

### Westerners raid Pak seminary in Islamabad for al-Qaeda

AFP, Islamabad
Pakistani and Western agents raided an Islamic school in the capital Islamabad searching for al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives, the seminary's director and students said Thursday. School director Fida Mohammad Khan said some 14 men including five Westerners burst into the school around 1:00 am Wednesday and searched the compound for half an hour. "They asked whether any Taliban and al-Qaeda men were staying here and also checked the attendance and maintenance registers," Khan told AFP. "They were asking questions with the help of interpreters." The men conducting the raid did not identify themselves. US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents have been involved in several raids on suspected al-Qaeda hideouts in Pakistan in the past year, including a raid in the eastern industrial city of Faisalabad last March that netted Abu Zubaydah, a key lieutenant of Osama bin Laden.

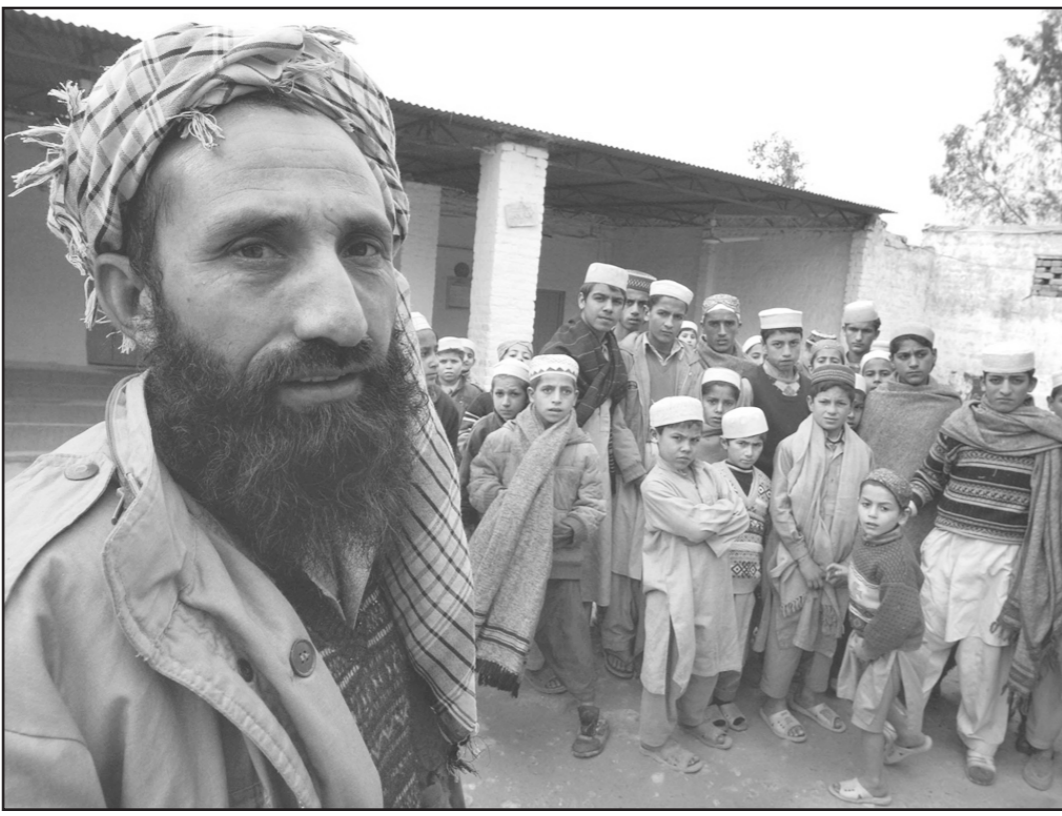


PHOTO: AFP

Khaista Gul (L), a seminary cook who was taken away by the agents for investigation, tells the story of Pakistani and Western agents' raid in search of Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives while standing along with religious students in the seminary compound in Islamabad on Thursday. Gul informed that the agents put him in a room and kept asking about people visiting the madrassah (seminary).

