

34 Maoists rebels killed in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

At least 34 Maoist rebels were killed in three western districts of Nepal while 60 others were injured in clashes with the security forces, the Nepalese defence ministry said Wednesday.

"At least 30 Maoist were killed in a clash with security personnel at Thawang in Rolpa district on Tuesday," the ministry said in a statement.

"Similarly, four others were killed in three other western districts on Tuesday," it said.

One Nepalese soldier lost his life while three others were injured, the statement said.

The security forces recovered arms and ammunitions from the rebels, it added.

FBI issues alert over aide of Sept 11 hijackers

REUTERS, Washington

The FBI has issued a worldwide alert seeking the arrest or information about a 21-year-old Saudi man suspected of being an associate of the Sept. 11 hijackers.

Acting after a new review of documents seized in the investigation of the hijacked airliner attacks on America, the FBI late on Tuesday identified the man as Saud Al-Rasheed, of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and posted his photograph on its Web page.

The sudden bureau bulletin, developed in recent days and distributed worldwide, said Al-Rasheed was "armed and dangerous" and his whereabouts unknown.

Video shows Bin Laden declaring war against US

AFP, Washington

Scenes from one in a library of 64 secret al-Qaida videotapes aired on CNN television on Tuesday depict al-Qaida chief Osama bin Laden launching a war against the United States at a 1998 press conference.

"By god's grace," bin Laden said on the video, "we have formed with many other Islamic groups and organisations in the Islamic world a front called the International Islamic Front to do jihad against the crusaders and Jews".

"And by god's grace," he said later, "the men reacted to this call and ... Their actions are going to have a successful result in killing Americans and getting rid of them."

Pak court indicts 3 over US consulate attack

AFP, Karachi

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court on Wednesday formally charged three Islamic militants over a deadly car-bomb attack outside the US consulate in this volatile southern port city on June 14.

Mohammad Imran Bhai, Hanif Ayub, and Mohammad Ashraf were charged with murder, attempted murder, terrorism, and abetting during a hearing inside Karachi Central Prison.

They could face the death penalty if found guilty.

"You are charged with attacking the US consulate on June 14, which killed 12 people," Judge Aale Maqbool Rizvi told the three accused, who were asked to stand up from behind the bars in a makeshift courtroom.

'Abu Nidal committed suicide in Baghdad'

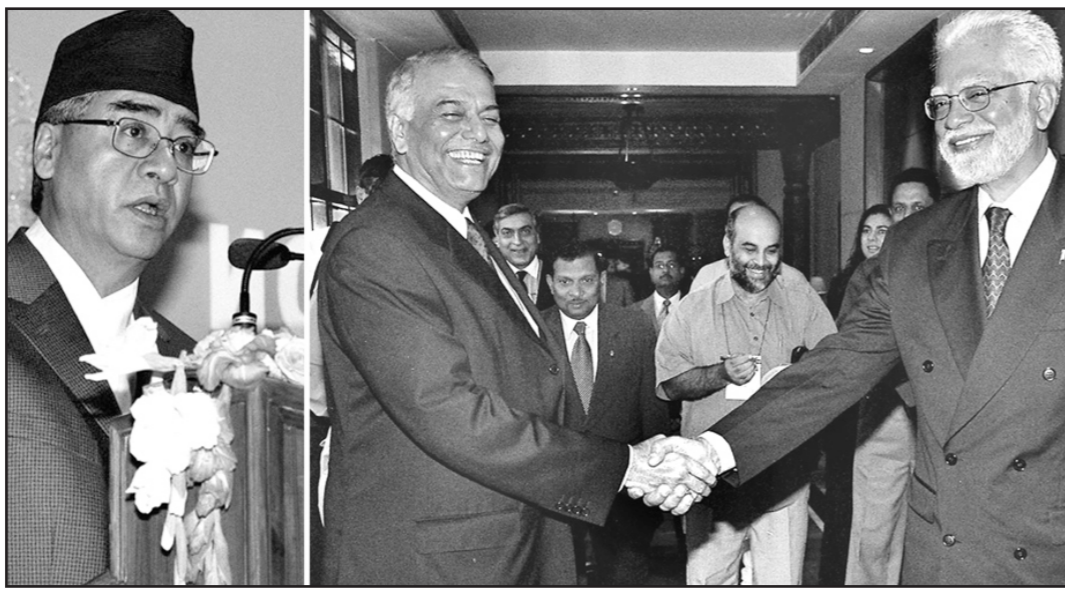
REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz confirmed on Tuesday that Palestinian guerrilla commander Abu Nidal had died in Baghdad, saying he committed suicide.

