

Suicide bomber strikes Jerusalem: 4 injured

Two settlers killed in WB

AFP, Jerusalem

A suicide bomber wounded four other people when he blew himself up in downtown Jerusalem on Tuesday, in the first such attack here in nearly six weeks, police said.

There was an explosion in the centre and as a result of the suicide bomber died in the place. There are four others injured, lightly to moderately. Jerusalem police chief Micky Levy told Israel public television.

The explosion occurred in an area of central Jerusalem close to the boundary with occupied east Jerusalem, in front of a falafel stand near the Russian Compound, the site of several bars but also a prison.

Public television said most of the injured suffered from shrapnel wounds in the blast, the first in Jerusalem since attacks on June 18

and 19 that left a total of 25 Israelis dead.

Israelis had been bracing for new suicide attacks with Palestinian militants vowing to avenge a bloody July 22 air strike in Gaza City that killed 14 people, including nine children, in addition to a targeted top militant.

But until Tuesday's bombing in front of the Yemeni falafel stand, the reprisals had involved attacks on Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

The bomb went off about 400 meters (yards) from the prison housing Israel's most prominent prisoner, Marwan Barghuti, the West Bank secretary general of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement facing trial on terrorism charges.

Although the authorities were on the alert for suicide attacks, Levy told Israeli television it was virtually impossible to stop all would-be

bombers from reaching civilian targets.

There is a population of 180,000 Palestinians in east Jerusalem who are trying to live their lives peacefully, he said. "When there is a population like that it is much easier for a crazy suicide bomber to get through and reach a heavily populated (Israeli) area."

Together with the security services we are trying to do everything we can to protect the population.

Reuters adds: Palestinians shot and killed two Jewish settlers who drove a fuel truck into a Palestinian-ruled village in the West Bank on Tuesday, the Israeli army and a settlement spokesman said.

Palestinian municipal officials said the settlers were in the eastern part of Jammain village to supply fuel to a factory and that the army

had imposed a curfew to search houses.

A settlement spokesman said the settlers may have come from nearby Tapuach, near the Palestinian city of Nablus.

"It appears that two of our residents entered a Palestinian village, perhaps to collect or offload merchandise, and were shot and murdered," Tapuach secretary Daniel Shukrun told Reuters.

Jammain village is under Palestinian administrative and Israeli security control.

Israel Radio said police were searching for masked men who were seen fleeing the scene.

Jewish settlers have frequently been targeted by Palestinians waging a 22-month-old uprising for independence in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Hrithik on Mumbai dons' hit list

Mafia dons after top Bollywood stars like Amitabh, Shahrukh, Rakesh and Salman Khan for extortions

AFP, Mumbai

Fear has once again gripped Bollywood after police revealed plans by the Mafia to kill heartthrob film star Hrithik Roshan.

Police submitted audio tapes to a Bombay court of a conversation reputed to have been held in November 2000 between popular film star Sanjay Dutt and underworld don Chota Shakeel, discussing a plan to kill Hrithik Roshan.

The Bombay-based movie industry has retreated into a shell after the release of the tapes, with many top actors, producers and directors seeking police protection and at the same time claiming up on the renewed menace of the Mafia.

"Fear has definitely returned again despite the fact that the so-called plan to kill Hrithik Roshan was hatched two years back," said a well-known director on condition of anonymity.

He said the Mafia had recently begun a new series of extortion attempts on numerous top stars, producers and directors.

"I am lucky not to have gotten those dreaded calls," said the director, who turned out one of Bollywood's major hits last year. "But I am sure these calls have returned as many industry people are now seen moving with bodyguards. Well, you play with the devil, this is what you get," he added.



The deputy chief minister of Maharashtra state, which includes Bombay, Chagan Bhujbal, said police have been giving security to all those facing extortion threats, especially Bollywood figures.

"Earlier people were not coming forward and registering complaints that they have been facing threats from the Mafia," he said.

"But of late they have been doing this, and most of these who have been seeking security are from Bollywood," he added.

Police confirm that the underworld's grip has increased in the past couple of months, with most of the top industry personalities receiving threatening calls from gangsters belonging to outfits headed by Shakeel, Chota Rajan, Abu Salem and also from the Karachi-based Dawood Ibrahim.

Gangsters are known to have issued extortion threats to such film luminaries as legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan, superstar Shahrukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan's producer-director father Rakesh, and actor Salman Khan.

Film actresses Urmila Matondkar, Juhi Chawla, Manisha Koirala and Sonali Bendre have also been targeted.

