

Israel threatens to kill Hamas leaders

13 more Palestinians killed in air raids

AFP, Gaza City

Israel threatened yesterday to hit Hamas political leaders unless rocket fire from lawless Gaza subsides, as four militants were killed in a new air raid in the impoverished territory.

In the latest Israeli strike, four gunmen from the radical Islamic jihad group were killed in a car in the northern town of Jabalya, medics and the army said.

Nine people were killed in Israeli air raids in Gaza late Sunday -- six civilians and two Hamas militants were killed in a strike near the home of Hamas member of parliament Khalil al-Haya, and a



Khaled Meshal

civilian was killed in a raid on a metal workshop.

Israel will kill exiled Hamas political supremo Khaled Meshal "at the first opportunity" and could also target prime minister Ismail Haniya, warned Public

Security Minister Avi Dichter, a member of the powerful security cabinet.

Meshal, who is now based in Syria, survived a Mossad assassination attempt in Jordan in 1997. Haniya escaped an Israeli strike in Gaza in 2004 that killed Hamas's wheelchair-bound founder and spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

"He (Meshal) is a more than legitimate target and I am convinced that at the first opportunity we will rid ourselves of him, despite the difficulty of the task," Dichter told army radio.

Asked whether the Hamas prime minister could also be a

target, Dichter said: "If Haniya is part of those who give the orders to carry out attacks, that will make him a legitimate target."

Several other key ministers have made similar comments.

In Damascus, a senior Hamas official shrugged off the warning as "nothing new" and said that the group had taken preventative measures that amounted to "an open battle" with Israel.

"We are used to these threats," Mussa Abu Marzuq told AFP. "It's an Israeli policy that has targeted Palestinian leaders since 1948" when the Jewish state was created.



PHOTO: AFP
Mourners carry the bodies of six Palestinians killed in an Israeli airstrike, during a mass funeral for nine victims, eight of which belong to the al-Haya family in Gaza City yesterday. Israel has pounded Hamas targets across Gaza for the last six days in response to a sharp increase in rocket fire from the territory in raids that have so far killed at least 11 civilians and 25 militants.

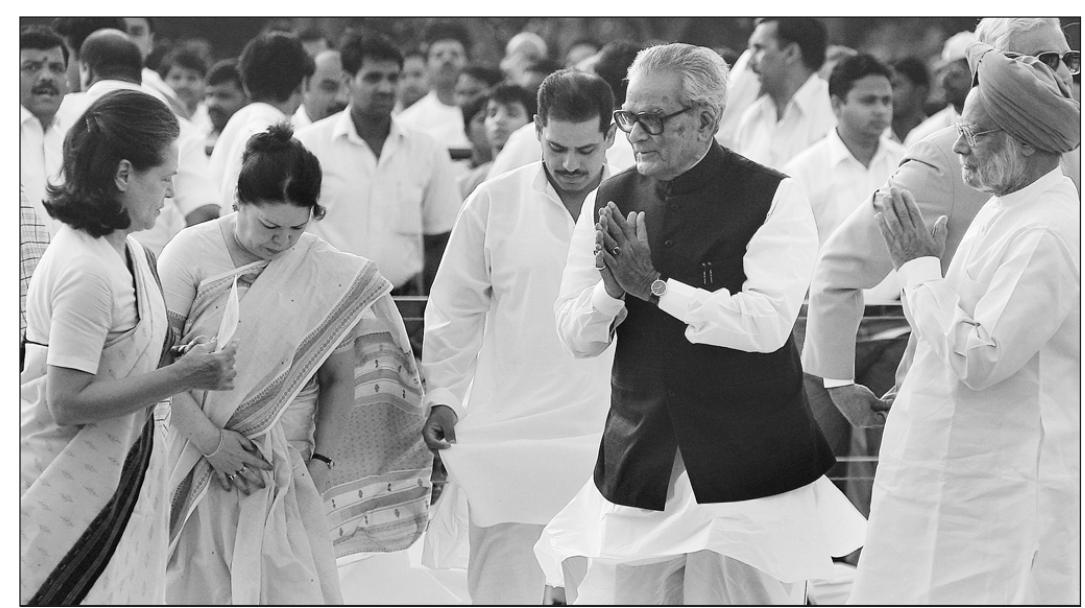


PHOTO: AFP
Indian Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (2R) and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) greet Congress Party President and Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government Sonia Gandhi (L) during a memorial ceremony for slain former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, on his 16th death anniversary in New Delhi yesterday.

SACKING OF TOP JUDGE

Judges rebuff Pak govt

AP, Islamabad

Supreme Court judges rebuffed government arguments yesterday at a hearing on President Gen Pervez Musharraf's suspension of Pakistan's chief justice, a move that has stoked the worst political crisis of the general's eight-year rule.

The court is considering a complaint from Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, whose refusal to resign has galvanized opposition to the military leader ahead of presidential and parlia-

mentary elections due this year.

The government ousted Chaudhry March 9 after receiving what it said was credible evidence of his misconduct. But the proceedings of a closed-door judicial complaints panel examining the allegations are on hold pending a decision on the judge's petition and about 20 others arguing that his removal was unlawful.

