

Two killed in Saudi blast

AFP, Riyadh
An American and another foreigner have been killed and a British man injured in a bomb blast in Saudi Arabia which a US official said was probably unrelated to last month's terror attacks on US targets.

The deadly blast occurred at around 8:00 pm (1700 GMT) Saturday in front of an electronics store in the eastern Saudi town of Khobar, "killing two people and injuring four others," the official SPA agency quoted the provincial police chief as saying.

"All the victims are foreign residents," the police chief said, without providing their nationalities.

Pro-Taliban Pak leader put under house arrest

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani fundamentalist party leader Fazlur Rahman was put under house arrest Sunday to prevent agitation by his radical Islamist group against the US-led war against terrorism, a spokesman said.

Police and paramilitary forces surrounded the radical Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) party leader's home in Dera Ismail Khan, North West Frontier Province, hours before he was scheduled to lead an anti-US rally in central Pakistan.

"Fazlur Rahman has been put under house arrest for an indefinite period. We don't know what the charges are but we will go ahead with our rallies against America," spokesman Hafiz Riaz Durrani told AFP.

New CM takes over in Gujarat

AFP, New Delhi

A new chief minister for India's Gujarat state was sworn in Sunday after the previous incumbent resigned because of allegations that he mishandled relief work following January's devastating earthquake which killed 25,000 people.

Narendra Modi, who belongs to India's ruling BJP party, was sworn in at a ceremony attended by prominent BJP politicians including federal Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani.

The previous chief minister, Keshubhai Patel, resigned last week following a poor BJP showing in recent polls and amid widespread unhappiness in the way he directed the relief work after the January 26 earthquake.

The quake, which measured 7.9 on the Richter scale, also left 1.25 million people homeless.

Discontent over Patel's handling of relief operations had been brewing for some time, but his fate was sealed after two recent by-elections to the provincial legislature.

Heart beats on its own outside human body

AP, Pittsburgh

A human heart was kept beating on its own outside a body during a test of a new medical device intended to aid in organ transplants.

Doctors at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center used the heart from an 80-year-old man on Saturday to show how the Portable Organ Preservation System works. The machine had already been tested using a human kidney and animal organs.

"What we have in our hands today is a technology which allows the organ to be removed from the body and allows it to function," said Dr. Robert Kormos, director of the center's thoracic transplantation and artificial heart program.

Doctors say the technology could give surgeons more time to get potential recipients to a hospital where an organ can be transplanted, and more time to test for organ matches.

Italians vote in referendum

AFP, Rome

Italy votes Sunday in a referendum designed to grant greater powers to the regions, but turnout is expected to be low after a campaign so low-key that one newspaper called it "the invisible referendum".

Italians will effectively be asked if they want the country's 20 regional authorities to manage affairs like health and education, limited taxation and the appointment of lower court judges. The bulk of tax collection duties will remain with the state.

The vote comes after a law passed by the previous centre-left government in March, one of its last pieces of legislation before losing out to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right coalition in general elections two months later.

US, UK take commands of war on terrorism

AFP, Washington

Washington and London are clearly in command of the campaign against terror, with other allies seeming to play little more than supporting roles.

Experts fear this could affect institutions such as the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which for years were presented as tools for multilateral conflict resolution.

"I don't see any (other) country really coming on board," said Jack Spencer, a defence analyst with the Heritage Foundation think-tank.

Almost one month after the September 11 terrorist attacks, offers of help and promises of cooperation from other countries pale in the face of the deployment of dozens of warships, hundreds of planes and thousands of troops by the two close allies.

Since the beginning of the crisis, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has aligned himself with US President George W. Bush, joining him in declaring war on terrorism.

And he immediately backed his words with action, making available a Royal Navy squadron that includes the ill-fated aircraft carrier and two nuclear submarines. Some 23,000 troops currently stationed in Oman may be called upon to take part in action.

In the United States, analysts rapidly drew comparisons with the famed World War II team of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin Roosevelt, or, during the Gulf War, Margaret Thatcher and George H. Bush.

Peter Singer, an analyst with the Brookings Institution in Washington, attributes the close ties to cultural, historic, but also more circumstantial reasons.

