

## W Indian flood toll rises to 100

AFP, Mumbai

More than 100 people have died in heavy monsoon rains that have flooded India's western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, officials said Saturday.

According to state police, one person was killed in Maharashtra's state capital, Bombay, while the death toll in Thane district, about 50 km north of here, had risen to 44.

Another 23 people have been killed, most of them from drowning, elsewhere in the state, police said.

On Friday, Suresh Joshi, principal secretary of Maharashtra, said that 6,000 families had been made homeless, while a number of farmers in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg farming districts had lost their crops when the rains submerged farmland.

The heavy rains have also disrupted trains in the state, a railway spokesman said Saturday, adding that it would take days to reconstruct the damaged rail network.

## Powerful quake hits Russia-China border

AFP, Beijing

A powerful underground earthquake measuring 7.2 points on the Richter scale shook an area near the borders of China, Russia and North Korea early Saturday, but damage and casualties were expected to be light, seismologists said.

Despite the quake's magnitude, its epicentre was deep underground -- 540 kilometres (340 miles) below the earth's surface -- meaning there was unlikely to be much damage, the Jilin Seismological Bureau in northeastern China told AFP.

"At this moment we have no reported casualties and we are not expecting any as this was a very deep earthquake," an official at the bureau said.

## School children rally for peace in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Several hundred school children marched through the streets of India Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar on Saturday, carrying banners calling for peace in the disputed Himalayan region.

Wearing neat uniforms, the children from a number of private-run schools were accompanied by their teachers during the silent march of about two kilometres (1.2 miles).

Altaf Ahmed, 12, who was carrying a banner reading: "No war. Yes to Peace" said he wished for a "peaceful future."

"I wish there could be peace between India and Pakistan," he said, "which will also enable us to live in peace."

## US Capitol evacuated on fire alarm

AFP, Washington

US Congressional staff were briefly evacuated Friday from the US Capitol, housing the House of Representatives and the Senate, following a fire alarm, police said.

"There was some smoke coming from a generator motor," a Capitol police officer said. "It was not a fire ... it was just smoke."

The alarm was raised around 3:00 pm (1900 GMT) when staff of House Speaker Dennis Hastert smelled smoke.

The Congress was not officially in session and most legislators have departed ahead of the one-week July 4 Independence Day recess.

## Australia keeps up hunt for migrants

AFP, Adelaide

A fresh hunt was mounted Saturday for 26 illegal immigrants who escaped from Australia's remote Woomera detention centre, after another four were recaptured overnight, police said.

Of the 35 who escaped the outbreak compound on Thursday -- not 39 as originally thought -- nine have now been rounded up, police said.

The mass outbreak, the second in three months, was organised by a group of refugee sympathisers, four of whom have also been arrested and charged with aiding the escape. Eleven broke out of Woomera at Easter and another one escaped from custody in Adelaide three weeks ago.

# Pakistan lists 10 most wanted militants

## Pak cops link Sunni group to Pearl murder, attack on Western targets

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan issued a "most wanted" list of 10 suspected Islamic militants on Saturday and offered big rewards for their capture in connection with the killing of U.S. reporter Daniel Pearl and the bombing of Western targets.

Police posted in newspapers rewards totalling 20 million rupees (\$330,000) along with photographs of the 10 men.

Several of the suspects were named as members of the banned Lashkar-e-Janghvi group, a Sunni Muslim movement that police have previously associated with sectarian killings of minority Shi'ite Muslim Pakistanis, rather than with attacks on foreigners.

Top of the list was Asif Ramzi, a former leader of the group named as a suspect in the murder of Pearl, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal who was kidnapped in the southern port city of Karachi in January and subsequently killed.

The list also named suspects for the first time in a suicide bombing outside the U.S. consulate in Karachi that killed 12 Pakistanis on June 14 and in the bombing of a bus in the city on May 8 that killed 11 French engineers and two Pakistanis.

A man identified as Sharib was named as a suspect in both bombings. A second man, named as Naveedul Hassan, was listed in connection with the

attack on the U.S. consulate. Other wanted men whose photographs appeared included three unnamed associates of Ramzi, two unidentified Lashkar-e-Janghvi activists and a man named as Abdul Rehman Sindhi.

Sindhi was named as an associate of Saud Memon, a fugitive businessman police say is the owner of land on the outskirts of Karachi where a body was found that investigators believe may be that of Pearl.

The police chief for Sindh Province, Syed Kamal Shah, said some of the suspects named in Saturday's newspaper advertisement had previously been wanted for sectarian killings.

"Some of the names have been added after the recent attacks," Shah told Reuters. "We have some clues about these people and we are developing these clues."

Individual rewards ranged as high as three million rupees (\$50,000) in the case of Ramzi and two other suspects.

Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf is battling a string of militant groups blamed for a decade of sectarian violence and also faces pressure from India, which accuses Pakistan of supporting separatists in disputed Kashmir.

