

## Al-Qaida link with Pearl murder traced

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police are probing links between the murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl and suspected al-Qaida militants killed in a raid in the crowded southern port city of Karachi, an investigator said Thursday.

The militants were shot dead Wednesday during a fierce three-hour firefight with police who raided their hideout in an apartment in an affluent Karachi suburb. Two of the militants were killed and five were arrested.

"There is suspicion that one of the dead militants is linked with Pearl's murder," senior police officer Fayyaz Leghari told reporters.

"It could be possible that one of the dead militants had links with the murder of Daniel Pearl," another police investigator told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

Of the seven militants, at least six were Arab nationals, police said.

"There is little doubt that they are al-Qaida people," an intelligence officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A senior police intelligence officer initially described the two dead suspects as Yemenis. He said one of them was suspected of involvement in the killing of Pearl after he was kidnapped in Karachi on January 23.

A video cassette delivered to the US consulate a month later showed hidden assailants beheading the Wall Street Journal correspondent. His dismembered body was dug up from a shallow grave on the city's outskirts on May 17.

"We have very strong suspicions that one of (the dead militants) was the one who beheaded Pearl," the investigator said.

## Pyongyang may let nuke inspector in

AFP, Tokyo

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il will announce that he will cooperate with international nuclear weapons inspectors at a summit with Japan's prime minister next week, a report said yesterday.

North Korean negotiators conveyed their willingness to cooperate with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors in preparatory talks ahead of the September 17 summit in Pyongyang, the Yomiuri Shimbun reported, citing numerous government sources.

The North Korean side said Pyongyang would begin to gather data on its nuclear facilities, accept visits by nuclear engineering experts and select equipment to be used in the inspections, the paper said.

A foreign ministry official contacted Thursday would not confirm the report.

If the country accepts IAEA inspections, it will be the first time since October 1994 when it reached an agreement with the United States to do so.

The pact has been stalled by Pyongyang's refusal to allow inspections until key nuclear reactor components arrive on its soil, while the US and IAEA have demanded verification of the North's past and present nuclear activities first.

Under the 1994 deal, a US-led consortium would build two light water nuclear reactors in North Korea by 2003. In return, the North has agreed to freeze its suspected nuclear weapons program.

A senior US arms control official has said however the nuclear project could now not be completed until 2005.



A Palestinian girl cries in front of the debris of a house destroyed by an Israeli bulldozer in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah yesterday 2002. The Israeli army raided the self-rule Palestinian area and destroyed three houses, according to security sources.

## Parliament snubs Arafat's reforms measures

Cabinet resigns, Israeli army raids Gaza

AFP, Ramallah, West Bank

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was scrambling yesterday to retain his authority after being forced to dissolve his cabinet and call elections for January, measures taken to avoid a humiliating no-confidence vote.

The cabinet resigned Wednesday in the face of almost certain defeat from members of the Palestine Legislative Council who deemed Arafat's cabinet reshuffle in June insufficient to cleanse a corrupt administration.

Presidential secretary Ahmed Abdel Rahman said Arafat had accepted the decision.

Speaker Ahmed Qorei closed the session, saying parliament would reconvene in two weeks to consider a new cabinet line-up to be presented by Arafat.

Arafat had scrambled to avoid the blow to his authority, already under attack from Israel and the United States. He is now being assailed by his own lawmakers, who want more fundamental change in the administration,

widely accused of incompetence as well as corruption.

As Arafat fended off dissent in the West Bank, the military pressure from Israel continued early yesterday in the Gaza Strip.

Clashes between troops and armed Palestinian gunmen after Israeli tanks rolled into the eastern side of Gaza City, Palestinian security sources and witnesses told AFP.

The shooting occurred as the tanks moved more than 600 meters (yards) into the Isha Jayia and al-Muntara districts, which lie in the city's eastern half, they said.

There were no reports of injuries in the clashes.

Four tanks and an Israeli bulldozer also staged a brief incursion into the al-Mughazi refugee camp, south of the city, where they demolished two houses, Palestinian security sources said.

After destroying the houses the troops pulled out.

Local residents said one of the houses belonged to a member of the radical Hamas group, but

Palestinian security sources could not confirm the information. It was not clear who the second house belonged to.

An Israeli army spokeswoman confirmed that troops were operating both in the east of Gaza City and in the al-Mughazi refugee camp, but said she could not release further details until the operation had ended.

Arafat's Fatah movement, the main faction in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), was also split over the leaking of a document drafted by Fatah officials and the European Union which said that the group would prevent attacks on civilians inside Israel.

A Western diplomat said the partial ceasefire, which would not end attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories, would mark the second anniversary of the start of the Palestinian uprising in late September.