About 200 to 300 Britons are believed to have died in the kamikaze

attacks that left around 5,500 people dead or missing. "The British are as angry as the Americans," says Singer.

Britain is also deeply concerned about terrorist activities, and London is home to a number of organisations suspected of financing Islamic extremist groups.

But the alliance between the two countries also illustrates a shared determination to maintain a strong military capability.

The British are the most significant ally. Militarily they have kept a well-funded force and their equipment benefit from a high level of compatibility," says Christine Kucia, an analyst with the British American-Security Information Council in Washington.

Britain, which has a military presence in Ireland, the Balkans and Sierra Leone, also runs an important intelligence network.

"Americans are even jealous of the information-gathering capability that the Brits have kept in the region," says Singer, pointing out Britain was the first to train Afghan fighters battling against the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of their country.

But Kucia and other analysts warn that the weight of the Washington-London leadership could weaken multinational organisations.

She adds, however, that NATO's support "is very symbolic" and that the United Nations' "consensus-building approach would make any response weak."

"We don't want to kid ourselves," she said insisting that the British participation alone does not amount to "a multilateral approach."

"Americans are taking it as a personal affront, as a personal war, they don't see the value of addressing that as a multilateral issue, and they see the British as their only best friends in there," says Kucia.

Laden has 4 look-alikes to confuse Western spies

AFP, Dubai

Osama bin Laden, the prime US terror suspect, uses doubles to confuse western intelligence agencies trying to track him down, an Afghan opposition leader said in an interview published Sunday.

"According to our latest information he is in Jalalabad (eastern Afghanistan) but we know that he has several doubles who move around in convoys to cover up and cause confusion," said Ahmed Wali Massoud, charge d'affaires for the Afghan opposition forces in London.

He told Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, "Several months ago, we received reports about the presence of four look-alikes of Osama in four different places in Afghanistan at the same time."

Massoud, brother of commander Ahmad Shah Massoud who was killed on September 9, just two days before the attacks on New York and

Washington blamed on bin Laden, said the latter had become "the true leader of the Taliban".

"Since 1998 he has tightened the grip on the Taliban security services and their money," Massoud said, adding that US strikes on Bin Laden were now inevitable since Kabul refused to hand him over.

The Afghan opposition would support any US military action in Afghanistan "aimed at destroying the heavy weapons with which Pakistan supplied the Taliban," he said.

"But that does not mean that we want the Americans to set up bases in our country with a view to a permanent presence."

Massoud said Washington and its allies should "support the legitimate government of Afghanistan as soon as the operation against terrorists is over and help it to rebuild the infrastructure and the economy of the country."

Sharon apologises for remarks

AFP, Washington

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has apologised for recent remarks, in which he accused the United States and other Western powers of trying to appease Arab nations, saying he was misunderstood.

"Unfortunately, the metaphor in my words was not understood correctly, and I'm sorry about that," Sharon said in a brief telephone interview with The New York Times published Sunday.

On Thursday, Sharon called on Western democracies, in particular the United States, not to repeat the terrible mistake made in 1938, when European democracies sacrificed Czechoslovakia for a temporary solution to their problems with Germany.

The White House said President George W. Bush had found the

remarks "unacceptable."

In the interview, Sharon expressed regret five times in less than five minutes, according to the daily.

He said he had spoken with Secretary of State Colin Powell three times on Friday and once Saturday.

"It's behind us," he said of the dispute over his comments. "It's completely behind us."

Sharon said the United States had not unfairly put pressure on Israel to resolve the conflict with the Palestinians, but he suggested that he had been concerned that such pressure was coming, The Times reported.

"Now, we have not been under pressure," he said. "What worried me was what might be."

He promised "full support" for Bush's goal of "eradicating terror."

15 Abu Sayyaf rebels killed in Philippine

AFP, Zamboanga

Fifteen Abu Sayyaf Muslim guerrillas were killed Sunday while 10 soldiers were wounded in a fierce firefight in the southern Philippine island of Basilan, military officials said.

