

Bush policies encourage terrorism, says Kerry

AP, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Democratic candidate John Kerry accused President Bush of encouraging terrorist recruitment with policies that have made the world angry at the United States, a criticism that Bush dismissed as a "ridiculous notion."

On the day that Bush announced he would create a national intelligence czar and counterterrorism center to help prevent another terrorist attack, Kerry said the self-described "war president" was not acting fast enough to protect Americans.

Kerry said Bush should immediately call a special session of Congress to implement the recommendations of the Sept. 11 commission, and he said he would interrupt his campaigning to be there for debate and voting "when necessary."

"When we are at war, we need to do the things that make us safe rapidly, immediately," Kerry said. "If there is something that will make America safer, it should be done now, not tomorrow."

11 killed in Indian tunnel collapse

AFP, New Delhi

At least 11 people were killed and an as yet undetermined number injured or missing after a tunnel they were digging collapsed in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, police said Tuesday.

A senior police official said a survivor had told him about 75 to 80 people were in the tunnel when it started to collapse late Monday. He could not say how many people had managed to escape and how many were still trapped inside.

Police overnight pulled out the bodies of nine workers, while two others were retrieved Tuesday morning, he added.

The tunnel is part of a controversial hydro-electric power project which environmentalists say is dangerous as it is being built in an earthquake prone region.

Local district official Puneet Kansal told Aaj Tak television news channel that labourers were working in the tunnel when earth started falling from the roof.

"Some people came out when the loose earth started falling but others stayed behind," he said, without giving figures.

'100 bodies found in mass graves in Ivory Coast'

AFP, Abidjan

Three mass graves containing at least 99 bodies have been found in northern Ivory Coast in a region under rebel control where clashes took place between rival factions last month, the United Nations mission in the west African country said Monday.

"Some of these people were killed by gunshots. According to reliable witnesses, others were suffocated," the UN Operation in Ivory Coast (UNOIC) said in a statement.

It said the graves were found in the northern town of Korhogo.

Ivory Coast, the world's top cocoa producer, has been mired in unrest since a failed September 2002 coup plunged the country into a divisive war that has left the north in rebel hands ever since.

India, Pakistan talk ways to boost ties

AFP, New Delhi

Senior officials from India and Pakistan were meeting here yesterday to discuss ways to increase cultural contacts between the two countries, an Indian official said.

The two-day talks in the Indian capital are part of peace discussions known as the Composite Dialogue Process revived by the neighbours earlier this year.

On the agenda are matters such as easier visa access, increasing the volume of religious tourism between the two countries and the lifting of a ban by Pakistan on the broadcast of Indian television channels, the official said.

The ban has been in place since 2002 when the two nuclear rivals came to the brink of their fourth war since their independence from British rule in 1947.

The Indian team is led by Neena Ranjan, secretary in India's ministry of culture, while the Pakistani delegation is headed by Ranjan's counterpart Jalil Abbas, a culture ministry official said.

The eight-member Pakistani delegation arrived in New Delhi on Monday, he added.

India and Pakistan, who have fought two of their three wars over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, decided to restart the peace talks in January.



PHOTO: AFP

South Korean anti-war activists kick and scuffle with riot police yesterday in an attempt to break into a military airport at the southern outskirts of Seoul. Hundreds of activists squared off with riot police outside the airport and in another protest near the office of President Roh Moo-Hyun, demanding the government cancel the possible dispatch of troops to Iraq.

'40 to 50 Taliban killed in Afghan border clash' Pakistan swoops on al-Qaeda ring, several detained

REUTERS, Kabul

Between 40 and 50 suspected Taliban militants have been killed in heavy fighting with Afghan forces backed by US attack helicopters and "tank buster" aircraft near the Pakistan border, the US military said yesterday.

The casualty figure, based on estimates by pilots flying in support of Afghan soldiers in the fighting on Monday, came in a statement from the US-led force of 18,000 troops hunting al-Qaeda and Taliban guerrillas in Afghanistan. It gave no concrete details for the figure.

If confirmed, it would be one of the heaviest losses in recent months from a single battle for the insurgents fighting foreign and Afghan forces in Afghanistan.

A local commander in Khost, near the site of the clashes that erupted in the early hours of Monday, told Reuters on Monday he knew of two Afghan soldiers

and two Taliban guerrillas killed. The US military said 50 insurgents attacked Afghan soldiers using rockets, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns.

In a second assault some five hours later, between 20 and 50 militants struck in the same area.

"The exact number of enemy casualties is unknown, but pilots flying overhead estimated that approximately 40-50 insurgents were killed," it said.

Local commander General Khialbaz Sherzai said on Monday his forces saw suspected Taliban militants retreat over the border into Pakistan, many apparently wounded.

