## INTERNATIONAL



Palestinian medical workers wheel a wounded woman into a hospital at Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel pressed its assault against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip with a surge of strikes Saturday, killing at least 35 Palestinians including four children.

### The gardens of the devil, Musharraf won't step down still sowing death

The foundation of their lives remains the war that was fought before they were born

ROBERT FISK, The Independent

The first time I saw one, my first instinct was to pick it up. It shone in the sunlight, bright green, something new and fresh amid the dry grass of the south Lebanon hills. The little cluster bomblet seemed to have been made to hold in the hand. No wonder the little children died.

Israel rained more than a million bomblets into the orchards and fields of southern Lebanon in 2006 after the ceasefire to the 34day Israel-Hizbollah conflict had been announced. So far, post-war, they have killed more than 40 men, women and children. Some of the mine disposal men and women who turned up in Lebanon found that the cluster bombs had themselves been dropped on minefields left behind by the Israelis in 2000.

And these minefields, in somecases, had been laid over old Palestinian minefields. And some of these minefields and here the 20th century's most titanic war threatens us yet again had been inadvertently placed over carpets of mines dug into Lebanon's red earth by French Vichy forces in 1941, as they awaited British and Free French invasion from Palestine.

turns out to be the foundation for so many of the Middle East's present-day horrors. In Tripoli, they publish a "White Book" on Libya's legacy from the 1939-45 war, the tens of thousands of mines buried in the sands around Tobruk and tion. Benghazi by the Italians and Germans, the British and the Australians and New Zealanders and South Africans.

"The Italians lay mines," says the caption beneath a photograph of Berti's engineers placing landmines in the desert. "The British lay more mines. The Germans lay more and more mines. Then they leave but the mines are still there!"

Twenty years after the war riesitwould awake. when at least 800 Libyan farmers and family members had already been blown up by mines an Italian journalist was describing the continuing carnage during mine-

These mines are so sensitive that a light footstep is enough to make them jump into the air like a grasshopper all we found of the two men were a few rags of flesh and clothing."

Egypt calls its own Second World War minefields "the Gardens the Libyan border. Add to these the Sinai and the surrounding area after 1967 and you have a good the sands remain.

As the Egyptian Mail pointed out last month, we in the West remember the dead of Alamein every year. But who remembers the dead of Egypt? And just for the our own way towards the beach, record, although the British and which we did largely by following Italians and Germans have all the noise made by the Navy's guns forwarded their ancient minefield and the shells screeching over our As usual, the Second World War maps to the Egyptians and heads, and the noise of the Stuka although the Egyptian army bombers attacking the beaches. cleared 2,976 mines between 1983 When we did finally find our way and 1999 there remain about 17.6 on to the beach and came over the million landmines beneath the sandhills to see the scene, most of Egyptian coastal strip, according to the country's clearance organisa-

> Since 1982 alone, 700 Egyptians have been killed by them and another 7,600 wounded. And while Atonement a few weeks ago with shot of the 1940 Dunkirk evacuadestruction of Balham Tube station I little realised how many memo-



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A medical worker evacuates a family after their house was hit by an Israeli air raid in Jabaliya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel pressed its assault against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip with a series of strikes Saturday, killing at least 35 Palestinians, including four children.

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A lady from Scotland wrote to tell

me how as a child during the Blitz she "regularly slept down the Underground Imissed the landmine which dropped in the Balham High Street, the resultant flood drowned many people (including Cecilia in Atonement). I recall the Tube station being closed for a long time to clean (out) the bodies. I also remember seeing the tide mark high on the wall afterwards"

More dramatic was a letter from 90-year-old former Second of the Devil", and they run from El Lieutenant Hal Crookall, a Dunkirk Alamein to Mersa Matruh, east of veteran in the East Yorkshire Regiment. In my article, I noted vast minefields laid by Egyptian how the first sight of the Dunkirk and Israeli forces in the eastern beaches in the film provoked my deserts in 1948, 1956, 1967 and cry of "Fuck me!" and how these 1973 the Israelis have maps of 5.5 were the first words to be uttered by million landmines they planted in a young corporal in the movie a few seconds later. So imagine my shock and the smile that spread over my idea how deadly, how poisonous face when I read the following words from Crookall.

