

# Al-Qaeda claims to have nukes

AP, Sydney

Osama bin Laden's terror network claims to have bought ready-made nuclear weapons on the black market in central Asia, the biographer of al-Qaeda's No. 2 leader was quoted as telling an Australian television station.

In an interview scheduled to be televised on Monday, Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir said Ayman al-Zawahri claimed that "smart briefcase bombs" were available on the black market. It was not clear when the interview between Mir and al-Zawahri took place.

US intelligence agencies have long believed that al-Qaeda attempted to acquire a nuclear device on the black market, but say there is no evidence it was successful.

In the interview with Australian Broadcasting Corp. television, parts of which were released Sunday, Mir recalled telling al-Zawahri it was difficult to believe

that al-Qaeda had nuclear weapons when the terror network didn't have the equipment to maintain or use them.

"Dr Ayman al-Zawahri laughed and he said 'Mr. Mir, if you have \$30 million, go to the black market in central Asia, contact any disgruntled Soviet scientist, and a lot of ... smart briefcase bombs are available,'" Mir said in the interview.

"They have contacted us, we sent our people to Moscow, to Tashkent, to other central Asian states and they negotiated, and we purchased some suitcase bombs," Mir quoted al-Zawahri as saying.

Al-Qaeda has never hidden its interest in acquiring nuclear weapons.

The US federal indictment of bin Laden charges that as far back as 1992 he "and others known and unknown, made efforts to obtain the components of nuclear weapons."

# Truce takes hold in Pak al-Qaeda offensive

AFP, Wana

A ceasefire took hold in Pakistan's northwest tribal region yesterday as a delegation of elders tried to negotiate the surrender of al-Qaeda-linked fighters believed to be protecting a senior militant leader.

Firing halted early Monday after intense exchanges overnight between troops and an estimated 500 tribesmen and militants, now believed to be mostly radical Uzbek or Chechen fugitives who fought alongside al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and fled into Pakistan after the US-led offensive in late 2001.

"Firing has stopped and a truce will be observed for the whole day," the chief administrator of South Waziristan tribal district in Pakistan's northwest frontier, Rehmatullah Wazir, told AFP.

The delegation of some 20 tribal elders flew white flags from their cars as they travelled into the besieged villages of Kalusha and Shin Warsak, near the district capital Wana, where a siege since Thursday has left at least four people dead and an unknown number of people injured.

# World condemns killing of Hamas founder

AFP, Brussels

World leaders yesterday condemned as unlawful the killing of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and warned Israel may have buried the peace process along with any hope of resolving the bloody Arab-Israeli conflict.

Fearful the killing will unleash a new spiral of violence in the region blighted by decades of conflict, governments lined up to urge both sides to show restraint as the Palestinian militant group Hamas vowed an all-out war.

Amid a wave of fury in the Palestinian territories which drew thousands out onto the streets, Arab countries led initial outrage at Israel's dawn helicopter strike against the blind, wheelchair-bound, 67-year-old Sheikh in Gaza City.

But European and Asian leaders

were swift to warn that the attack could herald a dangerous new phase in the dragging conflict, unresolved since the creation of Israel in 1948.

Israel had the right to defend itself from terrorism, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told reporters in Brussels ahead of an EU foreign ministers meeting called to discuss the fight on terrorism.

"But it is not entitled going for this kind of unlawful killing and we therefore condemn it," the British minister said.

"A measurable restraint is required and I don't believe Israel will benefit from the fact that this morning an (elderly man) in a wheelchair has been the target of assassination."

In a statement, EU foreign ministers condemned the assassination saying it had only poured oil

on the tense situation and called for restraint.

"The assassination which has just been carried out has inflamed the situation," said the statement.

In the first US reaction, White House national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said Washington "did not have advance warning" of the attack and repeated previous US calls for calm.

"We would just ask everyone to step back and do nothing that precludes a better day," Rice told Fox News.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians marched through the occupied territories early Monday, shouting, wailing with some toting guns.

Such scenes were repeated in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat declared three days of mourning.



PHOTO: AFP  
Palestinians march in the West Bank town of Jenin yesterday protesting the killing of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Sheikh Yassin was killed in an Israeli helicopter strike in Gaza City, prompting the radical Islamist movement he founded to declare all-out war on the Jewish state.

# NEHRU-GANDHI DYNASTY 5th generation in polls fray

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The decision of India's main opposition party Congress to nominate Rahul Gandhi, the fifth generation of Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, for the coming parliamentary polls has ramifications that go far beyond the coming electoral exercise.