Bollywood has been known for its links with the underworld, especially after the arrest of Sanjay Dutt for his alleged role in a series of bomb blasts that killed more than 300 people in Bombay in 1993.



Villagers carry a sick child away to safety from their flooded village near Goplaganj on Monday. Large swathes of northern India are being crippled by a savage drought while the east of the country is being tormented by monsoon rains that have left some six million people homeless.

Plot to kill Karzai foiled

AFP, Kabul

Afghan security forces have arrested two men linked to al-Qaida who planned to assassinate President Hamid Karzai or senior ministers with a car bomb, an official told AFP Tuesday.

An Afghan man and another suspect believed to be foreign were pulled over in a Toyota Corolla containing semtex explosives in the centre of Kabul on Monday, said General Din Mohammad Jurat, director of public security at the interior ministry.

"It was a programme to kill Karzai or one of the key members of the government like (defence minister Mohammad Qasim) Fahim or someone else in the cabinet," Jurat said.

He said the men were "related to the opposition of Afghanistan", and that one of the men was possibly from Pakistan.

"We strongly believe that they were related to al-Qaida or Hezb-i-Islami, which is right now an ally of al-Qaida."

UN sees no Iraqi troop buildup near Kuwait

Arab League warns against strike on Baghdad

REUTERS, AFP, Kuwait/London

A United Nations peacekeeping force in Kuwait said on Tuesday there was no sign of Iraqi troops building up near the border with the emirate.

"We have not seen such a thing," UNIKOM spokesman Daljeet Bagga told Reuters in response to a report abroad that Iraqi forces were building up close to its border with Kuwait.

"There is nothing in the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone between Iraq and Kuwait) or close to it. We have no confirmation of that," said the U.N. official.

The United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), has been monitoring the border since the U.S.-led Gulf War ended in 1991 a seven-month Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. It also enforces a 10-mile demilitarised zone which runs into Iraq.

Various Kuwaiti ministries and departments have been holding special meetings in recent days to update emergency plans in case of a U.S.-led attack on its northern neighbour to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

AFP adds: A US-led invasion of Iraq would destabilise the Middle East, Arab League chief Amr Mussa warned Tuesday amid reports of growing unease among US and British military chiefs over any such offensive.

"It would threaten the whole stability in the Middle East, which is already under constant threat by the continuation, the aggravation of the Arab-Israeli or Palestinian-Israeli issues," Mussa, a leading voice in the Arab world, told BBC radio.

"Nobody needs more tension and issues to provoke again public opinion," added the secretary general of the 22-member pan-Arab organisation.

Washington has repeatedly threatened to take action against Iraq to unseat President Saddam Hussein, whom it accuses of developing weapons of mass destruction.

Britain is Washington's closest military ally, and it is believed that US President George W. Bush would call on London's help in any campaign.

But Mussa said he believed Saddam may yet allow the return of UN weapons inspectors to his country, a key US demand.

"The UN inspectors should return back to Iraq and verify the situation. The Iraqis have not rejected that proposal, they are negotiating the terms and certain points of clarification," he said.

Mussa's comments came the day after King Abdullah II of Jordan met British Prime Minister Tony Blair in London for talks, during which he warned Britain of the dangers of going along with US military action, according to press reports.

Fernandes sees Laden alive

AFP, London

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said Monday that "unimpeachable sources" had told him that Osama bin Laden, chief suspect for the September 11 attacks in the United States, was still alive.

His claim that bin Laden was in Pakistan hiding out with the knowledge of Pakistani intelligence drew a furious denial from Islamabad.

But Fernandes said India had received intelligence three months ago that the al-Qaida leader was alive in Pakistan and had no reason to believe that the situation had changed since then.

ASEAN readies anti-terror plan for Powell

REUTERS, Bandar Seri Begawan

Southeast Asia prepared on Tuesday to give visiting Secretary of State Colin Powell what he wants -- a strong commitment to fight terrorism together.

Foreign ministers from the 10 Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) wound up a two-day meeting in Brunei vowing to pool efforts to that effect.

"We recognised that terrorism is a global threat and that the disturbing acts of terrorism and transnational crimes, which continue to threaten world peace and stability, must be tackled by the international community," they said in a communiqué.

Toward this end we called for the need to undertake concerted efforts and concrete initiatives at all levels," the ASEAN ministers added. They and Powell are to sign a

declaration on Wednesday promising to co-operate in anti-terrorist campaigns, share information, block terrorist funds and make it tougher to use forged travel papers and tighten borders.

They will sign the declaration during the ASEAN Regional Forum in Brunei, which Powell is to attend along with foreign ministers from 21 other nations, plus the European Union.

