

Sr separatist arrested in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Police in Indian-administered Kashmir arrested a senior separatist overnight and seized a substantial sum of cash, a police officer said yesterday.

Nayeem Ahmed Khan, who heads the separatist National Front, was arrested in the Hyderpora district of the summer capital Srinagar, the officer said.

"We have recovered some 900,000 rupees (19,600 dollars) from him, and we are investigating where the money came from," the officer told AFP.

He said Khan had been moved to an interrogation center.

Several separatist leaders have been arrested in the past for allegedly funding militancy in Kashmir.

Last year Yasin Malik, the chairman of pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was arrested and detained for eight months after police recovered 100,000 US dollars in cash from a couple in Kashmir.

The couple said the seized cash was meant for Malik, who denied having any links to the money.

Another hardline separatist, Syed Ali Geelani, was arrested in June last year on similar charges and held for several months before being released on bail.

The court cases against Malik and Geelani are still pending.

Kashmir is in the grip of a 14-year-old insurgency that has so far claimed 38,000 lives, according to government figures.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's Christian minority leader and peace activist Julius Salik together with schoolchildren release doves to commemorate the second anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the US in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan, which reversed its pro-Taliban Afghan policy and has undertaken a crackdown against extremists in the wake of the September 11 attacks, has no plans for any official memorial ceremonies.

Bomb on horseback kills 8 in Colombia

AFP, Bogota

Explosives loaded onto a horse blew up, killing at least eight people and injuring 20 others in the central Colombian town of Chita on Wednesday, police said.

Five people, including a young boy, died at the scene, while three others were declared dead a short time later, police commander General Luis Alfredo Rodriguez said.

The blast occurred on a busy downtown street near a school and just 400 meters from a police station in the town, 200km north of Bogota in the province of Boyaca.

30 killed in Iran bus-truck collision

AFP, Tehran

At least 30 people were killed in north-western Iran in a collision between a passenger bus and a truck on Thursday, state television reported.

It said that the crash occurred between the towns of Zanjan and Miyaneh, adding that all those on the bus and the truck driver were killed.

The accident occurred when the bus swerved into the path of the truck and a gas canister exploded setting both vehicles on fire.

About 21,000 people are killed on Iran's roads each year. Most of the accidents are blamed on poor roads, appalling driving habits and badly-maintained vehicles.

N Korea has developed new missile: US

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has developed a new intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of striking neighboring countries but not the United States, a well-informed US government source disclosed late Wednesday.

The new weapon was described as a step-up from Scud and No Dong-type missiles, the mainstays of Pyongyang's arsenal, which are based on old Soviet-era technology and often lack accuracy.

But details about the new missile were scarce as US intelligence agencies continued to assess the system and search for more information.

"The North Koreans have developed a new mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile," the source told AFP on condition of anonymity. "And it's different than the Taepo Dong," which Pyongyang fired into the Sea of Japan in 1998.

The source said the new missile was land-based, did not have the range to reach the United States, and was designed "to complement" North Korea's existing arsenal.

A missile is normally classified as intermediate if it has a range of between 500 and 5,500km.

Earlier reports that the weapon was fashioned after an old Soviet submarine-launched missile, the SSN-6 Sawfly, could not be confirmed.

The Pentagon would not confirm or deny the report late Wednesday.

Israel mulls fresh strikes, expulsion of Arafat

World leaders ask Tel Aviv, PA to end bloodshed

REUTERS, AFP, Jerusalem/ Washington

Israel's foreign minister said Israeli leaders, holding an emergency session Thursday after two suicide bombings, should ignore US objections and expel Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

"We are now in a situation that if we ask for such permission (from Washington), it will be virtually impossible to get it," Silvan Shalom told Army Radio.

"But sometimes, there are situations where you have to make decisions independent of outside influence."

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, cutting short a trip to India after 15 Israelis were killed in suicide bombings in Jerusalem and near Tel Aviv Tuesday, prepared to consult his security cabinet on further military moves against Palestinian militants.

