

# Russia faces pressure for full Georgia pullout

## Fuel train hits mine and exploded near Gori

AFP, Tbilisi

A fuel train hit a mine and exploded near the stricken Georgian city of Gori yesterday as Russia faced renewed European Union pressure to make a complete withdrawal from Georgia.

The Georgian Interior Ministry said the rail track used by the train had been mined and a huge pall of black smoke could be seen across the Gori region after the huge explosion.

"The railway was mined and that was the reason for the explosion," Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utashvili told AFP.

The blast was the latest fallout from the five day conflict between Russia, where its troops held a strategic port, and the Georgian army.

Russia withdrew tanks, artillery and hundreds of troops from the heart of Georgia on Friday, saying it had fulfilled all obligations under a French-brokered peace agreement.

But Russian troops still control access to the western port of Poti and have established a checkpoint just north of Gori.

Acting as chair of the European Union, French President Nicolas Sarkozy telephoned his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev on Saturday and asked him to withdraw his forces from a key road linking Poti to Senaki in western Georgia.

Sarkozy and Medvedev agreed on the need for an "international mechanism" in the area south of South Ossetia, a statement from Sarkozy's office said.

The Kremlin said it was ready to cooperate with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor a buffer zone near South Ossetia, where fighting broke out this month.

But it added that international monitors would not replace Russian troops as a statement from the French presidency asserted.

"During the telephone conversation between the Russian and

French presidents, there was no discussion about replacing Russian peacekeeping troops by an OSCE mission in the buffer zone," said a Kremlin spokesman.

The West sees the presence of OSCE monitors as critical to ensuring the success of the ceasefire.

The vague six-point peace plan has been interpreted differently by Russia and the West, with Russian claiming it has the right to leave peacekeepers deep inside Georgia.

France, Britain, the United States, Nato and other Western powers have demanded Russia pull back further but this has been rejected by Russia.

Georgian National Security Council secretary Alexander Lomaia told AFP however that he expected the Russians to withdraw from near Poti on Sunday.

"There were no changes in the position of Russian peacekeepers overnight but we are expecting that they will withdraw from Poti today," he said.

Russian troops poured into

Georgia on August 8 to repel a Georgian attempt to regain control of the breakaway region of South Ossetia, which is backed by Moscow.

After smashing Georgia's small US-trained army, Russian troops fanned out through Abkhazia, another pro-Moscow breakaway region in the west, and pushed far into Georgian territory.

On Saturday, Russian soldiers backed up by four tanks were still on a bridge on the road heading from Poti to the city of Senaki further east and Batumi to the south, an AFP correspondent reported.

Some 500 Georgians expressed outrage over the continued presence of Russian troops in Poti, going up to the post waving Georgian flags and shouting "Russians go home!"

Two Russian armoured vehicles and lorries on Saturday controlled a checkpoint in the village of Karaleti outside Gori on the main road to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali.



A Georgian fireman walks on the scene of a fuel tanker explosion yesterday in Gori. A train carrying fuel exploded on Sunday in a former military base near the Georgian city of Gori after hitting a mine on the railway track.

