

## New Indian rebel group sets up base in Bhutan

AFP, Guwahati

Bhutanese troops have been put on maximum alert following reports that a new Indian separatist group is operating from inside the tiny Himalayan kingdom, a report said Sunday.

Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) militants had been spotted along the Wangchu river in the southern district of Chukha. Bhutan's home minister Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho told a high-level security meeting earlier this week.

"Although it was a small group, the KLO's proximity to Chukha and to Bhutanese capital Thimphu was a reason for concern and called for appropriate responses," Gyamtsho was quoted as saying by the Kuensel, Bhutan's government-run newspaper, on Sunday.

## 26 pilgrims killed in bus accident in N India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 26 Hindu pilgrims were killed when the bus they were travelling in fell into a river in the northern Indian state of Uttaranchal, police said Sunday.

The accident occurred late Saturday when one of the tires of the bus burst and the driver lost control of the vehicle, plunging it into Alaknanda River, about 300 kilometres (186 miles) northwest of the Indian capital, a police spokesman told the Press Trust of India news agency.

Four bodies had been recovered by mid-afternoon.

## Militants gun down 5 Hindus in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Five Hindus were shot dead and three others critically injured Sunday when Islamic separatist militants opened fire on a village in the disputed region of Kashmir, police said.

"The militants entered their home and opened indiscriminate, fire killing five of the villagers instantly," a police spokesman said. "Three others were seriously injured."

The attack occurred at Baimakote village of Kashmir's Udhampur district, 200 (124 miles) north of India's Kashmir's winter capital Jammu, he said.

In a separate incident, three village guards were killed by militants in northern Doda district overnight.

## Fighting goes on in Congo

AFP, Brazzaville

Sporadic clashes continued Saturday in the Republic of Congo capital, Brazzaville, between a diehard militia group and government forces, a day after fighting left 60 militiamen dead, according to the army.

Witnesses told AFP that members of the Ninja militia -- the last of Congo's feared armed groups that served in the 1980s and '90s as private armies, who have refused to fall in line with a disarmament programme -- burned down a police station in Brazzaville Friday.

## Centre-left wins Czech polls

AFP, Prague

The Czech Republic's ruling Social Democrats won weekend legislative elections, setting them up to form a coalition to lead the country into the European Union, according to almost-full results.

The elections also saw an unexpected surge in the vote for communists, who won nearly one in five ballots in the ex-Soviet bloc country which hopes to become an EU member in 2004. Turnout meanwhile slumped.

## Shanghai introduces 'green card' for talents

AFP, Beijing

China's largest city Shanghai has started providing eligible outsiders with residence permits similar to the US green card, the municipal government said on its website Sunday.

The step is aimed at making it easier for talented people to live and work in the city, although it appears to do little to improve the plight of China's millions of underprivileged migrant workers.

# 'India to go guarding border despite Pak assurances'

## Restrictions on leave of soldiers relaxed

AFP, Ahmedabad

India will not relax its guard against Islamic militancy in Kashmir despite assurances by Pakistan that it has stemmed the flow of rebels into the Indian-controlled region and shut their training camps, a senior minister said Sunday.

"In spite of all the assurances given by Pakistan, we cannot afford to relax our guard," Indian home minister Lal Krishna Advani told reporters in the western city of Ahmedabad.

"We have to be still careful and alert, even after all the assurances given by Musharraf," said Advani, who is on a two-day visit to this riot-torn city.

The minister was referring to Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's assurances to US and British leaders that Islamabad would cap the flow of militants into Indian-Kashmir.

Advani repeated New Delhi's position that it was willing to hold talks with Islamabad if Pakistan stopped "cross-border terrorism" and "dismantled terrorist training camps" which India says are situated in Pakistan controlled Kashmir.

"Unless this is done, there is no point in dialogue," Advani said. Preliminary reports suggested that there was no reduction of terrorist activity against India, the minister said.

"There are 70 (Islamic militant training) camps operating in Pakistan-

controlled Kashmir and Pakistan," he said.

India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring an Islamic militancy in Indian-Kashmir, which has claimed about 35,000 lives since it broke out in 1989, a charge that Islamabad denies.

Relations between India and Pakistan have plummeted drastically over the past six months, with the two sides between them massing about one million troops along their common borders.

The troop build-up followed an attack on India's parliament complex by suspected Islamic militants in December.

Meanwhile, one quarter of the hundreds of thousands of Indian soldiers massed on the borders with Pakistan will be allowed to go on leave after more than six months in forward positions, sources said Sunday.

Despite the relaxation of leave restrictions, there will be no military escalation in the near future, the sources added.

"The soldiers can now go on leave for about a month," an army spokesman based in India Kashmir's winter capital of Jammu told AFP.

"For the last six months there were strict restrictions imposed on leave and only for a personal emergency could a soldier be granted leave. These have been lifted," the spokesman said.

He refused comment on the number of soldiers who had applied for leave.

