

PHOTO: AFP
An unidentified Indian woman injured in a bomb blast lies on a hospital bed, near her relatives, in Katra on Tuesday. At least seven Hindu devotees were killed and 36 others seriously injured in a bomb blast near Mata Vaishnodevi temple shrine in Indian Kashmir.

Attack on Kashmir army camp: 7 troops killed

7 killed in grenade attack on pilgrims, strikes aimed at derailing peace with Pakistan: India

PTI, AFP, Jammu

Terrorists struck in a big way, killing seven jawans and injuring six others in a suicide attack at an army camp at Aknoor in Jammu district early on Tuesday, and in the subsequent encounter two terrorists were eliminated.

This came barely twelve hours after the grenade attacks on Vaishno Devi pilgrims at Banganga near Katra in which seven devotees were killed.

The terrorists, in army uniforms, alighted from a vehicle around 5.30 am and began firing on security guards at the 610 EME camp at Tanda, Jammu defence spokesman, Col B Rathore told PTI.

The terrorists barged into the camp and after lobbing grenades opened indiscriminate firing.

The jawans were killed in the suicide attack, lasting 15 minutes, and of the dead two were on guard duty at the gate of the camp.

Rathore said two terrorists were killed in the subsequent encounter.

The number of terrorists involved in the attack on the camp was still to be ascertained, Lt Col RK Sen, a defence spokesman, said.

Mopping up operations were continuing in the area.

Seven pilgrims were killed and 48 others injured on Monday night in the attack by terrorists in Balganga.

"It is very unfortunate that the process of peace has suffered a setback," Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed said reacting to the attack on the Army camp.

AFP adds: India on Tuesday reacted angrily to an upsurge in violence that left 16 people killed in troubled Kashmir and said the attacks were aimed at derailing a fledgling peace process with rival Pakistan.

The Indian parliament briefly set aside the day's debates and condemned the overnight grenade

attacks on Hindu devotees that left seven dead, and the suicide raid by militants on an army camp earlier Tuesday in troubled Kashmir.

"The house strongly deplores this barbaric and inhuman act by the militants. It is an attempt to disturb the normalcy in the (Kashmir) state," parliament's lower house said in a resolution.

Seven soldiers died and six were wounded when militants at Tuesday dawn attacked Tanda military base in southern Kashmir. Two of the militants were also killed.

India's Deputy Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani reacted sharply, saying that the latest killings were not just an act of cross-border militant attacks in Indian Kashmir.

"Normally we consider these terrorist strikes as part of the continuing proxy-war but these incidents are an attempt to disturb the normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir," Advani told parliament.



PHOTO: AFP
British Prime Minister Tony Blair speaks during an informal question and answer session at Tsinghua University in Beijing on Tuesday. Blair said he had no regrets over the war on Iraq despite questions about its justification after the death of a British scientist.

Bush warns Syria, Iran again

Tehran rejects terrorism charge

AFP, Crawford

President George W. Bush fired off a new warning to Syria and Iran Monday, accusing them of harboring terrorists, and confronted a trio of deepening foreign crises in Iraq, Liberia and North Korea.

As he hosted Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in at his Crawford, Texas ranch, Bush said it was time for all governments in the Middle East to support Israel and the Palestinians as they strive to end their conflict.

"This includes the governments of Syria and Iran," Bush said at a press conference he also used to deliver a warm endorsement of the under-fire Italian leader, who backed his war on Iraq.

"Today, Syria and Iran continue to harbor and assist terrorism. This behavior is completely unacceptable," he said.

Ahead of his meeting with

Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas in Washington on Friday, Bush said states which support terrorism will be "held accountable" and that terrorism undermined the prospects for Middle East peace.

Bush also faced a quickly worsening situation in Liberia, where dozens of people died in fighting and a shell crashed into the US embassy in the capital, Monrovia.

But he gave no signal on when he would deploy US forces after promising to help a West African peacekeeping operation after sending special forces to secure the embassy.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi rejected charges Monday by US President George W. Bush that his country was harbouring and supporting terrorists, telling AFP in Pretoria that "it is the United States that is harbouring terrorists" in Iraq.

"Iran has not only not been harbouring terrorists, but it has been fighting against them," said Kharazi, in South Africa for a meeting of a South African-Iranian bilateral commission.

"I think it is the United States that is harbouring terrorists because right now every corner of Iraq is controlled by Americans," he told an AFP correspondent.

Kharazi accused the United States of supporting armed Iranian rebels operating from Iraq, allowing them to "stay and function in Iraq" even though the group was "a registered terrorist organisation."

"If President Bush means by terrorists the al-Qaeda organisation, then not only are we not harbouring them but we have arrested them and sent some back to their countries of origin and even put some of them in prison," he said.

Iraq war was 'right thing to do': Blair

AP, Beijing

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Tuesday that going to war with Iraq was "the right thing to do" and that he had no doubt Baghdad tried to develop weapons of mass destruction.