PHOTO: AFP

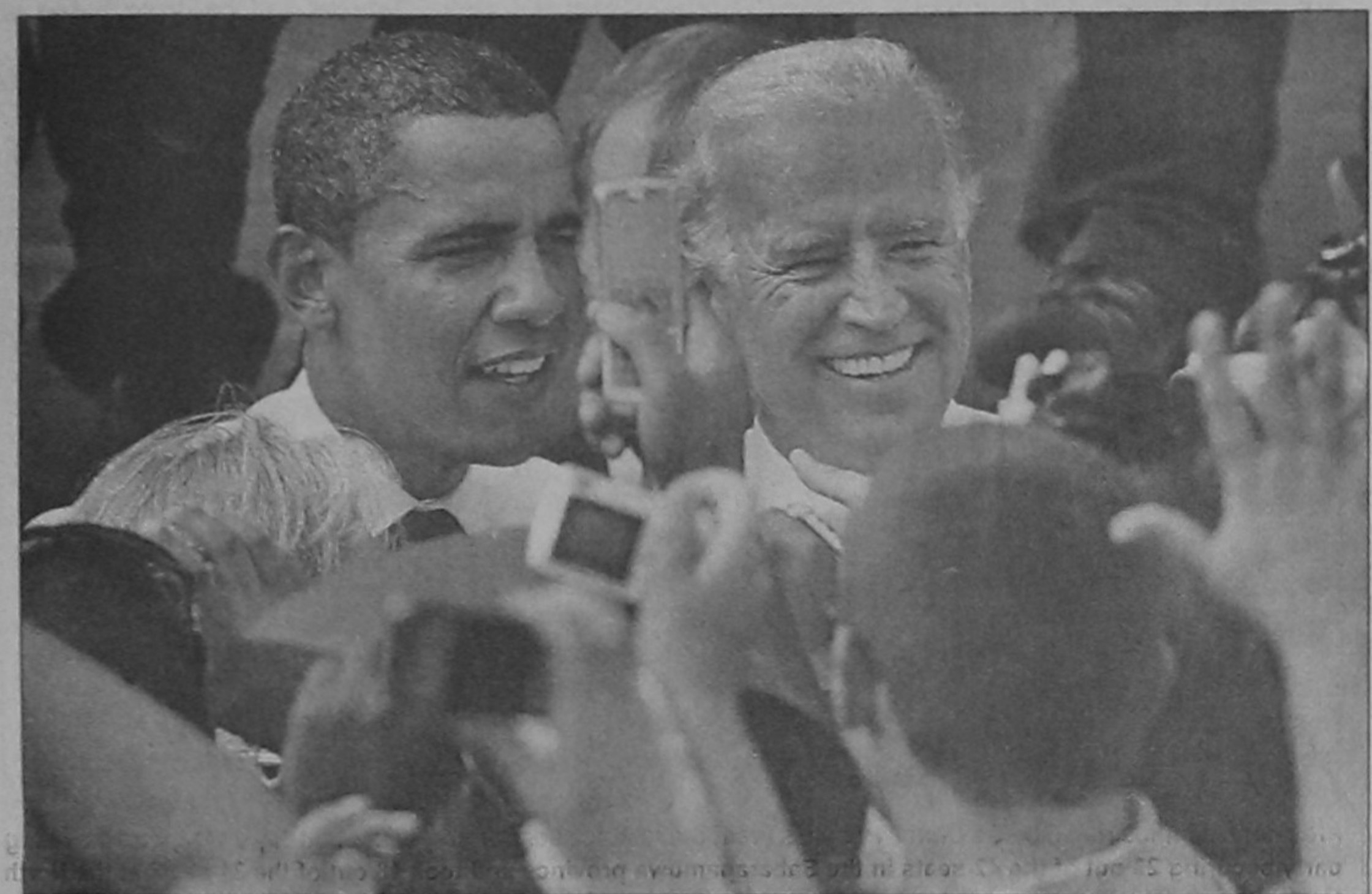


PHOTO: AFP

Presumptive Democratic presidential candidate US Senator Barack Obama and US Senator Joseph Biden pose for a picture as they greet people gathered for a rally on the lawn of the Old State Capital on Saturday in Springfield, Illinois.

## Hillary backers split over Biden as VP choice

AP, Denver

Hillary Rodham Clinton's supporters had mixed reactions Saturday to the selection of Joe Biden as the Democrats' vice presidential candidate.

Some realised a long time ago that Barack Obama, the party's presumptive nominee for president, was not going to pick Clinton as his running mate. Others held out hope until they awoke to the announcement Saturday morning.

Susan Castner, a Clinton delegate from Portland, Ore., said she sees some of Clinton's qualities in Biden. She likes his experience, especially on foreign policy.

"It really kind of humanizes Barack Obama," Castner said. "He has this air of perfection, and Joe Biden is more down to earth."

"I love his passion," Castner said of Biden. "I like him a lot."

Obama announced Saturday that Biden, a senator from Delaware for the past 36 years,

would be his running mate, passing over Clinton, Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine and Indiana Sen. Evan Bayh.

Clinton issued a statement Saturday praising Obama's decision and calling Biden "an exceptionally strong, experienced leader and devoted public servant."

Some of her supporters were less charitable.

"It's a total diss to Sen. Clinton, in my opinion," said Diane Mantouvalos, co-founder of the Just Say No Deal Coalition. "It just speaks volumes about how Barack Obama doesn't stand for anything."

Mantouvalos, of Miami, is part of an Internet movement of Clinton supporters who refuse to back Obama, regardless of pleas from Clinton herself. Mantouvalos is in Denver, where the Democratic National Convention is scheduled to start Monday, stoking anti-Obama sentiment.

## Naxals attack Orissa ashram: 5 VHP leaders killed

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

In a Naxal attack in the communally sensitive Kandhamal district in Orissa, 30 armed Naxals ambushed the Ban Basi Kalyan ashram for girls when Janmashtami celebrations were taking place on Saturday evening killing six people.

