

Helicopter crashes near pool of Jakarta hotel: 3 killed

AFP, Jakarta

Three people were killed when a private helicopter crashed Tuesday at a luxury hotel in the Indonesian capital Jakarta while trying to land on the rooftop helipad, hotel staff and witnesses said.

Witnesses said the Indonesian pilot and a male and a female passenger died when the Bell helicopter crashed in the swimming pool area at the five-star Sahid Jaya hotel. No one on the ground was hurt.

Hotel staff identified the two dead passengers as an Indonesian executive of a local bank and his secretary.

Hotel security supervisor Muhadi said he believed the helicopter had already touched down at the 21st floor helipad when a strong gust of wind helped push it over the side.

Muhadi told AFP he did not see the crash but based his conclusion on skidmarks he saw on the surface of the helipad.

Hotel managers could not immediately be reached for comment.

The red helicopter came down next to the children's pool and an open-air bar on the third-floor level, with part of the wreckage in the pool itself. It was totally wrecked but there were no signs of a fire.



Bystanders and police look at a crashed helicopter near the swimming pool of a hotel in Jakarta on Tuesday. Three people were killed when a private helicopter crashed near the pool of a posh hotel in the Indonesian capital.

China sets agenda for parliamentary meeting

AFP, Beijing

The agenda for a key Chinese parliamentary session was passed by a preparatory meeting here Tuesday, clearing the way for the final appointment of a new five-year government, parliamentary officials said.

A total of 18 agenda items were approved by the meeting and would be put before the incoming 10th National People's Congress for vote, including the election list for president, vice president and premier, Jiang Zhenhu, parliamentary spokesman told journalists.

Only one nominee will be named for each post as is normal in Chinese elections.

Widely expected nominees include Communist Party boss Hu Jintao for president, Vice Premier Wu Bangguo for parliamentary head and Vice Premier Wen Jiabao as prime minister.

The three men were appointed to the party's top three posts at a congress in November and have long been tipped to take the senior roles in the government.

The final vote was expected to be held toward the end of the two-week parliamentary session which begins Wednesday.

Thousands of allied spl forces already in Iraq

US deploys more troops in Gulf

AFP, London

Several thousand allied special forces, including more than 300 elite British soldiers, are already operating inside Iraq, the Daily Telegraph reported Tuesday.

The deployment suggests that war has begun, even as US-British efforts continue to secure a new United Nations resolution backing force against President Saddam Hussein's regime, the right-wing British paper said.

The troops were part of joint special operations, which include more than 4,000 American and Australian special forces with headquarters in Qatar and bases in Jordan, Kuwait and Turkey, according to the Telegraph.

Defence sources told the daily that about 240 men drawn from two squadrons of Britain's elite Special Air Service (SAS), plus more than 100 support troops, were engaged in various parts of Iraq.

The scale of the operations in the south and west was unprecedented, the paper said, adding that British special forces did not enter Iraq during the 1991 Gulf war until the ground offensive began.

The Telegraph reported in January that a team of 35 SAS men was operating in and out of western Iraq as part of a 100-strong allied force looking for Scud missile launchers that could be used to attack Israel.

The special forces were now moving in and out of Iraq virtually at will, monitoring Iraqi oilfields west of Baghdad and in the north amid concern that Saddam would set fire to them in the event of an invasion, the Telegraph said.

The priority of the SAS has been to ascertain Iraqi troop positions and confirm that targets selected from satellite photographs for the first attacks in any war were not decoys, the paper reported.

The troops have also been looking for suitable holding areas in south-western Iraq for the many Iraqi troops who are expected to give themselves up in the early phases of fighting.

The reported insertion of special forces into Iraq coincides with intensified air attacks.

An Iraqi army spokesman said Monday that six Iraqis had been killed and 15 others wounded in a US-British air strike on "civilian and service installations" in the southern province of Basra late Sunday.

On Monday Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon confirmed in parliament that British warplanes had been involved in US air strikes on Iraqi targets in the no-fly zones over the north and south of Iraq. The zones date back to the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. Hoon rejected claims that the attacks represented the opening shots of a bigger war.

But The Independent daily reported that anti-war British lawmakers were claiming that war had begun by stealth.

The paper quoted Doug Henderson, a former armed forces minister, as saying that the increased activity in the no-fly zones was a "slide into war".

The Times reported Tuesday that until recently only 21 British Royal Air Force aircraft were involved in the operation over the no-fly zones, a longstanding mission to protect the Kurds in the north and Shias in the south from Iraqi attacks.

Meanwhile, Britain's Press Association reported that Chancellor Gordon Brown would signal Tuesday that he is ready to add to the 1.75 billion pounds he has earmarked already to meet the costs of a new Gulf war.

Meanwhile, the United States has paved the way for the deployment of still more troops in the Gulf region as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein vowed his country would defeat the Americans if it came to war.