Government lawyer Malik Muhammad Qayum on Monday urged the court to reconvene the

five-judge panel, known as the Supreme Judicial Council, arguing that it was a full court able to deal with any defence motions.

"Therefore, no other constitutional court can interfere with its proceedings or assume jurisdiction" of the matter before it, Qayum said.

However, presiding Judge Khalil-ur-Rehman Ramday, said that if the council was no different from a court, there was no reason for the authors of Pakistan's constitution to create it.

More bad news for Nepal's king as statue 'sweats'

AFP, Kathmandu

Hundreds of devotees are flocking to see a "sweating" statue of a Hindu deity, officials said yesterday, describing the phenomenon as a bad omen for the Himalayan nation already embattled king.

The centuries-old statue of Bhimeshwar -- the Hindu god of trade and commerce -- has been perspiring since Saturday evening, drawing hundreds to a temple in Dolakha district, 70km east of Kathmandu.

Shanta Krishna Shrestha, the temple's chief priest, said the sweating is seen as a bad omen that usually precedes disasters or crises for the royal family.

"Most famously the idol sweated just before the royal massacre in 2001," he said, referring to an incident where an apparently drunken crown prince went on a shooting rampage that killed nine royals, including the king and queen.

Local media also said the idol broke into a sweat prior to a massive earthquake in 1934, as well as during massive street protests last year that saw the current king, Gyanendra, forced to relinquish direct rule.



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lankans, displaced by the fighting between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels in the island's east, head back to their shelters in Batticaloa following a hand out of food by UN agencies, the Red Cross and state authorities.

No talks until fighting stops, says LTTE

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's separatist Tamil rebels on Sunday vowed never to return to peace negotiations unless the government halts a military campaign against them while four more killed in fresh fighting yesterday.

The leader of the political wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), SP Thamilselvan, said attacks by government forces would not force them to compromise.

Thamilselvan told the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website the government was trying to present the campaign as part of the "war on terror" to win international support.

"The LTTE and the Tamil people under no circumstances will come to the table in a position of political and military weakness," Thamilselvan said amid clashes between troops and the Tigers across the island's northeast.

"It is a fallacy to think that by weakening the LTTE, the movement can be forced to compromise on its political stand."

Tiger rebels have suffered territorial losses in the east since fighting escalated in January.

But the guerrillas took the conflict to a new level in March by using light aircraft for the first time to attack government military installations.

Arabs should back nuke plan: Iran

AP, Southern Shuneh

Iran urged Arab countries on Sunday to support its nuclear programme but received a cool reception at the World Economic Forum, particularly from US allies worried about Iran's growing regional influence.

Iranian officials said separately that the nuclear programme was moving ahead as scheduled and that the country would not suspend uranium enrichment despite the threat of a third set of UN sanc-

tions. The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to present its latest report on Iran's nuclear programme to the UN Security Council in coming days.

Arab countries should value Iran's nuclear development because it could help them address their own energy needs, said Mohammed JA Larijani, a former deputy foreign minister and brother of Iran's chief nuclear negotiator.

3 bombs discovered on train in India

AP, Kolkata

Police discovered three bombs hidden in a train parked at Kolkata's main railroad station yesterday and safely removed them, police said.

The discovery comes days after a bomb went off in a mosque in the southern city of Hyderabad, killing 11 people.

"Our people were on a routine search of trains and found the bombs in one of the trains," said Amarkanti Sarkar, Inspector General of Railway Police.

No one claimed responsibility for planting the bombs, and police said it was too soon to name a suspect.

The train was set to travel from the Howrah railroad station in Kolkata to Tarakeswar, a small town sacred to Hindus some 50 miles west of Calcutta. Hundreds of pilgrims use the train daily.

"Seven other policemen were injured. It was the work of the Taliban," provincial police spokesman Abdul Ghafour told AFP.

They were moved to Kabul, where they had come from, the commander said.

News of the killings was brought by a sole surviving policeman who made it to the town of Gereshk a day after the bloody incident, the official added.

The Taliban said it was responsible.

Three more policemen, including a district counter-criminal chief, were killed in the eastern province of Nangarhar on Monday by a remotely controlled bomb similar to those regularly used by Taliban, a police spokesman said.

Carter moves to temper row with Bush

AP, Washington

Former US president Jimmy Carter yesterday tempered his biting criticism of serving President George W Bush after calling his administration "the worst in history."

Following a White House denunciation of Carter's original remarks, the Democratic former leader said he had intended to describe Bush as the worst president since scandal-plagued Richard Nixon.

"My remarks were maybe careless or misinterpreted. But I wasn't comparing the overall administration and certainly not talking personally about any president," Carter told NBC.

"I have been very careful and still am not to criticize any president personally," he said, while restating his opposition to Bush's policies on Iraq and the Middle East.

In a weekend commentary published by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Carter had written: "I think as far as the adverse impact on the nation around the world, this administration has been the worst in history."