Powell held talks in Malaysia on Tuesday with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, one of the ASEAN grouping's elder statesmen, and stopped over later in the day in Singapore.

These two countries, with the Philippines, have led efforts to combat terrorism in a region keen to dispel the idea that it might become a hotbed for Islamic militancy. Some ASEAN states harbour misgivings that Indonesia, for its

part, is not doing enough to hunt down Islamic militants hiding out in the vast archipelago.

Indonesia defended its record on Tuesday.

"We did what we can within our ability. For example, we captured two suspected terrorists," Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda told reporters at the end of the ministerial meeting.

"Of course, I know you wanted us to arrest radical groups, but radical is not equal to terrorism," he said.

While the U.S.-ASEAN declaration on counter-terrorism will take pride of place at the security forum, a potential meeting between Powell and North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun could take top billing.

The secretary of state said in Kuala Lumpur he would decide after his arrival in Brunei whether to hold talks with Paek.

US troops pack up Manila mission

AFP, Manila

US troops continued to pack up Tuesday ahead of leaving the Philippines at the end of a six-month anti-terror mission, as protests flared both for and against their presence.

The troops dismantled two giant Chinook helicopters and packed them and other equipment into container vans ahead of the official end of the mission on Wednesday.

The preparations came after a night of violent street demonstrations both for and against the US military presence in the Philippines.

At least five people were injured here late Monday when residents threw rocks at a convoy of leftist protesters from other provinces who had come here aboard 32 buses to oppose the US military deployment.

The some 1,000 protesters, who spent the night at an isolated city park, planned to march on the southern Philippines military head-

quarters Tuesday.

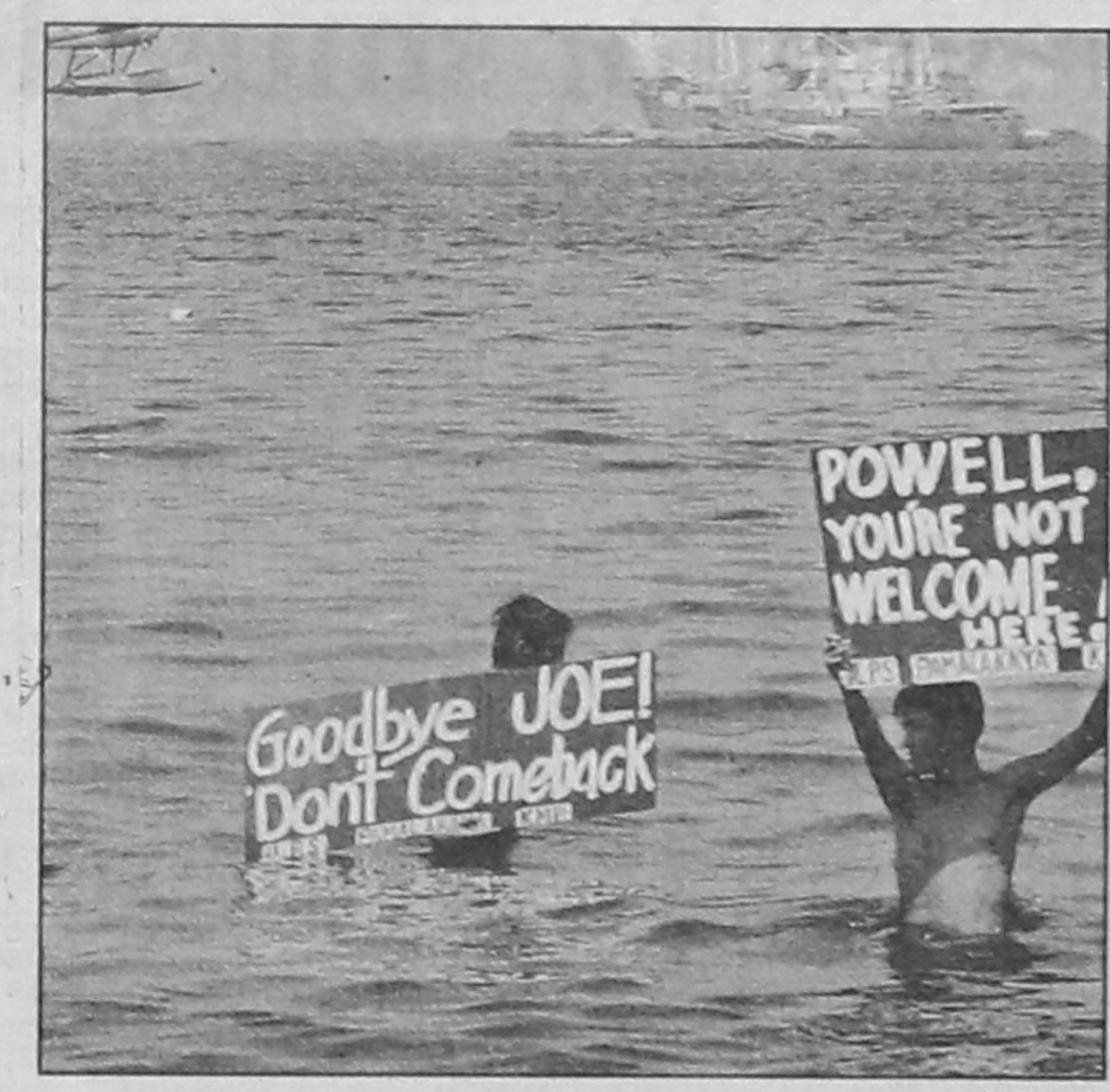
Police threatened to disperse the protest saying it did not have a city government permit.

