



Israeli policemen take a close look at the body of a man believed to be one of the suicide bombers at the scene of an attack in Tel Aviv on Wednesday. At least seven people were killed and about 30 to 40 wounded in twin suicide bombings, government spokesman Avi Pazner said.

## 5 killed in twin suicide blasts in Tel Aviv

AFP, Tel Aviv

Two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a busy area of Tel Aviv late Wednesday, killing three other people and wounding about 40 in the second attack on Israelis in two days, officials said.

The blasts went off about 20 metres apart in a downtown area near the old bus station that is full of falafel and shwarma stands, coffee shops and the central cinema, and is frequented by foreign workers.

Police spokesman Gil Kleiman said "three victims and two murderers" died in the attack which occurred as Israelis started to mark the high holy day of Tisha B'Av, commemorating the destruction of the first and second Jewish temples.

He would not confirm their nationalities but Israeli public radio said one Israeli and two foreign workers died in the attack, which came six months after a suicide bomber wounded 14 people on virtually the same spot.

The bloody incident in southern Tel Aviv was the second attack in two days on Israeli targets. Eight Israelis, including two babies, were killed in an ambush on a bus Tuesday outside a Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

Officials said the bombers Wednesday took up positions in front of a late night snack kiosk wearing belts carrying five kilograms (11 pounds) each of explosive and shrapnel, and attempted a "staged-attack" to maximise casualties.

Kleiman said about 40 people were wounded and the radio, quoting emergency service workers, said five people were in serious condition. Officials said the vast majority of the injured were foreign workers.

An anonymous caller claiming to represent the Islamic Jihad told AFP the radical group was responsible for the bombing. Officials said a note in Arabic was found on one of the bombers and the radio said it contained some verses from the Koran.

"I was crossing the road exactly when the first explosion happened,"

eyewitness Efraim Eloni told public radio. "I looked to my right and realised what happened. Within a few seconds, the next explosion happened and I saw all the horror."

Yossi Landau, a volunteer for the Zaka rescue and recovery organisation, said he arrived three minutes later and saw bodies and "a lot of very badly injured people. We're talking about intensive bleeding."

Landau said the onset of Tisha B'Av, which is a period of fasting and mourning, probably emptied the streets and cut the potential death toll by 70 per cent.

The suicide bombings, the first since back-to-back attacks on Jerusalem on June 18-19, came a day after the "quartet" of diplomatic powers seeking peace in the Middle East met in New York in a new bid to move talks forward.

Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner called the latest attack a "concerted effort" by Palestinian militants, encouraged by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, "to launch a series of murderous attacks on Israelis at this time."

Pazner said Israelis "will continue to do everything possible to defend ourselves from this terror."

But the latest bombing was a new source of frustration for the Israelis who have occupied seven of eight major West Bank towns for nearly a month in a new crackdown following the June suicide attacks in Jerusalem that left 26 Israelis dead.

"We know that we cannot succeed 100 per cent" in preventing Palestinian attacks, Pazner said. "We have now a rate of 90 per cent, we will try to increase it to 96, 97 or 98 per cent."

Arafat's Palestinian Authority denounced the Tel Aviv attack, but said Israel shared in the blame.

US President George W. Bush also condemned the latest bombings, which came as he prepared to meet yesterday with the foreign ministers of key Arab allies Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

## Explosion in fireworks factory kills 7 in China

AFP, Beijing

Up to seven people have been killed and a number of others injured after explosions ripped through fireworks factories in two villages in China, officials and reports said yesterday.

Four people died on Wednesday afternoon at a factory in Ruqiaotou village, near Wenzhou city in the province of Zhejiang, a county government official told AFP.

He said one person was seriously injured and four others remained hospitalized, while six more people were slightly hurt.

However an official from the county morgue put the death toll at five, but said only two bodies had been taken there.

According to the Hong Kong-based Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy, the explosion destroyed the factory and damaged houses nearby, with two factory managers and a county government official among the dead.