# Pak troops close in on fleeing al-Qaida men

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani troops have narrowed the hunt for around 40 al-Qaeda fugitives involved in a deadly encounter with Pakistan forces to a small pocket in mountains along its western border, local tribal leaders said Saturday.

Security forces suspect the fleeing al-Qaeda fighters may be on their way to the tribal belt town of Gul Kach, at the southern edge of South Waziristan district, some 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the rugged border with Afghanistan, tribal elders said.

The forces are concentrating on

Gul Kach, which lies on a route to southwestern Baluchistan province from Azam Warsak, where the militants killed 10 Pakistani troops in a gunbattle at their hideout on Tuesday night.

The troops were attacked with grenades and machine gun fire as they raided a tribal elder's mud-brick fortress home where the militants, described by locals as Chechens, were hiding.

The deaths were the first among Pakistani forces since they began hunting down al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives from the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, and reignited anger among fundamen-

talist groups furious at Islamabad's alliance with the US in its campaign against the extremists.

A circuitous mountainous track winds through Gul Kach to Zhob district in Baluchistan, which neighbours the former Taliban's stronghold province of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

Army troops and helicopters were heading towards the town, and a US aircraft was also seen flying overhead, tribesmen in South Waziristan told reporters.

They said the white craft may be a surveillance plane guiding the ground forces.

## Briton gets 4 life-terms for killing

AFP, London

A British man was sentenced to four life sentences on Friday after being found guilty of killing four members of the same family with an iron bar more than 10 years ago in a case that shocked the country.

David Morris, 40, showed no emotion as the sentence was read.

The construction worker was found guilty of murdering Mandy Power, 34, one night in June 1989 when she refused his advances, because she had begun a lesbian affair.



A general view shows the flattened "Moqataa" building which houses the Palestinian Authority administrative and security offices and was destroyed overnight by the Israeli military on Saturday in the West Bank town of Hebron. The Israeli army has bombarded the building for four days in an attempt to force out 15-20 wanted Palestinian militants believed to be holed up inside.

# KSA warns against Arafat ouster, US strike on Iraq

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi intelligence chief Prince Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz warned Saturday against the ouster of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, as demanded by US President George W. Bush to help bring about peace in the Middle East.

Prince Nawaf, in an interview with As-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper from Beirut, where he is convalescing after surgery for a brain haemorrhage, also reiterated that Saudi Arabia was opposed to any US military strike on Iraq.

Bush's vision for the Middle East contained "some positive and

important points, aside from the condition that the Palestinian leadership be ousted, a condition that is not useful for peace," the prince said.

"It is illegal to oust an elected leadership," he said, adding that the "Saudi kingdom opposes any interference in the affairs of Palestinians, whom we must leave to choose their own president."

Prince Nawaf also dubbed as a "true and comprehensive plan" the Middle East peace proposal inspired by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, which was adopted by the Arab summit in March as the Arab peace plan.

On Iraq, the prince said Riyadh was opposed to any US plan to strike at the country to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, which Washington accuses of developing weapons of mass destruction.

"The kingdom does not support a war or strike against Iraq," he said, stressing that the nature of the ruling regime in Baghdad was an "internal Iraqi affair."

"It is true that we don't see eye-to-eye with the Iraqi regime, but we oppose in principle that a regime is imposed on the Iraqis from overseas or it is changed by force."

## Lankan Muslims fear ethnic cleansing

AFP, Colombo

The leader of Sri Lanka's main Islamic party said Saturday Muslims feared Tamil Tiger were trying to ethnically cleanse them after clashes in the island's eastern province killed five people.

Four days of clashes between minority Tamils and Muslims have left four Muslims and one Tamil dead, injured more than 150 people and forced authorities to impose curfews to prevent any further violence.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Rauf Hakeem, said the Muslim community in the eastern province was under threat from the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"There is fear in the Batticaloa district (one site of the clashes)

that there is an attempt to ethnically cleanse them (Muslims)," Hakeem said.

There is a history of animosity between the two communities with some 100,000 Muslims being chased out of the northern Jaffna peninsula in 1990 by the Tigers.

Hakeem claims the Tigers have continued to intimidate and harass Muslim civilians in the east of the country.

In April Hakeem, who is also Ports Minister in the Colombo government, entered into a peace deal with Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran that allowed thousands of Muslims to return to their homes. The LTTE also agreed to stop extorting money from the community.

# Bush to transfer power to Cheney during colonoscopy

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush will briefly transfer power to Vice President Richard Cheney Saturday before undergoing a "routine" colonoscopy, during which he will be sedated.

"I just want to, you know, be super cautious," Bush told reporters on the White House lawn before helicoptering to the Camp David presidential retreat where the treatment will take place.

