

Indian politician Scindia killed in plane crash

Senior Indian politician Madhav Rao Scindia was killed Sunday when his plane crashed north of New Delhi, sources in the opposition Congress party told Star News.

Scindia and "a small number of journalists" were killed when the private plane crashed amid heavy rain after leaving the Indian capital at 1:00 pm (0730 GMT) for the northern city of Kanpur, the network said.

Earlier reports said eight people were on board the aircraft.

Scindia, himself a former civil aviation minister, was due to address a public meeting in Kanpur, which was abruptly cancelled after news of the crash.

Maoists should renounce 'terrorism': Nepali Speaker

The worldwide drive against terrorism provides an opportunity for Nepal's Maoist rebels to renounce the use of violence and seriously pursue peace negotiations, the speaker of the lower house of parliament said Sunday.

"This is a golden opportunity for the Maoists to leave the jungles and sit together for real solutions," Taranath Ranabhat told a forum in Kathmandu.

"The Maoists can remain in the limelight at the point of their guns for some time but their termination is inevitable," he said.

Speaking as the rebels and government prepare for a third round of peace talks, Ranabhat blasted the Maoists as "extravagant" and "childish."

'Saudi envoy helped evacuate Laden kin from US'

Within days of the September 11 terror attacks, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington supervised the urgent evacuation of 24 members of Osama bin Laden's extended family, fearing they could be assaulted, the New York Times reported Sunday.

US authorities believe bin Laden, a Saudi-born multimillionaire mastermind of the terrorist strikes. The Times cited the Saudi ambassador, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, as saying most of the relatives of bin Laden who were evacuated were studying in the United States.

The diplomat said the embassy received an urgent message from King Fahd pointing out there were bin Laden children "all over America."

Ombudsman fights a lonely battle against Estrada

Decades into a long career nailing petty crooks and peasant guerrillas, special Philippine anti-graft prosecutor Aniano Desierto now has a shot at sending a former president to the gallows.

It is a dream assignment any lawyer would kill for. But as he lays out the corruption case Monday against Joseph Estrada, Ombudsman Desierto appears a forlorn, wind-tossed figure atop the shifting sands of Philippine politics.

His worst enemy may well be a skeptical public. The 65-year-old inspires mistrust in some quarters and a private citizens watchdog claims he is incompetent.

UK journalist could be freed in a week

A British woman journalist arrested by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia for entering the country illegally will be held for a maximum of one week before being deported, her newspaper employer reported the Taliban foreign minister as saying.

The Taliban said Saturday that it was questioning Sunday Express reporter Yvonne Ridley and hinted that she could be tried for spying.

The Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press quoted a Taliban official as saying Ridley was being held in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad and her case had been handed over to the Taliban intelligence department.

"She will be dealt with under the country's law," the news agency quoted the official as saying.

US lawmakers talk post-Taliban govt as covert war heats up

A US congressional delegation was in Rome Sunday to discuss Afghanistan's post-Taliban political makeup, while President George W. Bush told his country that the covert war against terror was heating up.

Eleven senior US congressmen were to meet former Afghan king Mohammed Zahir Shah at his Rome villa Sunday after attending a conference, under the auspices of the 86-year-old former king, of opposition leaders deliberating on a future interim administration.

"Ultimately, our goal is to show support for the unity of the Afghan people," Al Santoli, National Security Advisor to Congress, told AFP. "It's not a matter of eliminating (Osama) bin Laden. It's a matter of (eliminating) the whole terrorist network in Afghanistan. And the foundation of that network is the Taliban."

Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network are the prime suspects in the September 11 terror attacks against the United States that left more than 6,000 dead or missing; he has, for the past five years, been "an honored guest" of the Taliban, who refuse to hand him over to Western authorities.

"We hope that what comes out of this entire weekend is unity among Afghans in opposition to the Taliban and bin Laden and that the foundation is laid for a government that would lead to a more democratic Afghanistan and put an end to the terrorist network there", Santoli said.

In Islamabad, the UN special envoy to Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell, urged moderates within the Taliban to cooperate with the international

community and save themselves from political elimination. "Their behaviour in the coming weeks will say something as to whether they are acceptable for the future," said Vendrell, who believes moderate elements of the Taliban could play a part in the future of the country.

Vendrell told AFP Taliban moderates were "unhappy" with the close links between their leadership and bin Laden.

"It is very important for these people to lift their heads now," he said. "If they don't, they may end up being tarred with the same brush as the rest of the most extreme elements of the Taliban."

Vendrell's office has been working for several years to help Zahir Shah convene a traditional Afghan "loya jirga" -- a council of elders -- although there was no suggestion that the monarchy should be restored.

"Zahir Shah is a supreme elder of elders, and even the respect with which Afghan people see him now should play a role in any transition," he said.