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana welcomed the reports of the pledge to end attacks on Israeli civilians.

# Annan, Bush square off at UN over Iraq

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Kofi Annan and US President George W. Bush, split over the best tactics to adopt against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, prepared yesterday to face off at the beginning of a debate in the United Nations.

Annan will warn Washington from the rostrum of the UN General Assembly of the dangers of acting alone against Iraq shortly before Bush takes the floor to set the stage for a military showdown with Baghdad.

In his speech, released by his spokesman's office, Annan acknowledges that the UN Charter gives every country the right to self-defence if attacked.

However, he insists that "when states decide to use force to deal with broader threats to international peace and security, there is no substitute for the unique legitimacy provided by the United Nations."

Annan will also say Iraq's refusal to comply with UN demands to disarm is one of "four threats to world peace," along with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, continuing instability in Afghanistan and tensions between India and Pakistan.

He will urge Iraq to comply with UN Security Council resolutions "for the sake of its own people and for the sake of world order," and appeal to any country that has influence with Iraqi leaders "to impress on them the vital importance of accepting the (resumption of UN) weapons inspections."

Annan is due to speak at 10:00am, immediately before the General Assembly starts a nine-day debate gathering world leaders.

Bush is the second scheduled speaker, and is

expected to lay out the case for military action against Iraq, arguing that Baghdad is trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction in defiance of the UN Security Council.

He will assert that Iraq's alleged drive to acquire weapons of mass destruction poses a major threat to world peace.

A senior aide told reporters Bush would urge the UN to end Saddam's "decade of defiance" of UN resolutions demanding that he disarm.

He would "make very clear that the United States is not prepared to stand by and let this situation continue," the aide said.

Hours before Bush was to take his case to the General Assembly, the White House released a 22-page indictment of the Iraqi leader, accusing him of seeking weapons of mass destruction and backing terrorism in a "decade of deception and defiance."

The "background paper," issued against a backdrop of widespread international opposition to unilateral US military strikes, focuses on Iraq's violations of UN resolutions aimed at disarming Baghdad but makes no new allegations.

US officials would not say whether Bush would push for a new resolution stepping up pressure on Saddam, perhaps by setting a deadline for the return of UN arms inspectors who pulled out in 1998, but that he was keeping his options open.

"For more than a decade, Saddam Hussein has deceived and defied the will and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council by, among other things: continuing to seek and develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, and prohibited long-range missiles," the document says.

Saddam is also charged with "brutalising the Iraqi people," committing human rights violations and crimes against humanity, backing global terrorism, refusing to detail the fate of prisoners of war from the 1991 Gulf War, refusing to return stolen property and working to dodge UN economic sanctions.

In Baghdad, the official press charged that Bush is seeking to exploit the UN to legitimise an attack.

"Bush wants to use the United Nations to implement and confer international legitimacy on his aggressive plots against Iraq after most world leaders came out against the unilateral (military) campaign Washington is preparing to wage," wrote the daily Ath-Thawra, mouthpiece of the ruling Baath party.

Salem al-Kubaisi, who heads the Iraqi parliament's Arab and international relations committee, told AFP the US administration decided that Bush should address the UN after it "failed to win over world public opinion, and even American public opinion, or find allies" for its planned "aggression" against Iraq.

But the international community will hopefully "uphold the truth and ignore the pressures and lies which the head of the administration of evil will mouth before the UN," Kubaisi added.

And Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, whose country is a key US ally, said uncertainty over Washington's plans for Iraq was harmful, and renewed opposition to any military strike against its southern neighbour.

Vietnam also joined in the chorus of disapproval, saying any intervention would be a gross violation of international law.

## US again presses EU on Afghan food aid

AFP, Washington

The US stressed yesterday the increasing urgency of food aid for refugees in Afghanistan as winter draws near, and admitted differences still exist with the EU on the issue.

Only two weeks ago Washington unleashed a furious barrage of criticism at the EU, accusing the 15-nation bloc of endangering refugees by not giving enough food and monetary aid to UN operations in Afghanistan.

Richard Greene, deputy assistant secretary at the US bureau of population, refugees and migration, said Afghanistan's fragile security

could be harmed further if food was not delivered in coming weeks.

"We both recognize that there are urgent food needs out there," he said, after meeting EU officials in Brussels to discuss the aid requirements of some 1.8 million refugees in Afghanistan.

Greene sought to underline the common aims of the United States and the European Union, but admitted that differences still exist.

"They are as close to agreement as you are going to get on overall objectives," he said.

But he added: "There are differences on how to go about meeting those objectives."

