



Palestinian refugees sit in a municipal garden in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon after fleeing their refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh yesterday. Scores of Palestinian families fled to safety after two Lebanese soldiers and two Islamist extremists were killed in overnight clashes in Ain al-Hilweh.

Fighting breaks out at 2nd Lebanon camp

AP, Ein el-Hilweh Camp

Violence sparked by a two-week old confrontation between the Lebanese army and al-Qaeda inspired militants spread to a second Palestinian refugee camp in the southern part of the country, killing two soldiers, police said yesterday.

After sporadic clashes Sunday evening, fighting picked up overnight and resumed briefly Monday morning as Islamic militants of the Jund al-Sham group fired rocket propelled grenades at the army on the edge of the southern Ein el-Hilweh camp, the largest of 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The army fired back.

Police said five Lebanese soldiers were wounded in the Ein el-Hilweh clashes. One Jund al-Sham official was wounded and several houses belonging to members of the group were burned by army fire, Lebanese security and Palestinian officials said.

Jund al-Sham, which is based in Ein el-Hilweh, has claimed responsibility or been blamed for a number of bombings and gunbattles, mainly in Lebanon and Syria. Syrian officials have portrayed Jund al-Sham, which is Arabic for Soldiers of historic Syria, as the most active militant group in their country. In Lebanon, the militants are believed to number in the dozens.

About 60 miles to the north along the Mediterranean Sea coast, another militant group, Fatah Islam, continued its 16-day standoff against the army in the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. The sound of gunfire exchanges had tapered by the morning, suggesting the army was conducting pinpoint commando operations inside the camp.

The army brought reinforcements to Nahr el-Bared Monday. Two convoys of a total of 12 armoured cars were spotted heading toward the camp along with five trucks, each

carrying 20 soldiers, and several small military vehicles.

The army has been pounding Fatah Islam positions at Nahr el-Bared since May 20 and has moved tanks and armoured carriers into the camp in a push to crush the militants, who first appeared in Lebanon last fall and are suspected of having links to al-Qaeda.

Many in Lebanon believed the army would be able to quickly crush Fatah Islam inside Nahr el-Bared, but after several days of fierce battles using artillery and tanks, the troops continued to face strong resistance.

The relentless bombardment at Nahr el-Bared, which is located on the outskirts of this port city, has angered Palestinians in some of Lebanon's 11 other refugee camps, a possible recipe for spreading violence.

Back at Ein el-Hilweh, where Jund al-Sham militants are believed to be trying to occupy the army and

take the pressure off their Fatah Islam allies, a member of Asbat al-Ansar, another Islamic group that has refused to join the fight and is mediating an end to the confrontation, was killed in the clashes, the officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not allowed to talk to the media.

Asbat al-Ansar, Arabic for the Partisans' League, is on the US list of terrorist groups.

An official with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' moderate Fatah faction, said Palestinian groups would be meeting to try to ease the tensions at Ein el-Hilweh, blaming Islamic factions for blocking Fatah from going after Jund al-Sham.

"The camp cannot be taken hostage by 40 gangsters," said Col. Abu Walid Ashi, a Fatah spokesman at Ein el-Hilweh, referring to the Jund al-Sham militants.



Paris Hilton checks into prison

AFP, Los Angeles

Celebrity socialite Paris Hilton checked into prison just before midnight on Sunday to begin serving a 23-day sentence for driving with a suspended licence.

An entry at the Los Angeles County Inmate Information Centre said Hilton, 26, heir to her family's hotel fortune, had been processed into the jail system at 11:38 pm (0638 GMT) and given a booking number - 9818783.

She was ordered to serve time behind bars after being pulled over in February for driving with a suspended license while on probation for a previous drunk driving violation.

Russia warns US on missile defence

AP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that Moscow could take "retaliatory steps" if Washington proceeds with plans to build a missile defence system for Europe, including possibly aiming nuclear weapons at targets on the continent.

Speaking to foreign reporters days before he travels to Germany for the annual summit with President Bush

and the other Group of Eight leaders, Putin assailed the White House plan to place a radar system in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in neighbouring Poland. Washington says the system is needed to counter a potential threat from Iran.

In an interview released Monday, Putin suggested that Russia may respond to the threat by aiming its nuclear weapons at Europe.

"If a part of the strategic nuclear

potential of the United States appears in Europe and, in the opinion of our military specialists, will threaten us, then we will have to take appropriate steps in response. What kind of steps? We will have to have new targets in Europe," Putin said, according to a transcript released by the Kremlin. These could be targeted with "ballistic or cruise missiles or maybe a completely new system" he said.

Pakistani militant infiltration on the rise: Indian army

AFP, Srinagar

The Indian army said yesterday it had registered an increase in militant activity along the heavily-militarised Line of Control, despite a pledge by Pakistan to block cross-border insurgents.

The comments came after Indian troops on Monday killed four suspected Islamic militants along the de facto border with Pakistan, in what police said was the sixth infiltration attempt in less than 10 days.

"There has been no let-up in infiltration by militants into our side from across the Line of Control," army spokesman AK Mathur told AFP, asserting that militant training camps were still intact across the border in Pakistan.

"The infiltration this time of the year is bit higher than last year," he said, after troops reported killing a

group of four "heavily-armed" fighters in a fierce gun battle on Monday.

The army says militant attempts to cross the ceasefire line into Indian Kashmir increase in the summer as snow melts on mountain passes.

The level of militant activity this season will be closely watched as a barometer for the state of the slow moving India-Pakistan peace process launched in 2004.

Islamabad denies New Delhi's charges of arming and funding the militants, and has pledged to do its best to stop insurgents in Kashmir.