Fighting erupted shortly before noon when police and military forces were alerted by reports that Abu Sayyaf gunmen who attacked Basilan's capital of Isabela on Thursday had holed up in Balatayan village, about seven km to the west and bordering the town of Lantawan.

Responding government forces were met with gunfire from the rebels, triggering intense fighting.

Floods kill 3 in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

At least three people were killed and thousands of others forced to leave their homes after incessant post-monsoon rain caused floods in eastern Nepal, home ministry sources said Sunday.

The floods, in the lowland tropical region of the country, have caused thousands of dollars of damage to property and crops, according to police.

"The torrential rains lasting over 72 hours have washed away several thousand acres of farmland with standing paddy crops, apart from damaging the roads in the area," a source said, adding the rains were now receding.

Poisonous brew claims 26 lives in south India

AFP, Madras

Twenty-six people have died and 40 others are in a critical condition in hospital after drinking moonshine liquor in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, police said Sunday.

The victims drank the potent brew, a country liquor known as saraayam, on Friday and fell ill soon afterwards, complaining of giddiness and loss of vision.

Additional Director General of Police, K. Natarajan, who has launched an investigation into the deaths, told AFP that the drink was suspected to have been laced with methyl alcohol.

Most of the victims were poor farm workers.

Police have arrested a woman and an accomplice accused of selling the moonshine in Puzhal, a town 20 km north of the state capital Madras.



Israeli tanks keep their position in Abu Snehneh overlooking the West Bank city of Hebron on Saturday. An Israeli army spokesman said Israeli troops and tanks moved into the Palestinian controlled section of Hebron during a dawn incursion on Friday to target areas from where Palestinians had fired on Israeli settlers living in Hebron earlier in the week.

Peres for Palestinian state

Suicide bomber kills Israeli

AFP, Jerusalem

A Palestinian suicide bomber killed himself and an Israeli in a blast in northern Israel early Sunday, even as Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres declared a Palestinian state will be created thanks to a "historic compromise."

Israeli police said the Israeli, from the Shluhot kibbutz near Beit Shean, had spotted the Palestinian walking close to the collective farm. The Palestinian detonated his bomb as the car stopped, killing them both.

The explosion, the first by a suicide bomber in Israel since the deadly terror attacks on the United States on September 11, came as continued violence threatened to bury a ceasefire agreed upon by Israel and the Palestinians.

The deal, concluded at a meeting on September 26 between Peres and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, was pushed through at the urging of a United States keen to see a peace breakthrough which

would allow it to concentrate on hunting down terror suspect Osama bin Laden.

Peres, who has called on Arafat to crack down on extremists attacking both Israel and the peace process, said he still held out hope for a "historic compromise" that would see the creation of a Palestinian state, as mooted last week by US President George W. Bush.

In an interview published in the German weekly Bild am Sonntag on Sunday, Peres declared: "We must arrive at a historic compromise with the Palestinians. A Palestinian state will be created."

Calling Arafat the uncontested leader of the Palestinian people, Peres exhorted him again to stem the violence. "If Arafat fails to rein in the extremists then there will be more attacks, an escalation of the violence and war," he warned.

The dovish Peres said that Israel had handed over to the Palestinian Authority a list of 108 of "the most dangerous terrorists": "We have demanded that at least the 10 worst

offenders should be arrested. Arafat has not done so," he added.

In a sign that Arafat was moving on the Israeli demands, the headline Islamist group Hamas said one of its top bomb makers had been detained in Tulkarem in the northern West Bank. It called for his immediate release.

A member of Islamic Jihad, Hamas' smaller rival, was also detained in Nablus, Palestinian officials said, while two more Hamas activists were being detained for questioning in Jenin.

But one of Arafat's own top lieutenants, Marwan Barghout, said in an interview to be published in Germany on Monday that peace in the Middle East is "impossible right now."

"We have been ready to fight for 100 years," Barghout, West Bank head of Arafat's Fatah movement, told the German quarterly Zenith, adding that if war were to erupt between the Israelis and Palestinians "it would be a real war."

AIDS vaccine within 10 yrs

AP, Melbourne

Researchers are optimistic a vaccine for HIV/AIDS will be available within 10 years, but it's unlikely to be fully effective against all strains of the virus, a US health expert said Sunday.