Wednesday an Israeli warplane narrowly failed to assassinate Mahmoud al-Zahar, a leader of the Hamas group that claimed responsibility for the two bombings, but killed his son and a bodyguard in a missile strike on his home in Gaza.

The wave of tit-for-tat violence has drawn a US-backed peace plan in blood.

Trying to defuse a political crisis amid the violence, Palestinian parliament speaker Ahmed Qurie said he had accepted Arafat's nomination to become prime minister in place of Mahmoud Abbas, a moderate who resigned Saturday.

Qurie planned to meet the Palestine Liberation Organisation's policy-making executive committee Thursday to discuss candidates for a scaled-down emergency cabinet of six to eight members.

He has called on Israelis and Palestinians to end violence that has clouded his chances of renewing dialogue with Sharon over the peace "road map," which envisions reciprocal confidence-building steps and a Palestinian state by 2005.

Several members of Sharon's security cabinet said they would raise the issue of Arafat's expulsion from the Palestinian territories.

"If it is brought today for a vote, the result, in my opinion, will be in favor (of the expulsion)," Shalom said on Israeli Radio. But he added: "I am not sure this will be decided today at all."

Israel and the United States have accused Arafat, a symbol of the Palestinian struggle for statehood,

of encouraging violence in a three-year-old uprising for independence.

The 74-year-old leader, effectively confined by Israeli military roadblocks to his headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah for the past two years, denies the allegations.

Israeli Vice Premier Ehud Olmert said Wednesday a better alternative to expulsion would be to put Arafat in "solitary confinement" in his battered compound, cutting him off from the outside world.

The proposal calls for the compound to be encircled again with tanks, phone lines cut, mobile phones jammed and no one allowed in.

Sharon has repeatedly turned down calls to expel Arafat, fearing an international backlash and a rift with the United States, Israel's main ally.

Some Israeli security officials have opposed expulsion, arguing Arafat would win international sympathy and could still control Palestinian security forces from afar. But Shalom said his departure would encourage the emergence of "more moderate (Palestinian) forces."

AFP, adds: World leaders

Wednesday told Israel and the Palestinians to stop their killing after a surge in bloodshed, as Washington insisted the new Palestinian premier control extremists and Russia called for an international force to restore peace.

A day after two deadly attacks in Israel and a retaliatory Israeli air raid, US President George W. Bush insisted the roadmap to Middle East peace "still stands" and called on the Palestinians to battle those who attack Israelis.

"I still believe strongly in the two states living side by side in peace is a hopeful vision for the future of the Middle East. The roadmap is still there," Bush said as he met with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah in Washington.

Asked about Ahmed Qorie, the Palestinian prime minister-designate, Bush said: "His job, if he is interested in a two-state solution, is to consolidate power within his administration to get the security forces under control, all security forces, and then to unleash them against the killers. And we can make progress if that's the case."

Islamists unmoved by al-Qaeda call to topple Musharraf

Pak president rejects 'traitor' tag

AFP, Islamabad

Islamists in Pakistan poured cold water yesterday on calls purportedly by al-Qaeda's number two to rise up against President Pervez Musharraf for "selling Muslims' blood in Afghanistan."

The calls were broadcast by the al-Jazeera television network in an audiotape allegedly carrying the voice of Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's right-hand man in the global terror network.

Pakistan's largest Islamic party Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), embroiled in a protracted political battle with Musharraf over his unelected presidency and sweeping powers, rejected the exhortations.

"Myself and my party do not endorse Zawahiri's views. We are trying to reform Pakistan's internal matters in our own way," JI senator Khurshid Ahmed told AFP.

"We have differences with Musharraf's policies, but we are not working to launch a coup against him. We are striving to bring change through a political struggle."

The speaker on the audiotape exhorted Pakistanis to avenge Musharraf's support of the US-led overthrow of Afghanistan's Taliban regime in late 2001 for harbouring bin Laden, and Pakistan's arrests of some 500 al-Qaeda suspects.

