

6 more Palestinians killed in Israeli tank raid

Arafat is history, says Sharon

AFP, Nablus

Six Palestinians all of them policemen were killed when Israeli tanks raided a Palestinian self-rule town on the West Bank, Palestinian sources said in an updated toll.

The death toll in the raids on Salfit rose to six when residents found the bodies of two more men in olive groves after Israeli tanks rolled out of the town at the end of a five-hour operation, the sources said.

The bodies were later identified as belonging to Khaled Abu Yaacub and Assaad Abu Ataya, who like the four first victims identified belonged to the Palestinian security forces, the sources said.

The Israeli confirmed the raid during which it said "five armed Palestinians were killed and four wounded in the exchange of fire" during an operation targeting Salfit when gunmen "opened fire at IDF (army) forces".

"IDF infantry, tank, border police and special forces entered the town of Salfit," the army said in a statement, adding that four Palestinians were wounded in the clash.

"Weapons were found in searches conducted by security forces," the army statement said.

Palestinian sources told AFP all six men killed were under the age of 27

and that two of them were originally from the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is "history", Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared in an interview published here Friday.

Talking to the popular daily Bild, Sharon warned that Israeli troops could remain in Palestinian areas for a prolonged period of time "in order to maintain law and order".

"From now on Yasser Arafat is history," Sharon said. "If, in talks with a new Palestinian leadership, we cannot reach a peaceful solution, the Israeli army will be in the Palestinian towns to ensure law and order."

"We have been talking for seven years with the other party, now we are acting."

Israeli helicopter gunships, tanks and warplanes swooped again on Palestinian cities Thursday and early Friday after the Jewish state dropped a political bombshell on the Palestinians with a decision to cut ties with Arafat in rage at a deadly bus ambush.

Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter-bombers blasted a mosque compound and security targets in Gaza City, which had been pounded the night before in repeated air raids after Palestinian militants killed 10 Israelis in the West Bank raid.



PHOTO: AFP

A US Marine looks at a large crater in front of the Kandahar International Airport on Friday. Some 200 Marines swept into the airport terminal and cleared the area of debris and booby traps left behind by Al-Qaida fighters as they retreated a week ago. Securing the international airport will provide a new base for US military flights to Afghanistan and likely pave the way for delivering international humanitarian aid.

3 top Hizbul militants killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian security forces killed three top members of the dominant Kashmiri militant group Hizbul Mujahedin overnight and seized more than three million rupees (64,000 dollars), the army said Friday.

The three were shot dead during a clash near Patan township, 30 km north of Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

"The three belonged to Hizbul Mujahedin," an army spokesman said, adding that one of them, Nazir Ahmed Yatoo, was the outfit's divisional commander who headed a list of most-wanted militants.

The operation was carried out by army and counter-insurgency police.

"Yatoo has been a kingpin and chief coordinator of all militant activities in north Kashmir," the spokesman said.

UK parliament okays anti-terror laws

AFP, London

Britain's parliament approved early Friday a package of emergency anti-terror legislation, which includes the right to intern foreign suspects without trial.

Home Secretary David Blunkett hopes to have the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, drawn up in the wake of the September 11 atrocities in the United States, in force by Christmas.

The government was forced into a number of last-minute concessions before The House of Lords, Britain's upper chamber, gave its seal of approval and the bill was granted royal assent. The lower chamber, the House of Commons, had already approved the measures.

Laloo Prasad gets bail

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court granted bail Friday to maverick politician Laloo Prasad Yadav, who faces fraud charges relating to a 700 million dollar embezzlement scam.

The colourful former chief minister of the eastern state of Bihar had surrendered to the authorities last month after a non-bailable warrant was issued against him following investigations by the federal Central Bureau of Investigation.

He is accused of embezzling 700 million dollars during his tenure as chief minister between 1990 and 1996.

US troops land in S Philippines

AFP, Zamboanga

A group of US "special operations" soldiers landed in the southern Philippines Friday in the latest of a stream of visits following a deal to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, a military spokesman said.

An unspecified number of troops, all members of "Special Operations Command" of the Hawaii-based US Pacific Command, arrived at the Edwin Andrews air base here aboard a military cargo plane, Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Servando told reporters.

"We can't say what their purpose is," he said, describing their mission as "sensitive".

Astrologers hold up Lanka's parliament opening

AFP, Colombo

The opening of Sri Lanka's new parliament has been held up because astrological advice on auspicious timing has overruled a presidential decree, officials said Friday.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga had initially ordered that the parliament should have its first sitting since the December 5 general election on January 1.