"Most of the men from my platoon were dockers from Hull We had been left behind to fight rearguardactions, and had to make my chaps said in broad Yorkshire: 'Fooking 'ell!' which in some cases was abbreviated to 'King-ell!'."

In 1943, Second Lieutenant Crookall was wounded in of all places the Libyan desert. Not by a they die, our survivors grow older. mine he and his soldiers placed When I wrote about the film sandbags in the bottom of their Bren carrier to prevent the mine its graphic five minute tracking blasts hurting them but by a German shell splinter which penetion beaches, and the landmine trated the vehicle's 3/8 inch plating and smashed into Crookall's arm He was invalided out of his infantry division, posted around the Middle East and ended up in Damascus.

"My wound practically finished me off as a violinist," he told me this week. "But I was in Damascus when Josephine Baker arrived to give a concert to the Free French and she asked me to accompany her. Then I played again." After the war, Crookall returned many times to the Middle East, a guest of Ali Ayoubi, the son of a Syrian president, he says I think he would have been the son of the Syrian prime minister. "My father had two bodyguards," Crookall remembers Ali telling him. "(President) Assad has about 10,000!" In Libya and in Egypt, of course, the people of the desert have no bodyguards. The foundation of their lives remains the war that was fought before they were born andwhich is still killing and maiming them, just as it maimed Second Lieutenant Crookall 65 years ago. I suppose the moral can only be expressed in a cliché. In the Middle East, the Second World War has not ended.

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# Analysts question US role in Turkey's Iraq pullout

AFP, Ankara

Turkey's top general said the withdrawal of troops from northern Iraq was not based on political concerns, but analysts on Saturday questioned whether US pressure had accelerated the end of a ground offensive against Kurdish rebels.

In a decision that surprised many, the Turkish army on Friday announced that it had ended a week-long operation to hunt Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels in the autonomous north of Iraq, pulling its forces out in the early hours of the day.

The withdrawal came a day after US President George W. Bush urged Turkey to end the incursion "as quickly as possible" and visiting US Defence Secretary Robert Gates personally put pressure on Turkish leaders during talks in Ankara.

"What happened at the last minute?" asked the popular Aksam daily, recalling Ankara's refusal to

set a timetable for a pull-out and assertions to Gates that Turkish forces would stay in Iraq as long as necessary.

"Bush told us to leave and we did. One could not vacate his hotel room so quickly, in such panic," commentator Yilmaz Ozdil wrote in the mass-circulation Hurriyet daily.

The popular Vatan newspaper went so far as to call the withdrawal "degrading" in its editorial.

In an interview published in the popular Milliyet daily, the head of the Turkish general staff denied the "unfair" criticism. He said the withdrawal had begun long before Gates's visit, but had not been announced for tactical

"This was a decision taken on military reasons altogether. There was not even a hint from politicians or foreigners to withdraw," General Yasar Buyukanit said.

"One third of our forces were inside Turkey on Wednesday, but it

would have been murder to announce the withdrawal then.

"When you say your forces are withdrawing, it amounts to telling terrorists to set up an ambush. That would be an enormous mistake,"

But many here remain unconvinced.

Sceptics noted that a first text of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's monthly television address, distributed Friday but embargoed until the evening, said the operation was continuing even after Baghdad had confirmed the

A few hours later, his office distributed a second text of the speech that mentioned the withdrawal.

The abrupt end to the operation is a major setbak for the government and the army that could have consequences in its struggle against the PKK, which has waged a 23-year bloody separatist campaign, Vatan claimed.

# or reinstate deposed judges

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

President Musharraf's spokesman on Friday denied media reports that he was ready to reinstate the deposed judges including Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary. Spokesman Maj Gen (retired) Rashid Qureshi said there was "no question" of reinstating.