The divided territory has sparked two of the three wars fought between the neighbours since their independence in 1947.

The insurgency launched against Indian rule in 1989 has claimed more than 42,000 lives by official count.



Delegates attend a conference on 'Islam and Muslims in the World Today' at Lancaster House in central London yesterday. Britain is to boost funding to help train Muslim imams at universities here, to curb reliance on foreign Islamic teachers and to promote moderate Islam, Prime Minister Tony Blair said Monday.

Liberia's Charles Taylor boycotts war crimes trial

AP, The Hague

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor boycotted the opening of his war crimes trial, and his assigned lawyer walked out of the courtroom in a dramatic opening to the landmark first international tribunal of a former African leader.

Karim Khan said Taylor had withdrawn permission to represent him and was applying to act as his own defence attorney. Apologizing and defying threats of contempt of court, Khan gathered his defence files and left the room, ignoring increasingly testy instructions from the judges to sit down.

The court ordered the trial to continue, and Chief Prosecutor Stephen Rapp began his opening statement.

The case was due to adjourn for three weeks after the prosecution's four-hour presentation Monday, and it was unclear who would be sitting on the defence bench when it resumes June 25.

Israeli tanks roll into southern Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli tanks and troops pushed into southern Gaza yesterday in the first such ground operation so deep into the area since a November truce, witnesses and the military said.

Soldiers took over two buildings and military bulldozers ripped open roads during the incursion around the town of Rafah, about two kilometres (just over a mile) inside Palestinian territory, witnesses said.

"Armoured and infantry forces are searching the area for terrorist infrastructure. Several Palestinians have been detained for questioning," an army spokesman told AFP.

It is the first time Israeli tanks have pushed so far into southern Gaza since a November 26 truce took effect, although bulldozers and armoured vehicles have carried out several small operations on the Palestinian side of the border.

Sierra Leone helicopter crash kills 22

AFP, Freetown

A privately-owned passenger helicopter that crashed in Sierra Leone killed at least 22 people, most of them Togolese sporting officials and fans, officials said Monday.

The Paramount Airlines helicopter exploded and caught fire while descending in preparation for landing at the country's main Lungi airport late Sunday and crash landed on the runway.

One person, a Russian pilot survived.

Sierra Leone transport minister Prince Harding told AFP that "an investigation is to be launched, but I am appealing for international support to get it under way."

Iranian arms found in Afghanistan: Gates

AP, Kabul

Iranian weapons have begun flowing into Afghanistan, Defence Secretary Robert Gates said Monday, but he and Afghan President Hamid Karzai agreed involvement by Tehran cannot yet be proved.

Gates told a news conference at the presidential palace that he and Karzai had discussed the Iranian weapons issue.

"There have been indications over the past few months of weapons coming in from Iran," Gates said. "We do not have any information about whether the government of Iran is supporting this, is behind it, or whether it's smuggling, or exactly what's behind it."

The Iranian weapons are being supplied to the Taliban insurgents, he said, adding that some may also

be headed to criminals involved in Afghanistan's drug trade. Gates did not specify what types of weapons were involved.

A Nato spokesman told reporters last week that a powerful type of roadside bomb like those used in Iraq, but never before seen here, was found recently in Kabul. The bomb, known as an EFP, or explosively formed projectile, was notable for its level of sophistication.

Asked separately whether he believed Tehran was behind the flow of weapons, Karzai suggested it was unlikely.

"There's no reason that any of our neighbours should support the Taliban," Karzai said. "We don't have any such evidence so far" regarding possible Iranian government involvement, he said, adding that relations between the two nations were improving.

Man wakes from 19-yr coma in Poland

AP, Warsaw

A railway worker who emerged from a 19-year coma woke to a radically altered Poland and thinks "the world is prettier now" than it was under communism, his wife said Sunday.

Gertruda Grzebska, 63, said that for years she fed her husband Jan carefully with a spoon and moved his body to prevent bed sores.

"For 19 years he did not move or say anything," Grzebska told The Associated Press by phone. "He tried to say things but it couldn't be understood. Sometimes we pretended we understood."

"Now he spends his days sitting in a wheelchair and last weekend we took him out for a walk in his

wheelchair," she said.

"He was so amazed to see the colourful streets, the goods," she said. "He says the world is prettier now" than it was 19 years ago, when Poland was still under communism.

"I could not talk or do anything, now it's much better," Jan Grzebski, 65, told in TVN24 Television in a weak but clear voice, lying in bed at his home in the northern city of Dziedlów.

"I wake up at 7 a.m. and I watch TV," he said, smiling slightly.

Wojciech Pstragowski, a rehabilitation specialist, said Grzebski was shocked at the changes in Poland especially its stores: "He remembered shelves filled with mustard and vinegar only" under communism.



Jan Grzebski is learning to live and to understand the politically altered Poland to which he has awakened after 19 years. With him is his wife, Gertruda.

Pak judges refuse to hear complaints against lawyers

AFP, Islamabad

Two Pakistani judges have quit a panel dealing with a complaint over lawyers who shouted slogans against army rule and the country's judiciary, court officials said yesterday.

Last week, the Supreme Court announced the panel would start hearing petitions against remarks made at a seminar that was attended by suspended chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

President Pervez Musharraf has said the May 26 seminar was "tantamount to humiliating the armed forces and judiciary."

"Justice Faqir Muhammad Khokhar and Justice Saiyed Saeed Ashad have declined to sit on the bench and now a three-member bench will hear the petitions," a Supreme Court spokesman told AFP.

Both judges are also part of a 13-member panel hearing Chaudhry's petition against his March 9 suspension by Musharraf on misconduct charges.