

## Pak troops net 230 al-Qaeda suspects in tribal belt raids

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan has netted 230 al-Qaeda suspects in a military operation in the northwestern tribal region bordering Afghanistan this month, state media said yesterday, quoting a senior commander.

The operation launched on October 2 is continuing in phases, Corps commander Lieutenant General Ali Muhammad Jan Aurakzai told a team of foreign diplomats on Saturday, state-run Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported.

Three phases have been completed in the rugged tribal terrain and the fourth phase of the operation, named al-Meezan (balance), is currently underway, he told some 20 ambassadors and military attaches at the Corp Headquarters in the northwestern city of Peshawar.

During the operation, over 230 suspects believed to belong to the al-Qaeda terrorist group have been rounded up while 10 others were killed, Aurakzai said, according to the APP report. It did not identify their nationalities.

Ten Pakistani military personnel were killed in the operation, the news agency quoted the general as saying.

# Israeli troops dynamite Gaza high-rise bldgs

## 2 more Palestinians killed

AP, Gaza City

Israeli troops killed at least two Palestinians in separate battles early yesterday and briefly evacuated 2,000 Palestinians from their homes in the dead of night before blowing up three empty high-rise buildings.

The 12-story buildings were destroyed in retaliation for an attack early Friday in which two Palestinian gunmen infiltrated an army outpost in the Jewish settlement of Netzarim and killed three soldiers, including two women. Israel said the buildings were used to plan Friday's attack.

The buildings were located on a sandy hill overlooking the heavily guarded settlement. The explosion could be felt miles away and sent plumes of black smoke and debris into the air, damaging many nearby Palestinian homes.

Coupled with political uncertainty in the Palestinian leadership, the

violence pushed Middle East peace efforts further into the background.

In one of Sunday's clashes, a Palestinian, armed with a rifle and hand grenades, approached an army outpost guarding a Jewish settlement bloc, the military said. An army guard saw the gunman and alerted a nearby force. A fierce gunbattle erupted and the Palestinian was killed, the military said.

A few miles away, troops noticed four Palestinians crawling toward another army outpost, the military said. Troops fired on the group and hit two. Two others fled, the military said. The army said at least one Palestinian had been killed.

Friday's attack on Netzarim was carried out jointly by the Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups. One of the gunmen was killed and the other escaped.

Before dynamiting the three apartment buildings, Israeli troops

blew up a Palestinian police post where the military said one of Friday's attackers had fled. The gunman received shelter and assistance from Palestinian police, the army said.

Shortly afterward, troops set off explosives in and around the three tall buildings, which belong to Palestinian Preventive Security, the main Palestinian force in Gaza. The buildings, the army said, were used "by the terrorists to plan terrorist attacks."

"The terrorists who carried out the attack on Netzarim last week used the buildings for several weeks and collected prior intelligence for the attack," Brig. Gen. Gadi Shamni, commander of the Gaza division, told Israel Radio.

Before the huge blasts rocked the area, Israeli soldiers ordered about 2,000 residents of nearby buildings in southern Gaza City out of their homes.

Maj. Sharon Feingold, an Israeli military spokeswoman, said the 2,000 residents were temporarily evacuated "for their own safety." Later, the residents returned to their homes.

When they came back, they found considerable damage, said Moreed Naim, 29, an off-duty Palestinian firefighter who lives in the neighborhood. "All the windows were broken, some of the furniture was damaged, and my car was destroyed," he said.

Residents said soldiers fired rifles and machine guns, wounding two people and pock-marking walls.

As Palestinians left their homes, the settlers at Netzarim moved into bomb shelters for protection, the military said.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians search in the rubble of three buildings after they were dynamited by the Israeli troops in the town of Al-Zahara in the Gaza Strip yesterday. Israeli troops blew up scores of apartments in the southern Gaza Strip after three soldiers were killed on October 24 as they guarded Netzarim Jewish settlement. Some 2,000 Palestinian residents living nearby were evacuated from their homes as the three 13-storey buildings were dynamited in a single massive explosion. Israeli security sources said that the partially-constructed buildings had been used by Palestinian militants to spy on Israeli troop movements in Netzarim.



PHOTO: AFP

Some of 15,000 protesters from across the nation march past the White House Complex in Washington, DC Saturday calling for what they describe as "an end to the occupation of Iraq" by the US.