The factory was illegally run, the center said.

A former mayor of Lupu township, which includes the village, told AFP that government officials were usually tough on such illicit workshops.

"These are all illegal underground private businesses. We have been very strict with them. If we find them, we detain the owners. If they are detained two times, they'll be sent to labor camp," he said.

However he conceded that underground fireworks factories still flourished.

"Each night, they can produce a lot. These illegal businesses are especially dangerous," he said.

In a separate incident, two people were killed and two others seriously injured when a village firecracker workshop exploded Tuesday in north China's Shaanxi province, the state-run China Daily said.

## From paperboy to president

AFP, New Delhi

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, the 71-year-old Muslim missile scientist from a tiny fishing village in south India, yesterday completed an epic journey from paperboy to president.

Although Abdul Kalam's candidature was opposed by India's Communist parties, his elevation to the largely ceremonial top post was a foregone conclusion, after India's ruling coalition and main opposition parties promised to back him.

"Missile Man" Kalam, as he is known in India, hails from a middle-class Tamil family in the village of Rameswaram, in Tamil Nadu, where he started his working life selling newspapers.

Colleagues know the scientist with the trademark shoulder-length grey hair as a simple man who likes ordinary vegetarian food -- despite being born into a Muslim family.

Though his father Jainulabdeen Maricar, who rented out boats to fishermen for a living, was himself uneducated, he ensured that his son was given all the facilities necessary to pursue his studies.

He inherited his father's honesty and self-discipline, Kalam would later tell his friends.

After studying aeronautical engineering at the Madras Institute of Technology, Kalam joined the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thumba, in southern Kerala state, as one of its first three engineers in 1962.

There he played a major role in the centre's evolution

in space research, helping develop the Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV)-III, which projected India's Rohini satellite into orbit.

The satellite technology evolved into a missile development programme, which Kalam headed from 1983, his work earning him the title of the father of India's nuclear bomb and its missile delivery systems.

The missile project -- known as the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) -- developed an array of missiles including short, medium and ballistic.

Under Kalam's guidance, India conducted a string of nuclear blasts in May 1998, the tests including a thermonuclear device and nuclear weapons meant for the battlefield.

Pakistan conducted rival tests the same year, prompting the United States to impose a raft of nuclear sanctions on the two South Asian adversaries, who have fought three wars since 1947. Most of the sanctions were lifted in September.

Kalam has been attached to Anna University in Madras since December 2001, after he was made Emeritus Professor to guide research and developmental activities.

It is here that he has devoted his time to training the next generation, with the goal of bringing 100,000 young Indians into the scientific community by 2020.

## Laden dead, says FBI

AP, Washington

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's counter-terrorism chief Dale Watson said Wednesday he believes Osama bin Laden is dead -- the first time a senior US law enforcement official has publicly given an opinion on the al-Qaida leader's status.

Watson, speaking at a conference of law enforcement officials at a downtown hotel, quickly emphasised that he had no evidence that bin Laden was dead, but his comments suggest that the FBI has no intelligence that proves bin Laden is alive.

"Is (bin Laden) alive or is he dead?" Watson said. "I am not really sure of the answer... I personally think he is probably not with us anymore but I have no evidence to

support that."

Watson also said that bin Laden's network of terrorist training camps has been dismantled, but "there is no question in my mind... we will be attacked again."

Watson, who rarely makes public appearances, is the top official for counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence in the FBI. He did not elaborate on his comments on bin Laden and rushed away from reporters after he spoke.

Since December, reports of bin Laden's whereabouts and wellbeing have been sporadic and from different sources.

