



Investigators search for evidence inside the wreckage of a police bus at the site of a bomb blast in Kabul yesterday. A powerful bomb destroyed the bus in the heart of the Afghan capital yesterday killing more than 35 people.

## US forces kill 10 militants in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

US forces killed 10 militants and detained nearly a dozen more in a series of operations targeting al-Qaeda networks in Iraq yesterday, the military said.

Six militants were killed in the region of Karmah in the western province of Anbar when US forces raided a safe house allegedly used by a Libyan foreign fighter involved in suicide bombings in Iraq, it said.

Three suspects were detained, including one who was wounded in the exchange of fire with the troops, it said.

Another four militants were killed in a raid near Zaydon, also in Anbar, the military said, adding two suspects were arrested.

Troops also found a truck rigged with wires and other car bomb making equipment.

In the northern city of Mosul, a suspected smuggler and four others were captured after reports that the group was involved in bomb attacks.

## India to change law to punish corrupt politicians

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The Indian government has initiated steps to change the anti-corruption law to formally empower the presiding officers of parliament and state Assemblies to grant sanction to prosecute MPs and MLAs for graft.

According to a tentative proposal initiated by the ministry of personnel under the Prime Minister's Office, the Lok Sabha speaker and Rajya Sabha chairperson would be the designated authorities to give the necessary sanction in the case of MPs.

Similarly, in cases of corruption involving members of legislative Assemblies and councils in states, the presiding officers of the states' houses would have the power to allow the politicians to be prosecuted.

Sources in the ministry of personnel said they hoped the bill would get cabinet approval in time to be introduced in parliament

Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, was cleared last month by a Group of Ministers, headed by Home Minister Shivraj Patil. It comprised Law Minister HR Bhardwaj and Minister of State for Personnel Suresh Pachauri.

Later, it was sent to the Legislative Department in the law ministry to draft a cabinet note and a bill to amend Section 19 of the act, which provides that an investigative agency has to secure prior sanction from the appropriate authority to prosecute corrupt public servants.

Section 19 would be amended to empower the presiding officers of parliament and state legislatures with the authority to grant the necessary sanction.

Sources in the ministry of personnel said they hoped the bill would get cabinet approval in time to be introduced in parliament

## Flash floods leave 22 dead in Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

Flash flooding caused by torrential rain and thunderstorms struck several villages in mountainous northwestern Pakistan, leaving at least 22 people dead, a senior government official said yesterday.

Some 120 homes have been washed away in the flooding that hit seven villages Saturday in Swat, a hill resort district in North West Frontier Province, about 190km northwest of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, said Qari Mahmood, the province's minister for agriculture and livestock.

At least 20 people, many of them children, died in the village of Bedara and another two people were killed in the nearby Barinjal village. Many of the victims were crushed to death when their homes collapsed in the rain and floods, Mahmood said.

More than 100 homes have been destroyed and 300 more were partially damaged in the seven affected villages. Police and paramilitary troops have been deployed to the villages to remove debris and distribute tents, medicines and food, he said.

## Gazans rush to stock up on supplies

AFP, Gaza City

Queues are snaking outside bakeries and supermarkets in Gaza as frantic residents stock up on supplies amid fears their overcrowded land will remain sealed off from the world in the wake of an Islamist takeover.

Israel closed off the tiny coastal strip and its 1.5 million residents after it was overrun by fighters from Hamas, a movement sworn to the destruction of the Jewish state.

With the territory completely dependent on imports for food, fuel and supplies, its residents are now flooding to stores and gas stations amid rumours that supplies will soon run out.

"More and more people are coming, buying everything to store in their house," said Samir Nasser, the owner of a small supermarket in western Gaza City. "They are afraid of a prolonged Israeli closure."

"For the moment we have fuel, but we don't know if this fuel will last for several days," said Mahmud, who works at a petrol station in Gaza City. "The people are afraid that with an extended Israeli closure, it will run out."

And Israeli army radio reported on Sunday that the country had deliveries of fuel to Gaza.

The new rulers of Gaza have sought to play down rumours of dwindling food supplies, branding them "propaganda," but admitted that a continued closure of the territory by Israel was dangerous.

"Israel can't keep its closure of the crossings for a long time," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told AFP. "It's very dangerous if they keep doing so and we will not remain silent," he said, declining to say what steps the radical Islamists would take.