The Naxals threw grenades and opened indiscriminate firing at the ashram.

All the dead were prominent VHP leaders including senior leader and ashram chief, Lashmananda Saraswati, Arupnanda, Chinmayananda and Mata Bhaktimayee.

Lashmananda Saraswati had received a letter threatening him on Saturday morning, asking him to stop religious activities at the ashram.

## UN envoy's Myanmar visit was a 'waste of time', says NLD

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's opposition party led by Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday labelled a recent visit by a UN envoy "a waste of time" as the ruling junta continued to trumpet its own vision of democracy.

Ibrahim Gambari, the United Nations' most senior negotiator with Myanmar, left the country Saturday after failing to secure a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, who is kept under house arrest by the ruling generals.

The junta said that the Nobel peace prize winner had refused to see Gambari, and on Sunday printed pictures in its New Light of Myanmar newspaper of his entourage waiting in vain outside her lakeside home in Yangon.

Nyan Win, a spokesman for the opposition National League for

Democracy (NLD) party, said he did not know why their leader was unable to meet Gambari, but said no key demands of the democracy movement had been resolved.

"I have read reports in the newspaper that the authorities did not reply to the two aims of Mr. Gambari's mission," Nyan Win told AFP.

"One is to release political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the other is the dialogue between the government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he said, using an honorific to describe the pro-democracy leader.

"In conclusion, Mr. Gambari's visit resulted in no improvement and was a waste of time."

Aung San Suu Kyi led the NLD to a landslide election victory in 1990, but was never allowed to govern.

## Global warming time bomb trapped in Arctic soil

AFP, Paris

Climate change could release unexpectedly huge stores of carbon dioxide from Arctic soils, which would in turn fuel a vicious circle of global warming, a new study warned yesterday.

And according to one commentary on the research, current models of climate change have not taken this extra source of greenhouse gas into account.

Scientists have long known that organic carbon trapped inside a blanket of frozen permafrost covering one fifth of the world's land mass would, if thawed, release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

But until now they simply did not have a good idea of how much carbon is actually locked inside

this Arctic freezer.

To find out, a team of American researchers led by Chien-Lu Ping of the University of Alaska Fairbanks examined a wide range of landscapes across North America.

They took soil samples from 117 sites, each to a depth of at least one metre, in order to provide a full assessment of the region's so-called "carbon pool."

Previous estimates of the Arctic carbon pool relied heavily on a relative handful of measurements conducted outside of the Arctic, and only to a depth of 40 centimetres (15.5 inches).

The study, published in the British journal Nature Geoscience, found that the stock of organic carbon "is considerably higher than previously thought" -- 60

percent more than the previously estimated.

This is roughly equivalent of one sixth of the entire carbon content in the atmosphere.

And that is just for North America. The size and mix of landscapes in the northern reaches of Europe and Russia are about the same, and probably contain a comparable amount of carbon-dioxide producing matter currently held in check only by the cold, the study said.

And the danger of a thaw is real, note climate scientists.

The Nobel Prize-winning UN panel of climate change scientists project temperature increases by century's end of up to six degrees Celsius (10.8 degrees Fahrenheit) in the Arctic region, which is more sensitive to global warming than any other part of the planet.

## 10 Taliban fighters killed in Afghan clashes

AP, Kabul

US-led coalition troops clashed with a group of Taliban fighters in northern Afghanistan on Sunday, killing six militants, while four militants were killed in a battle in the south, officials said.

President Hamid Karzai, meanwhile, fired two Afghan army officers, following a joint Afghan-coalition operation in the country's west that he said killed at least 89 civilians.

In the north, coalition troops returned fire after being attacked by militants while on patrol in the volatile Tagab valley of Kapisa province, said coalition spokesman 1st Lt. Nathan Perry.

Rahimullah Safi, the province's deputy governor, said six militants were killed in the clash, while Perry said "multiple militants" were killed.

Tagab is close to where militants

killed 10 French troops Tuesday in the deadliest ground attack on foreign troops since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001.

In southern Helmand province Sunday, four militants were killed by Nato aircraft and Afghan troops, the military alliance said in a statement.

Troops fired on the militants after they attacked an Afghan army unit that was guarding a satellite station in Helmand's Musa Qala district, the statement said.

In the eastern Kunar province, a civilian Mi-8 supply helicopter contracted by Nato-led troops crashed shortly after takeoff Sunday, killing one person on board and wounding three others, the alliance said in a statement.

