

Top al-Qaida member captured

AFP, Washington

A senior member of the al-Qaida network held responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States has been captured, a US official said Friday.

"I can't tell you when, I can't tell you where, I can't tell you how," said the official, who declined to be named.

The official also said there was a "very, very high likelihood" that an audio tape purportedly of the voice of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, recently broadcast by Arabic television station Al Jazeera, was authentic.

He added however that "absolute certainty has not been reached."

The Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency are still studying the tape, which threatened more terrorist attacks against the United States.



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinian police inspect the rubble of a metal workshop after it was hit by missiles fired by two Israeli helicopters in Gaza City on Saturday. Five rockets were fired at a building housing a metal workshop and a goldsmith's workshop, completely destroying it and causing damage to 10 nearby houses in the central industrial area, Palestinian security sources said.

Israel rules out talks after killing of 12 settlers

Army sets up checkpoint outside Arafat compound

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli authorities were in shock on Friday night following a shooting attack in the southern West Bank town of Hebron in which 12 Israelis were gunned down, warning that the killings ruled out the possibility of any talks with the Palestinian leadership.

"This Sabbath massacre is the second time in a week that innocent civilians have been senselessly murdered either in their beds or on their way to prayers. No political process can take root while these atrocities continue to be carried out by Palestinian terrorists," foreign ministry spokesman Gilad Millo told AFP.

Twelve Israelis were killed and 15 wounded in one of the worst shooting incidents since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation 25 months ago.

There was no immediate large-scale retaliation from Israel, but two helicopter gunships carried out a raid on central Gaza City early Saturday, destroying a metal workshop and injuring two Palestinians, Palestinian security sources said.

Five rockets were fired at the building, which housed the metal workshop and a goldsmith's workshop, completely destroying it and causing damage to 10 nearby houses in the central industrial area, they said.

The injured men, including a Palestinian policeman, were hit by shrapnel from the missiles, they said.

An army spokeswoman confirmed the attack, saying Israeli helicopters had hit a workshop used for manufacturing weapons.

"Within the framework of the fight against terror and the recent shooting attacks against Israeli communities (settlements), airforce helicopters attacked a workshop for creating all kinds of weapons in Gaza City," she said.

The building had been used by "many different terror organisations to make different weapons including mortar shells and Qassam rockets", she said referring to the Katyusha-style rockets which are made by the radical Hamas group.

Meanwhile, Israeli troops backed by four armoured vehicles set up a checkpoint just outside Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's compound here, only hours after a shooting attack which left 12 Israelis dead in Hebron, Palestinian witnesses said.

The curfew had been lifted in the West Bank town of Ramallah for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, leaving residents free to move at night.

But the witnesses said movement was now restricted around Arafat's battered Muqataa due to the new checkpoint, set up right against one of the compound's walls, meters from the Palestinians leader's office.

The Israeli military has often charged that such workshops are used by Palestinian militant groups to produce a variety of weapons, including crude missiles, used in attacks on Jewish settlements, troops or even Israel itself.

Protest outside Pak parliament

Benazir blames intelligence for split

AFP, Islamabad

Around 40 suited lawyers and politicians demonstrated in front of Pakistan's parliament house Saturday as new legislators arrived for the first session in three years.

The protesters waved placards rejecting controversial amendments introduced by President Pervez Musharraf in August via the Legal Framework Order (LFO).

"We will continue our fight for democracy in this country and we will fight for the supremacy of parliament and parliamentarians," said Hafiz Hussain Ahmad, leader of the Islamist alliance Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA).

The 1973 Constitution was suspended by Musharraf when he stole power in a 1999 bloodless coup. He reinstated most of the constitution late Friday, incorporating his LFO amendments, angering around half the elected MPs.

"The LFO has no legal basis or status," said Makhdoom Javed Hashmi, parliamentary leader of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's party.

The president of Rawalpindi's High Court Bar Association Muhammad Ikram Chaudry said the lawyers were protesting against Musharraf's domination of Pakistan.

Meanwhile, former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto blamed the military regime's intelligence agencies for the splintering of her opposition party during an emotional satellite address to loyalists on the eve of parliament's inauguration.

The self-exiled Benazir addressed Pakistan People's Party members in the capital late Friday, after 13 PPP legislators-elect broke ranks to support a "government of national consensus," the term for an alliance with the chief pro-military party.

