

International

Taliban deny report

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An undated recent file picture shows Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden in an undisclosed place inside Afghanistan. — AFP photo

Blaze at Saudi wedding kills 40 children, women

RIYADH, July 30: Forty children and women died at a wedding in eastern Saudi Arabia as a blaze swept through a huge party tent, newspapers said Friday, reports AFP.

Al-Jazira said the regional governor and King Fahd's son, Prince Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdel Aziz, offered more than half million dollars in compensation to the bereaved families of Wednesday's tragedy.

The fire was triggered by an air conditioning unit which exploded, sending the burning tent crashing down on the wedding party in a village of Qatif province, the daily said.

The official news agency SPA on Thursday gave a death toll of 20 children and 17 women, on top of 132 others wounded.

At least three of the wounded have died of their injuries, said newspapers, which did not specify whether the bride was among the casualties. She was reportedly seated near the air conditioning unit.

More than 300 women and children were in the tent, segregated from the men in keeping with the Moslem traditions of Saudi Arabia.

51 bodies unearthed in Aceh

LOHSEUMAWE, Indonesia, July 30: Mass graves containing 51 corpses were unearthed in the war-torn western province of Aceh, and human rights activists said Friday they believed the victims were civilians massacred by the Indonesia military, reports AFP.

Villagers in Beutron village, about 150 kilometres southeast of Lohseumawe, discovered 31 bodies in two separate gravesides, and another 20 bodies in a ravine.

"The corpses looked like porridge," said Abdullah Saleh, a lawyer who helped lead the excavation of the graves on Wednesday and Thursday.

Last Friday, Indonesian military and police forces shot and killed at least 31 people in what they said was an operation against rebel base. Human rights groups have expressed outrage, saying those killed were ordinary villagers.

Meanwhile, the official Antara news agency said the death toll was 52, with five others still missing.

Saleh, who is linked with Acehnese separatist rebels, said he found the body of a relative in one of the graves. The relative has been accused by the Indonesian military of being a rebel leader.

Lt Col Widagdo, military district commander in West Aceh, denied the massacre report. "It's just not true," he told the Associated Press by telephone from Meulaboh, the capital of West Aceh.

Pakistan accuses India of anti-Islam campaign over Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, July 30: Pakistan today accused India of mounting an anti-Islamic propaganda campaign in order to win support from the West for its stance over the disputed Kashmir region, reports AFP.

"India perceives the West to be sympathetic to anti-Islamic sentiments and wishes to enlist its support by declaring the popular Kashmiris struggle as a manifestation of 'Islamic extremism,'" a foreign office spokesman said.

New Delhi is also including Afghanistan in its propaganda offensive, although "the same Afghans fought for the defence of the free world," the spokesman said.

India is using the "current Western attitude to the Afghans as a convenient handle," he told reporters, adding "India wants the world to perceive reality through its own coloured glasses."

The spokesman Tariq Altaf said the origins of the Kashmir dispute were neither ideological, religious, nor border-based.

"It is purely the question of right of self-determination of a people usurped by force over half a century ago and maintained by brutal repression," Altaf added, accusing India of carrying out "ethnic cleansing".

He said the "alarming feature" of India's propaganda against the Kashmiris was "her desperate display, indeed use, of malice against Islam."

The entire Islamic Ummah (nation) needs to be made aware of this phenomenon, which in effect represents a civilizational onslaught against Islam."

The spokesman claimed that some 60,000 people had been killed in "brutal repression" of Kashmiris over the past years.

A son scorned?

KUALA LUMPUR, July 30: Hell hath no fury like a son nagged — a Malaysian woman emigrated from China to the United States last year, on charges of disturbing public order. It requested international cooperation from Interpol member states.

The move came a week after China banned a Falungong and launched a major propaganda campaign against it and its New York-based founder.

But Li's aides told reporters in Washington that Li would be safe from extradition as long as he stayed in the United States.

Falungong intends to erode the minds of practitioners and manipulate them in a bid to have them contend with the government. It has posed a serious threat to the state and people," the official People's Daily newspaper said in an editorial.

"We should recognise that the current efforts to expose Li Hongzhi are a struggle which has an important bearing on the fundamental faith of communists ... and on the destiny and future of the Communist Party and government," the paper said.

"It is a political struggle in the ideological sphere about winning over the broad masses



A group of women take turns photographing each other next to the father of Communist China as they stand in front of a giant statue of China's late Chairman Mao Zedong yesterday in Beijing. China's Communist party could be headed for a "Cultural Revolution-like" campaign in its expanded party purge as a result of the crackdown on the spiritual Falungong sect, according to analysts. AFP photo

Indians, Pakistanis held in HK:

Hong Kong police have arrested 60 people from India and Pakistan for "unlawful assembly," a police spokesman said yesterday. AFP reports from Hong Kong.