"We are not talking of a role for Zahir Shah as executive leader of a transitional government, only a nominal role as a flag around which Afghans can rally," Vendrell said. "He is not seeking an executive role."

In a radio address Saturday night, Bush hinted that covert action against bin Laden was already under way and made it clear the US military had the Taliban in its sights.

"This war will be fought wherever terrorists hide, or run, or plan," he said. "Some victories will be won outside of public view, in tragedies avoided and threats eliminated."

KSA won't allow foreign attack on Muslims from its soil

A highly placed Saudi military source already denied Saturday that the kingdom would allow the United States to use its air bases to launch attacks against Osama bin Laden, prime suspect in the September 11 terror attacks in the US, and his Afghan hosts.

US President George W. Bush said Friday that Saudi Arabia -- thought to have been reluctant to help -- was "cooperating with us in terms of any military planning we might be doing."

His statement followed reports that the kingdom had decided to allow Washington to use air command facilities on its territory.

Prince Sultan said all foreign troops, called by the kingdom after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, were withdrawn following the liberation of

the emirate by a US-led international coalition in February 1991.

"Currently, there is no non-Saudi soldier in our country," he said.

But the minister said that "40 American, British and French fighters" have used a Saudi base to patrol a no-fly zone over southern Iraq "because we do not trust the Iraqi regime."

The United States is known to station around 6,000 troops connected with its air force presence in Saudi Arabia.

A Gulf diplomat told AFP on Friday that Saudi Arabia had agreed to allow the United States to use state-of-the-art US-built air command facilities at Prince Sultan Air Base to fight bin Laden and Afghanistan's Taliban ruling militia.

Fear of suicide bombing mounts in Colombo

Sri Lankan police have arrested four people, including two women, after a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomb was discovered and defused, officials said Sunday.

The suspects were taken into custody following a search operation near Colombo's Vihara Maha Devi public park where the bomb packed inside a "suicide jacket" was found Saturday, police said.

The capital was on a heightened alert following the discovery of the bomb amid fears that the killing Wednesday of a top Tamil guerrilla leader could lead to retaliatory assassinations.

Police defused the three-kilo (6.6-pound) bomb packed into a jacket of the type usually worn by suicide bombers of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).



US anti-war demonstrators pass a mural commemorating the September 11 terrorist attacks in Los Angeles on Saturday.

Thousands join peace rally in US

Thousands of protesters peacefully flooded the streets of the nation's capital on Saturday to call for peace, as President George W. Bush moved forward with plans for a military strike against those responsible for the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Chanting "war is not the answer," an estimated 10,000 demonstrators assembled peacefully only blocks from the White House. Their voices rose in opposition to the "war on terrorism" that the Bush administration declared on Saudi-born militants including Saudi-born Osama bin Laden, the chief suspect in the attacks, which left 6,500 dead or missing.

"War is not the answer because the events on September 11 were not the first battle in the war. This has been an escalating cycle of violence," Brian Becker, one of the

protest organisers, told Reuters. "The US has tens of thousands of troops in the Middle East. They occupy Saudi Arabia, they bomb Iraq every week, they impose economic sanctions in Iraq so dreadfully that the (United Nations) say 1.5 million Iraqi people have died," he added.

Many of the protesters traveled from across the country to join the rally. James Creedon, a rescue worker in New York City, left the rubble of Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center once stood as a symbol of America's economic might, to join the medical teams at the protests.

"Like the people here I want justice done, but I don't want to see the destruction of more innocent lives," Creedon told Reuters. "Many people at Ground Zero want international justice, but we don't want to see a hundred or a thousand more World Trade Centers in this country

or abroad."

As hundreds of police officers in riot gear looked on, protesters of all ages, races and movements carried banners bearing messages that revenge would benefit nobody. "Eye for an eye and we're all blind," one banner read. "Violence does not solve violence," said another.

Although recent polls showed an overwhelming majority of the American people support some form of military action, Becker said the protesters represented a broad spectrum of the US population.

"It is the rainbow, it is what America looks like right now," Becker said. "The administration is unfortunately believing its own propaganda and its own polls."

Protesters also demonstrated against the hundreds of attacks on Arab Americans and Muslims carried out since the attacks across the country.

Arafat has 48 hours to enforce truce: Israel

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said Sunday that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat has 48 hours to enforce a shaky ceasefire and end a weekend of unrest marking the first anniversary of the Palestinian uprising.

"The agreement we signed with Yasser Arafat stipulates that the ceasefire effectively starts Sunday morning and the Israeli security cabinet has decided to see what will happen in the next 48 hours," Peres said on army radio.

Peres and Arafat concluded a ceasefire deal on Wednesday, with the violence to be reined in over a 96-hour period starting from Friday, when both sides held a high-level joint security meeting.

But a weekend of unrest that saw 11 Palestinians killed and scores injured in anti-Israeli demonstrations undermined the first half of that period.

