

## US raids on al-Qaida training camp

AFP, Kabul

US ground forces have launched an operation against a suspected al-Qaida training camp in eastern Afghanistan amid reports the world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden, has fled to Pakistan.

The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said Monday an unspecified number of US troops landed near the town of Zhawar in Paktia province in four helicopters on Sunday after days of heavy pounding from US planes.

The Pakistan-based news agency said the American soldiers, with the support of local tribal elders, were combing the area to flush out al-Qaida and Taliban fighters.

## Peres begins India visit

AFP, New Delhi

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was set to meet top Indian leaders Monday at the start of a three-day working visit to India.

Peres, who was to arrive in New Delhi from Bombay on Monday afternoon, will initially hold talks with Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, foreign ministry officials said.

On Tuesday, he will meet Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Defence Minister George Fernandes.

India, which treated Israel as a pariah state for decades, established diplomatic links with the Jewish state in 1992.

## Shanghai-6 FM's pledge action against terrorism

AFP, Beijing

The foreign ministers of six Central Asian states, including China and Russia, Monday formally pledged their backing to global efforts to wipe out terrorism while laying down their own plans to target separatism and extremism within their own borders.

The foreign ministers' meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, also agreed to set up a regional counter-terrorism agency and a "mechanism for emergency response," officials said.

But they also expressed caution in expanding the current US-led action in response to the September 11 terror attack on New York and Washington beyond measures agreed by the United Nations.

## US embassy on terrors' hit list: S'pore govt

AFP, Singapore

The American embassy was among several US establishments targeted for bombing by the 15 suspected terrorists arrested last month by authorities here, the Singapore government said Monday.

In a statement released to AFP, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said: "American establishments including the US embassy and commercial entities were the principal targets for attack."

The US embassy said it was confident of the security measures taken so far by Singapore.

"The embassy has full confidence in the measures taken by the government of Singapore and its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for Americans and American institutions based here," a US embassy spokesman said.

"Its recent actions are a further indication that Singapore and the United States share the same concerns regarding international terrorism and are cooperating closely in these matters," he said.

## Malaria kills 54 in C Java

XINHUA, Jakarta

An outbreak of malaria, a sometimes lethal tropical disease transmitted by the "bite" of anopheline mosquitoes, had killed 54 out of some 10,000 people infected by the disease in Banyumas, Indonesia's Central Java province, last month, the Jakarta Post reported Monday.

The paper quoted data at the Banyumas Public Health Center as reporting that malaria has incited more than 10,000 locals, mostly in the Tambak, Sumpiuh, Kemranjen, Banyumas and Somagede subdistricts in the southwestern part of the province.

Thousands of local people have therefore demanded that the local administration, including the health office, take necessary measures to fight the problem.

# India rules out talks with Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India ruled out Monday any immediate prospect of a dialogue with Pakistan, saying Islamabad had shown no sign of changing its stance towards the issue of terrorism.

"Where is the question of dialogue, when there is no change of attitude," Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told reporters after a meeting of the Indian security cabinet which reviewed the weekend's South Asian regional summit in Nepal.

"So far as Pakistan's attitude and approach towards terrorism is concerned ... regrettably there is no change," Singh said.

He also accused Pakistan of double standards in addressing international terrorism and the activities of Muslim militant groups operating in Indian Kashmir.

India and Pakistan have massed troops on their border in the wake of last month's attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi, which left 14 people dead.

India has blamed the attack on two Pakistan-based militant groups and demanded that Islamabad crack down on all militant outfits it identifies as participating in "cross-border terrorism."

Pakistan denies all India's allegations of sponsoring terrorism and views the separatist movement in Indian Kashmir as a freedom struggle for Kashmiri self-determination.

Describing the current state of relations with Pakistan as "tense" and "far

from satisfactory," Singh said the situation could only be improved by Islamabad's rejection of terrorism in all its forms.

The security cabinet meeting was called by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee following his return Sunday from the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Kathmandu, which was also attended by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf.

Singh said he had met around six times with his Pakistani counterpart Abdul Sattar in Nepal, but stressed that the meetings were informal and comprised no "substantive" bilateral talks.

