

## Al-Qaida can't regroup in Pakistan, says Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said Saturday he believed alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden was still in Afghanistan but might be dead already.

He also said "hardly a dozen" US military communications experts were working on Pakistani territory with local forces to hunt down bin Laden's fighters as they fled across the border.

Musharraf said the al-Qaida extremists could never regroup in force in Pakistan, but small elements were capable of crossing the border and could destabilise the "security environment" in the country.

"I think most probably he's in Afghanistan, either dead or alive," Musharraf said of bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader and alleged mastermind of the September 11 attacks in the United States.

## India restricts movement near Bhutan border

AFP, Guwahati

India announced Saturday it would bar movement along its border with Bhutan to protect its insurgency-ravaged northeastern state of Assam from guerrilla strikes and rampant smuggling.

Indian citizens will be restricted from travelling within five kilometers (three miles) of Assam's border with Bhutan between 7:00 pm and 5:00 am, a government statement said.

It added that federal troops were on "high alert" along the border to enforce the new order.

## Rugova-Milosevic cross swords at UN court

REUTERS, The Hague

Slobodan Milosevic and Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova traded verbal bullets across a tense courtroom Friday in a bitter confrontation over the former Serb leader's role in repression of the renegade province.

Testifying at Milosevic's trial for war crimes before the U.N. tribunal in The Hague, Rugova accused his erstwhile foe of unleashing a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in 1999 in a bid to snuff out its independence movement.

## 11 schoolgirls drown in Tehran lake

AFP, Tehran

Eleven Iranian schoolgirls, all aged around 10, drowned Saturday morning when the small boat they were in capsized in the lake of a Tehran park, Iranian radio reported.

They were among around 60 schoolgirls aboard two small boats, spending a day out in Tehran's southern Park-e-shahr (municipality park), the Iranian capital's oldest park.

Seven other girls were hospitalised following the incident, radio said.

## Aga Khan meets Putin

Aga Khan, Imam (spiritual leader) of the Ismaili Muslims, met with President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation at the Kremlin in Moscow recently, says a press release.

The two leaders discussed the potential for expanding activities of the Aga Khan Development Network within the Russian Federation and reviewed together the context in which the Network has established and grown its development initiatives in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

During the Aga Khan's brief visit to Moscow, he also held discussions with Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and other senior government officials.

# Israel feels isolation in UNSC debate over Jenin mission

## US struggles to explain concept of ME peace conference

AFP, United Nations

Israel found itself isolated Friday in an open debate in the Security Council on its rejection of a UN fact-finding mission to the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin.

Only the United States offered any kind of relief to Israel, declaring that, contrary to Palestinian claims, "there is as yet no evidence that a massacre occurred in Jenin."

But deputy US ambassador James Cunningham said it was "regrettable" that Israel had decided not to cooperate with the fact-finding team set up by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

And State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said there were "unanswered questions" that still need answers, while highlighting efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the area.

A total of 38 speakers took part in the six-hour debate.

Nasser Al-Kidwa, Palestinian observer to the UN, said the council had failed to give Annan its full support and had caved in to "blackmailing" by the Israeli government, which repeatedly objected to the team's composition and terms of reference.

"Israel's refusal to cooperate with the mission proves that its defence forces committed unspeakable atrocities against our people in the Jenin refugee camp," Al-Kidwa said.

Israel's ambassador, Yehuda Lancry, recounting his government's reasons for challenging the mission, said the council turned a blind eye to the Israeli civilian victims of terrorist attacks.

Lancry accused the Palestinians of deliberate misinformation, of making "over-alarms" statements and exaggerating the number of casualties in the nine-day battle for Jenin.

Meanwhile the United States struggled to explain its concept of a Middle East peace conference planned for the summer, with officials downplaying expectations.

They said Washington feared unrealistic hopes had been raised by banner front-page headlines about Secretary of State Colin Powell's Thursday announcement of the talks.

"The exact modalities are being developed," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. "The meeting is going to be a very helpful way to explore a variety of ideas that different people have for how to bring peace to the region."



Slum dweller march to protest their planned eviction by the police from their houses encroached both the side of a railway track in Kolkata on Saturday. Approximately thirty thousand people leave on both side of the railways for years.

## Fingers still crossed for Suu Kyi's release

REUTERS, Yangon

The world's most famous political prisoner, Aung San Suu Kyi, is set to be freed from 19 months in house arrest within days despite fears a last-minute hitch had delayed her release, political sources said on Saturday.

Myanmar has been abuzz all week with speculation that the 56-year-old Nobel peace laureate was about to be freed after striking a deal with the ruling junta in a breakthrough after years of political stalemate.

Senior leaders of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) say she told them this week she expected to be released soon following secret meetings with the junta.