"We ask our Muslim brethren in Pakistan: until when will you put up with the traitor Musharraf, who sold

the Muslims' blood in Afghanistan and handed over the Arab Mujahedin to crusader America?" the speaker said.

"Had it not been for his treason, the surrogate government would not have been installed in Kabul, that government which brought the Indians to Pakistan's western borders."

"Not only this. He opened up nuclear installations to US inspection, choked off the jihad in Kashmir ... and is (planning) to recognize Israel all for a handful of dollars the Americans stack in his pocket..."

"The officers and soldiers of the Pakistani army should realize that Musharraf will hand them over as prisoners to the Indians ... and flee abroad to enjoy his secret (bank) accounts."

Zawahiri urged "all Muslims in Pakistan" to close ranks to protect their country from "the crusade allied with the Hindus."

"Act, O Muslims in Pakistan before you wake up from your slumber to find Hindu soldiers raiding your homes in complicity with the Americans," said the top lieutenant of al-Qaeda terror chief Osama bin Laden.

The audiotape was aired along with a videotape showing the two men in an undetermined mountain location. Al-Jazeera said the videotape was probably recorded in late April or early May.

Many Pakistani officials believe

India has gained influence in the post-Taliban administration, which is dominated by ethnic Tajiks from the anti-Taliban resistance and has little ethnic Pashtun representation.

Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, an MP and senior leader of the Taliban-sympathetic Jamaat Ulema-i-Islam party, cast doubt on the authenticity of the tape.

"Who can be sure that it is genuine, because with today's computer technology it is possible to (have) anyone speaking anything."

BBC Online adds: Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has said he takes strong exception to al-Qaeda's deputy leader purportedly calling him a traitor.

General Musharraf, a key ally of the United States in its war on terror, was speaking to the BBC on the second anniversary of the 11 September attacks.

He was responding to a tape broadcast on Wednesday in which the man said to be Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, denounces General Musharraf as a "traitor" and calls on Pakistanis to overthrow him.

President Musharraf said the Pakistani authorities were doing their best to catch Bin Laden, who he thought was somewhere along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

General Musharraf said both the Muslim world and the West needed to work to bridge the differences which had led to the 2001 attacks.

UN envoy asks Asia to act now on AIDS or face dire consequences

AFP, Manila

The United Nations yesterday called for immediate wide-ranging action to prevent Asia emerging as the epicentre of a global HIV/AIDS pandemic in the next decade.

Joy Phumaphi, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's HIV/AIDS commissioner, told a regional World Health Organisation meeting in Manila that a comprehensive plan was needed urgently to halt the virus in its tracks.

"You have to have a full-scale, multi-sectoral, fully-integrated aggressive intervention now. That is my message to you, it is absolutely critical," Phumaphi said.

Phumaphi, who hails from Botswana, which has the world's highest HIV/AIDS infection rate, said the action was needed to prevent forecasts Asia would witness an explosion in cases in the next decade.

"I come from Botswana and I came here to share our experience because I don't want you to fall into the same trap that we fell into," she told top health officials from 37 countries attending the WHO Western Pacific annual meeting.

She said Botswana had once thought HIV/AIDS was limited to a certain high risk group only and that emphasis on prevention and moral values was effective enough to control the spread of the epidemic.



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese journalists stage a sit-in programme during a peace rally defying the government's ban against demonstrations in Kathmandu yesterday. The demonstrators staged the rally to protest the death of journalist Gyanendra Khadka who was killed by Maoists on September 7 in Sindhuparchowk in eastern Nepal.

UK MPs slam Blair's '45-minute' WMD deployment claim

REUTERS, London

The most sensational claim made by British Prime Minister Tony Blair to justify waging war on Iraq was criticised by an influential parliamentary committee on Thursday.

The now infamous assertion that Iraq could deploy banned weapons at just 45 minutes' notice was used by Blair to steamroller intense public opposition to the US war.

But the Intelligence and Security Committee said the 45-minute point lacked context and was "unhelpful to an understanding of the issue" in a report that will further undermine trust in Blair.