The investigation is still ongoing" on the 60 men, aged about 20 to 35, who were held late Thursday on suspicion of holding an unlawful assembly in the tourist belt of Tsim Sha Tsui, he said. "They were suspected of trying to carry out unlawful activities," the spokesman added.

Blast kills 18 S African miners:

South Africa's AngloGold Ltd, the world's biggest gold producer, said yesterday 18 workers had died and one was missing after an underground explosion at its Mponeng Mine on Thursday night. Reuters reports from Johannesburg.

AngloGold said the blast some 2,700 metres (9,000 feet) underground at Mponeng Mine near Carletonville, 80 km (50 miles) southwest of Johannesburg, was thought to have been caused by methane gas.

Israeli, Arab MPs to visit Syria:

A delegation of 13 Arab Israeli members of parliament are set to visit Syria "soon," former Palestinian National Council president Khaled Faham told AFP on Thursday.

Faham said he had received permission for the visit from Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara, but said that no exact date had been set.

Finnish FM to visit ME:

Finnish Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen is to start a tour of the Middle East with a visit to Egypt, where she is set to meet President Hosni Mubarak on Monday, officials said here on Thursday. AFP reports from Cairo.

Halonen, whose country took over the six-month revolving presidency of the European Union this month, is also to meet her Egyptian counterpart Amr Mussa on Sunday to discuss a partnership agreement between the EU and Egypt. EU foreign minister approved the agreement last month.

5 Philippines soldiers slain:

Five soldiers were killed in an ambush by Muslim fundamentalist guerrillas in the southern province of Sulu yesterday, a military official said. AFP reports from Zamboanga, Philippines.

The soldiers were patrolling a remote village in Patikul town when guerrillas of the Abu Sayyaf group attacked with rifles and grenade launchers, local Marine Commander, Colonel Orlando Buenventura said.

Anti-terrorism confce in KSA:

Nine Arab states and the Palestinians are to take part in an anti-terrorism conference in Saudi Arabia on Sunday, the officials said. Saudi news agency SPA said, AFP reports from Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz is to chair the three-day conference of interior and justice ministers in the Red Sea city of Jeddah to discuss measures to combat terrorism. Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen are to take part, along with the Saudi hosts, SPA said.

Suharto leaves hospital:

Former Indonesian president Suharto left hospital yesterday 10 days after suffering a stroke, witnesses said. AFP reports from Jakarta.

The 78-year-old former strongman was taken by wheelchair from Pertamina Hospital in Jakarta to a waiting Mercedes Sedan, accompanied by his eldest daughter Siti "Tutut" Hardiyanti Rukmana, an AFP photographer said.

Pre-dawn fire kills 7 in Japan:

Fire incinerated at least seven people and left six others missing yesterday as it swept through an old wooden apartment block in western Japan, police said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

"The bodies were all found in their rooms and charred beyond recognition," a police spokesman said. "We still don't know how other people managed to escape," he added. "We are investigating the cause of the fire."

Australian FM in East Timor:

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer arrived in East Timor yesterday for a 24-hour visit, the first by an Australian minister to the troubled territory, AFP reports from Dili, East Timor.

Downer flew in to Dili's Comoro airport aboard a small Royal Australian air force executive jet from the resort island of Bali at 9.45 (0145 GMT) accompanied by Australian ambassador to Indonesia John McCarthy.

Chinese paper says

Falungong sect threat to communist rule

BEIJING, July 30: China today stepped up its attack on the exiled leader of the banned mystical Falungong sect Li Hongzhi, who is wanted by authorities, saying the sect posed a fundamental threat to Communist rule, reports AFP.

Falungong intends to erode the minds of practitioners and manipulate them in a bid to have them contend with the government. It has posed a serious threat to the state and people," the official People's Daily newspaper said in an editorial.

"We should recognise that the current efforts to expose Li Hongzhi are a struggle which has an important bearing on the fundamental faith of communists ... and on the destiny and future of the Communist Party and government," the paper said.

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on suspected bin Laden terrorist camps in Afghanistan to back for the August 7 bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam which killed 224 people.

Bin Laden, who has been stripped of his Saudi nationality, is widely hailed by radical Islamic forces in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan as a hero of Islam.

The Taliban leadership has consistently refused US demands to expel him despite mounting pressure, rejecting allegations of terrorism against him and underscoring protection for bin Laden according to Islamic norms.

Washington earlier this month imposed economic sanctions against Afghanistan for harbouring the Saudi dissident.

An AP report from Kabul adds: The Taliban government on Friday denied a report that Osama bin Laden, who tops the US 10 Most Wanted list, was ready to extend full cooperation.

Although bin Laden's stay in Afghanistan has become increasingly difficult because of the danger of a US attack and the militia's curtailment of his activities, the Taliban "will never oust him forcibly," the source said.

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