### JKLF slams Pakistan for Talibanisation of Kashmir

PTI, New Delhi
Pro-independence outfit JKLF has criticised Pakistan for "Talibanisation" of Kashmir by pumping in Jihadi elements into the state and said this policy had, in fact, resulted in a serious setback to Islamabad's policy. "Before the mushroom growth of the Kashmiri groups in early 1900s, the JKLF was the main group in the field, and to some extent had powerful voice in the matters. But when interest of those who supported JKLF changed, it changed the balance of power in Kashmir," wrote London-based senior JKLF leader Shabir Choudhry in the US-based Pakistani web weekly South Asia Tribune.

### Pak rules out nuclear platform for subs

PTI, Islamabad
Pakistan has ruled out equipping its submarines with a nuclear platform in the near future, but said it is building a third Agosta class French submarine to be commissioned by 2006 and plans to acquire frigates from China to strengthen its navy. "Despite the delays, Pakistan Navy has managed to commission two French built Agosta submarines and would commission a third one being built at Karachi docks with French assistance by 2006," said Pakistan's Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) Rear Admiral Iftikhar Rao. The possibility of equipping the new submarines with nuclear platform in near future was remote due to prohibitive cost, he told reporters at the Tactical Naval School in

Karachi yesterday. He said the navy also plans to acquire F22 frigates from China to add to the strength of the war ships. As per Janes magazine, Pakistan has 10 submarines and 20 war ships against India's 16 submarines and 90 warships. Admiral Rao said the induction of the Agosta class French submarines had strengthened Pakistan Navy even though it still suffered a numerical disadvantage against the Indian Navy. Rao said despite Indian Navy's massive modernisation programme, Pakistan Navy was fully capable of defending the country's territorial waters and maritime interests specially the Karachi port which was blockaded by Indian Navy in the 1971 war. "Pakistan Navy was in a position

to block oil supplies to India and its ports, especially the Kandla port in Gujarat which handled bulk of India's oil supplies," he claimed. He ruled out that acquisition of aircraft by Indian Navy had provided any "great advantage" to it as "the distance between Pakistan and India was short and Pakistan Air Force had the capacity to operate deep in the sea to provide support to the Navy". Claiming that Indian Navy was well on its way to re-establishing seabased nuclear capability both from submarines as well as ships, Rao said "their nuclear capable seabased missiles development and the ATV (Nuclear submarine) programme was a clear indication of that".

### Seoul braces for 'worst-case' Korean scenario

REUTERS, Beijing/Seoul
South Korea said on Thursday it was prepared for a worst-case scenario that included war on the peninsula if diplomacy failed to resolve the crisis over the North's suspected nuclear weapons ambitions. Defense Minister Lee Jun told parliament that war would be unavoidable if diplomacy failed, even as Washington's top envoy for Asia warned that settling the issue would be a long, slow process. Communist North Korea earlier poured scorn on the latest US offers of aid in return for abandoning its nuclear programs, but Japan's foreign minister and South Korea's president-elect said they saw signs Pyongyang wanted talks to end the crisis. "If the North Korean nuclear problem cannot be solved peacefully and America attacks North Korea, war on the Korean peninsula will be unavoidable," Defense Minister Lee said. "Our army is prepared for the worst-case scenario," he said. US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly, flitting between Asian capitals to drum up support for Washington's stance on North Korea, said he had held "very good" talks with officials from China -- one of Pyongyang's few allies -- but that he did not expect a swift solution. "We're going to have to talk more together and communicate with other people, including North Korea, very, very clearly, so we all agree on the end results," Kelly said. Kelly, speaking to reporters as he left China for Singapore, said there was widespread agreement that the Korean peninsula should be free of nuclear weapons, a position reinforced by the imminent departure of Russia's chief Asia expert, Alexander Losyukov, for Beijing and Pyongyang. "That's something China, the USA, South Korea, Japan and Russia and

