

## Fears of new al-Qaeda attacks stalk Saudis

### Manhunt on for hostage-takers

AFP, BBC ONLINE, Riyadh

Fears of even more spectacular terror attacks haunted Saudi Arabia after three suspected al-Qaeda militants, who slit the throats of several foreigners among at least 22 killed in a bloody rampage, escaped a 24-hour siege.

A massive manhunt is under way in Saudi Arabia for several Islamic militants who evaded capture after a bloody 25-hour hostage siege in Khobar.

Police checkpoints have been set up throughout the city in an effort to capture three heavily armed militants.

Officials say the group's leader was wounded and captured, but the others managed to break through a security cordon using hostages as human shields.

The UK ambassador to Saudi Arabia has warned that more attacks are likely.

Australia and Britain led the warnings of worse to come, with the Foreign Office in London seeing a threat of an imminent attack.

Despite a massive security presence, the interior ministry admitted three of four gunmen, who took dozens of hostages and holed up in an apartment building, managed to get away to fight another day.

The trio hijacked a car at gunpoint on Sunday after helicopters landed commandos on the roof of the building and rescued 25 hostages.

A fourth militant, the alleged leader, was wounded and captured. He was identified only as

one of the kingdom's "most wanted."

Also galling for the Saudi authorities was that a statement in which the al-Qaeda terror group purportedly claimed responsibility gave the essential details of the raids hours before the interior ministry released a very similar version.

A second statement, posted on an Islamist website and which could not be verified, vowed to "cleanse the Arabian Peninsula of infidels."

"We renew our determination to repel the crusader forces and their arrogance, to liberate the land of Muslims, to apply Sharia (Islamic law) and cleanse the Arabian Peninsula of infidels," it said.

The message, signed by the "al-Qaeda Organisation in the Arabian

Peninsula", headed by Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin, a Saudi, said one of the fighters was killed, naming him as "the hero Nimer bin Suhaj al-Baqmi".

Muqrin tops a Saudi list of 26 most-wanted terror suspects, which has since been reduced to 18 amid a nationwide crackdown on suspected al-Qaeda sympathisers.

The Times of London on Monday picked up on the warning the previous day from the Foreign Office that plans may be advanced for fresh terror.

Intelligence agencies feared a "spectacular attack", the daily said, listing key oil installations or the causeway linking the kingdom to Bahrain among possible targets.

Final preparations were being made by al-Qaeda sympathisers, The Times said.

## Bush keeps Saddam's pistol as a trophy

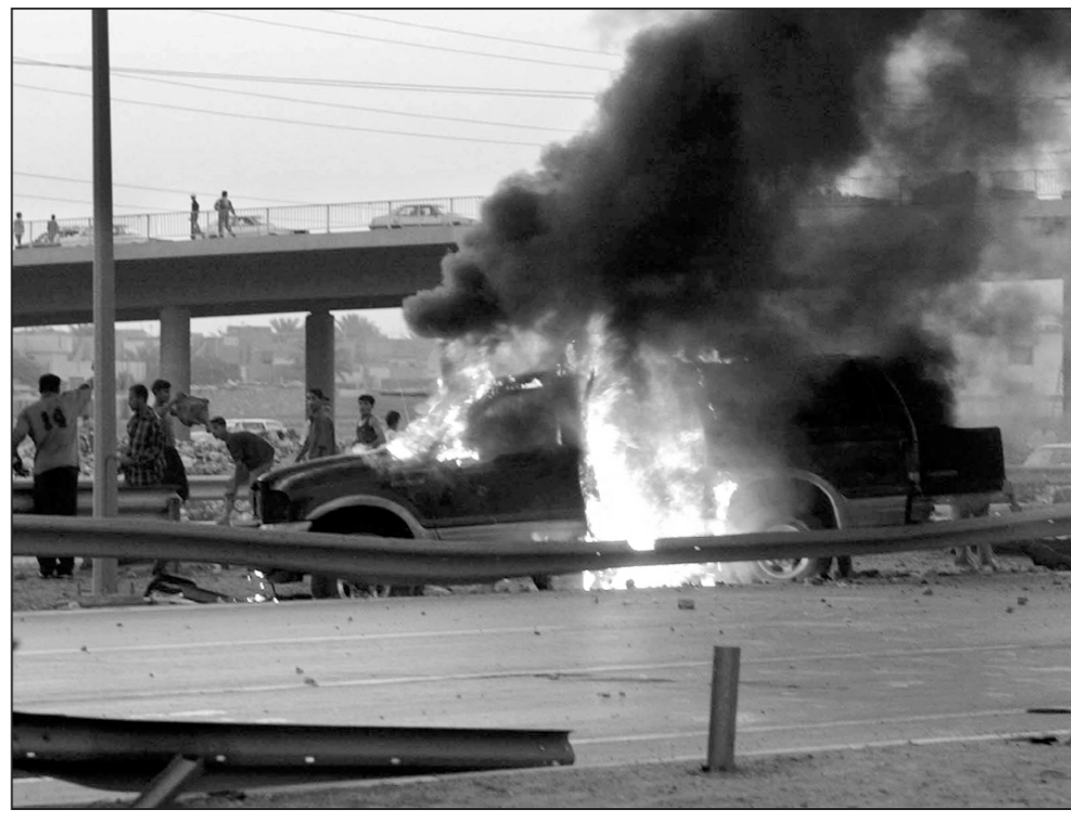
AP, Washington

President Bush keeps in his White House offices a trophy of one his high points in the Iraq war, the pistol that Saddam Hussein held when soldiers pulled him from his underground hideaway.

