

Pak police quiz 12 people over abduction of US journalist

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani police said Sunday they were interrogating 12 people over the abduction of US journalist Daniel Pearl but no arrests had been made.

"No-one has been formally arrested in this case so far," Manzoor Mughal, one of the chief investigators, told AFP.

Karachi police chief Tariq Jamil said 10 people had been detained in this southern port city, where the Wall Street Journal correspondent disappeared 11 days ago after going to meet a militant Islamic leader.

"We are checking their computers, e-mails and questioning them," Jamil told AFP.

Police in the capital Islamabad had detained two people and were quizzing them Sunday, Islamabad police chief Nasir Khan Durrani told AFP.

5 m Cambodians cast their votes in polls

AFP, Phnom Penh

More than five million Cambodians cast their ballots Sunday in land-mark local elections aimed at completing this country's transition to democracy as reports emerge of potentially more polls-related deaths.

Election monitors said a steady stream of voters had moved peacefully through polling stations and there were virtually no reports of violence or intimidation from the capital or the countryside by closure of the polls at 3:00pm (0800 GMT).

However, the day was marred by the discoveries of two bodies, and an 11th hour order that only official pens could be used at the ballot box.

Violence rocks Lagos, up to 11 killed

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria's largest city of Lagos was rocked again by violence as ethnic clashes erupted in a run-down working-class district leaving up to 11 feared dead, reports and witnesses said Sunday.

Lagos State Police Commissioner Mike Okiro told AFP that only one man was confirmed killed in clashes which flared Saturday between members of the ethnic Yoruba and Hausa communities, Nigeria's two largest ethnic groups.

The clashes broke out around midday Saturday in a dispute around a mosque in the Idi-Araba district of the Mushin quarter and left scores wounded, six houses and 20 market stalls burned, newspaper reports said.



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish film director Alejandro Amenabar holds the "Goya" award for his movie "Los otros" starring Australian actress Nicole Kidman, during the award ceremony in Madrid on Saturday. The Goya Prize is awarded by the Spanish Academy of Cinema and Fine Arts.

NC asks BJP to identify Pak 'agents' in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

The ruling party in Indian Kashmir Sunday asked the nationalist Hindu BJP party to identify Pakistani "agents" who it says have infiltrated the police and local government.

Daya Kishen Kotwal, the state chief of the BJP said in an interview Saturday that Pakistani agents had made "inroads" into the state administration and police.

"If there are people with Pakistani connections in the administration and the police they should be exposed by the BJP," said Ghulam Nabi Shaheen, a senior leader of Kashmir's ruling National Conference (NC).

"If the BJP is sincere towards India, it should expose those who the party believes are Pakistani agents," he added.

The spat comes ahead of elections in Kashmir. Local elections are due to be held in the state in September 2002, but by-elections for a federal parliament seat for the Jammu-Poonch constituency are scheduled to take place on February 21.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar (L) chats with India's Security Minister Brajesh Mishra (R) at the 38th Security Conference in Munich on Sunday. The Munich Conference on Security Policy, attended by 43 nations, began on Friday and continued till Sunday. US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and defence ministers from most European states as well as many Asian nations have attended the meeting.

Floods cause chaos in UK

BBC, London

Dozens of flood warnings are still in place, mainly in Wales and central England, as the weather continues to create chaos.

A salvage attempt will continue on Sunday on an abandoned cargo ship carrying oil which ran aground on the Cornish coast.

A Royal Navy helicopter is dropping a team of Dutch salvage experts on to the ship where they will inspect the condition of the hull, a spokesman said.

"We're keeping our fingers crossed that she may not be too difficult to tow off," he told BBC Radio 5 Live.

The ship's 16-strong Russian crew were winched to safety on Saturday.

The Maltese-registered Kodima cargo vessel was carrying timber and 500 tonnes of oil.

Three severe flood warnings are in place on the River Wye near Hereford, the River Tems near Ludlow and the River Monnow in Wales

And a total of 35 flood warnings were active by Sunday - 18 in the Midlands, 13 in Wales and four in the north-east of England.