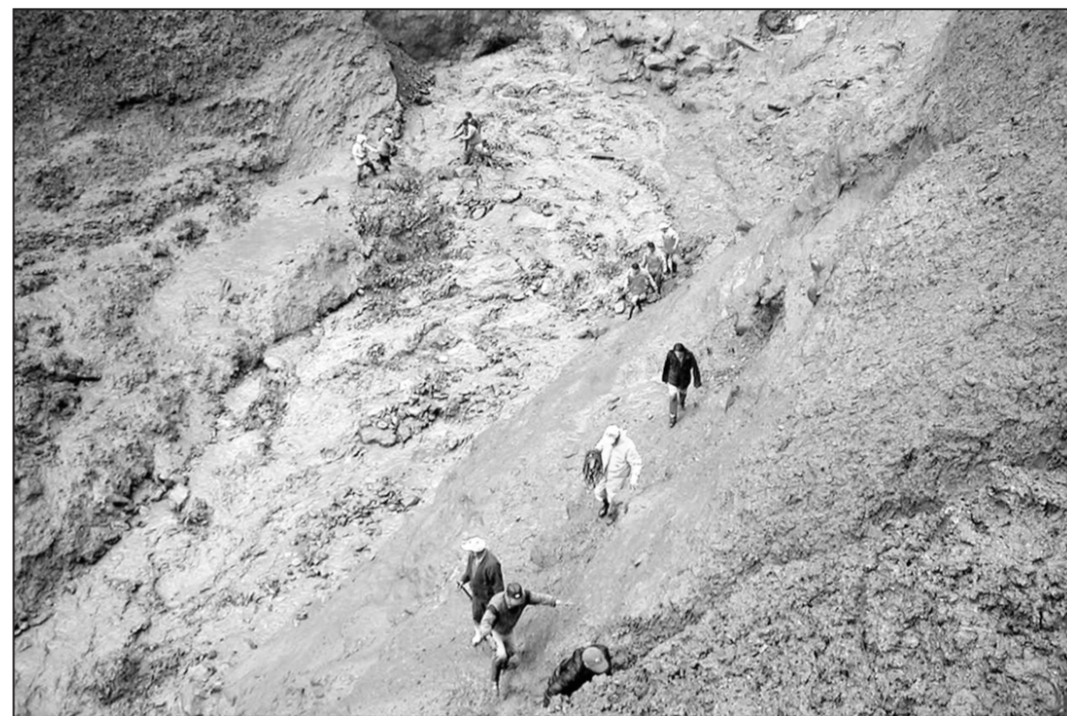
Earlier this month, a London-based Arabic newspaper said Osama bin Laden was wounded in a US bombing raid in Afghanistan last year but is in good health.

There was no way to verify the

report in London-based Al-Quds Al-Arabi. US officials say they have no evidence bin Laden was wounded in the US bombing of al-Qaida hide-outs in Tora Bora, Afghanistan, late last year, but acknowledge it is a possibility. The newspaper's editor said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press that bin Laden underwent surgery to remove shrapnel from his left shoulder.

Atwan told the AP on Monday that sources close to the al-Qaida leader "confirmed to me that the man is in good health" after recovering from the wound.

While the Bush administration has said publicly it does not know whether bin Laden is alive or dead, some US counter-terrorism officials have privately acknowledged they believe he is alive.



Civil Defence and Red Cross workers search for victims following a landslide on Wednesday in Boomba, Ecuador. As many as 70 people may have died in the landslide which buried a bus and other vehicles along a one-kilometre stretch of highway in southern Ecuador.

## 70 feared dead in Ecuador landslide

AFP, Quito

As many as 70 people may have died in landslide which buried a bus and other vehicles along a one-kilometre stretch of highway in southern Ecuador, a local official said Wednesday.

At least ten other vehicles were buried along with the bus which was carrying some 30 people when the landslide struck, according to Rafael Ruiz, mayor of the nearby town of Mendez.

Captain Edgar Delgado, the commander of a nearby military base agreed with Ruiz's estimate of casualties, though he added that rescue work was still to begin and "it was impossible to determine exactly how many people the vehicles were carrying."