"There will always be differ-

ences of approach. There have been in terms of focus, in terms of coordination issues and the challenge is to be able to merge those different approaches into a comprehensive approach that meets the urgent needs on the ground," he added.

The US official, speaking to reporters after his talks with EU officials, cited a shortfall of up to 250,000 tonnes of food for refugees in Afghanistan.

And he repeatedly stressed the urgency of getting the aid onto the ground. "The winter hits pretty early in Afghanistan and we are trying to put measures in place now, over the next month," he said.

## Hekmatyar denies link with Kabul explosions

AFP, Islamabad

Former Afghan premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has denied involvement in a massive car bomb blast in Kabul last week but called for a jihad (holy war) to expel US "aggressors" from Afghanistan, a report said yesterday.

Hekmatyar said he was opposed to terrorism and was not involved in the car bomb explosion in Kabul that left around 30 people dead, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said.

The fundamentalist leader, who went into hiding after he was expelled from Iran this year, sent a recorded message to newspaper organisations in the border city of Peshawar from an unknown location, AIP said.

## Euro press sounds alarm over US pursuit of war

AFP, Paris

European newspapers yesterday gave blanket coverage to the poignant first anniversary of the September 11 attacks, but signalled growing alarm at Washington's unrelenting preparations for war.

Across the continent newspaper front pages recorded Wednesday's global ceremonies of remembrance accompanied by sombre pictures of people embracing in the dust of Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center once stood.

But Russia's Kommersant business daily echoed the concerns of many writing of "A funeral march

that turned into a mobilisation".

"The United States turned September 11 into a mobilisation day for the country and the whole world for the war against terrorism," the paper said in a commentary.

Several Russian newspapers set the tone suggesting that with the United States having mourned its loss, it was set to go back on the offensive to unseat Saddam Hussein's regime accused of developing weapons of mass destruction.

"America marked its anniversary -- now it will take care of Iraq," said the Russian centrist Izvestia daily.

US President George W. Bush was due later Thursday to address the United Nations General Assembly to outline his case against Iraq.

Under the headline "Before it is too late", French Communist daily l'Humanite voiced fears Bush would fail to distinguish between international sorrow on the anniversary of the attacks and concern over US preparations for war with Iraq.

"George W Bush only hears what he wants to hear in the solidarity of prayers", while he "arrogantly ignores appeals to reason", it said.

In a similar vein, the Parisian daily Liberation accused Bush of hypocrisy of lauding "the virtues of worked without ever having worked or calling for war while having done everything he could to avoiding the Vietnam War".

And it acknowledged "a sense of embarrassment" on the European side of the Atlantic which had replaced the horror and sympathy of a year ago.

The conservative Le Figaro, in a nod to the US's military superiority, acknowledged wryly that "if bin Laden had decided to knock down the Eiffel Tower rather than the World Trade Centre", France would have had difficulty in retaliating.

"The gap with the United States has become an abyss. In the crises to come, apart from any diplomatic considerations, France risks being left out of the game because it has missed out technologically."

"More seriously France now has to play second fiddle to Britain."

## 15 Pakistani al-Qaida men held in Italy

AFP, Rome

Italy has arrested 15 Pakistani nationals on suspicion of membership of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation and plotting a terrorist strike in Europe, judicial officials announced Thursday.

The suspects, all men, face charges of conspiracy to carry out terrorist and subversive acts, following an investigation by Italy's anti-terrorist police assisted by a unit of the United States Naval Criminal Investigative Service (USNCIS) based in Sigonella, Sicily.

"It's likely that they are part of the al-Qaida," Santi Giuffre, local governor of Caltanissetta in Sicily, where the men are being held, told a press conference.

But he added that the suspects were not thought to have been preparing an attack on Italian soil.

The men were initially detained in August after coastguards intercepted their vessel, the Sara, in Italian territorial waters off Sicily following a tip-off from Italian intelligence services.

Italian officials who searched the merchant ship said that the Pakistanis were travelling on false passports. Suspicious messages and codes were also found.

The vessel, carrying a cargo of lead, was bound for Libya from the Moroccan port of Casablanca when it strayed into Italian waters.

"These people had no reason to be on this boat," said Giuffre, adding that this had been clear "from the start" to anti-terrorist police, the Digos.

"Documents and notes have been found which are still being examined. They have been questioned at length by the Digos and there are contradictions in their stories."

"There are therefore strong reasons to suppose that they are really terrorists and that this is not a case of simple illegal immigrants."

Giuffre said that coded documents found on board the vessel had been deciphered with the help of USNCIS, whose commander Samuel Worth flanked Giuffre at the press conference.