Meanwhile, Turkey's refusal to allow US forces into the country would cost it six billion dollars, the State Department said.

With more than 225,000 troops already massing near Iraq, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has ordered two additional divisions to the Gulf region -- the 17,500-strong 1st Armoured Division and the 17,000-strong 1st Cavalry Division -- a Pentagon official said.

North Korean fighters intercept US spy plane

US warns against nuke reprocessing, tests

AP, Washington

Four armed North Korean fighter jets intercepted a US reconnaissance plane over the Sea of Japan and one of the Korean jets used its radar in a manner that indicated it might attack, US officials said Monday.

Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said it was the first such incident since April 1969 when a North Korean plane shot down a US Navy EC-121 surveillance plane, killing all 31 Americans aboard.

The most recent crisis involving US reconnaissance aircraft was in April 2001 when a Chinese fighter jet collided with a Navy EP-3 plane, forcing it to make an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island. The fighter pilot was killed and the American crew was detained for 11 days.

The latest incident happened Sunday morning, Korean time, and there was no hostile fire, Davis said.

A dispute between the United States and North Korea over nuclear weapons development increased last week when North Korea restarted a 5-megawatt reactor that could produce plutonium for such weapons. North Korea said Saturday that nuclear war could break out at "any moment."

moment."

In the Sunday incident, Davis said, North Korean planes "shadowed" the American plane over international waters for about 20 minutes before breaking off.

Two North Korean MiG29 fighters and two other aircraft that Davis said appeared to be MiG23 fighters intercepted the Air Force RC-135S reconnaissance plane, which Davis said was conducting a routine intelligence mission over the Sea of Japan about 150 miles off North Korea's coast.

The closest the fighters came was about 50 feet, Davis said.

He did not know whether there was any communication between the North Korean and American crews.

At one point one of the fighters "locked on" to the US plane with its fire-support radar, Davis said. This is an action that would indicate a possible intent to fire, although in this case there was no hostile fire.

The US plane broke off its mission and returned to its home station at Kadena Air Base in Japan, Davis said.

The American plane is a highly specialised version of the RC-135 series of reconnaissance planes. This version, nicknamed "Cobra Ball," is loaded with electronic receivers and features large cir-

lar windows in the fuselage for the photography of foreign ballistic-missile tests at long range. The intelligence equipment aboard includes multiple infrared telescopes.

The RC-135 planes are modified Boeing 707s.

The incident happened amid heightened tensions between the United States and North Korea. The two countries have no formal diplomatic relations, and North Korea frequently complains that joint US-South Korean military exercises are a prelude to a US-led invasion.

The US Air Force regularly flies U-2 spy plane missions to monitor North Korea's military, including its nuclear facilities.

AFP adds: The United States warned North Korea on Monday not to reprocess spent fuel or to conduct a nuclear weapons test, after Pyongyang warned that a strike on its atomic facilities could provoke a "horrifying" disaster.

The warning followed reports at the weekend that US spy satellites had detected activity around a reprocessing plant that can produce weapons-grade plutonium in North Korea and the shadowing of a US spyplane by fighters from the Stalinist state.

Khalid quizzed to locate Laden

AFP, Islamabad

US and Pakistani investigators pressed al-Qaeda's alleged terror mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed on the fate and whereabouts of Osama bin Laden Tuesday as he underwent a fourth day of interrogation, officials said.

"He is still in Pakistan," military spokesman Major General Rashid Qureshi told AFP, although some security officials said there was a plan to fly him out of the country late Monday.

"There is a joint investigation going on by Pakistani and American intelligence personnel," Qureshi said.

"Once that is concluded then we will come to the conclusion of how to dispose of the case further."

Security officials connected to the investigation said top of the questioning was the location of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, who is believed by most Western intelligence officials to be alive and hiding along the remote Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Mohammed, the alleged architect of the September 11 2001 attacks that killed more than 3,000 people, is believed to rank number three in the network after bin Laden and his Egyptian deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.

"He is being questioned on Osama bin Laden," an intelligence official told AFP.

"We're asking him about his links and his contacts with other al-Qaeda members here and abroad."

"He was here in Pakistan for more than a year. We want to know what he was doing here and what kind of people he was maintaining contacts with."

Mohammed is an uncle of Ramzi Yousef, convicted over the 1993 attack on New York's World Trade Center, and has been wanted by the US since 1995 over a plot to blow up commercial airplanes over the Pacific.

Investigators were also scanning laptops and documents found on Mohammed when he was captured sleeping in a house in the northern city of Rawalpindi.

"We found documents and laptops in his possession, which are likely to yield some valuable information," the intelligence official said, but declined to pass on what had been gleaned from Mohammed so far.

"We are not in a position to reveal any information obtained from KSM (Mohammed)."

