



PHOTO: AFP
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, 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 34-day 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 some cases, 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.

As usual, the Second World War 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 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 Bert'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!"



PHOTO: AFP
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.

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 reasons.

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

But many here remain unconvinced.

Skeptics 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 pullout.

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 setback 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.

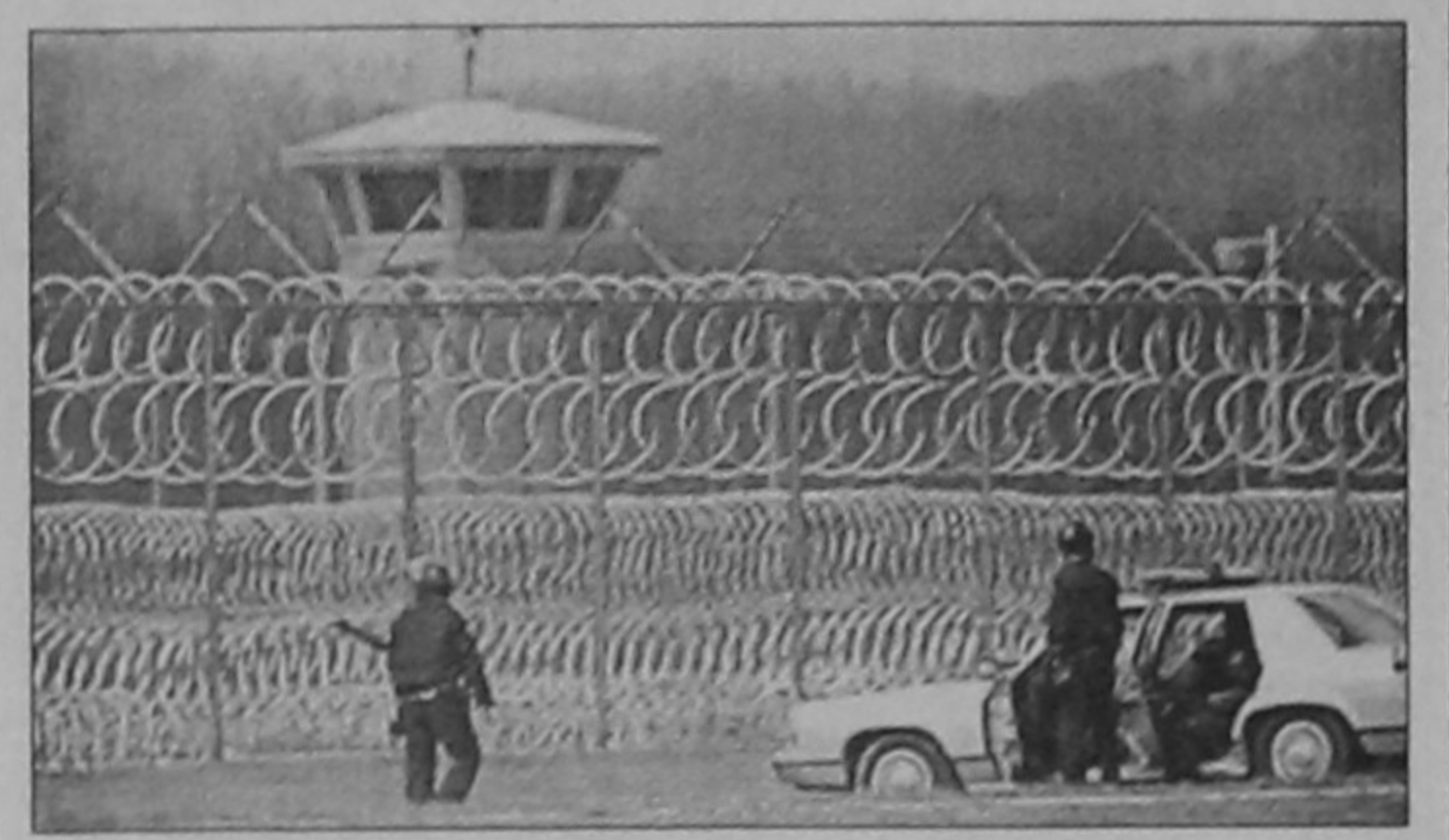


PHOTO: AFP
Police officers patrol the outer perimeter of a prison in the US. More than one in 100 adults are now behind bars in the United States, home to the world's largest penal population, with a startling one in nine young black men incarcerated, a study has shown.

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 shown.

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.

By comparison, China, with a 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 times higher in the United States: 750 per 100,000.

Musharraf won't step down 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 re-election, 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

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

"The President is 'neutral' in the 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, 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 considering resigning.

China, US to push on with security talks

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 East Asia.

"We had very positive discussions on that (nuclear strategy and

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 to search for missing servicemen from conflicts since World War II.

2 killed in Pak tribal area suicide bombing

AFP, Khar

Two people were killed and 21 others injured when a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-filled 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 official Mohammad Iqbal Khan told AFP.



PHOTO: AP
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 up to 10,000 pounds per worker or jail up to two years under a new points-based immigration system which became effective today.

The penalty could be raised to 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.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith described the new laws for people from outside the European Union as "the biggest changes to British immigration policy in a generation, which includes a new deal for those migrants seeking citizenship here, a new UK border agency to strengthen controls at the borders and the

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 be tested for highly skilled migrants from India applying 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, students and temporary workers.

Indians and Bangladeshis running hotels and food chains in Britain will find it difficult to get low-skilled workers from the sub-continent under the new law and they will have to hire migrants from Eastern Europe. There are over 10,000 Indian restaurants in the UK.

Thaksin's PR blitz

THE STRAITS TIMES/ANN, Bangkok

Former Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra continued to hog the limelight on the second day of his homecoming Friday.

Even the cancellation of an appearance at a soccer clinic in favour of beef noodle soup with his family in his hotel suite was reported by a breathless media.

Thaksin arrived at Chulalongkorn hospital in a bullet-proof car to visit ailing supreme patriarch Nyanasamvara Suvaddhana Mahathera - the most senior monk in the Buddhist clergy.

The attention the billionaire has grabbed by returning in apparent triumph after being forced from

power by the military in an overnight coup in September 2006 has spawned feverish speculation which was not put to rest by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's testy answer yesterday when asked if the country now had two prime ministers.

"I am the real prime minister!" Samak snapped at the reporter.

"Is that all you can think of? How shameful. How can you say that there are two prime ministers? I am no one's nominee," he said as he left his office for his first official visit as premier to Laos.

While Thaksin has sworn repeatedly that he will not return to politics, few seem willing to take this as a face value.

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