While some Gazans stocked up on supplies, others sought to flee the impoverished territory already

reeling from an economic aid boycott where 80 percent of the population depends on it.

About 500 Palestinians, mostly women, children and the elderly, were gathered on Sunday at the main Erez border crossing with Israel, sitting on suitcases in the baking sun without food or water, witnesses said.

When one of them approached too close to the Israeli side of the crossing, an Israeli soldier warned them over a loudspeaker "Stay Away."

The previous day Israeli soldiers fired in the air to keep people away.

About 700 metres (yards) away from the crossing, fighters from Hamas' armed wing had set up a checkpoint, turning away anyone else who tries to set up shop at the crossing, sending them back into Gaza where residents fear for their future.

## Abbas outlaws Hamas armed forces

### Israeli troops enter northern Gaza

AFP, Ramallah/ Jerusalem

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas yesterday outlawed Hamas's armed wing and paramilitary force following the Islamists' takeover of Gaza, his office said.

"The executive force and Hamas militias are declared outside the law for having carried out an armed rebellion against Palestinian legitimacy and its institutions," Abbas ordered in a decree released by his office.

"Anyons whose ties with these groups are proven will be punished in accordance with the law under the state of emergency," it said.

Abbas sacked the Hamas-led government and declared a state of emergency in Gaza and the West Bank late on Thursday, after Hamas fighters routed forces under his command in the impoverished Gaza Strip.

In Gaza, a spokesman for the Hamas-run executive force brushed aside the decree.

"We reject this decision," said Islam Shahwan. "It reflects the precipitate manner in which Palestinian officials in Ramallah are acting."

Meanwhile, Israeli army units took up positions in northern Gaza on Sunday after it was overrun by the Islamist movement Hamas, Deputy Defence Minister Ephraim Sneh told public radio.

"These are activities of a preventive character, for the moment we are not going on the offensive in the Gaza Strip," he said.

The troops were positioned in the north of the territory near its border with Israel, on the sites of two former Jewish settlements that were dismantled in 2005, he said.

"There are sectors where it's better that it is us who is present rather than others," he said, referring to Hamas, whose charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.



Palestinians leave Gaza Strip through the Erez border crossing with Israel yesterday. About 500 Palestinians, mostly women, children and the elderly, were gathered Sunday at the main Erez border, sitting on suitcases in the baking sun without food or water, witnesses said. Queues are snaking outside bakeries and supermarkets in Gaza as frantic residents stock up on supplies amid fears their overcrowded land will remain sealed off from the world in the wake of an Islamist takeover.



PHOTO: AFP

Socialist candidate Michele Delaunay running against Alain Juppe, minister of environment, sustainable development and regional development and Bordeaux' mayor for the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) in the French parliamentary election, casts her vote at a polling station yesterday in Bordeaux, southwestern France.

## Sarkozy set for big mandate as France starts voting

AFP, Paris

French President Nicolas Sarkozy looked set to win a sweeping mandate for his ambitious programme of reforms yesterday, as the French went back to the polls to elect a new National Assembly, the lower chamber of parliament.

In the second round of the country's legislative elections, some 35 million registered voters began choosing deputies in the 467 constituencies where there was no winner in the first round a week ago.

Opinion polls are unanimous in predicting Sarkozy's centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) a big victory over the Socialist Party (PS), and the only doubt is likely to be over the extent of its majority in the new Assembly.

Both parties urged voters to turn in force in order to bring down the record abstention rate – 39.6 percent – of June 10. If it's France's fourth national vote in less than two months, and the country is showing clear signs of election weariness.

Elected on May 6 over the Socialist Segolene Royal, Sarkozy wants a large majority in the legislature in order to maintain the political momentum behind his promised

reforms.

He has pledged to summon a special session of the National Assembly in July in order to push through the first stage of his programme, which will include key changes to the tax system meant to encourage the French to work harder.

Demoralised and deeply divided over Royal's defeat, the PS seems resigned to another five years in opposition and its campaign has focussed mainly on warning against a too large UMP majority.

Opinion polls suggested the UMP and its ally the New Centre will win between 405 and 435 seats in the 577 member Assembly, with the PS getting at most 170. Of the 110 seats decided in round one, all but one were for the UMP or its allies.

