yesterday just after a US convoy drove by, killing at least 14 people and wounding 31, officials and witnesses said.

The attack in the city of Gardez damaged around 30 shops, shattered windows and destroyed the stores closest to the explosion. Three vehicles were damaged, including a taxi blasted by dozens of pieces of shrapnel.

Witnesses said a US convoy appeared to be the target, and Maj. William Mitchell, a spokesman for Nato's International Security Assistance Force, said there were initial reports of injuries to Isaf soldiers, though he didn't have further details.

Six people died at the scene of the blast, police said. Another eight later died at a hospital, said Ghulam Hazrat Majedi, the doctor

in charge of the Gardez hospital. He said two of the 31 people injured were in a critical condition.

Afghan soldiers donated blood for the wounded.

Nasar Ahmad, a 30-year-old shopkeeper whose three cousins were seriously injured in the blast, said he saw a US convoy driving through the city just before the explosion.

"I heard a strong blast and then saw a fireball go up," Ahmad said from Gardez hospital. "For 10 minutes I couldn't hear and I didn't know where I was. I saw a lot of people injured lying in the street."

Shah Mohammad, 19, said everyone killed or wounded by the blast were Afghan civilians.

"The convoy had already passed when the attack happened," he said.

The blast in Gardez comes one day after a suicide bomber in northern Afghanistan killed three German soldiers and seven civil-

ians.

More than 30 rebel fighters were killed in the southern province of Ghazni early Sunday in a sweep involving foreign forces, provincial police commander Alishah Ahmadzai told AFP.

The foreign militaries could not confirm their involvement.

Isaf announced in a statement meanwhile that "a significant number of Taliban extremist leaders were successfully targeted and killed in a precision air strike" in the south late Saturday.

It did not give the location of the strike.

His toll could not be independently verified. Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) and the separate US-led coalition said they did not have information about the operation.

Eleven other rebels were captured and 18 wounded in the sweep, which moved through villages along a key highway in the province, Ahmadzai said.

# Endangered stork egg hatches in wild

AP, Tokyo

An endangered white stork egg laid in the wild has hatched naturally in western Japan for the first time in more than 40 years, a local stork museum announced yesterday.

The new chick's parents a 7-year-old male Oriental white stork and his 9-year-old partner were born through artificial breeding at a public farm, the Hyogo Prefectural Homeland for

the Oriental White Stork, and were released into the wild last September.

The couple started mating in April and built their nest atop a 14-yard-tall manmade pole in a rice paddy near the farm in the city of Toyooka.

"The baby was born!" the Eco Museum Centre for Oriental White Stork said in a statement on its Web site. "It would be a major step forward for storks' return to the wild."



PHOTO: AP  
A chick is seen at the feet of parent white stork in a nest at Toyooka, western Japan on Sunday. An endangered white stork egg laid in the wild has hatched naturally in western Japan for the first time in more than 40 years.

# Violence erupts at Tata Motors plant

PTI, Kolkata

Violence erupted at the Tata Motors plant site in Singur on Sunday when police fired rubber bullets and teargas at Krishni Jami Rakhsha Committee activists when they hurled bombs and brickbats in a bid to enter the area.

IGP (Law and Order) Raj Kanojia said here that activists of the Committee, who gathered at Bajemelia for a "law violation" programme under the leadership of local Trinamool Congress MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharya and Committee convener Becharam Manna, tried to break a police cordon in a bid to proceed to the Tata Motors' site.

After jostling with police, the activists hurled bombs and brickbats in a bid to break the cordon. Serampore's sub-divisional police officer Kalyan Banerjee and a constable were injured in the brickbatting.

Police then fired two teargas shells and one rubber bullet and carried out a "mild" baton-charge to disperse the crowd, he said.

Kanojia said several arrests were made but did not immediately provide figures.

The Committee has been resisting the acquisition of farm land for the Tata Motors' small car project.