## Thousands rally in US against Iraq invasion

AP, Washington

To chants of "Impeach Bush," thousands of anti-war protesters rallied in the nation's capital Saturday and delivered a scathing critique of President Bush and his Iraq policy.

Demanding an end to the US-led occupation and the quick return of American troops, the demonstrators gathered on a sunny fall day at the Washington Monument to listen to speeches and songs of peace.

One man's small cardboard sign gave his summing-up of the day: "This administration does not represent me," it said in black capital letters typewritten on white paper.

Al Sharpton, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomina-

tion, exhorted the crowd not to be content with the gradual withdrawal of US forces from Iraq.

"Don't give Bush \$87 billion, don't give him 87 cents, give our troops a ride home," Sharpton said to loud cheers from the crowd.

In contrast, people stood up to 12 deep in Oceanside, Calif., to cheer more than 11,000 Marines and sailors who marched through downtown in the homecoming of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force based at nearby Camp Pendleton. Many held flags or signs that said "Thank You," and red, white and blue confetti filled the air.

## Iran will not reveal names of detained al-Qaeda figures

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday it would not reveal the names of suspected top members of the al-Qaeda network detained here, adding that a list of names it had given to the UN only covered members of the group already extradited by the Islamic republic.

"Regarding the people who are in Iran, the Islamic republic prefers not to disclose their names because of the security issues," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

When asked if some of the detainees could be classed as high-ranking -- confirmed several months ago by other officials -- Asefi replied that "what I know is that there are a number."

On Saturday, state media reported that Iran had finally revealed to the UN Security Council the names of scores of suspected al-Qaeda members in its custody.

## KL won't give in to Jewish economic boycott threat: Mahathir

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has said a call by a US-based Jewish lobby group for an economic boycott against Malaysia may hurt economically but the country would not give in to "blackmail".

The influential Simon Wiesenthal Center last week called on investors and tourists to avoid Malaysia after Mahathir branded Jews "arrogant" and accused them of controlling the world by proxy.

"We may be affected but the question is 'do we allow ourselves to be blackmailed or do we stand up for what is right?'" Mahathir was quoted as saying by the New Sunday Times.

"I don't think we should allow ourselves to be blackmailed by them."

Mahathir appeared to point to the boycott call as validating his criticism of Jewish power.

"The truth is, the Jews now control the world through proxy. If you say anything against them, then they are going to accuse you of being anti-Semitic," he was quoted as saying by The Star in a report Sunday.

"And they may try to stop investments from coming into this country, and this is the kind of pressure that

they apply." On Saturday, Mahathir accused US President George W. Bush of lying when he claimed to have rebuked him over the remarks about Jews ruling the world.

"It's the biggest lie. If he had rebuked me I'm quite sure I would have rebuked him also," Mahathir was quoted as saying by the official Bernama news agency when he arrived home after a series of visits to neighbouring countries.

Mahathir said it was common for someone who could lie about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in order to go to war (in Iraq) to lie about what he had said, the agency reported.

The prime minister told reporters that from what he remembered Bush had pulled him aside at an Asia-Pacific summit in Bangkok last week only to explain why he had made such a strong statement over Mahathir's remarks about Jews.

"I think he wants to support his officer (White House spokesman Scott McClellan)," Mahathir said.

McClellan said last Monday that Bush had pulled Mahathir aside at the summit to denounce his "wrong and divisive" comments.

## Syria to retaliate if Israel strikes again

AFP, London

Syria has threatened to attack Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights if Israel launches another attack on its territory, Syria's foreign minister has warned, according to a British newspaper yesterday.

In an interview with the Sunday Telegraph, Faruq al-Shara said: "If we are attacked again our people will not stand for it and we have to carry out the will of the people."

He added: "We have many cards that we have not played. Don't forget there are many Israeli settlements in the Golan. I am not exaggerating but I am describing things as they might happen."

On October 5, Israel bombed what it said was a training camp

near Damascus used by the hard-line Palestinian group Islamic Jihad, which had just claimed a devastating suicide bombing in the northern Israeli town of Haifa.

Damascus insisted the attack, Israel's first air raid deep into Syria in three decades, had targeted a civilian area.