Doug Kempster, of the Environment Agency told the BBC that high winds were bringing in heavy rainfall as high tides subsided.

He warned that up to 40mm of rain in the Welsh mountains in the next 24 hours could bring further flooding.

"The weather over the last few days has been extremely violent weather.

It's not typical weather. We have seen container vessels that cannot leave ports, ferries that ran aground, lorries being blown over, trees being ripped up."



PHOTO: AFP

A local woman trudges home across the River Usk, which burst its banks in Abergavenny, Wales on Saturday. The Environment Agency Wales confirmed three severe flooding warnings were now in place, two on the River Monnow at Skenfrith and Over Monnow in Monmouthshire and one on the River Usk at Crickhowell.

Hizbul calls for resolving Kashmir dispute

10 more militants killed

AFP, Srinagar

The leading indigenous Kashmiri militant group said Sunday the resolution of the Kashmir dispute was the only way to ease tensions between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

"Nothing less than the resolution of the Kashmir dispute will bring peace in the subcontinent," said Saif-ul-Islam, the chief commander of Hizbul Mujahedin, which wants to see Kashmir's accession to Pakistan.

"Neither withdrawal of troops from the borders, nor harping on cessation of cross-border terrorism will help in easing the tensions between the two countries," he said.

Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed by both

countries.

Tensions have risen between them since the December 13 attack on the New Delhi parliament, which India blames on two Pakistan-based militant groups. The dispute escalated until around 800,000 troops were massed along their shared borders.

Islamabad last month banned both groups and froze their assets.

Pakistan has said India should withdraw its troops from the border, but New Delhi says it will not pull back until it is convinced that "cross-border terrorism" has ended.

Pakistan denies funding or arming Kashmiri militants

Islam said the people of Kashmir would continue their struggle until "the complete objective of freedom

is achieved".

Meanwhile, ten separatist Muslim militants and an army soldier have been killed in clashes in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said Sunday.

Two militants and a soldier were killed in a clash overnight in the village of Hillar near the health resort of Kokernag, 70 kilometres (43 miles) south of Srinagar, the Kashmiri summer capital.

Police said the encounter erupted during a cordon and search operation by the Indian army and lasted for several hours.

"Militants trapped inside a hide-out were asked to surrender, but they preferred to fight by opening fire at the troops," a police spokesman said.

Peres meets Palestinians

Pressure mounts on Arafat

REUTERS, New York

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met Palestinian officials in New York overnight for nearly two hours of talks on ending the Middle East crisis, the Israeli minister's spokesman said on Saturday, amid signs contacts were picking up between the two sides.

Yoran Dori told Reuters that Peres resumed his contacts with parliamentary speaker Ahmed Korei and Khaled Salam, economic adviser to President Yasser Arafat, in the margins of the World Economic Forum, a gathering of political and business elite.

Palestinian officials could not be reached for comment. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon also met Korei, an architect of the 1993 Oslo peace accords also known as Abu Ala, and Salam, whose other name is Mohammed Rashid, this week in his first face-to-face talks with the Palestinian leadership since taking office.

The dovish Peres had already held a series of talks with them.

"Both sides continued discussions on principles and ideas on how to reach a cease-fire and to renew political negotiations in order to reach an agreement which will be accepted by the government of Israel and the Palestinian government," Dori said.

He said such contacts "always" brought progress and that the negotiations would likely resume after Sharon returned to the region from a visit to Washington, where he is expected to meet President George W Bush February 7.

Meanwhile, the second biggest group in Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization suspended its membership on Saturday in protest against his arrest of its leader, piling more pressure on the Palestinian President.

The radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) announced its decision at a time when Arafat faces demands from various Palestinian groups to resist Israeli and international demands to clamp down on militants behind a wave of suicide bombings and gun attacks against the Jewish state.

The Damascus-based PFLP's politburo said in a statement it would not resume activities in the PLO's executive committee headed by Arafat until the Palestinian Authority freed its leader, Ahmed Saadat, who was arrested about a month ago. Arafat also heads the Authority.

"This is a conditional step...until Saadat is released," Abdel-Rahim Mallouh, Saadat's deputy, said.