But the military government has been silent and the way to Suu

Kyi's home on University Avenue in Yangon was still blocked off on Saturday by barricades and a "No Entry" sign.

Every day, scores of opposition activists have crammed into the dilapidated headquarters of the NLD waiting for word. So far, they have heard nothing.

Political sources told Reuters it was probable Suu Kyi would be freed on Sunday or Monday, and that she would speak to the media on Monday. But there was also speculation that her release had been held up by haggling over whether there would be any conditions attached.

Suu Kyi spent a previous spell in house arrest from 1989 to 1995, and her release then was marked with jubilant scenes as large crowds thronged the street outside her residence.



Supporters of the French President and conservative presidential candidate Jacques Chirac waves banners and flag as he arrives for his last campaign meeting for the second round of the presidential elections in Villepinte, north of Paris, France, on Thursday. Chirac will face far-right leader Jean Marie Le Pen in today's runoff.

# Musharraf utters his worries over Indian war games

## 'Pak referendum was free & fair'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said Saturday he was concerned by Indian military exercises near the border but played down fears of escalating tensions between the nuclear rivals.

"I do not think at the moment there is a likelihood of a serious threat but I would like to say that we are watching, so we are concerned because of the capabilities that they have for any kind of adventurism," Musharraf told a news conference.

India began the military exercises with thousands of combat troops near the border with Pakistan on Thursday.

An Indian army spokesman told AFP the army would conduct the

exercises with support from the air force in Rajasthan's Thar Desert but would remain 90 to 150 km from the Pakistani border.

"The war games should end on May 15 and will test some of the army units which have been deployed along the border with Pakistan since December last year," said the spokesman.

Tensions between the two South Asian states, which have fought three wars since independence in 1947, were sent spiralling on December 13, when Islamic militants allegedly linked to Pakistan attacked the Indian parliament, leaving 14 people dead.

Since then, both India and Pakistan have deployed nearly one million troops along their shared

border. Indian defence ministry sources confirmed New Delhi had given advance notice to Islamabad about the war games.

"These military exercises normally take place at this time of the year in Rajasthan. We inform them routinely as we conduct these operations," said a defence source.

Under a 1991 agreement between the two countries, each side is required to give advance notice to the other of all exercises within a distance of 75 km from the border.

A previous exercise in Rajasthan in 1987, codenamed "Operation Brasstacks", drew India and Pakistan dangerously close to war.

# Nepal, India team up to clip wings of Maoists

## Over 350 rebels killed in offensive

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal and the eastern Indian state of Bihar have set up a joint team at their border to prevent the movement of Maoist rebels and anti-Indian militants between the two countries, officials said Saturday.

The team, which includes police and administrators from Bihar and southeastern districts of Nepal, has established joint posts along their part of the porous 1,040-km border.

"We have sent them photos of 35 wanted Maoist leaders and told the local authorities they will be eligible for a reward of up to five million Nepalese rupees (64,000 dollars) if these terrorists are killed or apprehended," an official in Nepal's home ministry said.

One photograph sent is of the Maoists' elusive supreme Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachand, he said.

Nepal has also agreed informally on cooperation with Uttar Pradesh, the other major Indian state that borders the landlocked kingdom, the official said.

Nepal has charged that Maoist rebels, fighting a bloody six-year insurgency to topple the constitutional monarchy, have set up bases in lawless areas across the border.

India, in turn, alleges that arch-rival Pakistan's

intelligence services use the Nepal border as a gateway into the country to circumvent the heavily militarised Indo-Pakistani border.

Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in March visited India, Nepal's chief supplier of military aid and economic partner, and said New Delhi agreed to step up patrols of its border with the mountain kingdom.

Meanwhile, at least 350 Maoist rebels were killed in an offensive by Nepalese security forces this week, state minister for home affairs Devendra Raj Kandel said Saturday issuing a new toll.

The new figure -- up from at least 140 given on Friday -- makes the battle the deadliest in the Maoists' six-year insurgency to topple the constitutional monarchy.

More than 210 rebels were killed Thursday in the western district of Rolpa, some 298 km west of Kathmandu, Kandel told AFP.

Another 40 were killed when security forces attacked a rebel base at Boktang in Doti district, 398 km west of the capital.

Official sources said the heavy toll was inflicted in Rolpa when government forces spotted a high-level Maoist meeting at a training camp and pounded the base with attack helicopters.

## Asian arts in limelight in UK

AFP, London

Britain is warming up for an Indian summer; not the long, hot variety, but one packed with Asian films, plays and exhibitions that are putting Asian artists in the limelight and helping them to break into mainstream British show business.

Billed as the biggest event of its kind yet in Britain, ImagineAsia, an eight-month festival of films from South Asia or by Asian film-makers, opened here last week.