"It is better to be rid of Saddam Hussein," Blair told students at elite Tsinghua University.

The prime minister, nearing the end of a marathon Asian tour, was speaking a day after holding talks with Chinese leaders to heal strains in relations over the Iraq war, which Beijing opposed.

Blair said coalition inspectors in Iraq were still looking for evidence of programs to make weapons of mass destruction, but added, "I have no doubts that Iraq was trying to develop these weapons."

The prime minister, with his characteristic wide grin back on his face after a difficult start to his Asian tour, seemed pleased to take questions during the informal, 45-minute session.

Blair is facing controversy at home over disputed weapons intelligence used to justify war in Iraq. He has rejected demands by opposition lawmakers to cut short his Asian trip and recall parliament following the suicide of military adviser David Kelly.

Responding to a student who asked whether he had any regrets about going to war, Blair said, "I believe that no matter how difficult it was, it was the right thing to do. In terms of the security of the world and the suffering of the Iraqi people, it is better to be rid of Saddam Hussein."

Typhoon slams into Philippines: 5 dead

AFP, Manila

At least five people were killed Tuesday as Typhoon Imbudo hit the Philippines with peak sustained winds of nearly 200 km per hour, officials said.

The strongest typhoon to strike the Philippines in five years toppled power pylons and uprooted trees as it reached land on the northern town of Palanan in mid-morning, blocking roads and blacking out a wide area of the north.

The typhoon toppled a tree and crushed five people underneath in San Agustin town on the central island of Romblon, the Red Cross said.

One person was reported missing after bad weather capsized a boat off the western island of Palawan on Sunday, the local coast guard chief, Captain Reynaldo Trajano said.

The government declared a holiday for some schools in Manila, where high winds and strong rain disrupted power supply.

Netted militants were al-Qaeda members: KSA

AFP, Riyadh

Sixteen Saudi citizens arrested in the latest crackdown on suspected militants were members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, Saudi authorities said Tuesday, vowing to "clean up" the kingdom of any remaining terror cells.

"Certainly yes," Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz told the London-based Saudi-owned Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper when asked if the 16 detained men were al-Qaeda members.

"We will not stop until we are absolutely certain that the country has been cleaned up of these people," Prince Nayef vowed, adding that it was premature to call a halt to the crackdown on suspected militants.

The interior ministry announced Monday that security forces had foiled major terror attacks against the kingdom's key installations, including targets in the oil-rich Eastern Province and arrested 16 people.

11 killed as ancient Chinese city wall collapses

AFP, Shanghai

Eleven people were killed when a section of an ancient city wall collapsed early Tuesday in China's eastern city Shuzhou, state press reported.

Sleeping migrant workers were crushed to death when a segment of wall that was 15 meters (49.5 feet) wide and seven meters (23 feet) high gave way after days of heavy rains in Anhui province, the Xinhua news agency said.

The city government mobilised more than 400 policemen and soldiers in the rescue effort but by mid-morning 11 workers were pronounced dead.

The migrant workers, who lived in shanty huts next to the wall, were from nearby Mengcheng county and had been employed in a river clearing project around Shuzhou.

Continuous rainstorms have battered Anhui province, with more than a million people alone being evacuated from low-lying areas.



PHOTO: AFP
The portrait of jailed Palestinian West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti is seen through chained hands during a demonstration for the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails on Monday in the West Bank city of Nablus.

US set to unveil civil defence force in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

The US-led coalition in Iraq was expected to announce details of a homegrown civil defence force Tuesday, amid efforts to get Iraqis more involved in security patrols and ease the burden on US forces.

There are already more than 30,000 Iraqi police employed across the country, with solo Iraqi patrols increasing slowly and their presence on the streets of Baghdad steadily becoming higher in profile.

With daily attacks on US forces leading to a steady trickle of fatalities -- one more US soldier was killed in an ambush Tuesday -- the occupying army is keen to develop collaboration with Iraqis.

"Obviously Iraqis have a better sense of their country and who people are," Major William Thurmond told AFP.

"The people going out on patrols are just Americans and they're not culturally aware, they're not sensitive to what's going on," he added.

"We need to have Iraqis out with us."

Top US army General John Abizaid mentioned the plan in an interview at the weekend, saying the force would work as a buffer while a new Iraqi army was formed -- something he said would take years.

"In the interim, we need civil defence forces that can operate with coalition forces, and eventually alone," he said in an interview with The Washington Post on Sunday.

"The Iraqis want to be in the fight. We intend to get them in the fight," he added. Abizaid took over as head of US Central Command, which oversees operations in Iraq, earlier this month.

US may offer non-aggression assurance to North Korea

AFP, Washington

US officials have proposed meeting with North Korean officials in Beijing and are considering offering the communist state guarantees that it will not come under attack from the United States. The Washington Post said Tuesday.

The offer to meet in Beijing -- no date was specified -- was conveyed last week to visiting Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo who was asked to inform the North Koreans, US officials told the daily.