He also welcomed remarks made by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who left India for Pakistan on Monday on a South Asia tour aimed at easing tensions between the nuclear rivals.

Throughout his four-day visit to India, Blair pushed a two-stage process for defusing the current crisis, involving a complete rejection of terrorism, followed by a political dialogue.

The formula catered to India's demands that Pakistan crack down on "anti-Indian" militant groups and to Islamabad's call for a resumption of formal bilateral talks.

"I am entirely satisfied," Singh said when asked to comment on Blair's visit.

"The clarity, directness and the forthrightness with which Prime Minister Tony Blair has conveyed his opinions with regard to terrorism ... is really for India a very strong point."

## Kashmir rebels kill 6 of a Hindu family

AFP, Jammu

Six members of a Hindu family were killed Monday by suspected Muslim militants in Indian Kashmir, while security forces shot dead 10 militants, army officials said.

A group of attackers threw hand grenades and opened fire at a house in Banihal village, 160 kilometres (100 miles) north of Jammu, Kashmir's winter capital, Lieutenant Colonel H.S. Oberoi said.

The house belonged to a mem-

ber of the village defence committee -- local bodies set up around Kashmir to counter attacks by militants.

"The entire family was killed; husband, wife and four children," Oberoi said.

He said Muslim militants were responsible for the attack, though he did not identify any particular group.

Meanwhile Indian security forces said they had shot dead 10 Muslim militants in two separate encounters.

## Pilot expressed 'sympathy' for Laden before crash

AFP, Washington

The teenage pilot who deliberately crashed his Cessna plane into a Florida skyscraper expressed "sympathy" for top terror suspect Osama bin Laden in a note found in the wreckage, police said.

In the note found in 15-year-old Charles Bishop's pocket, which Tampa police chief Bennie Holder characterised as a suicide note, the pilot "clearly stated he had acted alone without any help from anyone

else."

"He expressed sympathy toward Osama bin Laden and the events of 9-11," the police chief told reporters Sunday. "He was a troubled young man."

But Holder stressed there was no indication that Bishop had any ulterior, terror-related motives, declining to elaborate on the contents of the hand-written note investigators found on his battered body, still strapped into the plane's cockpit.

## Misuari deported

AFP, Manila

Malaysia on Monday deported renegade Filipino Muslim leader Nur Misuari to the Philippines, where he faces charges over an armed revolt that left more than 100 people dead.

Misuari and an aide arrested with him in Malaysia flew into the Philippines Monday afternoon, accompanied by arresting officers, and was immediately whisked to a police camp in Santa Rosa, south of Manila, police said.

President Gloria Arroyo's spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao told reporters that Malaysian authorities had handed the fugitive to Filipino officials in the morning, and that he had been flown out of the country in a C-130 military transport plane.

Police said six other detained Misuari aides were brought back to the Philippines separately and were later taken under tight security to a suburban Manila jail.

Misuari, 60, and his seven followers were arrested in the Malaysian state of Sabah on November 24 for illegal entry after fleeing a short-lived rebellion in the



Nur Misuari

southern Philippines island of Jolo that left more than 100 people dead. Manila charged Misuari with inciting the armed revolt, and he faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad had laid out the deportation plan on Saturday, but the details were kept under wraps for Misuari's own safety, Tiglao said.



PHOTO: AFP

British Prime Minister Tony Blair (r) talks with Pakistani foreign minister Abdul Sattar (2ndL) upon his arrival along with wife Cherie (L) at Pakistan air force military base Chaklala, some 25 km from Islamabad on Monday. Blair arrived here as part of his South Asian tour aimed at reducing military tensions between Pakistan and India.

## Blair arrives in Pakistan on peace mission

AFP, Islamabad

British Prime Minister Tony Blair arrived in Islamabad Monday for talks with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf aimed at reducing the tense military stand off with nuclear rival India.

Blair's C-130 Hercules military transport plane touched down at the Chaklala air force base near the capital at 1.40 pm (0840 GMT) from the Indian capital New Delhi.

The British premier and his wife Cherie were greeted by Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar and other dignitaries.

He is scheduled to hold talks later in the afternoon with Musharraf in a bid to defuse the regional crisis as well as to discuss bilateral relations between Britain and Pakistan, officials said.