But her rivals in the United National Party (UNP), which won the parliamentary polls, insisted that the date be brought forward.

Explosion kills 6 in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

At least six people, including two children, were killed in a blast at a house in southwestern Nepal, a report said Friday.

"The explosion ripped through a private home at Bataulpur village... which killed six people on the spot that included two children aged five and six," the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported, quoting local officials in the southwestern Dang district.

India vows to avenge attack

AFP, New Delhi

Indian leaders vowed Friday to avenge the stunning suicide attack on the parliament complex in New Delhi, with some calling for punitive raids on alleged terrorist training camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Thursday's "cowardly" attack by five unidentified gunmen who stormed the parliament compound, killing seven people before they were shot dead themselves.

"Such attacks reinforce our determination to fight the evil of terrorism. Let us rededicate ourselves to protect the sovereignty

and integrity of the country at all costs," the resolution said.

The identity of the gunmen remained a mystery, although Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan did not rule out the possibility that a Pakistan-based militant group may have been responsible.

"All of us know that terrorism in this country is sponsored by our neighbour," Mahajan said.

The chief spokesman for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP party said the time had come to consider punitive raids across the disputed Kashmir border with Pakistan.

Spokesman V.K. Malhotra said

BJP MPs had met Vajpayee on Friday morning and urged him to "adopt a pro-active and hot pursuit policy and destroy terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, whether through land or by air."

"The way the United States went into Afghanistan, the government should also take similar steps," Malhotra said.

Hardline elements within Vajpayee's BJP-led coalition have long been pushing for a "hot pursuit" policy in Kashmir, which would allow security forces to chase Muslim militants over the Line of Control (LoC) dividing the Indian- and Pakistan-controlled zones of the divided Himalayan region.

'Women suicide bombers may hit on Republic Day'

AFP, New Delhi

Indian intelligence agencies have warned that Islamic militants are training women to carry out suicide attacks in the Indian capital on Republic Day on January 26, a report said Friday.

The report in the Asian Age newspaper came a day after a suicide attack by five unidentified gunmen on the Indian parliament complex in which 12 people, including the attackers, were killed.

Senior police officials cited by the newspaper said intelligence reports suggested the targets of the women suicide squads would be the Republic Day parade -- an annual showcase of India's military might -- and the official residences of the president, prime minister and the home minister.

US confirms producing anthrax

AFP, Washington

The US army admitted Thursday it has produced small amounts of weapons-grade anthrax spores but said its stocks were all accounted for and could not have been used in recent bioterror attacks.

"It has been confirmed many times. We used anthrax in our testing equipment to test decontamination, protecting gear and detection," army spokeswoman Nancy Ray said. "It has been designed to save American lives on the battlefield."



PHOTO: AFP

Members of Parliament look at damage to Parliament House on Friday sustained in a terrorist attack on the building in New Delhi a day earlier. Indian leaders vowed to avenge the stunning suicide attack on the parliament complex, with some calling for a response similar to the US anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan.

Musharraf accuses India of trying to damage Pak interest

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf accused India of seeking to use Afghanistan to damage Pakistani interests, in an interview released Friday.

The military leader told the Far Eastern Economic Review magazine that Pakistan wanted to play a positive role in Afghanistan but the new administration in Kabul must be friendly toward its neighbours.

"Anything they (India) want to do in Afghanistan -- the purpose is only

one: How to do something which will be against Pakistan, that will damage our cause," Musharraf was quoted as saying.

The interview was conducted before Thursday's attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi. Musharraf has sent a message of condolence to the Indian leadership over the attacks.

The president attacked India's policies after being told during the interview that an Indian newspaper was reporting that two Pakistani nuclear scientists may have fled to

Myanmar. Musharraf said India only sought to harm Pakistan interests.

"That is their sole purpose. They have invited the future interior minister of Afghanistan, Mr. (Yunus) Qanooni, there (to Delhi). They must have planted something in his mouth to say. We are not bothered."

"I am very sure we want to play a positive role in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has suffered tremendously. We understand their problems. We are their neighbours."

EU summit focuses on Afghanistan, ME

AFP, Brussels

European Union leaders kick off a two-day summit Friday with intensive discussions on Europe's role in Afghanistan, the fight against global terrorism and the conflict in the Middle East.

Heads of state and government, meeting as the European Council, will also debate the next wave of EU institutional reforms, as the bloc prepares for enlargement in 2004.