It said the helicopter was leaving a Nato base in the area when it crashed. The alliance did not release the nationalities of the civilians or say what caused the crash.



PHOTO: AFP

Leader of India's Trinamool Congress (TMC) party, Mamata Banerjee (L), accompanied by Swamajwadi Party leader Amar Singh (R), addresses a rally in front of the main entrance of the Tata car plant at Singur, some 50km north of Kolkata yesterday. About 40,000 protesters surrounded the Indian factory slated to produce the world's cheapest car, alleging land for the site was forcibly taken from local farmers.

## 90 civilians killed in US airstrikes

Says Afghan investigation

AFP, Herat

An official investigation has found that more than 90 civilians, mostly women and children, were killed in coalition air strikes this week, the Afghan religious affairs minister said yesterday.

The Afghan and US-led coalition military forces involved in the anti-Taliban operation that called in the strikes Friday had also not coordinated their actions, Minister of Hajj and Islamic Affairs Nematullah Shahrani told AFP.

President Hamid Karzai appointed the minister to head an investigation into the incident in the western province of Herat after Afghan officials said high numbers of civilians were killed but the coalition said only 30 militants died.

"We went to the area and found out that the bombardment was very heavy, lots of houses have been destroyed and more than 90 non-combatants including women, children and elders have died," the minister said.

"Most are women and children," he added.