Margaret Johnston, Associate Director of AIDS vaccines at the National Institutes of Health in the United States, said there were dozens of vaccine prototypes under development around the world, with some 9,000 people participating in clinical trials.

"There's never been more optimism than there is now that an HIV vaccine can be identified," Johnston told delegates to the 6th International Congress AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Melbourne.

"However, we don't know what it

will look like just yet. We don't know how it will act. Clinical trials will take a long time and it's likely the first (vaccines)... will not be 100 per cent effective," she added.

Some 36 million people around the world are living with HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS, according to the United Nations AIDS agency, UNAIDS. Since the epidemic began about 20 years ago, AIDS has killed almost 22 million people.

Johnston said the most advanced vaccine now being tested is GP-120, developed by the California-based VaxGen biotech company. The product is made from a protein that forms the outer surface of the HIV virus and stimulates antibodies to neutralize or stop the virus from spreading.

Now being tested in Thailand, North America and the Netherlands,

results could be available as early as next month. If they are promising, another larger trial over 3 years would be conducted, she said.

"The very soonest we can have a vaccine is maybe four to five years from now and that's wildly optimistic more likely in the real world (it) will take seven to nine or 10 years," Johnston said.

Johnston said it was anticipated a future vaccine would protect people from contracting HIV/AIDS and, when given to those who already have the virus, prevent its spread.

Production costs and pricing were difficult to estimate, she said.

Costs would be increased by the need to license and buy patent rights, while manufacturing costs would depend on the vaccine design, Johnston said.

FBI agents search Web for terrorist tracks

AFP, Washington

FBI agents are searching the Web for clues left behind by the hijackers who slammed fuel-laden planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, hoping this will help track down the terrorists who masterminded the September 11 attacks.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has deployed a special unit, the "Computer Analysis Response Team" to conduct the Web-based operation.

"They are able to retrieve the information across the hard drive of computers used by the terrorists, whether it be Web surfing, E-mail, instant messengers, chat rooms, providers," said Curt Bryson, whose company trains federal agents in

Net-tracking techniques.

The FBI unit is largely concentrating on recovering conversations the hijackers could have had, according to Bryson.

To do this, agents use a system known as "Carnivore", which works through software that makes it possible to monitor and even break into the flow of electronic mail.

Since investigations started, the FBI has searched internet-cafes, public libraries equipped with computers the hijackers could have used, and hotels where they stayed.

The US daily Sun Sentinel reported that the FBI also examined hundreds of computers from libraries in Florida, where the hijackers lived for several months before the attacks.

Sources of Yellow River drying up

XINHUA, Madoi, Qinghai

Half of the over 4,000 lakes which nurture the source of China's second-longest river the Yellow River in Qinghai Province are disappearing, bringing a drinking water shortage to local people.

In Madoi, the country closest to the river source in this northwest China province, grassland is shrinking fast, with dried-up river beds emerging everywhere. However, Madoi used to be called a "country of thousands of lakes."

Partly due to the global warming phenomenon, the river has suffered a shrinking water supply for several consecutive years.

Chandrika govt in bitter survival battle again

AFP, Colombo

A new bid to oust Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga has exposed the instability of her government, just one month after she was thrown a political lifeline by a Marxist party.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) has revived a move to overthrow the minority government through a vote of no-confidence in parliament when it meets Tuesday.

The state-run Daily News said the UNP was trying to finance foreign trips for ruling party legislators so that they would be out of the country when the crucial vote is

taken and thereby ensure the fall of the government.

"Some businessmen who are sympathetic to the UNP had agreed to bear the total cost of the overseas trips of PA (Kumaratunga's People's Alliance party) MPs..." the Daily News said Saturday.

However, Agriculture Minister D.M. Jayaratne said the government was ready to face the challenge.

The opposition UNP is equally confident it can topple the PA government as it marks the first anniversary this week of its second six-year term in office.

Political analysts say the president may not risk a defeat in parlia-

ment, as she has the option of calling fresh elections.

When faced with near certain defeat in the assembly in July, Kumaratunga suspended parliament for two months.