"Yes, he committed suicide," Aziz told reporters in response to a question on reports the body of Abu Nidal, one of the world's most wanted men, had been found at the Palestinian's Baghdad apartment.

He did not elaborate, but an Iraqi source said Abu Nidal had committed suicide at his Baghdad home last week after he was confronted with charges that he was plotting against Iraq.

Aziz told journalists: "Tomorrow there will be a meeting by a high-ranking Iraqi official with you and he will give all the details of this incident."



Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba delivers his speech at the opening ceremony of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Ministerial meeting in Kathmandu on Wednesday while Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha (L) shakes hands with Pakistani State Minister for Foreign Affairs Inamul Haq after the opening ceremony. Deuba in his speech, called for greater regional cooperation and increased vigilance against terrorism.

Israel storms Gaza Violence clouds pullback plan

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli forces blasted their way into a Gaza town early Wednesday, killing a Palestinian civilian and wounding four more in an operation to root out militants, as fresh violence threatened to cripple the latest efforts to restore calm.

Despite the Israeli raid, which followed the killing of a soldier guarding a Jewish settlement, security officials were to meet to discuss an Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, the next step in a phased pullback plan designed to defuse the 23-month crisis.

Israeli tanks and infantry stormed into the southern Gaza Strip town of Khan Yunis at 2:00 am (2300 GMT Tuesday), sending residents of the bullet-scarred refugee camp scattering and ordering the evacuation of two high buildings overlooking the neighbouring Jewish settlement of Gush Katif.

Twenty tanks and armoured vehicles, backed by attack helicopters, opened fire on the camp, after which army sappers moved in and dynamited the buildings, which the army said were used by Palestinian

snipers targeting the coastal settlements.

The blast also destroyed 15 of small refugee houses in the immediate vicinity and damaged another 22, Palestinian security officials said.

One man was crushed to death when the blast and falling debris obliterated his house, Palestinian officials said.

The army said it had "undertaken a search operation in the suburbs of Khan Yunis after an outbreak of attacks in the sector." It said the soldier killed Tuesday morning had been shot by a Palestinian sniper hiding in Khan Yunis.

The Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades, the armed branch of the Islamic Hamas movement, claimed the attack which was followed by an exchange of fire in which a young Palestinian was killed.

The army said it was ordered to "destroy abandoned houses that are used as shelter or as firing positions" by armed Palestinians. The operation lasted around four hours.

Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer, whose "Gaza

First" plan for a staged Israeli withdrawal has switched focus to the calmer southern West Bank, warned Tuesday that if the Palestinian security forces did not rein in militants, Israel would. The withdrawal plan, which began 24 hours earlier with an Israeli pullback from Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem, is aimed at handing back reoccupied towns to the reformed Palestinian security forces, who have to ensure there are no more anti-Israeli attacks.

It is meant to gradually scale back Israel's two-month re-occupation of almost all of the West Bank, alleviate the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living under curfew and pave the way to resumed talks.

Bethlehem has remained calm since the changing of the guard, but the killing has continued elsewhere in the West Bank.

In Tulkarem, in the north, a militant was killed in an Israeli army raid early Tuesday, and in Ramallah, the brother of a top Palestinian faction leader was killed in clashes later in the day.