Military specialists mounted the sidearm, and soldiers who helped in the deposed Iraqi president's capture presented it to the president, the White House said Sunday. The president keeps the gun in a small study adjoining the Oval Office.

"The president was proud of the performance and bravery of our armed forces and was honored to receive it on behalf of the troops involved in the operation," said White House spokesman Jim Morrell.

Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, commander of 4th Infantry Division, said the Saddam had the loaded pistol on his lap but didn't move to use it against the Americans who surprised him in what the military described as a spider hole near his hometown, Tikrit, on Dec. 13.



Flames engulf one of three vehicles that came under attack Sunday on the outskirts of Baghdad. At least two men were killed when gunmen open fired on a convoy of three sports-utility vehicles in northwestern Baghdad.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: AFP

Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala (R) talks with General Secretary of Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist, Madhav Kumar Nepal (L), during a meeting of opposition parties in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal's opposition leaders despite hectic discussions failed to pick a candidate for prime minister within the one-day deadline set by King Gyanendra.

## Nepali parties fail to pick PM

### Political turmoil deepens

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's political turmoil deepened yesterday as feuding opposition leaders failed to settle on a candidate for prime minister before a deadline set by King Gyanendra.

The king late Sunday gave political parties until 5:00 pm (11:15 GMT) Monday to recommend a prime minister who could fight a Maoist insurgency and bring the opposition into the government for the first time in two years.

But the deadline passed with 34 political leaders still huddled in talks and one opposition chief vowing to defy the request of the king, who had fired the elected government in 2002.

"We haven't been able to reach unanimous agreement on a candidate," said Girija Prasad Koirala, a former prime minister who heads the Himalayan kingdom's largest party, the Nepali Congress.

"In the present situation there is anyway no question of giving a name to the king. To do so would go against the protest campaign we started. Our movement must

continue," Koirala told reporters.

A five-party opposition alliance held weeks of mass demonstrations outside the royal palace, prompting the resignation on May 7 of the king's handpicked prime minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa.

The king opened a dialogue with opposition leaders after Thapa quit, but without any breakthrough.

The king was expected to finalise a choice for prime minister this week, with or without a recommendation by the opposition, a source close to the palace said on condition of anonymity.

Former foreign minister C.P. Bastola, who supports the opposition, said the king likely imposed his deadline because of a visit to Kathmandu planned at the weekend by the new foreign minister of giant neighbour India, Natwar Singh.

"Officially Singh will be here on a religious pilgrimage but it's clear he will also be observing the political situation," said Bastola, who has also been Nepal's ambassador to New Delhi.

## New govt in war of words with Pakistan

### Coalition seeks 'constructive dialogue'

AFP, New Delhi

India's new government called yesterday for a "constructive dialogue with Pakistan but entered a war of words with its rival neighbour over how to resolve the protracted Kashmir dispute.

Natwar Singh, the foreign minister of the Congress party-led government, said India wanted "frank discussions" on all issues including divided Kashmir, where an insurgency against Indian rule has raged since 1989.

"We have to tell them no positive relationship can be one-sided, that we should work together without acrimony... that the new government is looking for a constructive and creative dialogue," Singh told the Hindustan Times

newspaper.

But the two countries, which launched a peace process a year ago after coming to the brink of war, entered into a dispute over what the starting point of the dialogue would be under the new government.

Singh last week highlighted the 1972 Shimla agreement, which ended the countries' third war, as a "bedrock" of bilateral relations.

India believes the agreement, negotiated by Congress prime minister Indira Gandhi, implicitly recognised the Kashmir ceasefire line, known as the Line of Control, as the border with Pakistan.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in a television interview said that while he looked forward to working with the new govern-

ment, talks could not begin on the assumption that the Line of Control would be made permanent.

Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank in a statement Monday said India was "somewhat surprised" at Musharraf's remarks.

"It (the agreement) provides the framework for our relations and commitment both to dialogue for resolving differences and not to take any unilateral actions," said Shashank, who uses only one name.

But he assured that India would also abide by all subsequent bilateral agreements including those signed by former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose Hindu nationalist government lost April-May elections.

## ASIAN ANALYSTS SAY

# al-Qaeda winning the war

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The al-Qaeda network is winning the global war on terror, while America's use of overwhelming force against Muslim extremists is creating a sea of hatred and is strategically flawed, Asian analysts said yesterday.

They were speaking at a three-day Asia-Pacific Roundtable on security organised by Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), which drew some 100 international participants.