the whole international community agrees on," he said. North Korea triggered the crisis last month after it threw out UN atomic inspectors, then pulled out of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty and threatened to resume missile tests. But in talks in Seoul, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi and Roh Moon-hyun, South Korea's president-elect, said they saw three promising elements in Pyongyang's January 10 announcement that it was quitting the treaty, aides said. The three items were Pyongyang's statement that it did not intend to produce nuclear arms, its offer to discuss other ways of verifying its non-nuclear pledges and the omission of a demand for a non-aggression treaty, Japanese spokesman Hatsuhsisa Takahisa said. "Foreign Minister Kawaguchi mentioned that these three factors...indicate some willingness on the North Korean side to have a dialogue with other parties," Takahisa told reporters in Seoul. "Mr Roh agreed with her analysis," he said. Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose monitors were evicted from a North Korean nuclear plant last month after Pyongyang announced it would take it out of mothballs, said a visit by Russian Asia expert Losyukov could be key to a solution. "The elements of a solution are there on the table. They just need an honest broker or an interlocutor to put it together," ElBaradei said. "I am very heartened that Russia is sending an envoy to Pyongyang in the next couple of days and I hope that will start the ball rolling." In a major shift in his approach to North Korea since the crisis erupted, President Bush offered on Tuesday to revive a stalled initiative to give North Korea food and energy aid if it abandoned its pursuit of a nuclear arsenal.

### Indian leaders on hit list of suicide squads

AFP, New Delhi
Suicide squads have set their sights on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, his deputy L.K. Advani and vital installations in India ahead of Republic Day on January 26, police said Thursday. "Taking no chances, we have made elaborate security arrangements to foil any attempt by anti-nationals to cause disturbance or target (officials) and vital installations," a top Delhi police officer said. The official told the United News of India (UNI) news agency that Pakistan's intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) made several attempts last year to attack Advani through a number of Islamic militant outfits.

### Red alert in Manipur over rebels' threat

AFP, Guwahati
Federal soldiers have been put on high alert in India's northeastern state of Manipur after a powerful pressure group threatened to launch a secessionist movement Thursday night, an official said. "We have put security forces in a state of maximum alert with emotions running high in Manipur over an alleged threat to its territorial integrity," a senior police official said from the state capital Imphal. The influential United Committee of Manipur (UCM) has warned it will kick off a secessionist campaign Thursday night to warn New Delhi not to bow to demands to carve slices off Manipur to create a Greater Nagaland. The demands are being made by the tribal separatist National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which is currently locked in peace talks with the Indian government.

The talks, between the federal government and exiled NSCN leaders Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, are aimed at putting an end to one of India's longest running tribal rebellions. "People in their thousands would come out of their homes with torches and raise slogans to secede from India if New Delhi tries to Balkanise the region while signing a peace accord with the NSCN," said R.K. Ranendrajit, advisor to the UCM. The visiting NSCN leaders have asserted that their demand for a Greater Nagaland is legitimate. "People are generally very angry with New Delhi for failing to dispel fears that Manipur's territorial integrity would not be disturbed while reaching a peace accord with the NSCN," said Khaidam Mani Singh, a member of the monitoring committee of all political parties in the state.

### Lankan govt ignores threat to sack PM

AFP, Colombo
Sri Lanka's cohabitation government Thursday brushed aside a threat by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to sack the prime minister and asserted it had a clear majority to rule the country. Spokesman G.L. Peiris said the government did not want to get into a debate with Kumaratunga, who on Tuesday announced she would sack Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe if he "continues to jeopardise national security." "The president has said many things and our intention is not to get into a public debate," Peiris told reporters. "This is a democracy and anyone is free to say anything." Peiris, who is also the government's chief negotiator with Tamil rebels and the constitutional affairs minister in cabinet, said the prime minister enjoyed a majority in parliament and to remove him would be

undemocratic. Wickremesinghe has a slender two-seat majority in the 225-member assembly. Official sources said the government did not want to raise the stakes in a confrontation with Kumaratunga amid fears the political crisis could affect the ongoing Norwegian-backed peace bid with Tamil rebels. The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have said they consider the crisis between bitter rivals Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga the main obstacle to the peace process. A spokesman for the prime minister's office said they had studied the lengthy live phone-in programme during which Kumaratunga made her remarks and said they believed it was not worth responding to.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (2nd L) sits with opposition leader Mahinda Rajapakse (L), on Thursday during a conference in Colombo on the Theravada school of Buddhism practiced in Cambodia, Laos, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The monks were meeting in Sri Lanka to discuss the future of their religion.