US talks tough on terror

NATO urges Washington to share more tech

AFP, Munich

The United States presented its hard line in the war on terrorism at an international security conference in Germany this weekend but there were reservations from Russia, and even from some Western allies.

US Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz warned European allies Saturday that the United States was ready to act outside traditional alliances in its fight against terror -- and hinted it would take a dim view of anyone who tried to sit on the fence.

"Our approach has to aim at prevention and not merely punishment," he told the 43-nation conference in Munich, in a reference to US President George W. Bush's description of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil."

US Senator John McCain said here: "Dictators that harbour terrorists and build these weapons (of mass destruction) are now on notice that such behaviour is itself, a casus belli.

"Nowhere is such an ultimatum more applicable than in Saddam Hussein's Iraq," said McCain, a former US presidential hopeful.

Karl Lamers, a German conservative opposition official, summed up European concern when he said: "It cannot be that you decide and we follow."

German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping said that he favoured a political solution in the anti-terrorist fight against Iraq rather than the military option towards which the Americans seem to be edging.

Scharping said it would an "error" to move militarily against Iraq.

"It is preferable to seek a political solution," Scharping said.

And Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said he did not agree with Bush's charges against Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

"I don't have any data that the governments of these three nations support terrorism," Ivanov said.

Wolfowitz said the United States had not yet made a decision on Iraq.

He said it was a "long way from what the president said to concluding any course of action."

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General George Robertson called Sunday on the United States to help its European allies build up their armies by sharing more technology.

"The United States must do much more," Robertson told a 43-nation security conference meeting in Munich.

He said Washington has asked western European states to spend more on defence but that the United States must still help its European allies "by easing unnecessary restrictions on technology transfer and industrial cooperation."

"If the United States does not act in this way, the huge additional investment it is making in defence will make practical inter-operability with Allies, in NATO or other coalitions, impossible," Robertson said.

He said: "For Washington, the choice could become: act alone or not at all, and that is no choice at all."

Fresh clashes in Mazar-i-Sharif

Karzai prods probe into fighting

AFP, BBC, Kabul

Fresh fighting has broken out between rival warlords in the northern Afghanistan city of Mazar-i-Sharif, a defence ministry official said Sunday.

There was a "one to two hour" battle Saturday between forces loyal to Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam and those of rival Tajik commander Atta Mohammad, defence ministry official Mira Jan said.

No one was injured, and the fighting stopped when local authorities intervened, Jan told AFP.

"It was a minor clash, but investigations are continuing. We will identify the culprits of these clashes and punish them," he said.

It was the second reported clash in a fortnight involving the forces of

Dostam, the interim government's deputy defence minister, and Tajik fighters.

Dostam's fighters and ethnic Tajiks loyal to former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani previously battled in Kunduz province, east of Mazar-i-Sharif, leaving 11 dead.

Dostam and Rabbani's factions are seen as uneasy partners in the fragile Northern Alliance that fought the Taliban militia from 1996 until the hardline Islamic regime crumbled in the face of US bombing in November.

Jan called the fighting between local commanders a symptom of the 23 years of war that has devastated Afghanistan.

"These battles have always happened in our country. Most of them occur usually for personal

interests," he said.

The factional infighting has raised fears that long-standing ethnic rivalries could again split the country after the defeat of the Taliban.

BBC adds: The head of Afghanistan's interim government, Hamid Karzai, is to send a delegation to investigate the fighting which killed 50 people in the province of Paktia.

Speaking immediately after arriving home from his trip to Washington and London, Karzai said he wanted to calm things down there.

He said he deeply regretted the bloodshed and he was strongly critical of the actions of the warlord his own government had appointed as governor.

Advani vows to win 'proxy war' with Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India's hawkish Home Minister L K Advani said Saturday there had been no let up in militants infiltrating the border from Pakistan but vowed to "win this proxy war with Pakistan."

"Infiltration from across the borders has not come down. Whatever reduction has taken place is due to the snowfall, which happens every year from December to February," he said at a state election rally in the northern Indian Uttaranchal state.

Pakistan and India have massed 800,000 troops along their common border and traded tit-for-tat diplomatic sanctions after a deadly attack on the Indian parliament on December 13 which New Delhi has blamed on two Pakistani-based Islamic militant groups.