Pakistan denies Afghan accusations that its territory is being used as a sanctuary by militants.

Remnants of the Taliban, ousted in a US-led war in 2001, have declared a "jihad," or holy war against foreign forces, Afghan troops, government officials and aid workers.

The Taliban have vowed to disrupt preparations for elections in October and April.

US-led forces sent a B-1 bomber, A-10 Thunderbolt II "tank buster" aircraft and attack helicopters to support Afghan soldiers in the latest clashes.

AFP adds: Pakistan has arrested a foreign al-Qaeda suspect and five local al-Qaeda "facilitators" in the past 10 days, officials said yesterday.

The foreign national, Salman Juma Ibrahim, was captured in Pakistan's most populated province Punjab on Monday, said a senior security official.

"Ibrahim... is a low to mid-ranking al-Qaeda operative," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"He was carrying some messages," the official said, but refused to elaborate on their contents or to whom they were addressed.

Five Pakistanis who had assisted al-Qaeda operatives were also arrested, the official said.

Hamas threatens to rocket Israeli town 3 Palestinians killed in Gaza explosion

AFP, REUTERS, Dubai

Hamas's military wing threatened yesterday to rain down rockets on an Israeli town if the occupation of a Gaza Strip village continues, in a videotaped message believed to be the first of its kind by the Palestinian militant group.

"Residents of Sderot, stop your army's crimes and get it out of Beit Hanun, or else you will be the ones paying the price," said one of three masked gunmen on the footage aired by the Dubai-based satellite channel Al-Arabiya.

"We have decided to send you Qassam rockets to whatever place you thought was safe. We have prepared

rockets that can reach wherever we want ... and we will continue to bombard you daily," he said, reading from a prepared statement.

The gunman, standing with two other masked men among a number of rockets and launchers, recalled that the Israeli army had reoccupied Beit Hanun "on the pretext of stopping the Qassam rockets".

"But it has destroyed crops and houses ... and killed dozens of people," without succeeding in halting the rocket attacks, he said.

Israeli troops poured back into Beit Hanun in late June after a makeshift Qassam rocket fired by Hamas for the first time killed two Israelis in Sderot.

Reuters adds: An explosion killed three Palestinians in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday as militants clashed with Israeli troops and tanks on a raid to find weapons-smuggling tunnels.

Witnesses and Israel's army said the blast appeared to be from a bomb that militants were trying to detonate against Israeli troops in Rafah, a militant stronghold near the Egyptian border and scene of frequent clashes.

Two of the dead were militants. The third was an off-duty policeman who owned a shop in Rafah.

At least 15 people were wounded, including a Reuters cameraman, who was hit in the hand by shrapnel.

'Jordan considers troops for Iraq' Bangkok-Amman agree to be allies

AFP, Dubai

Jordan would consider sending troops to troubled Iraq if Baghdad made a request for an Arab force to replace the US-led coalition, King Abdullah II told Al-Arabiya satellite channel yesterday.

"We do not want to replace the Israeli tank in Palestine with a Jordanian tank or the American tank in Iraq with a Jordanian tank, therefore we hope that our friends and brothers understand our position," he said.

"But if our Iraqi brothers request the participation of Arab forces on their territory, then we would look into the matter and see what is suitable," he told Al-Arabiya in an interview to be aired at 1830 GMT.

On Sunday, Arab League chief Amr

Mussa said Arab and Islamic states do not at present want to send troops to Iraq.

He was speaking following talks with Saudi leaders who have proposed sending a Muslim force to replace the US-led troops in Iraq.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said on Sunday that any Muslim troops dispatched to Iraq would be sent to replace US-led multinational forces and not to supplement them.

He also said that troops should be sent only at Baghdad's request and operate under the auspices of the United Nations.

Meanwhile, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra told Jordan's King Abdullah II yesterday he wanted the two

countries to team up to help rebuild war-torn Iraq, a government official said.

"Thailand has agreed that Jordan is our ally in rebuilding Iraq as Thailand will join with Jordan in restructuring infrastructure," spokesman Jakrapob Penkair told reporters after the two leaders met in Bangkok.

King Abdullah, on a three-day official visit, told Thaksin Iraq was in urgent need of new roads, traffic signals and bridges following the war to oust president Saddam Hussein's regime last year and subsequent insurgency, Jakrapob said.

Thailand dispatched a 451-strong contingent of troops to Iraq in a one-year humanitarian mission due to end in September.

Terror targets remain under tight security

AP, New York

Under the steady gaze of police officers sporting body armour and automatic weapons, workers were confronted with ID checks and bag searches as they headed for work following the most specific domestic terrorism warnings since the 2001 attacks.