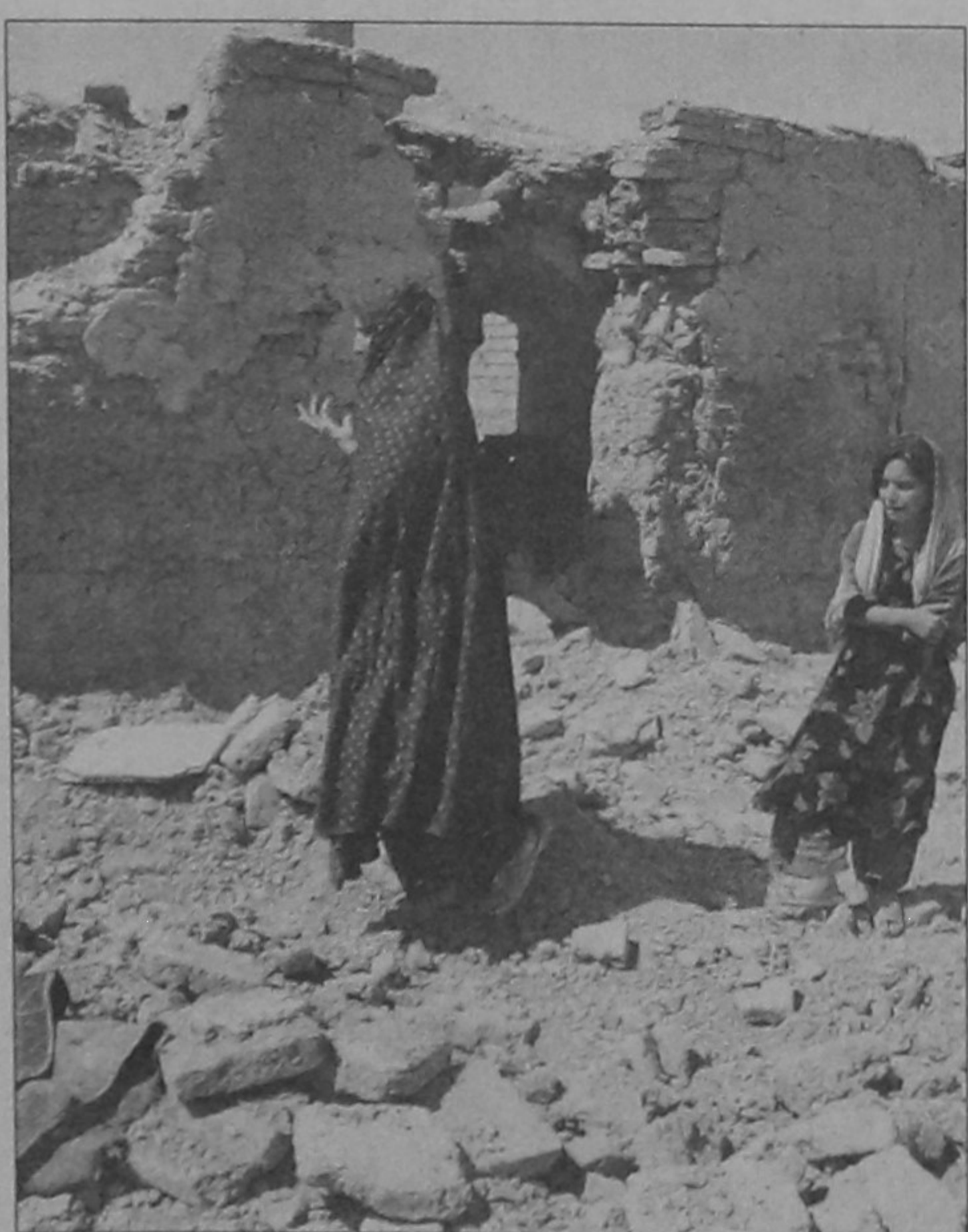


PHOTO: AFP

An Afghan woman stands next to the remains of her home, which was destroyed in a US airstrike at Azizabad village in Herat province, east of Kabul on Saturday.

## Israeli forces raid offices of Hamas

AFP, Jerusalem

Security forces raided the offices of the Islamic Movement in the northern Israeli town of Umm al-Fahm early on Sunday and accused it of aiding the Palestinian Hamas movement, police said.

Dozens of police and internal intelligence agents took part in the raid on the offices of the Al-Aqsa institution, which is operated by the Israeli Arab Islamist party, a police official said.

Officers confiscated documents, computers, and a safe with hundreds of thousands of shekels (dollars) in the operation which was ordered by the defence ministry, the official added.

Israeli security forces accuse the office of funneling funds to the Hachawa organisation in east Jerusalem, which is operated by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement, which seized power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007.

The Islamic Movement condemned the operation in a statement, saying that the "Israeli establishment went bankrupt, having no answer to the solid and strong information on the Al-Aqsa institution's activities in regards to the damage caused to the holy sites in general and to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in particular."

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# India scrambles for Kashmir solution

AFP, New Delhi

A lack of political leadership threatens to allow seething Hindu-Muslim tensions and separatist anger in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir to spiral out of control, analysts say.

Kashmir, which is witnessing its biggest anti-India demonstrations in years, is "poised at a very delicate stage," said security analyst Uday Bhaskar.

On Friday, hundreds of thousands of people massed in Indian Kashmir's main city Srinagar to demand "azadi" or freedom and protest against New Delhi's rule -- the second major demonstration of the week.

The trouble began in June when the Kashmir administration announced a plan to donate land to a Hindu shrine in the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley.

Muslims in the valley saw the move as a ploy by mainly Hindu India to occupy their land and

staged huge protests, forcing a reversal of the plan.

But the decision to scrap the move angered Hindus further south in Jammu, who viewed it as an act of appeasement, prompting hardliners to block the region's main highway -- a protest that shut the Kashmir valley.

"The political process has not been able to defuse the situation and now we're at a very critical point where we have a very disturbing communal divide," said Bhaskar.

Since June, at least 31 Muslims and three Hindus have died in police firing on protesters in Kashmir and Jammu areas.

"A matter of almost trifling significance has been allowed to swell -- indeed, has been engineered -- into a national crisis," said former police chief Kanwar Pal Singh Gill, credited with stamping out a deadly Sikh insurgency in the 1990s.

The snowballing crisis has breathed new life into Kashmir's separatist movement, with hundreds of thousands of Muslims taking to the streets.

The developments have also soured relations between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which have fought two of their three wars over the region.

Analyst Neeraj Chowdhury said the New Delhi and Kashmir administrations were caught napping.

"The government simply was out of sync with the mood in Kashmir -- the implications of the land transfer on the psyche of the people in Kashmir and the impact of the revocation on Hindus," she said.

The controversy "has wiped out the huge gains made politically in the region in the last seven to eight years," she noted, referring to Indian claims that militancy was on the wane and peace was being restored.

Analyst B. Raman, a former Indian intelligence officer, criticised the "government's inept handling and the BJP's (Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party's) cynical exploitation of the crisis."

"What militants failed to do in Kashmir since 1989 the government and the BJP have achieved for them" -- dividing the region along religious faultlines, he said.

And Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government "illustrated its ineptitude in the casual manner in which it watched without intervening," he added.

Hindustan Times columnist Vir Sanghvi suggested a radical solution to the problem.

"I reckon we should hold a referendum in the (Kashmir) valley," he said, referring to a longstanding demand by Pakistan and rejected outright by India since 1947.