Chaudhary and several other deposed judges were hearing petitions challenging Musharraf's re-election in uniform when the President proclaimed emergency last year and sacked them.

· The new Supreme Court comprising Musharraf's handpicked judges, who also validated his reelection, later dismissed the cases.

Earlier local media reports said Musharraf conveyed a message to PPP chief Asif Ali Zardari saying he would allow the judges to be reinstated. But Qureshi denied that any such message had been sent to the PPP on behalf of the President. "The President's position is very clear he would not restore the judges," Qureshi said.

According to media reports, the message also said Musharraf would appoint service chiefs and give up his powers to dissolve Parliament on the condition that he should not be impeached.

However, Qureshi's denial considering resigning.

appeared to scotch speculation of Musharraf reaching out to his adversaries.

prevailing political situation and had not sent his close aides to any party for a 'power-sharing deal, the spokesman said. PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif

"The President is 'neutral' in the

whose party is set to form government with the PPP, has been insisting on Musharraf's resignation following the defeat of the President's supporters in the polls.

Musharraf has, however, ruled out the possibility of stepping down. Qureshi denied all media reports saying Musharraf was

#### 2 killed in Pak China, US to push on with security talks bombing

AFP, Shanghai

China and the United States have agreed to deepen a dialogue on nuclear and Asian security issues following the end of high-level talks in Beijing this week, the US defence department said yesterday.

The discussions were part of ongoing Sino-US defence consultations aimed at increasing mutual understanding and avoiding miscalculation between the two powers, said David Sedney, deputy assistant secretary of defence for EastAsia.

policy) and we expect to be moving forward with that dialogue very shortly," Sedney said at a press briefing in Shanghai.

"We also had an in-depth exchange of each other's views of Asian security issues -- that will lay the basis for us continuing that kind of discussion that we both agree is very important."

The talks were followed by a signing on Friday of two agreements announced earlier this week between the countries.

The first gives Washington access to Beijing's military archives "We had very positive discus- to search for missing servicemen sions on that (nuclear strategy and from conflicts since World War II.

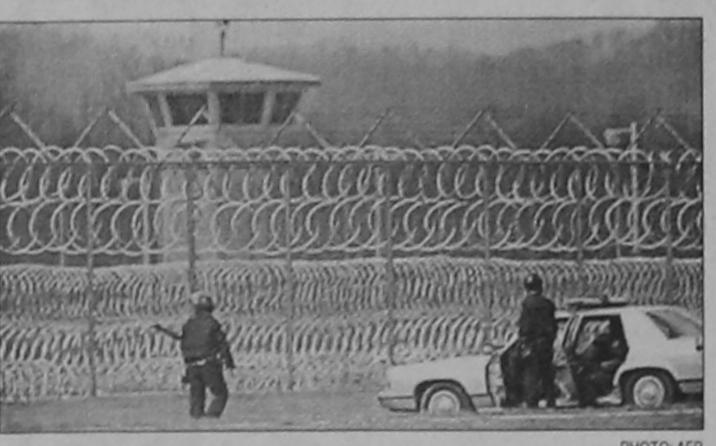
### tribal area suicide

AFP, Khar

Two people were killed and 21 others injured when a suicide bomber rammed his explosivefilled car into a security personnel vehicle in a restive Pakistani tribal area bordering Afghanistan, officials said.

The attack took place outside Jar village, near Khar, the main town of lawless Bajaur tribal district, where suspected pro-Taliban militants regularly attack security forces.

"A civilian and security official died and 21 others, including eight Levis (tribal police) personnel were injured in the suicide blast, local government officia Mohammad Iqbal Khan told AFP.



Police officers patrol the outer perimeter of a prison in the US. More than one in 100 adults are now behind bars in the United States, home to the world's largest penal population, with a startling one in nine young black men incarcerated, a study has shown.