Blix sets out mission urging Saddam to come clean

AFP, Paris

Chief UN arms inspector Hans Blix was to meet top French officials Saturday after warning Iraq not to play games when he arrives in Baghdad to launch the process of disarming the regime.

French Foreign Minister Dominique Villepin was to hold talks about 12:30 pm (1130 GMT) with Blix, who was then to fly on to a final staging post in Lamaca, Cyprus, en route for the Iraqi capital on Monday.

The behaviour of the Iraqi authorities would be pivotal between war and peace, Blix told a news conference in New York on Friday night, imploring Baghdad to make a clean breast of its weapons arsenal.

"What will they declare? How open are they? How much transparency will there be?" he asked.

In Baghdad, the official press urged Iraq had nothing to hide and invited the inspectors to carry out their work impartially.

"Iraq, sure of what it says, will prove to the world that it no longer has weapons of mass destruction," said government daily Al-Jumhuriya.

Blix announced that the first inspections should take place on November 27, adding that the Security Council would not tolerate any "cat-and-mouse games".

Security Council Resolution 1441, adopted November 8, gave the government of President Saddam Hussein 30 days to make a full declaration of its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles programmes.

"Iraq's declaration is a very important document and we hope they take it seriously," Blix said.

The resolution warned Iraq it faced "serious consequences" for making false statements or omissions, and US President George W. Bush has made clear that would mean war.

Blix, noting that Iraq concealed its biological weapons for many years, said "an omission can be very serious... That was a very significant omission."

Meanwhile, US warplanes

bombed an air defence communications facility in southern Iraq on Friday, after coalition aircraft came under Iraqi fire in violation of last week's UN Security Council resolution, the military said.

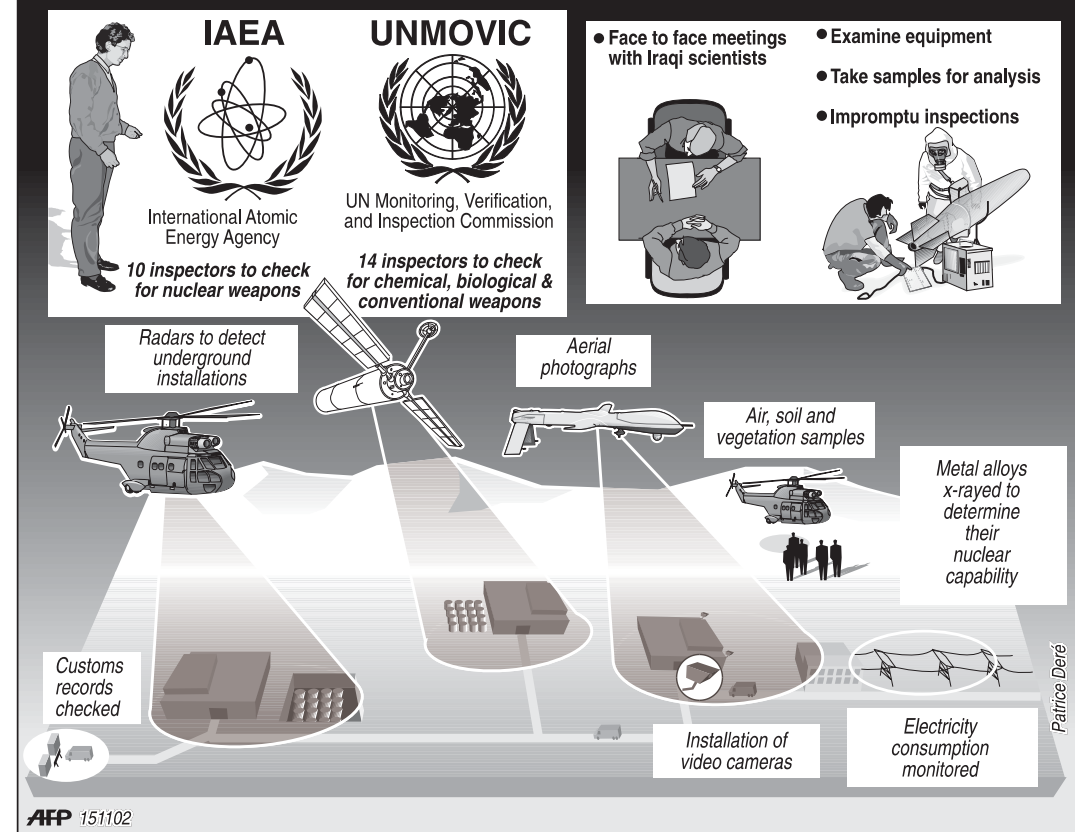
The Bush administration was expected to report the incident to the UN Security Council, but it was still debating whether to declare it a "material breach," US officials said.