As a condition for the meeting, however, the United States wants it to be followed almost immediately by multilateral talks that include South Korea, Japan and possibly Russia, the officials added.

They said that at the broader, multilateral meeting, the United States would formally unveil a plan for ending the crisis, which would open with discussion on how it could reassure Pyongyang it will not come

under US military attack.

Once that issue is settled, the meeting could move on to what one US official called a "whole gamut" of issues between the United States and North Korea, including providing energy and food aid if the North Koreans meet a series of tough conditions, including progress on human rights.

The United States up to now has resisted Pyongyang's insistence on one-on-one talks, calling instead on a multilateral venue that would include South Korea, China and Japan.

China hosted a first round of talks on North Korea's nuclear ambitions in April and has been trying to broker a second round amid claims that Pyongyang has finished processing 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods, enough to make about six nuclear devices.

An unnamed White House official quoted by the Post disputed the notion that the US administration

had shifted in its public refusal to negotiate directly with North Korea.

"As we have said many times, we will not submit to blackmail or grant inducements for the North to live up to its obligations," the US official said.

US President George W. Bush on Monday warned North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il that developing nuclear weapons would "alienate" him from the world, after new revelations on Pyongyang's program.

But Bush shrugged off reports that Pyongyang had opened a second plant to process plutonium, concealed to avoid detection by US satellites.

"The desire by the North Koreans to convince the world that they are in the process of developing a nuclear arsenal is nothing new, we have known that for a while," Bush said at his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Bush said he still believed the nuclear crisis could be solved diplomatically.

S Korean baby girls separated

AFP, Singapore

Singapore doctors Tuesday successfully separated two South Korean baby girls fused at the pelvis just two weeks after the tragic deaths of conjoined adult Iranian sisters in the same hospital.

"The Korean twins have been successfully separated," Prem Kumar Nair, spokesman for the Raffles Hospital, said after Min Sa-Rang and her sister Min Ji-Hye underwent surgery by a team of more than 60 doctors and assistants.

"From what I know at this moment, the twins are separated and well in the operating theatre," Nair said as the four-month-old girls underwent post-operative treatment, including plastic and reconstructive surgery.

The five-and-a-half hour operation took place 14 days after 29-year-old Iranian twins joined at the head, Laleh and Ladan Bijani, died within 90 minutes of each other from massive blood loss.

Experts said separating infant twins has a higher chance of success than surgery on adults. The Bijanis insisted on surgery despite warnings that one or both of them could die from the untried procedure on adults.

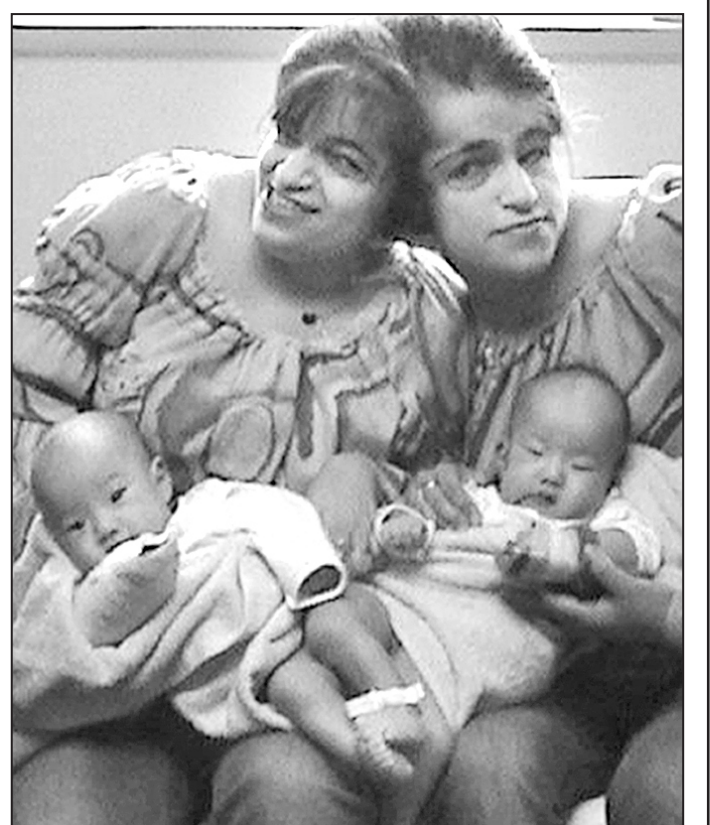


PHOTO: AFP
Four-month old South Korean twin girls Min Sa-Rang and Min Ji-Hye (front) are held by Iranian twins Ladan (L) and Laleh Bijani in this recent undated picture at Singapore Raffles Hospital. The South Korean twins, who were joined at the spine, were successfully separated on Tuesday, two weeks after 29-year old Iranian twins joined at the head died in an unprecedented operation to separate them.