The committee also criticized embattled Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon, who has been targeted by opponents as a fall guy for the government's troubles over the case it made for war in Iraq.

Hoon is widely expected to be the first ministerial casualty of the Iraq crisis: the worst of Blair's six-year premiership and one that has sent his public ratings tumbling.

Hoon's Ministry of Defense was "unhelpful and potentially misleading" about its concerns over the government's dossier on Iraq's banned weapons, the committee said in a report.

"We regard the initial failure by the MoD to disclose that some staff had

put their concerns in writing to their line managers as unhelpful and potentially misleading," the cross-party committee said, fingering Hoon personally.

"We are disturbed that after the first evidence session ... the defense secretary decided against giving instructions for a letter to be written to us outlining the concerns."

The committee's investigation ran in parallel to a judicial inquiry into the suicide of a British weapons expert who was exposed as the source for claims that the government exaggerated the threat from Iraq.

Judge Lord Hutton's inquiry has already revealed that at least two Defense Intelligence staff were unhappy with warnings in the dossier. The committee said intelligence chiefs did not know for sure what weapons Iraq had made or in what quantities.

"This uncertainty should have been highlighted to give a balanced view of Saddam (Hussein's) chemical and biological capacity," it said.

The report also said Blair's outgoing communications chief Alastair Campbell did not "sex up" the dossier. But it added claims about Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capacity did not give a balanced view.

Anti-Iraq war trio propose changes to US plan

AFP, United Nations

France, Germany and Russia proposed limiting the US political role in Iraq in exchange for their support of Washington's request for international help to bring order and stability to Baghdad, it emerged on Wednesday.

A joint French-German and a separate Russian proposal, obtained by AFP, were given to the United States ahead of an urgent meeting on Iraq's future with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Geneva on Saturday.

It was unclear if the United States would accept the measures, which would largely hand supervision of the emerging political process to the United Nations while US commanders would maintain military and security control.

The amendments, suggested changes to a draft US resolution now circulating at the UN Security Council, would speed up the process to give Iraqis sovereignty and establish a constitution and future elections.

Wary of the bitter split at the Council over the Iraq war, Annan will try to get the five permanent members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States to hammer out a consensus on at the least the outline of what comes next.

"We think that all Council members do share, essentially, the same objective," US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters on Wednesday.

"The differences in the Council, we think, should relate to the steps that need to be taken to get there."

US officials have been calling for Iraqis to have greater control of their destiny but the proposed amendments would accelerate that process and inevitably limit the role of the current UN civilian administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer.

The French and German amendments say the United Nations should take the lead in "immediately" beginning new procedures to pave the way to "the full restoration of Iraqi sovereignty."

The Russian text calls for the world body to "strengthen its role in Iraq" and, like the French-German proposal, calls for the creation of a timetable for when the United States would hand the nation back to Iraq.

At the same time, both amendments broadly back the US call for a multinational force in Iraq, where deadly attacks like last month's bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad have been on the rise.

The United States appealed for

UN help in the face of the bloodshed despite previously launching the war to topple Saddam Hussein without the approval of the world body.

The draft US resolution is seen as one of the first major tests of whether the acrimony over the war has eased and Annan said this week that it was imperative for the Council to get past the earlier dispute and move on.

"Everyone wants this to work," one diplomat said.

The US proposal seeks UN authorisation for the multinational force requested by countries like India, Pakistan and Turkey, which have indicated they could not send troops to help keep the peace in Iraq without it.

US President George W. Bush on Wednesday said stability and peace in Iraq were "in the world's interest" and urged nations "not get caught up in past bickering."

At the State Department, spokesman Boucher said Secretary of State Colin Powell had a "good and constructive exchange" with Russia over Moscow's proposals.

But he stressed that proposals aiming to improve the US draft had to be based on the "reality" of post-war Iraq.

"You can't pretend a war never happened. You can't pretend the coalition never happened," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian house is detonated during an Israeli army operation in the divided West Bank City of Hebron yesterday. Israeli troops launched several raids in the West Bank and Gaza Strip overnight, Palestinian security forces said.