### 9 Maoists killed in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu
Nine Maoist rebels and two Nepalese soldiers were killed in a series of clashes in western Nepal, state radio said Thursday. The two soldiers died Tuesday in a rebel ambush as they patrolled the western rebel stronghold of Rukum, radio reported, quoting the defence ministry. Also Tuesday, four rebels were killed in three gunfights across the west of the Himalayan kingdom, it said. The radio said five other Maoists were killed last week in southwestern Kanchanpur district when the army attacked rebels and freed a soldier who had been abducted.

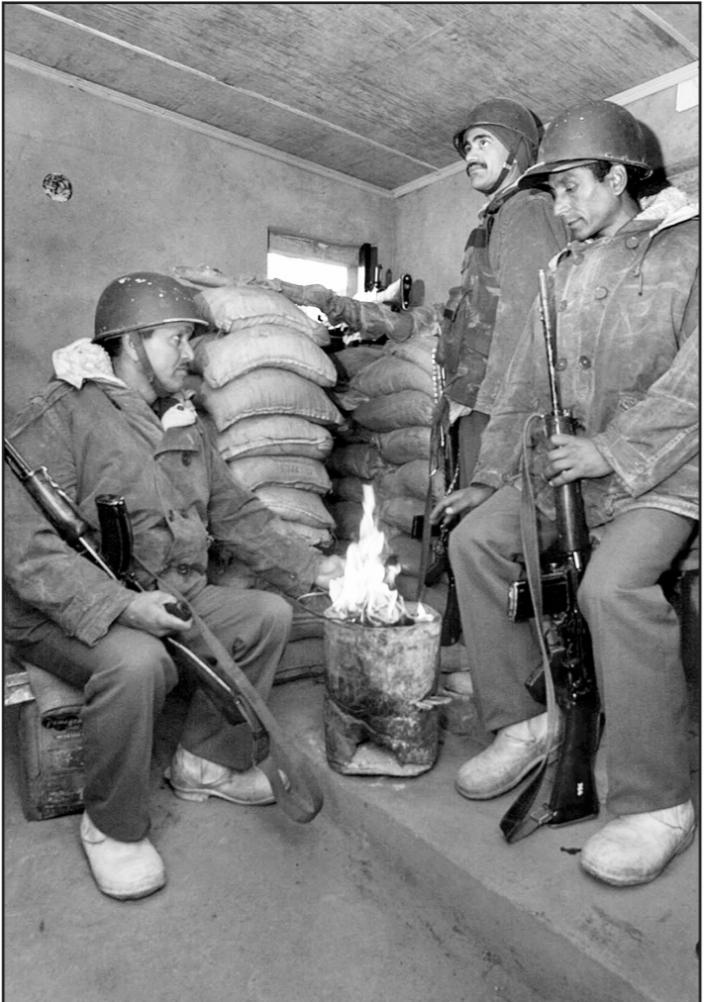


PHOTO: AFP

Indian soldiers warm themselves around a fire in a bunker at Lal-Chowk in Srinagar on Thursday. Ninety-eight more people have succumbed to more than a month of cold weather in northern India and Bangladesh as temperatures hit their lowest point yet, bringing the death toll across South Asia to close to 1,400.