The only other time that a president has made use of the US Constitution's transfer of power to a vice president was when Ronald Reagan did so on July 13, 1985, as he underwent surgery for colon cancer, officials said.

The president's doctor, Richard Tubb, explained that the procedure was "preventative" after previous

colonoscopies in July 1998 and December 1999 each led to the discovery -- and removal -- of two benign polyps.

"I'm going to be sedated for a period of time and will transfer power to the vice president during that time. And I look forward to exercising tomorrow afternoon after the procedure," the president said.

"I feel great. No signs, no symptoms," said Bush, who had a health scare in January when he choked on a pretzel while watching a football game alone in the White House residence, lost consciousness and fell off a couch.

And during his first presidential physical, in August, doctors had located and removed three small actinic keratoses -- lesions that can become cancerous -- from Bush's face. Four more were removed in December.

# 5 militants killed while crossing into Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Indian troops shot dead five Islamic militants overnight as they were trying to cross into the Indian zone of Kashmir from Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a defence spokesman said Saturday.

In an incident early Saturday in the Poonch district, 240 kilometres (150 miles) from Indian-Kashmir's winter capital Jammu, troops killed three heavily armed rebels who were trying to enter India, the spokesman said.

Poonch district is situated along the Line of Control (LoC) -- the de facto border dividing Kashmir into

Indian and Pakistani controlled areas.

In another incident, security personnel late Friday shot dead two rebels in Saujia village in Poonch, the spokesman said.

"These two incidents clearly revealed that ingress (of Islamic rebels into Indian-Kashmir) has not been totally stopped by Islamabad," the spokesman said.

The infiltration of militants into Indian-Kashmir is at the heart of the current stand-off between the two nuclear-armed South Asian rivals, which has seen both sides mobilise about one million troops on their common borders.

India accuses Pakistan of supporting and funding an Islamic militancy in Indian-Kashmir, which has claimed about 35,000 lives since it broke out in 1989.

Pakistan denies the charge but admits to extending moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris.

Earlier this month Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf promised to end infiltration which eased tensions between the two countries.

Meanwhile a group of suspected Islamic rebels attacked a police station in Chajjoora village in the Udhampur district, 80 kilometres (50 miles) east of Jammu early Saturday, the spokesman said.

## 'Silk Road' revisited

AFP, Washington

The Silk Road that linked Europe to Asia from ancient times has been recreated in one of the most ambitious festivals ever staged in the US capital.

Camels from Kazakhstan and painted buses from Pakistan join the exotic traffic flow on the Washington Mall, a central stretch of parkland bordered by museums, the White House, and the domed Capitol building housing the US Congress.

Replicas of the wonders of the East dot the landscape, including the landmark Nara Gate in Japan, the Xian Tower in China, Samarkand Square in Uzbekistan. At the other end of the Mall, just like at the end of the road, is a depiction of Venice's Piazza San Marco.

Some 400 musicians, artisans, cooks, gymnasts, dancers and story tellers from 20 countries have

gathered here for the annual Folklife Festival, this year entitled "The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust."

World famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma was on hand to set the tone for the six million-dollar festival organised by the Smithsonian, the venerable institution that runs Washington's museums.

"Welcome to the sight, sounds and scents familiar to half of the world," Ma said to open the 10-day festival Wednesday.

Ma, an American of Chinese origin, got the festival off to a multi-cultural start -- after a moment of panic when he briefly lost his cello -- by playing a passage from "Silk Road Journeys: when strangers meet," a recent recording of traditional Asian and Western musicians playing together.

# Live bombs litter streets after arms dump blast

REUTERS, Spin Boldak

Live rockets, missiles and mortars littered the streets of the scruffy Afghan border town of Spin Boldak on Saturday after an arms dump blew up, killing at least 25 people and leaving a trail of destruction.

Firemen were still struggling to control a blaze at the smoldering weapons depot in Spin Boldak, 90 km (55 miles) southeast of Kandahar, more than 24 hours after the blast, which unleashed a chain of secondary explosions that continued for hours.

"Looking at the ammunition spread all over the town, it seems like it rained rockets," one resident said.

The cause of the blast has not been established. Afghan officials said it may have been set off by a rocket attack on the depot by suspected fugitive al-Qaeda militants or it might have been an accident.

A senior western source said local also believed a grenade may have been thrown into the arms dump, just across the border from the Pakistani town of Chaman.

Spin Boldak is a main transit point for many of the Afghan refugees returning home from Pakistan to try to rebuild their lives after 23 years of war. It lies on the road to Kandahar, the main city in southern Afghanistan.



A crowd gathers at the main gate of the destroyed ammunition depot after a series of explosions in the Afghan border town of Spin Boldak on Friday. Explosions ripped through the army munitions depot overnight and destroyed foreign-aid buildings. There were conflicting reports on losses. An Afghan official said one person died while aid worker put the death toll from the blasts at 32.