No way to totally stop militants crossing into Kashmir: Pak FM

India rejects offers to resume dialogue

AFP, Kathmandu

Pakistan's deputy foreign minister said Wednesday there was no way to completely seal off the border in divided Kashmir to stop Muslim militants crossing from the Pakistan side into India.

"There is no way to absolutely seal the border," Inamul Haq said here while attending a meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Ending cross-border infiltration is a key condition set by India before it will enter into talks with Pakistan, but Haq said there should be no "pre-conditions".

"There might be members of divided families who might try to cross the LoC (the Line of Control which divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan) or some rogue elements," Haq told reporters.

But he said that Pakistan was not helping or supporting rebels to move across the porous border into India.

"Pakistan is ready for a dialogue with India without any pre-conditions," he

said.

He said India may not be ready for talks, referring to New Delhi's insistence that dialogue can only begin after border infiltration ends.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has promised to crack down on extremists fighting Indian rule in Kashmir.

But on Monday he also said there was still a possibility small groups of militants were crossing over into Indian-administered Kashmir.

PTI adds: Pakistan on Wednesday made a fresh offer to resume dialogue with India on all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir but New Delhi rejected it, asserting that the climate for this was no conducive.

"We are ready to start (the dialogue) today. But I suspect the Indian side is not ready yet," Pakistan Minister of State for foreign affairs Inamul Haq told reporters shortly after shaking hands with External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha.

The two ministers smiled and posed for photographs after the inauguration of the two-day 23rd session of the SAARC Council of Ministers. They were present during the informal consultations among SAARC foreign ministers.

Dreaming of long-extinct mammoth's return

AFP, Tokyo

he stressed Tuesday.

He said he would not give up the team's dream.

"Tusks and teeth (of mammoths) have been found but no complete carcass. I'm always waiting for good news from Siberia," he said.

Goto's team is collecting information on likely mammoth graveyards from Russian scientists and indigenous Siberians. The Japanese researchers had to waive a journey to Siberia this year because reports suggested they did not have a good chance of finding remains.

Goto has turned to a company dealing in trade with Russia for tips on finding mammoths.

The company, called Field and based in the southern Japanese prefecture of Miyazaki, launched the Mammoth Creation Society by roping in biologists and other scientific personnel.

"We have a concept of a 'Pleistocene Park' where moose, sabre-toothed tigers, ancient foxes and other animals seen in the era of mammoths would live in a sanctuary as well as mammoths, if possible," said the society's Yukiko Tokunaga.

"People tend to compare this with 'Jurassic Park' but the current scientific technology is a far cry from putting together dissembled DNA,"

Cost of European floods mounts

Deluge poses Czech chemical spill threat

AFP, Prague

Czech experts were Tuesday anxiously investigating the threat of a possible toxic leak from a flooded chemical plant as the costs of devastating floods across central Europe mounted.

Czech police launched an inquiry into possible contamination from the plant as officials began to tally the toll from the flooding which has ravaged huge areas of Europe at the height of the tourist season.

Authorities fear mercury and dioxins could have leaked into the Elbe river from the Spolana plant in a Prague suburb, where products for making pesticides have been stored since the late 1960s.

But after a visit to Spolana in Neratovice, 15 km north of Prague, Czech Environment Minister Libor Ambrozek and his German coun-

terpart Juegen Trittin told a news conference Tuesday that there had been no mercury or dioxin leaks from the factory long criticized by the environmental group Greenpeace for inadequate safeguards.

Acknowledging the plant's dioxin levels were "above" the norm, Ambrozek said the levels remained no different, however, to what they were before the floods.

Pesticide production was halted at Spolana in 1968 after an accident poisoned 80 workers but waste from those products remains on the site.

Trittin praised the Czech authorities' determination to clean up the plant. But he warned that another danger for Elbe in the wake of the storms was that several water purification plants had been rendered inoperative by flood waters.

Czech Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla meanwhile said the clean-up operation could cost up to three billion euros (dollars).

Floods have wreaked devastation across central Europe, leaving nearly 100 dead. More than 4.2 million people have been affected in Germany alone.

