INTERNÂTIONAL

Civilians flee as India shells Pak Kashmir

Pakistan detains 100 activists of militant groups

Indian troops shelled two southern districts of Pakistancontrolled Kashmir overnight Tuesday, sending more than 5,000 civilians fleeing the heavily militarised border region, officials said.

Intermittent shelling was reported from Kahuta and Bhedi sectors in the district of Bagh, superintendent of police Sabir Hussain told AFP.

Indian forces also fired on Nakyal and Tatta Pani sectors in Kotli district, another official said.

No casualties were reported in either of the two districts. But Indian officials said their security forces had destroyed at least 12 Pakistani bunkers and killed 10 Pakistani soldiers in retaliatory gunfire in districts further east towards the de facto border, the Line of Control.

The exchange of fire happened at Mendhar in Poonch district, said a senior defence official from Indian Kashmir's winter capital, Jammu,

Pakistani officials confirmed that on Monday morning the Abbaspur sector in Poonch district came under the heaviest shelling in Pakistani Kashmir since last weekend when one civilian and at least 12 others were injured.

A twelve year old boy suffered shrapnel injuries in his legs and arms and several houses were damaged in Monday's firing. Pakistan retaliated with mortar fire killing two Indian soldiers and seriously injuring five others.

Fresh firing over Kashmir border Indian, Pakistani armies trade mortar, small arms Gilait PAKISTAN ISLAMABAD ∘Srinaga Poonch Kashmir

Amid the tense stand-off between the nuclear rivals, more than 5,000 people have fled their homes from 10 villages since Monday in the southernmost Bhimbher district of Pakistani Kashmir, officials said.

Residents in three of the most vulnerable villages in Samahni sector along the Line of Control -- the de facto border between India and Pakistan in the disputed Himalayan region -- were asked to evacuate their homes.

"We asked them to temporarily move away from the immediate border area for their own safety," a local police

official said. "People from seven other nearby villages also decided to leave their homes.'

He said two school buildings had been vacated to house the evacuees

Unlike the majority of Kashmir the topography of the Bhimbher district is flat. Local authorities fear it could be a prime target for any Indian attack across the LoC. The two South Asian neighbours have massed troops

along their borders and traded tit-for-tat diplomatic sanctions since the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament. New Delhi has demanded Islamabad crack down on

Muslim militants it says carried out the bloody raid with the backing of Pakistan's military intelligence.

Meanwhile, Pakistani authorities have arrested about 100 officials and activists from two Kashmiri militant groups accused of involvement in last month's attack on the Indian parliament, a spokesman for one group said Tuesday.

"Police and security forces in a crackdown on Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad have picked up around 100 members and leaders of both the parties," Lashkar spokesman Yahya Mujahid told AFP.

He said around 70 supporters of Jaish-e-Mohammad, whose leader Maulana Masood Azhar is already in detention, had been detained over the past few days.

Police also arrested more than two dozen Lashkar officials and activists. Muiahid said.

Revellers in Times Square wave American flags which were handed out to those gathered to celebrate New Year's Eve in Times Square in New York on Monday. Red alert for summit in Nepal

Nepal has stationed armed guards around the clock, imposed major restrictions on traffic and will deploy helicopters later in the week to quarantee security for South Asian leaders holding a summit in the insurgency-rocked kingdom.

Aware of the current attention on the summit. King Gyanendra and Crown Prince Paras have both personally inspected key sites for security and other arrangements, officials said.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf are expected to be present.

Camouflage-clad army and police personnel carrying semiautomatic guns were already in the streets of the capital Kathmandu late Monday, four days before the heads of state and government are due to begin talks.

While rising tension between India and Pakistan seems sure to overshadow all else at the South

chief security concern for Nepal's government is the Maoist rebels who broke a ceasefire in November "The government has handed

Cooperation (SAARC) summit, the

over security arrangements to the army and the armed police force to check any acts of terrorism by the Maoist terrorists during the threeday summit." home ministry spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandev Even though most Maoist-

related violence has taken place outside Kathmandu, security forces have been watching all entry points to the capital "attentively" since the beginning of the week, Pandey said.

Stringent restrictions have been imposed around Tribhuvan International Airport, which only passengers and government officials are being allowed to enter, and at the SAARC summit venue, the Birendra International Conference

The venue lies about four kilometers (2.5 miles) away from the main hotel where the dignataries will stay accompany the motorcades Pandey said.

The government has demolished some small homes in narrow streets near the summit hall while nolice have asked families living near the site to identify any guests or tenants who live with them.