Muslim-majority Malaysia has been sharply critical of the US invasion of Iraq, while pledging its full support for efforts to curb

Islamic terrorism.

ISIS director-general Mohamed Jawhar Hassan said that even though al-Qaeda had lost some of its traditional bases in Afghanistan, the terror group's top leadership remained intact and its ability to wreak havoc remained as strong as ever.

"The US-led international battle is losing while the al-Qaeda-led international network is winning," Mohamed said.

The director of Singapore's Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Barry Desker, said al-Qaeda remained resilient and the use of force could not eliminate terror threats.

"The response cannot be a military one. This is fundamentally a US error," he said, adding that the US-led war on Iraq and subsequent occupation had driven Islamic militants to wage jihad, or holy war, against Washington.

"Iraq is seen as the epicentre of jihad," he said, adding al-Qaeda was propagating the view that the US occupation was the manifestation of an evil scheme to dissolve Islamic identity.

Noordin Sopiee, Malaysia's ISIS chairman, said the world was losing the war on terror because "we have expanded the sea of hatred and expanded the reservoir of deep-seated rage (in the Muslim world)".

## 'Israelis, Palestinians accept Egyptian plan'

### Sharon buys more time

AFP, Cairo

The Israelis and Palestinians have accepted an Egyptian plan for a ceasefire, a resumption of peace talks and a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Palestinian counterpart Ahmed Qorei, the Egyptian news agency Mena reported yesterday.

The plan, for which no timeframe has been set, falls within the framework of Israel's planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Egypt's agreement to help maintain security in the territory afterwards, Mena said.

It has been "welcomed" by Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid and "other capitals", which promised to help equip Palestinian forces to be able to secure Gaza following a withdrawal, the agency added.

It said Sharon had "agreed to stop violence, bombings and assassinations, on condition that the Palestinians remain committed" to an end to hostilities.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had "approved the Egyptian plan and said he was ready to start

working immediately towards a ceasefire," according to Mena.

The news, which has not been confirmed officially, came after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak confirmed in an interview with Romanian television that his country was ready to train Palestinian forces to maintain security in the Gaza Strip.

"We are ready to train Palestinian forces in case of a withdrawal from Gaza," in order to help them to "secure" the area, Mubarak said in the interview, cited Monday in the government newspaper al-Ahram.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon bought more time to gain support for his Gaza pullout plan when he pulled out of a debate in parliament on his project, a day after postponing a vote among his cabinet.

A spokesman for the Knesset confirmed that the debate, which had been called by 40 members of the 120-seat assembly, had been put back until Tuesday of next week although two no-confidence motions would still be put to a vote yesterday.

## Lanka battles mosquitoes as dengue fever claims 18 lives

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan authorities launched a week-long campaign yesterday to destroy breeding grounds of mosquitoes as dengue fever claimed 18 lives while another 3,300 people were infected.

The health ministry's epidemiology unit said there was a potential threat of a dengue epidemic ahead of the monsoon season that starts from June and continues for two months.

"We have seen a sharp increase in the number of cases reported in May and we fear the numbers will increase in the next two months with the monsoon setting in," said doctor Hasitha Tissera of the epidemiology unit.

He said 18 people have died this year of dengue, which is spread by mosquitoes.

The district of Colombo had 667 cases of dengue this year, making it the worst-hit region in the country, he said, as municipal workers and volunteers began a campaign here to clean up the city of mosquito breeding grounds.

## N Korea a 'far more compelling threat' than Iraq: Kerry

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush's fixation on Iraq has made the United States less safe and allowed North Korea and Iran to pursue efforts to develop nuclear weapons, Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry said in an interview published Sunday.

"This administration has been almost myopic in its view on Iraq itself, to the exclusion of those things that are necessary to, in fact, make the world safer," the senator from Massachusetts told The New York Times.

"This administration is high on rhetoric and high on ideology and low on actual strategic thinking and truth," Kerry said.

"And the fact is that they have broken alliances across the planet that have served us well for years, they've left our reputation in tatters," he said. "There's no one who deals with the global community who doesn't understand the degree to which we've isolated

ourselves, and I think we're less safe because of that."

Kerry said North Korea, Iran and nuclear material in the former Soviet Union posed the most serious threat of putting unconventional weapons into the hands of terror groups.

The Bush administration had put these problems on the back burner, he said, adding that North Korea "was a far more compelling threat in many ways, and it belonged at the top of the agenda."

Kerry told the Times he would have "dealt with them simultaneously" along with Iraq.

"Three and a half years ago, four years ago, we had television cameras and inspectors in Pyongyang," Kerry said. "Today we do not. Three and a half years ago we knew where the fuel rods were. Today we do not."

"We have to be more artful in seeing what they (the North Koreans) see, not just thinking about it from our point of view," he continued.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian street children take part in the anti-tobacco march in Kolkata yesterday on the occasion of the "World No Tobacco Day." The World Health Organisation (WHO) May 21, 2003 adopted a historic anti-smoking treaty aimed at curbing five million tobacco-related deaths a year.