A defence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said US warplanes have come under surface-to-air fire from Iraqi forces 11 times since UN Security Council resolution 1441 was passed.

In Paris, French President Jacques Chirac and visiting Mexican counterpart Vicente Fox stressed their rejection of any unilateral attack on Baghdad by the United States.

"Our position on the picture of the world and the crises that unfortunately are occurring is absolutely identical," Chirac told a joint press conference with Fox, whose country chairs the Security Council.

UN arms inspectors at work



Child-killer Myra Hindley dead at 60

AFP, London



PHOTO: AFP
A 1966 file picture shows convicted murderer Myra Hindley, 60, reviled for sexually abusing, torturing and killing children with her lover Ian Brady in the 1960s. Hindley died at West Suffolk hospital in Bury St Edmunds following respiratory failure, a spokesman said on Friday.

Convicted murderer Myra Hindley, reviled throughout Britain for sexually abusing and killing children with her lover in the notorious Moors murders, died on Friday aged 60 during her 36th year behind bars.

Hindley died at West Suffolk hospital in Bury Saint Edmunds, eastern England, where she was admitted Tuesday with severe respiratory problems. Under police guard, she was given her last rites by a priest at her bedside.

Hindley and her then-companion Ian Brady, 64, were jailed for life in 1966 for the sexual abuse, torture and murder of three youngsters whose bodies were buried on Saddleworth Moor, near Manchester in northern England.

In 1987, when Hindley received counseling from a priest, the pair confessed to two other child killings, adding to the hatred felt by many Britons for what she and her lover had done.

Nepal considers options after big Maoist attack

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal on Saturday mullied its response after a major offensive by Maoist rebels fighting to topple the monarchy left more than 150 people dead and set back hopes of peace talks.

The United States called on the Maoists to lay down their arms after they driven out two remote districts, one of which the guerrillas briefly took over.

Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who was appointed October 11 by King Gyanendra after the monarch dismissed the elected government, met in emergency session with his cabinet.

But senior officials, who had just days earlier expressed hopes of peace talks with the Maoists, were tight-lipped on what was decided.

Political analysts said the government faced two unattractive options after the assault, the dead-

est since it took power. Security forces could mount a counter-offensive on the Maoists, but the rebels' support network is well-entrenched and the government is already under pressure from political parties outraged by the king's intervention last month.

Or the government could go ahead with peace talks, which could be viewed as giving in to Maoist demands.

Just Friday, CNN aired an interview with top rebel negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who boasted that talks would come soon on the Maoists' terms and that "the king's army will not fight for very long."

Nepal's police chief Pradeep Shumsher Rana overnight travelled to Jumla district, 410 km northeast of Kathmandu, where he reported a scene of utter destruction.

"Almost all the government buildings and offices were set on fire

by the Maoists, who suddenly attacked," Rana told state television.

"But the Maoists could not take control of the army barracks because our men fought very bravely," he said.

Police officials said the rebels took control of Jumla's headquarters Khalanga early Friday, but were driven out several hours later when the army sent in reinforcements.

Rana said residents told him more than 150 Maoists may have been killed, but so far the bodies of 55 rebels have been found.

Thirty-five policemen were also killed along with three civilian officials, including chief district officer Damodar Pant, who died when they took shelter in an army bunker the Maoists torched.

Rana said the Maoists also looted a bank and made off with two million rupees, or about 51,000 dollars.

UN envoy wraps up mission to Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

UN envoy Razali Ismail on Saturday wrapped up his ninth mission to Myanmar aimed at reinvigorating a political reconciliation process, but diplomatic sources said he left with little to show for his efforts.

Razali departed Yangon at 12:45 pm (0615 GMT) on a Silk Air flight for Singapore, officials said, after a final meeting at the airport with deputy foreign minister Khin Maung Win concluded a five-day trip crucial to reform efforts in the country.