As the UMP already controls the legislature, it would be the first time since 1978 that a ruling party has retained its majority – a sure sign that Sarkozy's claim to represent a "clean break" from the past is widely accepted.

## Myanmar slams US report on human trafficking

AFP, Yangon

Military-run Myanmar yesterday denounced the US annual report on human trafficking, which blacklisted the country as one of the world's worst offenders for the seventh year, state-run media reported.

The US State Department's annual "Trafficking in Persons Report" released last week listed Myanmar in Tier 3, meaning it is one of the worst offenders along with 15 other nations including North Korea, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

"Although the stated aim of the US is to eradicate trafficking in persons, internationally, the report lacks objectivity," the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said, quoting a statement from the foreign ministry.

Local officials and Communist Party members were implicated in a slave trade scandal that has stunned a nation accustomed to

## Chinese police bust kidnap gangs, free 568 slaves

AFP, Beijing

Police have detained 168 people linked to a human trafficking network supplying slave labour to mines and brick works in northern and central China, state media reported yesterday.

At total of 568 people including children and the mentally handicapped were freed from slavery in brick kilns and illegal mines over the past few days in thousands of sites in northern Shanxi and central Henan provinces, Xinhua news agency reported.

Local officials and Communist Party members were implicated in a slave trade scandal that has stunned a nation accustomed to

reports of appalling worker exploitation linked to China's rapid economic growth.

A total of 351 people – including 22 children – were freed from 3,700 brick works and coal mines in Shanxi while 217 – including 29 children and 10 mentally handicapped people – were released in Henan, Xinhua said.

Police said that they had broken up five human trafficking gangs in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province, and arrested 13 members accused of supplying slave labour, Xinhua reported.

A total of 48 people linked to the scandal were detained in Shanxi, while 120 were being held in Henan, the news agency added.

## 'Lanka facing attacks, int'l isolation'

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has vowed to wage more attacks against Tamil rebels but analysts warn it faces the prospect of devastating retaliation and risks international isolation over rising rights abuses.

State-run media said last week that Tamil Tiger rebels were preparing for attacks on the capital's harbour, oil storage complex and electricity supply in response to government attacks in the north and east.

Both sides suffered heavy losses earlier this month when the army advanced into rebel-held territory but was beaten back by a major counter-attack.

"The territory captured in the northern theatre after months of operations was lost in a single day when the Tigers hit back," defence analyst Namal Perera said. "The signs are that we are headed for a prolonged stalemate."

The war is already affecting areas like tourism and aid flows as the economy slowed sharply in the first quarter, growing 6.1 percent compared to 7.9 percent in the same period last year while inflation averaged 19.7 percent, compared to 7.2 percent for the same quarter last year.

Britain and Germany have withdrawn some aid to the country although key Japanese envoy Yasushi Akashi said this month that further aid cuts would be counter-productive to efforts to resume peace talks.

The Tigers are already banned as a terrorist group in the United States, EU, and Canada and strong

efforts have been made to stop them raising funds from the diaspora in those countries.

Despite international pressure, both sides have hardened their positions on peace talks and vowed intensified efforts to carry on the bitter ethnic conflict, which has claimed 60,000 lives in the past 35 years.

The result is expected to be a wave of violence, said Sunanda Deshpriya, director of the private Centre for Policy Alternatives think-tank.

"We will see more violence," Deshpriya said. "There is no mood in the country to compromise and resume talks."

Top defence officials have said they will need about two to three years to subdue the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led by elusive leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and force them to talk, an outcome the rebels say is impossible.

## 'US needs to make changes in N-deal'

PTI, Mumbai

Senior nuclear scientists say unless the US makes substantial changes in its civil nuclear deal with India, back and forth negotiations on the bilateral 123 agreement to implement the deal are meaningless.

The tough terms and conditions for the civilian nuclear engagement with India as laid out in the Henry Hyde Act passed by US Congress in December 2006 and intent of the July 18, 2005 statement are at complete divergence with each other and so it is important to resolve it soon, they say.

Most of the senior scientists did not want to be quoted barring two former chairmen Atomic Energy Commission M R Srinivasan and P K Iyer.

Srinivasan, Atomic Energy Commission member, said now "it is the US which has to find a way to resolve the issue as the 123 agreement is only the operational arm of Henry Hyde Act". Asked about Prime Minister