The pre-dawn swoop on Saturday that netted Mohammed as well as a Somali al-Qaeda suspect and a Pakistani man has won massive praise from Washington, with the State Department calling it "the most significant arrest yet of an al-Qaeda leader and a very important victory against terrorism."



US armoured vehicles roll through a mock battlefield in Paju near the inter-Korean border on Tuesday as US and South Korean troops begin major war games aimed at deterring North Korea's military threat. The drill comes in the aftermath of growing tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapons drive and interception of a US RC-135 spy plane over the Sea of Japan by North's fighters planes.

'Pentagon to make spying aggressive'

REUTERS, Washington

The Defence Intelligence Agency, the espionage and counter-espionage arm of the Pentagon, is to be expanded into a worldwide network of spies to collect information on terrorist organisations and other military targets, The Los Angeles Times reported on Tuesday.

Department of Defence officials, described as familiar with the plans, told the newspaper the goal is a team "capable of handling a range of assignments -- from reconnaissance for military operations to long-term clandestine work in which Pentagon spies would function like CIA case officers, working undercover to steal secrets and recruit informants."

In a matter of years, the size of the force could grow into the hun-

dreds, the Times said. These agents would be drawn from all branches of the military, with emphasis placed on those with individual skills, such as special forces backgrounds, according to The Times.

They would receive CIA training at the agency's southern Virginia training facility.

"The effort stems in large part from frustration within the Pentagon over the extent to which the military was forced to rely on the CIA in the opening stages of the war in Afghanistan," the newspaper said.

"The CIA doesn't have the number of assets to be doing what the secretary of defence wants done," one Pentagon official told The Times.

US State Dept's image guru resigns

AFP, Washington

The high-profile former Madison Avenue advertising executive hired by the State Department to improve the US's image in the Muslim world resigned on Monday.

Charlotte Beers, hired with great fanfare in 2001 after the September 11 terrorist attacks brought home the grave public relations problem the United States has with Arabs and Muslims, resigned for health reasons. Secretary of State Colin Powell said.



Actress and former Miss World, Aishwarya Rai (R), performs on set during the filming of the Bengali film "Chokher Bali" in Kolkata on Tuesday. Aishwarya Rai will play the heroine in the movie adapted from a novel by Indian literary giant and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

All Nepali parties must join peace talks: PM

PTI, Kathmandu

Nepalese Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand has asked all parties to participate in the peace talks starting soon and assured that the government will make the whole exercise transparent.

"The government does not want to exclude political parties in the peace process. We invite them to be a part of the peace process and we are ready to disseminate whatever information they want from us," Chand said in Kathmandu on Sunday.

The Prime Minister's remarks came in contrast to that of Minister for Housing, Physical Planning and Construction and Talks Coordinator Narayan Singh Pun, who stated that the government will not wait for parties to join the talks, which he claimed will start within a week.

Parties, including Nepali Congress and Nepal Communist Party (UML), had recently boycotted the all-party meeting called by Chand and had demanded that the peace process must be transparent.

"I am still hopeful that they will participate in the peace process in the days ahead," the premier said.

"Peace is the ultimate goal of people from all walks of life," Chand said adding all the parties and the civic society should extend co-operation to every effort of the government to restore law and order in the country.

VHP for declaring India Hindu nation

PTI, New Delhi

Declaring that it was on the path of confrontation with the Vajpayee government over the Ram temple issue, the VHP has said it was not concerned about the government's stability and demanded amendment in the Constitution for declaring India as a Hindu nation.

Firebrand VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia has said the only legal solution to the Ramjanambhoomi dispute is a central legislation declaring it as a birth place of Sri Ram and hand it over to sants.

Dismissing as non-serious Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh's support for cow slaughter, Togadia suggested that if Singh really wanted the ban, he should ask party president Sonia Gandhi to support the move in Parliament.

"I think we stand for Hindutva and not for government... If Hindutva and the government are complementary, then it is fine... We have decided to go for Ram rather than Raj," he said in an interview to the latest edition of RSS mouthpiece Organiser.

"Of course we are confronting, without mobilising public opinion and democratic agitation how is it possible that any government would accept

our agenda," he asked.

Togadia asserted that the fight was not confined to government alone. "Of course, this is a fight against government administratively, secularists academically and Jihadi forces locally and globally," he said.

Referring to the government's "compulsion", he asked "are we here for the stability of the government or are we here to fulfil the aspirations of Hindu society?"

"If we are working for Ram temple, Hindu Rashtra and fulfilment of aspirations of the Hindu society, we should create awareness no matter if it creates any hurdles for government, including the NDA government," Togadia said.

Maintaining that India was a 'Hindu Rashtra' since millenniums, the VHP leader said, "We are now demanding the restoration of the glory" of that.

"It is a question of acknowledgement. We say, India is a Hindu Rashtra, but not everyone realises this. There is need to acknowledge it," he said adding "we have asked for the 'pranpratishtha' (consecration) of Hindu Rashtra.