First, Rahul has entered the rough and tumble of Indian politics at a time when her Italy-born mother and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi is under attack from ruling BJP-led NDA is flogging the issue of her foreign origin saying no such person should be allowed to hold the high office of prime minister or the president.

Secondly, the Congress, say political observers, is also mindful of the fact that a section of the opposition is also uncomfortable about Sonia's foreign origin vis-à-vis her credentials to hold the office of prime minister in the event of her party returning to power.

Rahul's candidature for the polls to the Gandhi family pocket-borough Amethi, which her mother had won in 1999, in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh is widely expected to provide the much-needed boost to the party in Uttar Pradesh, a state which sends the highest number of members (80) to Lok Sabha and holds the key to the success of the party to regain power at the Centre.

Thirdly, Rahul's nomination

## News Analysis

comes at a time when Congress is in dire straits in Uttar Pradesh with a deep erosion in its traditional vote bank of Brahmins, Dalits and Muslims who have moved away to BJP, Samajwadi Party led by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party which have emerged as dominant political forces in the state over the

last two decades.

It also comes in the backdrop of Congress' failure to firm up alliances with either Samajwadi Party or BSP in a bid to shore up its electoral fortunes in Uttar Pradesh where the real big battle of Indian elections is to be fought.

The announcement of Rahul's taking the plunge was greeted by Congress rank and file in Uttar Pradesh where party men expect him and his sister Priyanka to counter the formidable rivals like Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati.

The Congress also hopes that Rahul's presence will attract the young generation of voters.

Rahul's nomination not only extends the hold of Nehru-Gandhi family legacy in Congress and Indian political scene but also positions him as the heir apparent to the party's leadership and possibly to the post of prime minister, say the observers.

# Malaysian ruling party routs Islamists

THE STAR/ ANN, Kuala Lumpur

The Barisan Nasional has won a massive victory in the general election and in the process recaptured Terengganu and claimed victory in Kelantan as well.

The victory is a personal triumph for Prime Minister and Barisan chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. He now has a clear mandate from Malaysian voters for his campaign for reforms.

The Barisan sweep in the Malay heartland was so effective that opposition PAS leader Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang lost his parliamentary seat in Terengganu.

The PAS election machinery was further torn apart when its list of casualties included vice-president Datuk Dr Ali Hassan (Parit Buntar), secretary-general Nasharuddin Mat Isa (Bestu), central committee members Mahfuz Omar (Pokok Sena), Mohamed Sabu (Kuala Kedah) and Datuk Taib Azamudeen (Baling).

# FORMER US PRESIDENT CARTER SAYS Iraq war based on 'lies, misinterpretations'

AFP, London

The war in Iraq was based on a campaign of "lies and misinterpretations" by Washington and London which falsely linked Iraq's deposed dictator Saddam Hussein to the September 11 attacks in the United States, former US president Jimmy Carter was quoted as saying yesterday.

"There was no reason for us to become involved in Iraq recently," Carter told Britain's daily The Independent. "That was a war based on lies and misinterpretations from London and from Washington, claiming falsely that Saddam Hussein was responsible for (the) 9/11 attacks, claiming falsely that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction."

"And I think that President (George W) Bush and Prime Minister (Tony) Blair probably knew that many of the allegations were based on uncertain intelligence ... a deci-

sion was made to go to war (then people said) 'let's find a reason to do so'.

The 2002 Nobel peace prize winner said he believed that Bush was the prime instigator of the war and Blair let himself be convinced that it was justified.

"I think the basic reason was made not in London but in Washington," he said. "I think that Bush Jr was inclined to finish a war that his father had precipitated against Iraq."

"I think it was that commitment of Bush that prevailed over, I think, the better judgement of Tony Blair and Tony Blair became an enthusiastic supporter of the Bush policy".

Carter's criticism came amid efforts by the White House to downplay accusations by a former top Bush terrorism advisor who accused the current administration of doing a "terrible job" of defending the country against terrorism.



PHOTO: AFP

President of India's Congress Party Sonia Gandhi (L) is watched closely by a plainclothes policeman as she launches her party's manifesto at a press conference in New Delhi yesterday. Sonia Gandhi's party will be fielding candidates including her son Rahul Gandhi who will contest parliamentary seats in India's forthcoming general elections, the first of five stages which will begin April 20.