Reporters were denied access to the airport's VIP departure lounge and the Malaysian diplomat left without making a press statement.

Razali had come to Yangon armed with the threat he would quit his post if the junta failed to make progress on democratic reforms.

Prior to his arrival in Myanmar he said he planned to confront the country's leader, Senior General Than Shwe, over a broken promise to begin a dialogue with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Saddam to pay Libya billions of dollars to safeguard family?

AFP, London

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein plans to pay Libya billions of dollars to secure political asylum for his family and senior members of the Baghdad regime in the event of a war with the West, The Times newspaper reported Saturday. The deal, which would also cover an internal coup d'etat, would see the Iraqi leader pay 3.5 billion dollars (euros) into Libyan banks for the safe haven of his family and around a dozen senior officials of the Baghdad regime and their families, the paper said.

The deal does not include plans to provide refuge to Saddam or his eldest son, Uday, according to The Times, which said it learnt from diplomatic sources in Tripoli that the Iraqi leader's secret emissaries visited Libya and Syria to discuss an escape route.

The Times said any deal to provide refuge to Saddam or Uday would lead to Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi coming under intense international pressure to hand them over for war crimes trials.

According to the diplomatic sources in Tripoli, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz, Foreign Minister Najji Sabri and deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, would be among senior Baghdad figures to be granted refuge by Libya.

The deal emerged following a visit to Tripoli on September 8 by General Ali Hasan al-Majid -- who according to the paper is a cousin and trusted member of Saddam's clan.

An overland escape route was devised during a visit by senior Iraqi officials to Damascus in October, The Times added.

Ibero-American Summit gets underway

AFP, Bavaro

Leaders of Latin America, Spain and Portugal prepared to tackle issues ranging from corruption and terrorism to sustainable development and democracy as they met at here the 12th annual Ibero American Summit.

Among the leaders of the 21 countries represented at the two-day summit, which began late Friday, are the King of Spain, Juan Carlos II, and the presidents of Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, as well as Brazil's outgoing President Fernando Cardoso.

Cuban President Fidel Castro, and Peru's Alejandro Toledo are absent and instead sent their vice presidents.

The final declaration that caps the summit -- and occasionally makes some diplomatic waves -- is expected to address foreign debt, agriculture and tourism, as well regionalism and migration.

Pledges of closer cooperation in fighting terrorism are also expected to figure in the final declaration.

Mexican President Vicente Fox is expected to ask for a clause in the statement on respect for indigenous people's culture and heritage.