Police said the measures would remain in effect yesterday and would be reviewed daily.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge along with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Gov. George Pataki and New Jersey Gov. James E. McGreevey were to meet Tuesday with financial executives from affected companies to discuss security concerns.

On Monday, officials sealed off some streets in New York, put financial employees in Washington through extra security checks, and added concrete barricades and a heavily armed presence in Newark, New Jersey, in response to a terrorism alert aimed at financial titans.



PHOTO: AFP

Four-month-old baby Enzo Bobadilla Morales, rescued Sunday from the shopping mall in flames by police officer Juan Duarte, who resuscitated him with mouth-to-mouth techniques while taking him out of the smoldering rubble, recovers in the pediatric ward of a hospital Monday in Asuncion, Paraguay.

Sudan plans to double Darfur security forces

BBC ONLINE

The authorities in Sudan have announced plans to double the number of security forces in the troubled Darfur region to 12,000 over the next four months.

The news came at a meeting in Khartoum between government officials and a senior UN representative, Jan Pronk.

The UN has given the government 30 days to disarm the Janjaweed militias, accused of widespread atrocities against non-Arab groups.

More than one million people have fled their homes in 18 months of conflict.

Pronk told the BBC there had been positive progress in implementing last month's agreement between the UN and Sudan on improving security for the people of Darfur.

Lankan opposition quits support for peace talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's main opposition which could make or break a final peace deal between the government and Tamil rebels yesterday withdrew its unconditional support for pushing forward the stalled peace process.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told members of his United National Party (UNP) he had decided not to back the minority government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga due to mixed signals from the administration.

Last week, the UNP offered an

unexpected life line to Kumara-tunga's shaky coalition in order to revive peace talks with Tamil Tiger rebels despite differences within the government.

Wickremesinghe was quoted in a statement by his party as saying that although he supported Kumaratunga's plan to start peace talks with the Tigers based on rebel proposals for self-rule, her Marxist ally, the JVP, or People's Liberation Front was militantly opposed to the idea.

"President Kumaratunga's brother, Anura Bandaranaike, and the JVP have said they do not want our support and they have raised several allegations

against us," Wickremesinghe said.

"In that context, the UNP will move away from its earlier decision to support the government."

Any peace deal with the Tigers needs the backing of the opposition as Kumaratunga's government does not enjoy even a simple majority in the 225-member assembly.

Wickremesinghe entered into a ceasefire agreement with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in February 2002 and held six rounds of Norwegian-backed peace talks with the guerrillas.



PHOTO: AFP

Secretary of India's Ministry of Culture Neena Ranjan (C) shakes hands with her Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas (R) as Pakistan's High Commissioner to India Aziz Ahmed Khan looks on before the start of two-day talks in New Delhi yesterday.

Kashmir separatists fail to forge unity

AFP, Srinagar

Influential separatists in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir said yesterday they had failed in an attempt to unite feuding moderate and hardline factions, marking a major blow to separatist unity.

The All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, an alliance of some two dozen separatist groups, split last September between moderate and hardliners in a row over holding talks with New Delhi to end a deadly insurgency against Indian rule.

Leading separatists formed the Itehadi (Unification) Force in a bid to unite the opposing wings but said they were disbanding after attempts led nowhere.

"We tried our best in our efforts but we failed ... to forge unity among the warring Hurriyat groups," sai senior separatist Mohammed Yasin Malik in the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar, tears in his eyes. "We are dissolving the Itehadi Force."

The hardliners, supported by separatist guerrillas, oppose the talks launched last January by the moderates with New Delhi to bring peace to the Himalayan region where the revolt has left tens of thousands dead.

Malik's pro-independence Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and

other parties headed by veteran separatist leaders such as Shabir Shah, Sheikh Aziz, Mian Qayoom and Maulana Showket Ahmed set up the Itehadi Force.

"I and my colleagues apologize to the unfortunate people of Kashmir who have given huge sacrifices for freedom," Malik said.

He singled out hardliner Syed Ali Geelani, who wants Indian Kashmir to join Pakistan, as a "big impediment" to the unity efforts.

Geelani was declared head of the breakaway hardline Hurriyat last September. "I had a lot of expectations from Geelani but I am disappointed with his approach," said Malik. He was one of a dozen Kashmiris who launched an armed struggle against Indian rule in 1988 but who opted in the 1990s to pursue his goals through political means.

"He (Geelani) is on a suicide path," said Malik, adding by "not uniting we are helping the imperial power," a reference to India.

"It is a struggle for freedom. We must unite. If we don't, it may lead to a civil war," Malik warned, flanked by other Itehadi Force leaders.

There was no immediate comment available from Geelani.