Opponents of globalization will meanwhile brave freezing temperatures and take to the streets in a protest march on the summit venue,

the Laeken royal palace on the outskirts of Brussels.

On Thursday, police said 80,000 turned out for a street demonstration organized by Europe's main labor federation to demand better social conditions for the Continent's workers.

No incidents were reported, despite a big police presence.

Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, who later Thursday sat down with leaders of the European Trades Union Confederation and the employers' groups UNICE and CEEP, said the workers' message had been "received loud and clear".

Al-Qaida escape fears haunt Pakistan govt

AFP, Islamabad

Fears that Osama bin Laden or his lieutenants may slip across the frontier haunt the Pakistan government despite a huge surveillance operation at the border area nearest Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan.

Thousands of troops have sealed off the most sensitive 40 kilometer (25 mile) segment of the 2,500 km porous border, as US jets rain bombs on the cave hideouts of besieged Al-Qaida warriors.

"Mobile patrols criss-cross the terrain and helicopter gunships

hover around like giant hawks prowling their prey," said Mubarak Khan Afridi, a resident in the mountainous tribal belt.

The White Mountain range in Afghanistan, which includes Tora Bora, stretches to the Pakistan border, with many trails crossing into Pakistan's tribal zones.

Pakistani authorities said Friday they had detained more than 340 people, including 40 suspected Arab Al-Qaida fighters, who had fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Laden misrepresents teaching of Islam: Scholars

AP, New York

US Muslim scholars said the tape of Osama Bin Laden quoting religious teachings while celebrating the Sept. 11 attacks hurt efforts to convince Americans that Islam rejects terrorism.

Bin Laden cites the Hadith -- the record of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad -- and says the assault would benefit his religion. Others on the tape said the success of the hijackings were a blessing from Allah.

"This is totally out of context and does not represent at all the understanding of Islam and the teachings of the Quran," said Sayyid M. Syyed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America.

On the tape, bin Laden plucks phrases and short sentences from the Hadith about struggles with nonbelievers, making it difficult to know exactly which teachings he was referring to.

However, US Muslim scholars agree that individual references to fighting in the Quran and Hadith

cannot be used as justification for widespread violence.

"There has never been any instance when the Prophet ordered fighting non-Muslims as a kind of general order to Muslims," said Osman Bakar, of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.

Among the phrases bin Laden recites are, "I was ordered to fight the people until they say there is no god but Allah, and his prophet Muhammad."

Tape shows delighted Laden rejoicing

AFP, Washington

Osama bin Laden boasted the destruction of September 11 exceeded his hopes and calculations in a video that US officials say is a "smoking gun" proving he plotted the terror attacks that killed more than 3,000 people.

Bin Laden was shown on the often jerky, muffled amateur videotape in several meetings with associates, apparently in Afghanistan, rejoicing over the scale of the carnage in the attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

A triumphant bin Laden argued the attacks "benefited Islam greatly" and related how he waited by a radio for news the onslaught was under way.

"We had notification since the previous Thursday that the event would take place that day," bin Laden, shown sitting on the floor of a room wearing white headgear and a green military-style jacket, told an unidentified person.

"We had finished our work that day and had the radio on. It was 5:30 pm our time. I was sitting with Dr. Ahmad Abu-al-Khair," he said. "Immediately, we heard the news that a plane had hit the World Trade Center."

"After a while, they announced that another plane had hit the World Trade Center. The brothers who heard the news were overjoyed by it," he said on the tape, which lasted

nearly an hour.

Wearing a broad smile, bin Laden bragged that he had been surprised and delighted that both towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed.

"We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy who would be killed based on the position of the tower," he said, according to a US government translation of the tape, from Arabic to English.

"I was the most optimistic of them all. Due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only," bin Laden said, as he mimicked the impact of the towers with his hands.

"That is all that we had hoped for." Although bin Laden is seen going into chilling detail of the planning of the attacks, he is never shown explicitly admitting responsibility for the operation.

But Secretary of State Colin Powell said he failed to see how anyone could doubt bin Laden was to blame after viewing the tape, which was found in Afghanistan.

"How could there be a doubt in anyone's mind any longer about what we have said from the very, very beginning, that he was the mastermind, he is the head of an organization that participates in this kind of evil activity?" Powell said.



PHOTO: AFP

This combo of images taken from a video tape released by the US Department of Defence on Thursday shows suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden discussing the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11 with unidentified followers. US officials believe the tape proves that Bin Laden master-minded the attacks.