In Germany where the river Elbe is still threatening areas downstream from Dresden, at least 19 people have been killed, dozens are missing and more than 100,000 people have been evacuated in the worst floods in more than a century.

In Romania, two teenagers were swept to their deaths by floodwaters in a forest and dozens of houses inundated by torrential rains in the central region of Brasov. Torrential rains also brought new misery to villages near the Austrian city of Salzburg.



Residents leave their flooded homes at Szentendre Island in the north part of Hungary, about 60 km from capital Budapest on Tuesday while a woman and her dog sit amidst the debris in the garden of her house at Kozarovice in Czech Republic.

8 die in Moscow apartment blast

REUTERS, Moscow

Rescuers combed through rubble in search of survivors on Wednesday after an explosion ripped through a Moscow apartment block killing at least eight people and burying others, emergency officials said.

Officials said Tuesday night's blast was probably caused by a gas leak, dismissing early suspicions it may have been a bomb. Some residents said they had smelled gas powder and not gas after the explosion.

"According to preliminary infor-

mation, there was a fire with a gas explosion in flat 28 on the second floor," Moscow Prosecutor Mikhail Avdyukov told NTV commercial television.

"It was not a canister of gas, but gas which people use to cook food on a gas stove," he said.

Igor Babayevsky, the deputy head of Moscow's emergencies department, told Russian television the way the front of the building collapsed pointed to weak construction and a high concentration of gas.

Officials at Russia's Emergencies Ministry said at least

eight bodies, including two children, had been pulled from the debris. Eight people were taken to hospital after the blast ripped through the five-story block of flats. A dozen people could still be buried under the rubble, they added.

"According to the information we have now, there could be 12 people under the collapsed building," Russia's Emergencies Minister, Sergei Shoigu, told Interfax news agency from the scene on Wednesday, adding that a final list of residents had not yet been established.



Rescuers stand in front of the rubble of a three-floor apartment building on Wednesday following a blast that ripped the site late Tuesday near Moscow's Ostankino television tower. The powerful blast killed at least six people and injured five others.

Kabul rejects Musharraf's al-Qaida regrouping claim

US plays down Pak al-Qaida concerns

AFP, Kabul

The Afghan government rejected Wednesday claims by Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf that the Taliban and al-Qaida could be regrouping in Afghanistan, and instead said the feared forces were more likely using Pakistan to gain strength.

Afghan Defence Minister Mohamed Qasim Fahim described as "irresponsible" Musharraf's comments that Hamid Karzai's government lacked control over much of Afghanistan, and that this could lead to the re-emergence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

"If Al-Qaida and the Taliban are reorganizing, it is on the south-eastern borders of Afghanistan (with Pakistan)," Fahim told reporters here.

"On both sides of that border there are tribal zones which the Taliban and al-Qaida are crossing into.

"They are moving like nomadic tribes in the tribal areas of Pakistan and may sometimes move into on the Afghan side of the border which are also tribal areas."

Fahim added that Taliban supremo Mullah Omar and al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden were probably still alive.

and its US allies to establish control outside the capital since the fall of the Taliban regime last year was allowing it and al-Qaida to reform as a force.

The US-led military campaign overthrew the Taliban because of its support for al-Qaeda, the terrorist network of Osama bin Laden blamed for the September 11 attacks on the United States.

"The writ of this Afghan government is not spreading all over Afghanistan, which it should have," Musharraf said in the interview.

"This is tribal country, tribal environment, warlords reigning supreme in various pockets, the same Taliban-cum-al-Qaeda groups may be re-grouping again, because this government does not exercise control."

Meanwhile, the US military in Afghanistan on Wednesday discounted claims by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf that there was a risk of a resurgence by the Taliban and al-Qaida due to the weakness of the central government.

"I do not believe we have seen anything that can be classified as a resurgence of the al-Qaeda," spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Roger King told reporters at the Bagram air base.

However he said there could be an increase of small scale activity by the fundamentalist Islamic group in the next couple of months.