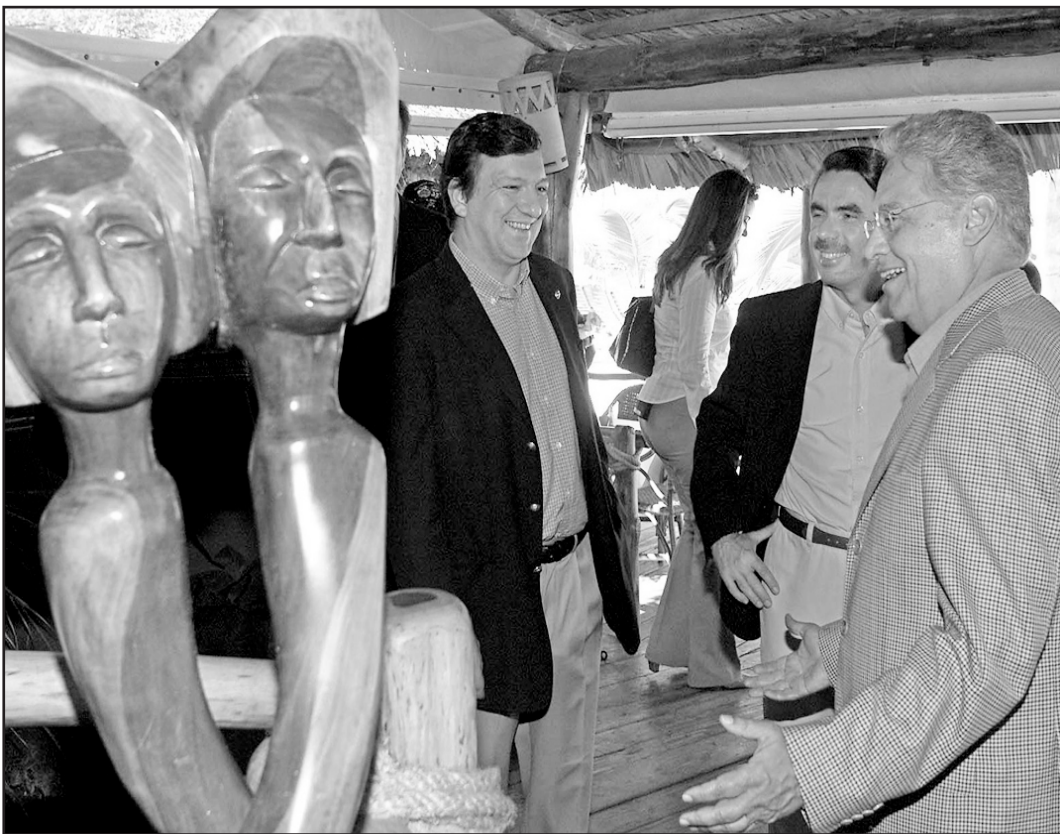


PHOTO: AFP
Brazilian President Fernando Cardoso (R) talks with Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar (C) and Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Manuel Durao (L) before a meeting at the Barcelo Bavaro hotel complex in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic on Friday. The three are attending the two-day XII Iberoamerican summit, gathering 20 presidents and heads-of-state from Latin America and Spain.

Carter calls for US disarmament

AFP, Washington

Former US president Jimmy Carter, this year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, called Friday for disarmament by the United States, which has taken the lead in urging such countries as North Korea and Iraq to destroy their weapons of mass destruction.

"One of the things that the United States government has not done is to try to comply with and enforce international efforts targeted to prohibit the arsenals of biological weapons that we ourselves have," Carter said on CNN's Larry King Live program broadcast late Friday.

He also called for more stringent efforts by Washington "to reduce and enforce the agreement to eliminate chemical weapons, and the same way with nuclear weapons."

"The major powers need to set an example," Carter said, as the United States confronts Iraq over its possession of such banned weapons.

"Quite often the big countries that are responsible for the peace of the world set a very poor example

for those who might hunger for the esteem or the power or the threats that they can develop from nuclear weapons themselves," the former US president continued.

"I don't have any doubt that it's that kind of atmosphere that has led to the nuclearisation, you might say, of India and Pakistan," he said.

Carter, who will receive the Nobel prize on December 10 in Oslo, Norway for his efforts in seeking negotiated settlements to head off violent conflict, also noted that the United States gives only one one-thousandth of its gross national product for international assistance, while the average European country gives four times as much.

"For every time an American gives a dollar, a citizen of Norway gives 17 dollars," he said.

"Foreign aid in this country has a bad name, but in other countries, it's a right thing for the government to do. And that's where we are at the Carter Centre quite often have to turn," the former president said, referring to the Atlanta-based Carter Centre he founded some 20 years ago, and which now operates humanitarian projects in 65 countries.

VHP barred from holding rally

AFP, New Delhi

A leading Hindu hardliner was Saturday banned from the site of a train massacre in India's riot-torn western state of Gujarat, where he plans to hold a rally ahead of elections.

Praveen Togadia, the general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council), will be prevented from entering Godhra, where he has scheduled a rally Sunday, officials said.

"Togadia has been prevented from entering the town to ensure maintenance of law and order situation," the Panchmahals area's top administrator, Manoj Agrawal, told the Press Trust of India news agency.

India's Election Commission has banned religious processions in Gujarat ahead of the December 12 assembly election, fearing they could trigger more unrest in a state that this year saw India's deadliest communal clashes in a decade.

More than 1,000 people, most of them Muslims, were killed in the state. The riots broke out after a Muslim mob torched a train carrying Hindu activists in Godhra on February 27, killing 58 people.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose BJP party has ideological ties with the VHP, has urged the Hindu right to respect the election authorities' decision.

But Togadia said he would defy the repeated orders not to hold the rally.

"Are Hindus second-class citizens? We will not sit quiet as this right of ours is violated. We will break the law and take out the rally," Togadia told Zee News television.

Gujarat is the largest state ruled by the BJP and its chief minister, Narendra Modi, is seeking re-election despite human rights groups' reports that the government did little to curb the anti-Muslim violence.