Later she revived parliament after the Marxist party, JVP, offered her crucial support and signed a rescue deal on September 5.

This time Kumaratunga will have the constitution on her side. It provides for the president to dissolve parliament and call elections after completing a year in office.

"What is most likely is an early election," a political source close to the government said.

Speculations on Nobel prizes

Nobel Medicine Prize to be announced today

AFP, Stockholm

This year's Nobel Prize season kicks off Monday with the announcement of the winner of the Medicine Prize, as speculation mounts that symbolic winners will be honoured to mark the awards' 100th anniversary.

As always, names of possible winners for the two most prestigious prizes, peace and literature, have circulated in recent weeks, but the identities of the actual laureates are always a well-guarded secret and leaks to the media are rare.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan is rumoured to top the list of 136 nominees for the Peace Prize, while French poet Yves Bonnefoy, US authors Norman Mailer and Joyce Carol Oates, South Africa's JM Coetzee and VS Naipaul of Trinidad are all said to be in the running for the literary award.

The suspense will end next week when the winners' names are revealed. Monday's Medicine Prize announcement will be followed by the prize for physics on Tuesday, while the

prizes for chemistry and economics will both be awarded on Wednesday.

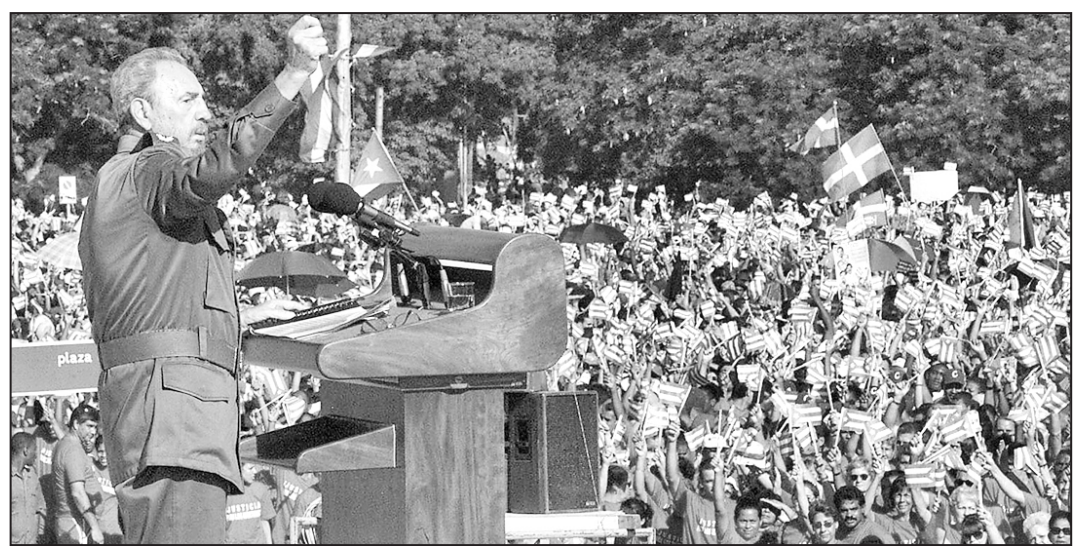
The date for the Literature Prize has not yet been officially set, but it is traditionally announced only 48 hours in advance and usually falls on a Thursday.

The grand finale, the much-anticipated and prestigious Peace Prize, will round off the week with an announcement Friday.

On September 28, the Norwegian Nobel Committee said it had made its selection for the 2001 Peace Prize laureate.

Stein Tonnesson, the head of the Oslo Peace Research Institute (PRIO), suggested the committee had likely chosen a symbolic winner who "pulls together" a century of Nobels, and predicted the laureate would "definitely" be Kofi Annan.

The Nobel Prizes were first handed out in 1901, in line with the last will and testament of Swedish inventor and scholar Alfred Nobel, who created the prizes for "those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind".



Cuban leader Fidel Castro waves the national flag at a political rally on Saturday in Havana to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1976 bombing of a Cuban plane which left 73 people dead. Speaking at the rally Castro said Cuba is against both physical and economic terrorism.