

## 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 coming 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 FMs 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 infected 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.

"This is not unprecedented, it

## 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.

"There 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."



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.

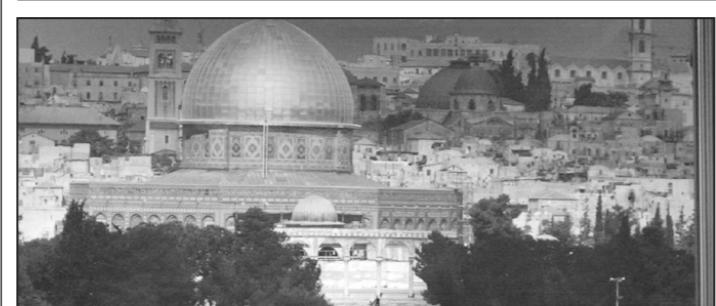


PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (R) meets with Russian parliament member Viktor Alksnis in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Sunday. Arafat met with a group of members of the Russian parliament who came to the region to attend the Greek Orthodox Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem.

## 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.

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