Several people have been

detained for questioning ahead of the summit, but all have been Maoists and are not linked to the Indo-Pakistani conflict, Pandey Security forces have seized an undisclosed number of pagers and

mobile telephones of people suspected of making contact with the Maoists, he said. Guards will patrol around the

clock near the summit venue and key government installations, with traffic movement severely restricted As of Monday vehicles were

being allowed to travel in Kathmandu only every other day, depending on whether their license plates ended with even or odd

Bush praises Pakistan for its anti-terror efforts

President George W. Bush praised Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Monday for measures he has taken to quell terrorism, and urged Americans not to let down their quard in the new year.

After issuing a stern call to Musharraf to rein in terrorists like those who attacked the Indian Parliament on Dec 13. Bush said he was encouraged by Pakistan's arrest of a longtime leader of an Islam militant group accused in the

That attack killed 14 people and brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war. It has also threatened to undermine Bush's coalition against

"He's cracking down hard and I appreciate his efforts," Bush told reporters at a restaurant before sitting down to a cheeseburger during his holiday vacation. "Terror is terror, and the fact that the Pakistani president is after terrorists is a good

Bush said he had told Indian

US intelligence, shows ousted

Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad

Omar may be hiding near Baghran,

in Afghanistan's southern Helmand

A senior Defense Department

province, officials said on Monday.

official said there had been a "fairly

suggesting Omar may be "holed

up" near Baghran, a mountainous

area about 100 miles (160 km)

The cleric's possible where-

abouts emerged amid reports of

stepped-up efforts by local forces

to capture Omar, second only to

Osama bin Laden on Washington's

nsistent body of inte

northwest of Kandahar.

REUTERS, Washington

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that he understood his anger over the Parliament attacks, but continued to hope war would not break out

between the two neighbours. The administration has been urging the two sides to open a dialogue. Officials noted that the Pakistani and Indian foreign ministers will be in Nepal on Wednesday for a regional conference. Musharraf and Vajpayee will be there later in the

Bush shook his head as he recalled speaking with interim Argentine President Adolfo Rodriguez Saa about that country's financial crisis on Saturday, only to have Saa resign a day later. "Once they elect a president, we'll

work with him," Bush said. "But the future president has got to deal with the economic crisis at hand, and once they come up with a plan that'll sustain economic growth, then we're willing to work with them, and we're willing to provide technical assistance to the government through the IMF (International Monetary Fund)."

US zeros in on Mullah Omar

list of most-wanted men from the

gear appeared to be on their way to

the area in support of an anti-

Taliban Afghan operation aimed at

It said "a significant number of

Marines" boarded helicopters at

apparently headed toward

Baghran, where US special opera-

tions forces were said also to be

But Rear Admiral Craig Quigley,

spokesman for the Tampa.

Florida-based Central Command,

said: "There are no Marines going

anywhere today from Kandahar or

capturing or killing Omar.

involved in the hunt.

CNN said Marines in full combat

Kandahar spy chief in talks to get Taliban supremo

Hopes for ME peace rise as **US** envoy set to return

Hopes for a breakthrough in the stalled Middle East peace process jumped on Tuesday as US and Palestinian officials announced the return of Washington's special envoy after a dramatic drop in vio-

US embassy spokesman Paul Patin said Zinni, a retired Marine Corps general, would be back for an initial four or five days, and would probably "be coming and going" in a bid to push the Palestinians to stick to their ceasefire while urging Israel to ease restrictions on the territories. He said Zinni would tell the

Palestinians the crackdown they have launched on extremists is "encouraging" and that they must continue in the same direction, while telling Israel he wants to see an easing up on travel for **Palestinians**

"The goal of all that is to get back to Mitchell and Tenet," he said referring to the internationally

Meanwhile, the intelligence

chief of the southern Afghan city of

Kandahar said on Tuesday he was

in talks with local fighters in a

neighbouring province to try to

persuade them to hand over fugi-

tive Taliban supreme leader Mullah

the cleric, who founded the funda-

mentalist militia in 1994, was hiding

in next-door Helmand province, but

said he could not give an exact

location for the recluse who surren-

dered his powerbase of Kandahar

to anti-Taliban Pashtun tribal

anywhere else.

Mohammad Omar.