### UK calls for end to Kashmir infiltration Top separatist urges Britain to arrange talks

AFP, New Delhi
Britain's High Commissioner to India Rob Young called Thursday for an end to infiltration from Pakistani to Indian Kashmir and urged dialogue to end the five-decade dispute over the Himalayan province. Young, on a visit to the insurgency-wracked Indian zone of divided Kashmir, stressed that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf had promised to end the flow of Islamic rebels across the de facto border. "The British government along with the American government and other governments have been trying to ensure that the commitments which President Musharraf made last summer are fully carried out and there is an end to cross-border infiltration," Young told a function in Kulgam, 70 kilometers (44 miles) south of the summer capital Srinagar. At the height of a crisis with India last year following a series of massacres, Musharraf pledged to US officials that Pakistan would do its best to prevent militants from crossing into Indian Kashmir. The standoff, which had brought a million troops to the common borders of India and Pakistan, eased in October after elections in Indian Kashmir and intense diplomacy by the United States and

Britain. "One of the main messages that I have brought with me is that there must be an end to violence," Young told several hundred people at the function, which was organised by Kashmiri communist legislator Yusuf Tarigami. "Violence will achieve nothing. All it achieves is the misery and despair of the ordinary people of Jammu and Kashmir," the envoy said, adding that the "only way forward is dialogue and democratic process." Meanwhile, a top Kashmir separatist said Thursday he had urged Britain's envoy to New Delhi to arrange talks among India, Pakistan and Kashmiris to resolve the five-decade dispute. Shabir Shah told AFP he met late Wednesday with British High Commissioner Rob Young in Indian-administered Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar. "I told the ambassador that Britain should at least try to facilitate talks among India, Pakistan and the Kashmiri separatists," Shah said. Britain -- like the United States and other Western countries -- has in the past declined to mediate over Kashmir, whose status was unresolved in 1947 when the subcontinent was partitioned at independence from London.

### By-polls give Pak ruling coalition majority Opposition outcries rigging

AFP, Islamabad
Pakistan's ruling coalition bagged four national assembly seats and opposition Islamists won three in by-elections that killed three people in poll-related violence, results Thursday showed. Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali's coalition government can now claim almost 200 seats, boosting its majority from the razor-thin position it held when Jamali was elected by the house in November with 172 votes. Support for Jamali, from the army-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), rose to 188 in a December 30 confidence vote on a larger wave of floor-crossing by MPs from opposition parties. Adding to the four seats picked up in Wednesday's by-elections, two victorious independents are expected to back the PML-Q-led coalition. The far-right religious alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), which scored massive gains in October 10 polls, defeated a ruling party candidate to win a hotly-contested seat in the northern city of Rawalpindi. Results have yet to be announced in a seat in southern Khairpur district, where three activ-

ists of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's opposition Pakistan People's Party were killed. PPP accused PML-Q workers of firing on its supporters in Khairpur, killing three and injuring two others. Police are investigating. The party complained of massive rigging and intimidation by ruling parties. "The PPP was not allowed to freely run its election campaign as its workers and supporters were arrested, their baills denied and their houses raided," parliamentary leader Makhdoom Amin Fahim said in a statement. "Heavily armed supporters of the PML-Q candidate encircled all the sensitive polling stations, refusing entry to PPP polling agents and PPP voters. "Armed men were sitting even inside the polling booths forcing the voters to cast votes in favour of the PML-Q candidate." PPP had boycotted by-elections in all seats except those in its traditional southern stronghold in Sindh province, alleging large-scale rigging. By-elections were also held in 18 provincial constituencies. The seats became vacant after lawmakers who won more than one seat in October 10 elections were

required to hold on to only one and vacate the rest. Earlier report says, Pakistani opposition parties on Wednesday alleged widespread rigging by Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali's government in by-elections across the country. "The entire state machinery is out in the field to engineer victory for the government-backed candidates," said a spokesman for the six-party religious bloc known as Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). By-elections were held in 10 national and 18 provincial seats to fill vacancies created after October 10 polls when lawmakers elected on more than one seats were required to retain only one seat and surrender the other. The by-elections are the first under Jamali's two-month old government, the first civilian administration since President Pervez Musharraf took power in a 1999 army coup. Jamali's party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), heads a fragile coalition in the 342-seat national assembly and is pinning hopes on favourable results to boost its numbers and cinch a more comfortable majority.