The British Film Institute event will feature movies, educational schemes and exhibitions across the country, promising to attract a string of Bollywood celebrities.

## Hostage-taker surrenders in Turkish hotel

AFP, Istanbul

A gunman believed to be of Chechen origin took at least eight people hostage at a luxury Istanbul hotel on Saturday, before surrendering to authorities 90 minutes later, the Anatolia news agency reported.

No one was hurt during the incident at the Marmara Hotel in the Taksim district, in the city's European quarter, Istanbul police chief Hasan Ozdemir said.

He told reporters outside the hotel that police persuaded the hostage-taker to give himself up.

"Our initial impression is that he is of Chechen origin," Ozdemir said, but refused to answer questions on his identity and motive.

The Anatolia news agency had reported earlier that the hostage-taker was 25 to 30 years of age, spoke Turkish and was armed with a Kalashnikov rifle.

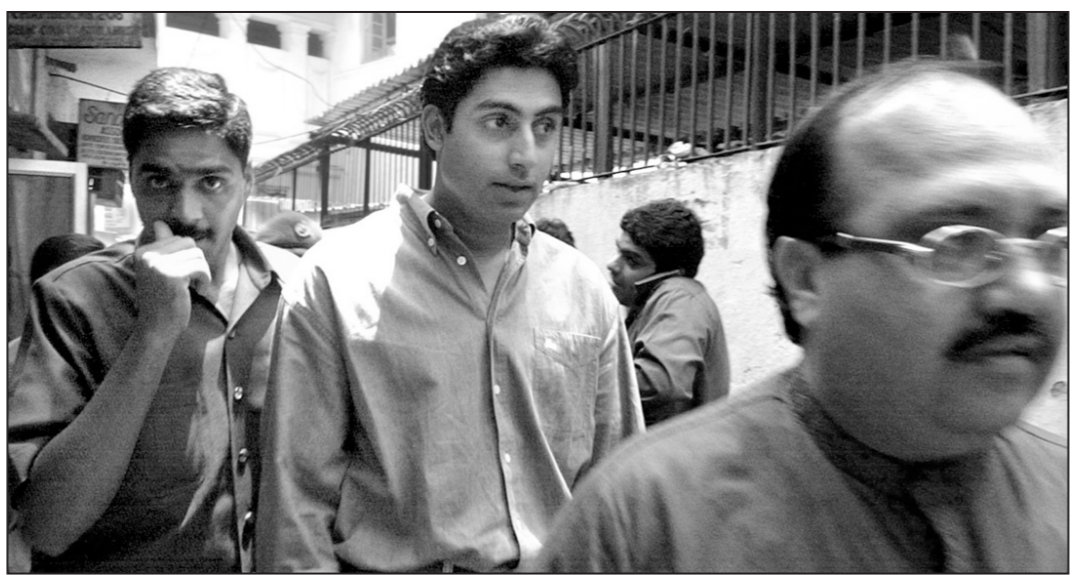
## Troops-rebels clash in Colombia: 60 killed

AFP, Bogota

At least 60 people seeking refuge in a northwestern Colombian church were killed and nearly 100 more injured when an explosive device detonated there amid clashes between leftist rebels and right-wing paramilitaries, government officials said Friday.

Calling the events in the town of Bojaya, some 580 km northwest of Bogota, a "national tragedy" and urging Colombians to show solidarity with one another, local government secretary Jorge Caicedo noted that the 60 killed were all believed to be civilians.

Bojaya Mayor Ariel Palacio confirmed the figures, adding that 13 of the 93 wounded had been seriously injured.



Bollywood film star Abhishek Bachchan (C), son of Indian super movie star Amitabh Bachchan, arrives at New Delhi's Patiala Court on Saturday. Abhishek Bachchan has been accused of allegedly beating a press photographer during the making of a movie near parliament house in New Delhi a year ago.

# Bush expresses hope for Russian-US arms deal

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush said Friday that he hopes to sign a deal with Russia at a late-May summit to slash both powers' nuclear stockpiles, but added: "There's some work that remains to be done."

Earlier, emerging from an Oval Office meeting with Bush, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told reporters "there is a very high probability" of such an agreement at the May 23-26 summit in Moscow and

# Annan sees progress in UN-Iraq talks

AFP, United Nations

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Friday that his talks with Iraq on the possible return of UN arms inspectors should resume within a month, and he hoped "real progress" would be made.

Annan told reporters that, for the first time since the inspectors left Iraq three and a half years ago, the two sides had been able to have a thorough and focused discussion on

technical aspects of disarmament.

"We did move forward and they are going back to report to their principals," Annan said after he and senior officials completed three days of talks with a 16-man delegation led by Iraqi Foreign Minister Najib Sabri.

Annan had just briefed the Security Council, which alone can decide to lift the crippling sanctions imposed on Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in August 1990.