The governor of Morona Santiago province where the disaster took place, Luis Rivadeneira, said that teams from the Red Cross, Civil Defence, the police and the army had all been mobilised but that a lack of heavy machinery meant that they had been able to begin their rescue work.

## Al-Qaida weapon access worries Washington

AP, Washington

Although US troops in Afghanistan turned up no evidence that al-Qaida had nuclear weapons, the Pentagon still worries the terrorist network could get them from sources in other countries, a senior official said.

Stephen Younger, director of the Defence Threat Reduction Agency, said extensive searches in Afghanistan showed al-Qaida was interested in nuclear technologies, as well as biological and chemical weapons.

He said they had made little progress toward building their own bombs before US forces intervened last fall, drove the Taliban regime

from power and sent surviving al-Qaida leaders into hiding.

Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has publicly raised the possibility that Iraq could be such a supplier for al-Qaida or other international terrorist groups.

Al-Qaida's interest in biological weapons seemed to be focused mainly on anthrax, Younger said.

In light of the September 11 attacks and concerns within the Bush administration that international terrorists might link up with Iraq to obtain weapons of mass destruction, the Pentagon is exploring new ways to neutralise or destroy biological and chemical weapons that might be stored

underground.

Younger said one possibility is a warhead that would encapsulate a biological or chemical weapons facility with a hard or sticky foam rather than blow it up with conventional bombs.

Another possibility is a non-exploding warhead that spreads flammable materials to incinerate biological agents.

Both approaches are still on the drawing board. They would be alternatives to conventional high-explosive warheads, which might allow contaminants to escape, threatening civilians or US troops.

## Indian students go on rampage after police gun down classmate

AFP, Agra

Students ransacked offices Thursday at a medical college in the northern Indian city of Agra, home of the Taj Mahal, after trigger-happy police allegedly shot dead a woman who studied there.

Angry doctors-in-training smashed up the emergency ward at the Medical College of Agra and set fire to furniture in the school's head office, demanding tough action against the police who allegedly killed medical student Sonali Bose on Wednesday after trying to stop her car.

Health services at the college were paralyzed as the medical students pledged to carry out a strike until the guilty policemen were prosecuted.

## Indonesian troops kill 12 suspected rebels in Aceh

AFP, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

The Indonesian military said yesterday that it has killed 12 separatist rebels in troubled Aceh province.

Soldiers killed eight Free Aceh Movement (GAM) members in a 30-minute encounter at Alam Jeumpa in West Aceh district on Wednesday, said provincial military spokesman Major Zaenal Muttaqin.

Also Wednesday, three guerrillas were killed and three arrested in a military ambush at Mereu in Aceh Besar district, he said.

GAM said the 11 were civilians. The military spokesman said troops killed another suspected rebel at Kampung Blang in North Aceh on Wednesday. A handgun and two home-made bombs were seized.

A rebel spokesman, Teungku Jamaica, said soldiers shot dead a civilian at Simpang Keuramat in North Aceh on Wednesday. The military denied the claim.

Jamaica also said two men were found dead on Wednesday in separate places in North Aceh. They had been arrested a few months ago by soldiers guarding the gas plant of US-based oil giant ExxonMobil, he said.

Police and troops have stepped up offensives against rebels following a recent series of kidnappings, arson attacks and murders which they blame on the separatist movement.

Aceh police said Thursday that at least 50 people had been taken hostage by the rebels over the past four months. Adjunct Senior Commissioner Dadek Achmad said more than 20 of them had yet to be released.

He said the remainder had been freed for ransom amounting to "hundreds or at least tens of million rupiah" (thousands or hundreds of dollars). "Otherwise they will execute them (the hostages) mercilessly," Achmad said.

Earlier this month GAM released nine crewmen seized from an oil company supply ship and nine athletes and sports officials. GAM said they were freed after they were found to be civilians and not engaged in military operations.

Top security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on July 4 said the government wanted to declare a state of civil emergency against what he called "terrorists."