### One in 100 US adults stays behind bars

AFP, Washington

More than one in 100 adults are now behind bars in the United States, home to the world's largest penal population, with a startling one in nine young black men incarcerated, a study has

The prison and jail population rose by 25,000 to 2.3 million last year, out of a US adult population of 230 million, bringing the incarceration rate to one in 99.1 for the first time in US history, the Pew Centre on the States said.

population of one billion people,

was second in the world with 1.5 million inmates, followed by Russia with 890,000 people in the slammer, the study said.

America also has the dubious distinction of leading the planet in the rate of incarceration, which is higher than nations like South Africa and Iran, the study said.

By comparison, in Germany, 93 people are in prison for every 100,000 people, including minors, the Washington-based independent research group said. The rate is about eight time By comparison, China, with a higher in the United States: 750 per 100,000.

#### Dogs, robots cheer elderly

Dogs may have a hard time wrapping their paws around this one: Robotic competition is nipping at their heels in the man's-bestfriend department. A study by Saint Louis University found that a lovable pooch named Sparky and a robotic dog, AIBO, were about building a home-assistance robot equally effective at relieving the loneliness of nursing home residents and fostering attachments.

The study, which appears in the March issue of the Journal of The American Medical Directors Association, builds on previous findings by the researchers that frequent dog visits decreased loneliness of nursing home residents.

Andrew Ng, who leads Stanford University's team in and was not involved in the study, said the strength of the research is very encouraging.



Marian Banks sits with her dog, Sparky, at her home in a 2006 file photo in St. Louis. Sparky was part of a study by Saint Louis University that found the lovable pooch and the interactive dog robot, AIBO, were about equally effective at relieving the loneliness of nursing home residents, and fostering attachments.

#### Point-based immigration system comes into effect in UK

PTI, London

Employers knowingly engaging illegal migrants in the UK will face tougher penalties, including a fine upto 10,000 pounds per worker or jail up to two years under a new points-based immigration system which became be tested for highly skilled effective today.

an unlimited fine or jail, an official said.

The British government has earlier put up a fine of 5,000 pounds for firms hiring illegal immigrants in the country.

described the new laws for peocontrols at the borders and the the UK.

introduction of ID cards for foreign nationals".

According to the new regulations, highly skilled migrants who wish to extend their stay in the Britain will have to have suitable employment. The points-based system will

migrants from India applying to The penalty could be raised to work in the UK from April and would be extended to the rest of the world by the summer. The new system will then be

extended to other categories, including skilled workers with a job offer, the low-skilled, stu-Home Secretary Jacqui Smith dents and temporary workers.

Indians and Bangladeshis ple from outside the European running hotels and food chains in Union as "the biggest changes to Britain will find it difficult to get British immigration policy in a low-skilled workers from the subgeneration, which includes a continent under the new law and new deal for those migrants they will have to hire migrants seeking citizenship here, a new from Eastern Europe. There are UK border agency to strengthen over 10,000 Indian restaurants in

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### Thaksin's PR blitz

Shinawatra continued to hog the homecoming Friday.

appearance at a soccer clinic in ters. favour of beef noodle soup with his family in his hotel suite was Samaksnappedatthereporter. reported by a breathless media.

Chulalongkorn hospital in a bullet-Suvaddhana Mahathera - the most senior monk in the Buddhist clergy.

which was not put to rest by Prime Even the cancellation of an country now had two prime minis-"I am the real prime minister!"

there are two prime ministers? I am proof car to visit ailing supreme no one's nominee," he said as he patriarch Nyanasamvara left his office for his first official visit as premier to Laos.

The attention the billionaire has repeatedly that he will not return to grabbed by returning in apparent politics, few seem willing to take triumph after being forced from this at face value.

#### THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN, Bangkok power by the military in an overnight coup in September 2006 has Former Thai premier Thaksin spawned feverish speculation

limelight on the second day of his Minister Samak Sundaravej's testy answer yesterday when asked if the

"Is that all you can think of? How Thaksin arrived at shameful. How can you say that

While Thaksin has sworn