## 24 teens killed in Beijing cyber cafe blaze

AFP, Beijing

A fire in a cyber cafe in Beijing's university district on Sunday killed 24 mostly teenaged students, triggering an immediate ban on the city's 2,400 Internet bars.

The blaze, which also injured 13, erupted between 1 am and 2 am (1700 and 1800 GMT Saturday) at the Lanjisu Cyber Cafe on the second floor of a two-storey building in the capital's Haidian district, witnesses said.

"I heard shouting, and thought someone was having a fight," said a resident of the neighbourhood, which is used to noisy late-night revellers.

"When I got down into the street, I saw flames reaching all the way to the fourth floor of the building next door," he said.

Firefighters arrived at the scene, and the blaze was put out at about 3:30 am (1930 GMT), witnesses said.

One man, thought to be under

20-years old, escaped through a window at the back of building, his hands and forearms blackened, according to witnesses.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me," he screamed in a state of shock as rescue workers tried to take him to a waiting ambulance, they said.

"Most of the victims were probably students aged about 18 or 19," said a local fire department official.

"I believe there were both boys and girls, although it was hard to tell because of the state the bodies were in," he said.

One witness described how the bodies, covered with blankets, were laid out in a row in front of the building.

Beijing Mayor Liu Qi announced later that all Internet cafes in the city had been closed down, and only those found not in violation of fire and safety regulations would be allowed to reopen, Xinhua news agency reported.

That could mean a sharp reduction in the number of Internet cafes

in the city, as Xinhua said only 200 of Beijing's 2,400 web bars were legal.

Chinese authorities have long been targeting the Internet, which had 33.7 million users at the beginning of this year and has possibly led to the freest flow of information ever enjoyed by Chinese on the mainland.

Officials have regularly expressed worries about the harmful effects of online content, and only last month they announced new regulations severely limiting teenagers' access to the Internet at web cafes.

The Lanjisu Cyber Cafe was located in an area housing several other Internet cafes and karaoke bars a few hundred meters (yards) from Beijing's Science and Technology University.

The Haidian area, in the northern part of Beijing, has a heavy student population as it has the largest concentration of universities in the city.

## Italian priest becomes 758th saint

AFP, Vatican City

Padre Pio, an Italian priest who is the second most popular religious figure in the country after Pope John Paul II, became the Catholic Church's 758th saint on Sunday at a ceremony in Rome attended by some 300,000 people.

The faithful began thronging into Saint Peter's Square in Rome at dawn and had filled the square well before 10:00 am (0800 GMT), when the ceremony during which the pope canonised Padre Pio started.

Despite the blazing heat, crowds also packed the avenue leading from the Vatican to the Tiber river and neighbouring streets to watch the ceremony on giant television screens.

The 82-year-old pontiff, whose failing health is being closely monitored, arrived in the square in his "popemobile" and made the last few steps to his throne near the specially erected altar in front of Saint Peter's Cathedral on foot, with the aid of a stick.



French President Jacques Chirac (second from r) and his wife Bernadette (r) get out of the voting booth after they cast their ballot in Sarran, southern France, in the second round of the parliamentary elections on Sunday.

## 'Karachi blasts only a warning to both US & Pakistan'

AFP, Karachi

The deadly car bomb attack on the US Consulate here was a clear warning to the United States and Pakistan to abandon its war against terrorism, Pakistani authorities said Sunday.

Friday's blast killed 11 people including six women and injured more than 50, blew a four-metre (13-foot) hole in the consulate wall and shattered windows within a one-kilometre (more than half-a-mile) radius.

Although investigators initially believed it was a suicide attack, they now suspect the bomb could have been a remote-controlled device planted in a driving school-owned Toyota Corolla carrying four women.

The home secretary of Sindh province, Brigadier Mukhtar Sheikh, said although the culprits have not been identified, authorities were sure the attack was linked to the ongoing battle against Islamic militants.

"We are working on different leads, but the message of the blast was for America and that is why the US consulate was targeted," he told AFP.

"It sounds a warning to the Pakistani government as well, as we are an ally of the international coalition against terrorism," he said, referring to its efforts to track down al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters fleeing from Afghanistan.

"This is a big challenge. There can be more attacks."

In talks here last week with top leaders in Pakistan's military regime US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described their cooperation in the fight against terrorism as "truly wonderful".

Such praise may prove to be a double-edged sword for Pakistan's leadership as it faces a wave of suicide bombings waged by al-Qaeda and other extremists who are battling for their survival.

Other attacks targeting Westerners include a March gre-

nade attack on a church in Islamabad's diplomatic enclave which left five dead, including two Americans, and the January kidnap and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl.

And police believe Friday's blast may have been carried out by the same al-Qaeda-linked militants suspected of launching a May 8 suicide bombing outside the Sheraton hotel here that killed 11 French nationals.

Washington has condemned the car bombing and announced the closure of the US embassy and American Center in Islamabad, as well as the consulates in Lahore and Peshawar.