Military authorities stepped up security in and around the military base, setting up steel barricades to block roads leading to the facility.

However, local residents were allowed to stage a pro-US rally in front of the military base.

The US mission, involving about 1,000 US military advisers and support units, provided training and advice for Filipino troops ranged against the Abu Sayyaf, a Muslim guerrilla group with links to the al-Qaida network of Islamic militants.

Half the US military contingent was deployed over the past six months in the nearby Abu Sayyaf stronghold of Basilan island, where they helped track down and kill senior Abu Sayyaf leader Abu Sabaya and rescue a US hostage.



Swimmers take part in an aquatic anti-US protest in Manila Bay on Tuesday near the US embassy against the upcoming visit of US Secretary of State Colin Powell. Filipino leftists have been staging rallies against Powell and the deployment of US troops in the southern Philippines.

7 killed in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Three Indian security personnel were among seven people killed in overnight fighting in the disputed state of Kashmir, police said Tuesday.

Suspected rebels ambushed security forces, killing a soldier and two policemen, in Mehroo village of the southern Poonch district, some 225 kilometres (140 miles) west of Indian Kashmir's winter capital Jammu.

The attackers opened fire on security forces as they were conducting a hunt for Islamic rebels in the village, a police spokesman said.

Nepal gets new heir to the throne

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's crown princess gave birth Tuesday to a son, bringing a new heir to the Himalayan kingdom's Shah dynasty, state radio announced.

"Her royal highness Crown Princess Hemani has given birth to a son at the Narayanhi royal palace," the radio said.

The baby boy, who has yet to be named, was born at 12:49 pm (0704 GMT) and weighed 3.3 kilograms (seven pounds and nine ounces), it said.

He is the first child of Crown Prince Paras and Crown Princess Hemani.



Investigators inspect the wreckage of two light planes on Tuesday after a mid-air collision over the runway at Moorabbin Airport in Melbourne while the two were going through night landing exercises on Monday. A 19-year-old female trainee pilot was killed and a pilot and passenger from the other plane survived after eyewitnesses claimed that one of the two Cessna 172s had landed on the other as both were approaching the runway.

India rejects Powell call for Kashmir polls monitors

AFP, New Delhi

India's government and opposition united Tuesday in rowdy rejection of a call by US Secretary of State Colin Powell for independent election monitors in the disputed state of Kashmir.

Powell, during a weekend peace mission to South Asia, had called here on the government to allow foreign observers to monitor elections in Kashmir set for October and to release "political prisoners" ahead of the vote.

During parliamentary debate on Powell's visit, junior foreign minister Digvijay Singh kicked off the tirade.

"Elections have been held (in Kashmir) for several years and they have always been free and fair," Singh retorted. "Elections were held even during the Emergency, so no one can doubt us about their impartiality," he said.

He was referring to the 17-month period of emergency imposed by former prime minister Indira

Gandhi in 1975.

Rejecting Powell's suggestion of international monitoring of the coming Kashmir elections, Singh said, "India is a country of one billion people. We are committed to our foreign policy and we don't need any suggestions".

Opposition leaders during the debate accused the government of being "too polite" with Powell.

"I can assure this house that our words may be polite but our actions will always be tough," the minister said.

Powell had said the Kashmir vote "can be the first step in a process that addresses Kashmiri grievances" and that "permitting independent observers and freeing political prisoners will be helpful" in making the polls "inclusive".

Kashmir separatists have vowed to boycott the vote.

Joining the fiery debate in the lower house of parliament, the chief whip of the main opposition Congress party, Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, said Powell's statement "questioned India's sovereignty".

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