His visit to Pakistan is the third leg of a South Asian tour that had turned into a US-backed mission to cool tempers between the region's two nuclear powers.

Blair arrived in India on Friday following a two-day working visit to Bangladesh.

Both India and Pakistan have massed troops on their borders and exchanged tit-for-tat sanctions in

the wake of last month's attack on the Indian parliament, which New Delhi blames on Pakistan-based militant groups.

Britain and the United States have expressed deep concern at the war moves and urged India to show restraint, while pushing Pakistan to crack down on militant outfits.

India has refused to engage Islamabad in a bilateral dialogue to reduce the level of brinkmanship, saying it has not gone far enough to curb "cross-border terrorism".

Although Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee met informally Sunday at a South Asian summit in Nepal, little emerged in the way of positive signs as to how their border stand off might be resolved.

On Saturday Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said he hoped Blair and other international leaders would persuade India to use negotiations rather than force to resolve their dispute.

"We would certainly like all friendly countries to play their part in the reduction of tensions, in convincing India that they should redeploy their forces to peaceful loca-

tions, move them from the border and agree to discuss all matters with Pakistan through talks," he said.

Blair wrapped up talks Sunday with Vajpayee during which the two leaders signed a anti-terrorism declaration that demanded those responsible for the attack on the Indian parliament be brought to justice.

Wary of the sensitivities surrounding India and Pakistan's dispute over Kashmir -- the divided Himalayan region that has triggered two full-scale Indo-Pakistan wars -- Blair stressed Sunday that the problem could only be resolved by New Delhi and Islamabad.

"It is important to reach a position where support for terrorism in whatever form stops, so that political dialogue can begin," Blair said after his meeting with Vajpayee.

India accuses Pakistan of training and funding militants fighting to end New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir. Islamabad says it merely supports an indigenous movement for self-determination in India's only Muslim-majority state.

A Muslim separatist insurgency in Indian Kashmir has claimed at least 35,000 lives since 1989.

## 'Multiple infant vaccines safe'

REUTERS, Chicago

Today's children, who receive as many as 11 vaccinations routinely, are not in danger of having their immune system overwhelmed, according to a study published on Monday.

"Current studies do not support the hypothesis that multiple vaccines overwhelm, weaken, or 'use up' the immune system," said the report from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and several other institutions.

"On the contrary, young infants have an enormous capacity to respond to multiple vaccines, as well as to the many other challenges present in the environment," it added.

"By providing protection against a number of bacterial and viral pathogens, vaccines prevent the 'weakening' of the immune system and consequent secondary bacterial infections occasionally caused by natural infection," it added.

The report was published in this month's issue of "Pediatrics," the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The authors said they

investigated the subject because recent surveys in the United States indicated that about a quarter of all parents were concerned about the possible negative impacts of multiple vaccinations.

A century ago, the study said, children received only one vaccination, for smallpox. Forty years ago four others came into common use - for polio, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus. Today children in developed countries receive 11 vaccines routinely and will have had as many as 20 completion shots by age two, the report added.

By a conservative estimate infants have the theoretical capacity to respond to as many as 10,000 vaccines, it said.

"Parents who are worried about the increasing number of recommended vaccines may take comfort in knowing that children are exposed to fewer antigens (proteins and polysaccharides) in vaccines today than in the past," the report said.

"Although we now give children more vaccines, the actual number of antigens they receive has declined. Whereas previously one vaccine,

smallpox, contained about 200 proteins, now the 11 routinely recommended vaccines contain fewer than 130 proteins in total," it added.

"Two factors account for this decline: First, the worldwide eradication of smallpox obviated the need for that vaccine, and second, advances in protein chemistry have resulted in vaccines containing fewer antigens..."

In a related development, the academy in the same issue published its annual recommendation for immunisations, saying there were no major changes to suggested timetables except one involving pneumococcal vaccine. Because there is a shortage of that vaccine, it said, healthy children should receive only the first three doses and doctors should defer the fourth of booster shot until the shortage eases.

The vaccine wards off pneumonia, meningitis and bloodstream infections. The US manufacturer of the vaccine has reported it has been unable to keep up with demand.