Haji Gullalai sai

approved plans to defuse 15 months of violence and open the door to political negotiations.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said Zinni was due back Thursday to resume his mission of securing a lasting ceasefire that will allow peace talks to resume. "We welcome the decision of the

US administration to send General Zinni to the region." he told AFP. "We hope this time we will set a

timetable and mechanism to implement Mitchell and Tenet and also to end the (Israeli) closure and seige and for Israel to pull back to their positions of September 28, 2000," when the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, began. The Tenet understanding, named

after US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director George Tenet, sets out a mechanism for implementing a ceasefire, after which the Mitchell plan, named after former US senator George Mitchell, can be set in

Raul Alfonsin

UCR

Carlos Menem

Fernando

Ramon

Puerta

Camano (interim)

Adolfo Rodriguez

Advance party of int'l force **ARGENTINA** The democratically elected presidents on way to Afghanistan Radical Party

1995

A small number of soldiers left on Tuesday to reinforce a UNmandated international security

Ministry of Defence said In Berlin, a German Defence Ministry spokesman said the group comprised 149 people from all 18 countries contributing troops for the force, including nine German offi-

force in Afghanistan, the British

The German spokesman said the contingent left London aboard a German air force transport plane for the Gulf state of Oman, where they were due to switch to a British aircraft for the rest of the journey. The British spokesman did not

state how many soldiers were involved, but said: "They are going o add to the contingent of around 300 British troops already deployed.' For security reasons, it was not

revealed at which airport in Afghanistan the advance party will land, whether at Kabul or Bagram to the north, but it was hoped the team would arrive later Tuesday, the

German spokesman said.

The new forces will be part of the British-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is due to comprise between 3,000 and 4,000 troops from several countries.

A final agreement on setting up the force was reached in Kabul on Monday, after talks between Afghanistan's interim Defence Minister Yunis Qanooni and Britain's

General John McColl. The first three months of the force's six-month mandate are to be under British command.

Assam offers safe passage to militants visiting families

India's north eastern Assam state government on Tuesday announced a month-long safe In the central island of Negros, one passage for outlawed separatists person was killed by a stray bullet while a who wanted to visit their families as man was shot trying to break up a drunken a peace gesture aimed at building a rapport for talks.

. "As a New Year offer, we want the militants to shun the path of violence and come to the negotiating table for peace talks," Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said

to their families on the New Year, provided they don't bring arms and indulge in violent activities," Gogoi told AFP in an interview. The banned United Liberation

Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), both fighting for independent homelands, are based in well entrenched bases in Bhutan from where they launch hit-and-run guerrilla strikes on Indian soldiers. "Violence cannot help achieve

any solution and all problems and grievances can be solved only through meaningful political negotiations," Gogoi added "We are ready to hold uncondi-

tional peace talks with any rebel group which is willing," he added. The chief minister said the biggest problem facing the state authorities in tackling insurgency was that both the ULFA and the NDFB operate out of Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

Russian troops kill 73 rebels in Chechnya

Russian federal troops killed 73 militants and mercenaries and captured 20 others in a special operation in Chechnya on Sunday, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, a Kremlin aide, said Monday

The special operation was the biggest in the rebellious republic over the last several months, said Yastrzhembsky. "As a result of an overnight raid

alone, 73 bandits including mercenares have been killed and about 20 others have been taken prisoner," Yastrzhembsky cited reports from the Russian troops command in Chechnya as saying

Ebola death toll rises to 22 in Gabon, Congo

AFP, Geneva

An outbreak of Ebola fever in the border region between Gabon and Congo has killed 22 victims out of 30 known cases, the World Heath Organisation (WHO) said on

WHO spokesman Gregory Hartl said that 18 of the cases had been in Gabon and 12 in Congo, without giving a breakdown of the number of deaths from the disease in each

Bushfires threaten Sydney

AFP, Sydney

Bushfires blazing around Sydney broke containment lines in scorching weather Tuesday to get to within 15 kilometres (nine miles) of the city centre. Weary firefighters battling

blazes for the ninth successive day saved 250 homes at Pennant Hills Park and North Epping north-west of Sydney as flames fanned by gusting winds lapped around the

But another 200 homes were threatened as crews, backed up by an Ericson super chopper capable of dropping 9,000 litres of water on fires, fought to stop the flames spreading down to Lane Cove national park, a 10-minute drive from the city centre.

That was as close as fires got to Australia's biggest city in the previous bushfires disaster in 1994 when four people were killed and 185 homes were destroyed around "The fire will continue to run until

we get some abatement in winds or find a point on which to hold it," New South Wales (NSW) Rural

Winter said.

smoke was blown towards the city. "This is something we have been hoping we might actually avoid but it is not to be so." NSW Rural Fire Service commissioner

Roads were closed as thick

Phil Koperberg said. "Most of the major fires along a 1,200-kilometre (750-mile) fire perimeter have effectively broken

their containment lines," he added. Koperberg revised the number of fires blazing around Sydney down to about 80.