New Delhi has demanded Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf take stern action against

extremists launching "cross-border terrorism" from its soil before a de-escalation of military power on the border.

Advani accused Islamabad of having started the "proxy war" as it could not match India's military might in an open battlefield.

Advani said Musharraf's speech last month promising tough measures against religious extremists needed to be backed up with strong action.

"Our yardstick to measure his sincerity would be to see whether they have stopped the training camps, infiltration, arming, monetary support and providing refuge to terrorists, besides handing over the 20 most wanted terrorists sought by India," Advani said.

"Only then we will know whether Musharraf's utterances were sincere or meant to please the United States," he said.

Al-Jazeera wants to resolve dispute with CNN amicably

REUTERS, Doha

Al-Jazeera TV, at odds with CNN over the broadcast of a three-month-old interview with Osama bin Laden, on Saturday rejected any challenge to its professional integrity and called for resolving the dispute amicably.

Jazeera, which gained fame for its coverage of US military strikes on Afghanistan and earlier interviews with bin Laden, said in a statement CNN had obtained a copy of the interview by "an unknown way," broadcast excerpts without prior permission and raised questions about the Arabic channel's refusal to broadcast the comments.

"Based on what has come out from CNN, it (Jazeera) sees a need to discuss this issue with the American network in the framework of the cooperation between the two sides," Jazeera said.

"Jazeera will remain committed to presenting an objective and honest news service to its viewers around the world that does not accept any doubt on its credibility from any source," the statement added.

Jazeera, which had a cooperation arrangement with CNN, had earlier said it was severing its relationship with the US network and taking "the necessary action to punish the organisations and individuals who stole this video and distributed it illegally."

CNN, which ran the tape despite protests from Jazeera, said it had obtained the interview from a "non-government" source and described the tape as "extremely newsworthy."

In it, bin Laden, named by Washington as the prime suspect in the September 11 attacks on US cities, said "the battle has moved inside America."

India, Russia to talk N-sub lease

HINDUSTAN TIMES, New Delhi

India wants to lease two nuclear submarines and two TU-22 long-range nuclear-capable bombers for its navy from Russia. The proposed deal will be discussed during Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov's visit to New Delhi shortly.

A protocol to this effect is "most likely" to be signed on February 8 between Klebanov and Defence Minister George Fernandes, according to informed sources.

India will also discuss with Russia emergency defence procurements in the context of the situation on the western front. "Emergency procurements are being made from other countries

too," sources said.

Sources in the Russian Embassy hinted at a final agreement on the acquisition of the aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov for the Indian Navy.

"In an interview to the Russian news agency Novosti on February 1, Klebanov said an agreement on Gorshkov, the 44,000 tonne Kiev class aircraft carrier, will be signed before April 1," the sources pointed out.

"An advance team of Russian defence experts is already in New Delhi to do the groundwork on the defence procurements and defence production. These preliminary meetings are at the level of joint secretaries of defence," sources disclosed.

Concern about Western interests in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

The rout of the Taliban and their Islamic Pakistani allies in Afghanistan has raised fears of reprisal attacks against Western interests in Pakistan, according to diplomats who say the kidnapping of US journalist Daniel Pearl was a warning.

"Some of the militant Islamic Pakistanis who fought in the jihad (holy war) in Afghanistan returned home sour and humiliated. It would not be surprising if they seek revenge," the head of security at one Western embassy said.

Defeated by the US-led coalition against terror, the Pakistanis who fought with the "Afghan brothers"

they had often studied with in the same religious schools, lost many men and their illusions under the US bombs.

Three incidents which could precede more serious reprisals have already occurred in Pakistan. Wall Street Journal correspondent Pearl was kidnapped 11 days ago and his fate remains unknown, and small bombs were recently placed under two vehicles belonging to European embassies.

"But the worst is yet to come. What we have seen up to now are isolated warnings," a US diplomat said on condition of anonymity.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of the Peace Now movement hold up placards during a demonstration in Tel Aviv on Saturday calling Israel to end its occupation in the Palestinian territories.