On Thursday, Syria's military chief of staff General Hassan Turkmani was quoted as saying in the local press that "Syria did not retaliate to the Israeli raid, but is fully capable of deterring Israel and of putting an end to its bellicose adventures."

Since October 5, Turkmani has twice called on the military to stand "ready to respond" to any Israeli attack.

Shara also told the London-based Sunday Telegraph that Syria could not control its entire border and had failed to stop Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians crossing to fight United States forces in Iraq.

"They are very determined and many of them dream of seeing an American tank," he said.

"We are doing everything we can. We have tightened our checkpoints and are turning people back. But the border is long and we cannot cover it all."

The foreign minister also insisted that the Syrian government had closed down the offices of Islamic Jihad, Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

## Iran yet to suspend uranium enrichment

REUTERS, Tehran

A spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said yesterday Iran had yet to suspend uranium enrichment, backtracking on his earlier statement that the process had already been suspended.

"We are discussing and examining how to suspend enrichment," Hamid Reza Asefi told Reuters by telephone.

He earlier told a news conference Iran had suspended its disputed enrichment process following a deal with the European Union "big three" who pressed Iran to prove it was not seeking nuclear arms.

Iran met with foreign ministers from Britain, France and Germany on Tuesday and agreed to suspend uranium enrichment and sign up to snap inspections of nuclear sites.

Asefi described the agreement as being in the interests of Iran but said the Islamic Republic reserved the right to restart enrichment at its own discretion.

"Any time we feel it is necessary, we will stop the suspension," he told reporters at the news conference.

The Islamic Republic was given an October 31 deadline by the UN's nuclear watchdog to prove it is not seeking atomic weapons by granting inspectors "unrestricted access" to nuclear sites and suspending uranium enrichment.

A member of the Expediency Council, the powerful body that arbitrates between the predominantly reformist parliament and the hardline Guardian Council, was reported on Saturday as saying an order to suspend enrichment had been issued.

## Britons sure about Blair 'spin' on Iraq

AFP, London

More than 40 percent of Britons believe Prime Minister Tony Blair deliberately distorted information about Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction, according to a poll released yesterday.

The YouGov survey for Britain's independent ITV television network also found that less than half the population now thought it was right to invade Iraq.

Questioned on whether the United States and Britain were justified in taking military action in March, 46 percent said they were, while 41 percent said they were wrong.

Asked about Blair's pre-war statements about Saddam's weapons capability, 49 percent thought the prime minister was telling the truth as he saw it, but 41 percent thought he deliberately distorted information.

## Fighting flares up in Congo

AFP, Kigali

Clashes in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) forced some 3,000 people from their homes during the last week, sources said on Saturday, while Rwanda denied allegations from Amnesty International that its troops were still operating in the vast country.

Sources told AFP the fighting occurred on Thursday and Friday in the Shari district of Ituri, not far from the regional capital Bunia. It involved two factions of the minority Hema tribe, the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) and the Party for the Unity and Safekeeping of Congo's Identity (PUSIC).

The United Nations mission in DRC (Monuc), which is in charge of peacekeeping operations in Ituri, confirmed there had been clashes but could not give details of casualties.

## Vajpayee to visit Nagaland to boost peace efforts

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will visit the northeastern state of Nagaland to boost efforts to find a solution to the country's longest running insurgency which has claimed about 25,000 lives, a spokesman said yesterday.

"Vajpayee will be leaving on the three-day trip early Monday," the government spokesman said.

The premier's programme in the province bordering Myanmar includes meetings with state leaders, launching its first mobile telephone service and talks with delegations representing local people, the spokesman said.

Vajpayee is also likely to announce more development assistance to Nagaland, for which New Delhi announced a 3.65 billion-rupee (76 million-dollar) package several months ago, reports said.

However, media reports in northeastern India said Vajpayee may delay his visit due to the weather in there, where thunderstorms are possible Monday.

Vajpayee would travel to Nagaland's commercial hub Dimapur by a special air force plane and head on to the state capital on an army Mi-17 helicopter, which could suffer turbulence during a storm.



PHOTO: AFP

Firefighters watch the line of wildfires as fires continue to burn near homes in Rancho Cucamonga, California on Saturday. The fire, one of several sweeping California, is believed to have been started by arson. Some 3,500 people were ordered to evacuate their homes as the fire zone grew to almost 14,000 acres (5,700 hectares), officials said.