"These people, if they think they're going to intimidate the United States, they do not understand the United States of America. And we will continue to hunt them down and seek justice," said US President George W. Bush.

## Israel begins fencing WB

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer on Sunday officially kicked off work on a controversial security fence along the West Bank aimed at containing would-be suicide bombers.

But as Ben Eliezer inspected the initial worksite near the northern Israel town of Kfar Salem, right-wingers in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government were clamouring to have the project shut down.

The defence minister made no speech but his appearance officially launched the long-delayed effort as bulldozers churned up the earth to start work on the first 120 kilometre (75-mile) leg of the barrier.

That fence is aimed at cutting off the northern West Bank towns of Jenin, Tulkerem and Qalqilya, considered by Israel dens of militant activity.

Work on the barrier between Kfar Salem and Kfar Kassem, which lies

about 20 kilometres (13 miles) east of Tel Aviv, is expected to take six months and cost about 400 million shekels (80 million dollars).

The full structure, comprising fencing, trenches and walls with electronic surveillance equipment, is to eventually stretch 350 kilometres (220 miles) along the "green line" between Israel and the West Bank and wind around Jerusalem.

The project, which has been floated since December 2000, has drawn sharp criticism from both Palestinians and right-wing Israelis.

The National Religious Party, on the influential right-wing of Sharon's government, demanded the work be halted during a stormy cabinet meeting on Sunday. Discussion was put off until a session of the "mini-cabinet" Wednesday.

The NRP, which represents Israeli settlers, fears the fence will become the acknowledged border between Israel and a future Palestinian state, pre-empting eventual negotiations.



Aleida March (C), widow of Argentine born Cuban guerrilla Ernesto Che Guevara, and Aleida Guevara March, daughter of Che, (R) participate in a ceremony honouring the birth of Che in El Cacahuel, Havana on Saturday. Some 50,000 gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the births of guerrilla folk hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Antonio Maceo, one of the revolutionaries who battled coloniser Spain.

## Pak defence spending soars

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan, in the midst of a military confrontation with India, has gone against the wishes of its aid donors and raised defence spending in the new national budget.

Announcing the budget on national television, Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz said Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP) was targeted to grow 4.5 percent in fiscal 2002/03 that begins on July 1, compared with 3.6 percent growth the previous fiscal year.

He said on Saturday military President Pervez Musharraf's government aimed to contain the inflation rate at 3.9 percent versus a 2.7 percent rate in the previous fiscal year.

The budget allocates 146 billion rupees for military spending compared with 131.6 billion in the original 2001/02 spending plan and 151.7 billion in the revised budget.

The revised defence spending figure reflected emergency outlays after India and Pakistan mobilised more than a million troops along their borders in December in a standoff over disputed Kashmir region, that sparked fears of war.

Tension between the two countries has eased in the past few days after U.S.-led international efforts to prevent a conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, but troops remain massed on the border exchanging almost daily artillery and mortar fire across a military control line dividing Kashmir.

## FBI agents inspect site of Karachi car bomb blast

AP, Karachi

U.S. FBI agents fanned out over the site of a deadly car bombing outside the U.S. Consulate on Sunday, seeking clues as investigators tried to reconstruct how the attack took place.

About 20 Americans most, if not all, FBI agents flown in to help with the probe extensively videotaped and photographed the scene of carnage where 11 people died and 45 were injured in a massive blast Friday.

Police said they were taking a claim of responsibility from a previously unknown group that threat-

ened further attacks seriously. Pakistani authorities said they had interviewed many people, including some who were questioned intensively at their homes, but that no suspects or witnesses were in custody.

The explosion blew a gaping hole in the heavily guarded consulate's perimeter wall, shattered windows a block away and sent debris flying half a mile. The devastation made it difficult to piece together events leading up to the bombing, count the dead the toll was lowered to 10 on Saturday and then raised back up to 11 and even determine which vehicle contained the explosives.

## Al-Qaida men reveal Laden plan

REUTERS, Washington

Three al-Qaida members have told Moroccan officials Osama bin Laden commanded his fighters in December to disperse across the globe to attack "American and Jewish interests," The Washington Post has reported.

The three men, citizens of Saudi Arabia, told the interrogators they escaped Afghanistan and came to Morocco on a mission to use bomb-laden speedboats for suicide attacks on U.S. and British warships in the Strait of Gibraltar, the Post said.

The men, captured in May in a joint Moroccan-CIA operation, appeared briefly in court in Morocco on Friday, but made no public statements, according to the Post.

Moroccan officials said bin Laden's instructions were behind a string of recent attacks, including Friday's bombing outside the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan, that killed 11 people.

They said that information from prisoners and other evidence shows that al-Qaida leaders continue to direct missions from afar, the Post said.



The International Space Station as seen from the US space shuttle Endeavour on Saturday after the shuttle undocked with the station. The shuttle with her four-person crew, along with the three-person Expedition 4 crew from the station, are planning to return to the Earth on Monday with a landing in Florida.