"The accord allows for a week-long process during which we will ease the sanctions (against the Palestinian population) while the Palestinians must exert maximum efforts to enforce a ceasefire," Peres said.

He acknowledged however that "Yasser Arafat is not in an easy position, given the anger and hatred to be overcome among Palestinians."

Anti-terror war to be long drawn-out conflict: Bush Sr

More than 6,000 people have reported dead or missing in the attacks in New York and Washington, more than died when Japanese forces launched a surprise attack on the US base of Pearl Harbour in December 1941.

Bush said the differences between now and the Gulf War was that, back then, "we could see what the enemy had done... we knew where his forces were and we knew we had to mobilise public opinion (and) press support."

"We had to go to the United Nations to get resolutions passed, and then we had to go to battle and what (Iraqi leader) Saddam (Hussein) had said would be the 'Mother of all Battles,' the former president said.

Now, while public opinion remained strong, "the enemy is much more shadowy, much more difficult to pin down."

The September 11 attacks were a "landmark" in history, he added.

Bush Senior said Osama bin Laden, the chief suspect behind the devastating September 11 suicide plane attacks which sparked the latest crisis, appears to be "the most evil of evil" but not the only alleged terrorist leader.

The US-declared war against terrorism is likely to be a long drawn-out conflict, critically different to the Gulf War, former US president George Bush told the BBC in an interview carried Sunday.

Speaking Saturday from Texas, the father of current US President George W. Bush said the crisis was unlike the campaign he led to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991.

"It's going to be a long drawn-out campaign," he said.

"It's not going to be a 100-hour ground war or a very effective TV air war -- it's going to be a different kind of a battle to win."

"But there's a determination, amongst world leaders, that we will win," he added.

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Newly arrived Afghan refugee girl (r) holds her younger sister beside her two sick brothers and grandfather (rear) inside a make-shift camp in the outskirts of south western city of Quetta on Sunday. Thousands of Afghans fled their homeland and took refuge in neighbouring Pakistan fearing US military attacks on Taliban militia in retaliation for terror strikes on New York and Washington on September 11.

Blair cites proof of Laden's links

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Sunday that he had seen "powerful and incontrovertible evidence" linking alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden to attacks in the United States.

Much of it came from intelligence services and other sensitive sources, he told BBC television, and leaders were still figuring out how to present it to the public.

Bin Laden has been named by Washington and London as the chief suspect over the bloody September 11 attacks, when hijackers flew airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon.

More than 6,000 people are feared dead or missing in the attacks.

"I have seen absolutely powerful and incontrovertible evidence of his links to the events of September 11," Blair said of bin Laden.

He also had a warning for the Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan, where bin Laden is based and which Blair said had supported the Saudi-born extremist for years.

"They either help us or they become the enemy themselves," he went on. "If they are not prepared to give up bin Laden then they become an obstacle."

The prime minister also promised measures to speed up extradition procedures in a package of emergency legislation following the terrorist attacks.

He said ministers would bring legislation to parliament in the next four to six weeks, and urged all parties to give it their support.

As well as speeding up the extradition laws, Blair said the measures would include ways to tighten asylum laws and tackle money laundering by bureaux de change.

"I hope in this new situation people realise we have got to act. I hope we will get support from all the political parties to put these measures through. I think our first duty has got to be to protect our citizens."

He said it sometimes took years to extradite people and that the asylum process was also being abused.

The prime minister said: "We cannot have a situation where if we know someone is a suspected terrorist we don't have the legal power to detain them indefinitely until we find a country to deport them to."

US struggles to balance security with civil liberties

accept quickly proposals from Attorney General John Ashcroft that would grant law enforcement bodies sweeping new powers to locate and nail suspected terrorists.

Those powers could include broad prerogatives in a range of sensitive areas including government monitoring of private communications, tools to track movements of people within US borders and authority to detain terrorist suspects indefinitely.

"We are worried," Nadine Strossen, national president of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), said.

"What we have been focusing on most concretely has been the proposed Ashcroft legislation and the types of provisions in there that would bring sweeping threats to the rights of many people," Strossen told AFP.

Some of the measures being discussed in Washington, such as posting of guards with automatic weapons at key public facilities and introduction of national identification cards, are already used by governments in many countries as articles of public security.

But in the United States, where such methods are regarded as too intrusive and more harmful than helpful, many are beginning to take a hard look at whether compromises on prized civil liberties Bush is asking for will really guarantee the safety many crave.



Contestants in the Miss International beauty pageant, R-L: Miss Guatemala Rosa Maria Castaneda, Miss Greece Kokari Fotina, Miss Germany Anna Ziemski, Miss France Benhail Nawal and Miss Finland Hanna Mirjami Pajilampi pose in their traditional dresses as they smile to photographers at a Tokyo amusement park on Sunday. Fifty-five contestants are now in Tokyo vying for the Miss International crown to be held on October 4.