## Lion devours antelope calf protected by lioness

AFP, Nairobi

A baby antelope protected for two weeks by a lioness in a game reserve in northern Kenya was devoured at the weekend by a lion, a tour official said Monday.

He said the lioness tried to fight off the lion that killed the little oryx on Sunday at Kenya's northern Samburu reserve.

In a rare case of intra-species love, the lioness had lived with the antelope as if it was its own offspring, since the two met in the bush two weeks ago, tour official Lmakiya Lesarge told AFP.

The oryx calf would go to its mother, who kept a safe distance from the lioness, for suckling and return to the lioness, normally a fierce predator of antelopes.

Lesarge said the two animals likely met when the oryx's mother ran away from the hunting lioness.

"Motherly instinct prevailed," conservationist Daphne Sheldrick, renowned for caring for orphaned young animals told AFP.

"This is not unprecedented, it

does happen, but it's quite unusual," said Sheldrick, who heads the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, named after her late husband David, a founder warden of the southern Kenya's Tsavo East National Park.

Sheldrick told the story of a baby zebra brought to her orphanage two years ago after it was found in the company of a lioness which had devoured its mother the day before.

"Lions, like all the other species, including human beings, have this kind of feelings for babies. This one, I think, felt sorry for this baby," she said.

She said the young oryx should have been separated from the lioness.

"But this story could only have this kind of bad ending. People should have brought the oryx back to the mother."

"The unusual thing is that the baby was sucking the mother and coming back to the lioness," Sheldrick said.



PHOTO: AFP

A lioness protects an oryx in the northern Kenyan game reserve of Samburu on Saturday. The lioness had been protecting the oryx calf for two weeks before a lion killed and ate the young antelope over the weekend.

## Peace a must for S Asian development

XINHUA, Beijing

Leaders of the seven South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations concluded Sunday their first summit in the new century in Kathmandu, Nepal, after pledging to strengthen regional socio-economic cooperation for development.

But peace, especially that between India and Pakistan, is instrumental to achieve the goal of development in the war and conflict-plagued region.

Civil wars, social unrest and international conflicts in South Asia have dragged more than 400 million residents there into poverty and misery, greatly hindering the development of national economies of SAARC members and the development of socio-economic cooperation between them.

The association groups India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

More than 50 years of hostility between India and Pakistan, two important SAARC members, dwarfed their national economies as they have been going all out to step up their respective national defense.

Wars and conflicts between the two countries, regarded the biggest stumbling block to peace and stability in South Asia, blew into the thin air a South Asian Free Trade Area, which was originally planned to be set up in 2001.

South Asia remains one of the poorest regions in the world, with 40 per cent of its 1.3 billion people living under the poverty line. The region has one fifth of the world's total population, yet its share of global gross domestic product was less than 2 per cent.

Tension has returned between India and Pakistan since December 13 when the Indian parliament was attacked. India blamed two Pakistani-based groups, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, for the attack and demanded Pakistan crack down on the groups and arrest their leaders.

India has moved more troops to the border, saying it was responding to a Pakistani buildup and the two sides exchanged heavy mortars and machine-gun fire in Kashmir, a region the two sides have disputed for half a century.

The firing of one mortar would cost India 250 US dollars, more than half of the annual income of an

ordinary Indian or Pakistani citizen, an Argentine newspaper calculated.

Even in time of peace, the two nations have paid dearly for their hostile history, the paper said.

In Pakistan, the Pervez Musharraf government invests 2 billion dollars every year in national defense, accounting for a quarter of the national revenue. India, with a population of more than 1 billion, spends each year in defense 13 billion dollars, 17 per cent of its budget and five times as much as the yearly allowances given to the poorest.

International sanctions upon the two nations for their 1998 nuclear tests brought vast impact upon Pakistan, aborting its economic revitalisation plan and depriving it of the ability to pay off foreign debts.

The hope and plans to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions in the two big South Asian countries, which have a decisive role to play in stabilising the region, would fade if they go for another war. But history has proven that hostility and conflicts could do little in solving disputes. War and confrontation never contributes to the solution to the Kashmir issue, but peaceful talks help a lot.