Maldives to show its sinking feeling to SAARC members

When South Asian leaders meet, they must get a sinking feeling listening to their smallest member state -- the Maldives -- which fears it may drown under the rising seas.

Maldives president Mamoon Abdul Gayoom will raise the alarm on behalf of the 250,000 Sunni Muslim Islanders during the Himalayan summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on Friday.

A declaration at the 11th summit in the Nepali capital. Kathmandu, is expected to include a call for environmental protection and urge industrial countries to ratify the Kyoto protocol.

Several developed countries have refused to endorse the Kyoto protocol, which aims to bind industrialised nations to legally enforceable reductions of so-called greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming.

a sort of a David in the battle against the seas, was nearly swept into the Indian Ocean when tidal waves battered his capital island, Male, in April 1987.

"While I was inspecting the damage, a large wave reared up suddenly and buffeted the vehicle I was in." Gavoom wrote later. "It was a moment of fear, not for my own safety, but for the safety of the people of Maldives.'

Asian diplomats said Gavoom would use the SAARC forum in Nepal to focus attention on the plight of his nation of 1,192 coral islands scattered some 850 km across the equator.

It is the first time Gayoom is taking his crusade to Kathmandu, at an elevation of 4,340 feet (1,324 meter) above sea level.

"If the sea level rises even slightly that will put so much pressure on the vegetation and drinking water because our islands are so

small and people will have to move out," a Maldivian diplomat in Colombo said. A Sri Lankan diplomat said the

grouping of the seven South Asian

nations had traditionally failed to address the ocean problem faced by the Maldives. "The SAARC summits have generally added hot air, but

achieved little." he said. Apart from expressing a routine 'concern" for global warming SAARC has little to show after 10

summits since its inception in 1985. "South Asia is the most vulnerable region to sea level rise," a Maldivian diplomat said. "But we

very little to address this problem in a collective manner." The Maldives could potentially produce the world's first environ-

are also the region which has done

mental refugees if the sea levels rise a couple of feet in the next few

Plane crashes at IBM HQs parking lot AP, Armonk

A small plane crashed on Monday into a parking lot at IBM's headquarters, killing the pilot, officials said.

No one else was aboard the single-engine plane when it went down about 30 miles (50 kilometers) north of New York City. The pilot was trying to land when the plane crashed about 1 1/2 miles (2.4 kilometers) northeast of Westchester County Airport, said Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Jim Peters

being investigated. Peters said the pilot had reported to air traffic controllers that his plane was experiencing electrical problems. The pilot, who had been heading from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Philadelphia, was given permission to divert to Westchester County.

The cause of the crash was

IBM spokesman Brian Dole said the plane went down in the parking lot of the Northcastle building, which used to be the firm's corporate headquarters and now houses the main offices of some divisions of the

34 killed in Chinese fireworks factory explosions

AFP, Beijing

At least 34 bodies have been discovered in the rubble of a fireworks factory in eastern China flattened by series of explosions over the weekend, according to local press reports

Tuesday. Rescuers combing through the rubble of the factory in Wanzai county, Jiangxi province, have found 34 bodies and expect the toll to go higher, while clean up efforts could take 10 more days, a report by Xiaoxiang Morning Post quoted by the Rednet.com Website said.

3 killed in New Year revelry in **Philippines**

At least three people were killed and 502 were injured by firecrackers and stray bullets in New Year revelry across the Philippines, Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit said here Tuesday

Elsewhere in the Philippines, one person was killed, reportedly in a firecracker accident, while 484 others were injured by firecrackers and 21 wounded by stray

welcomed in the New Year with the traditional-if-dangerous practice of setting off powerful fireworks, firing guns into the air and setting fires in the streets Dayrit said the toll this year was a big improvement over the previous new year celebrations when six people were killed,

The casualties came as Filipinos

wounded by stray bullets. Health department personnel were still compiling reports on more injuries and deaths but Dayrit remarked "the indicators

1,325 injured by firecrackers and six

Thousands march to protest vote fraud

Tuesday marched on the building housing Zambia's High Court and Supreme Court, where opposition leaders asked a judge to block the announcement of a new president.

block protesters from storming

on Zambian court AFP, Lusaka Thousands of chanting protesters

Riot police cordoned off the court

Judge Peter Chipinge for an injuncwinner of last week's presidential election.



building and were using shields to

Outside the courthouse, five top opposition leaders told their supporters that they had asked High Court tion to prevent the Supreme Court chief justice from announcing the



Lahore on Monday. The train service between the two nuclear arch rivals will be stopped on Tuesday as India announced suspension of cross-border train and bus services with Pakistan after the terrorist attack on their parlia-