

Escaped plotter of Musharraf killing attempt recaptured

Cops net 2 dozens more al-Qaeda suspects

REUTERS, AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani intelligence agents have recaptured a former air force man convicted of being part of a plot to assassinate President Pervez Musharraf, a senior security official told Reuters yesterday.

Mushtaq Ahmed's recapture earlier this week comes after the arrest in Pakistan of Abu Faraj Farj al Liby, who US counter-terrorism agents describe as third in command of the al-Qaeda network.

Pakistan says Liby was al-Qaeda's operations chief and was behind two assassination attempts against US ally President Pervez Musharraf in December 2003.

One of those assassination attempts involved Ahmed, a civil-

ian working for Pakistan's air force, and several low-ranking servicemen.

The government said Ahmed was a member of Jaish-e-Mohammed, an outlawed group fighting Indian rule in disputed Kashmir, which al-Qaeda had forged links with.

Authorities kept quiet for weeks over Ahmed's escape from custody on an air force base in Rawalpindi, near the capital Islamabad, last December.

The ease with which Ahmed got away raised embarrassing questions over security on the base. He escaped by breaking a window, while supposedly performing his ablutions for early morning prayers.

The official said the timing of

Ahmed's recapture, coming so close to Liby's arrest, was a coincidence.

"Earlier in the week he was coming from Lahore to Islamabad on the motorway when he was arrested," he said, adding that intelligence agents had made the arrest.

They tracked down the fugitive after he had been traced using an Internet cafe in Lahore, the capital of the eastern province of Punjab.

Liby was arrested in North West Frontier Province on Monday morning, and security forces have launched a series of raids since, arresting more than 20 suspects, including at least eight in Lahore on Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, Pakistani security

forces have rounded up about two dozen suspected al-Qaeda members using information from the third in command of the network who was arrested early this week, officials said on Thursday.

Officials told Reuters that Abu Faraj Farj al Liby, who US counter-terrorism agents say became al-Qaeda operations chief and third in command two years ago, could also provide leads to the whereabouts of leader Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Al Liby's capture was announced late on Wednesday, and he has been brought to Rawalpindi, the garrison town close to Islamabad, for questioning.



Indian Army personnel carry the body of Indian Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora during a funeral procession in New Delhi Thursday. Aurora, the Indian general known as the architect of the 1971 war with Pakistan that led to the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation died of heart failure in New Delhi on May 3, at the age of 92.

Nepal extends Deuba detention for a week

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's powerful anti-graft commission Wednesday ordered former Nepalese premier Sher Bahadur Deuba held in custody for another seven days while it probes corruption allegations against him.

Deuba, arrested last Wednesday, and his coalition government were dismissed by King Gyanendra when he seized power February 1.

Gyanendra, whose takeover drew international condemnation, said he needed to tackle an increasingly bloody Maoist insurgency.

The former premier has refused to testify before the commission, accusing it of waging a vendetta against politicians opposing Gyanendra's takeover.

He is the most senior politician to be detained by the body which has sweeping powers of arrest and punishment. Gyanendra said he set up the commission to fight corruption which is rife in the impoverished nation.

Delhi announces new Indo-Pak talks timetable

Third trans-Kashmir bus runs under tight security

AFP, New Delhi

India announced yesterday a new timetable of talks with rival Pakistan, including meetings next week over the launch of a new bus service and later in May over a long-running glacier boundary dispute.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said "technical level talks" on the proposed bus service between India's holy Sikh city of Amritsar and Lahore in Pakistan would begin next Tuesday in Lahore.

Sarna said the countries' defence secretaries would meet in Islamabad May 25-26 for talks on the disputed Siachen glacier high in the Himalayas, the scene of a

bloody clash between the nuclear-armed neighbours in 1987.

India's announcement followed a visit to New Delhi last month by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf during which the nuclear-armed neighbours declared that their 15-month-old peace process was "irreversible."

Sarna also told a news conference that talks between the Indian coast guards and the Pakistan maritime agency would be held in Islamabad next week to build better communications between the two bodies.

"This is one of the confidence-building measures that was agreed to after the foreign secretaries meeting in June last year," Sarna

said.

The announcement of talks on the proposed new bus service between Amritsar and Lahore coincided with the third run Thursday of trans-Kashmir bus service linking the administrative capitals of the two divided Himalayan region.

Buses left the capitals of the Indian and Pakistani zones of Kashmir under tight security yesterday on the third run of a bus service linking the divided Himalayan state.

Two buses left Srinagar in Indian Kashmir and another two left Muzaffarabad in the Pakistan zone, headed for the de facto border called the Line of Control.

Indian space rocket blasts off with 2 sats

AFP, Sriharikota, India

An Indian rocket blasted off yesterday, carrying the country's ambitions to be a major global space power and two satellites that it launched into orbit.

The liftoff in southeastern India marked the first time India had launched a rocket with two satellites aboard and notched up another achievement in its ambitious space programme to send a probe to the moon by 2007 or 2008.

The launch "reaffirms the emergence of India as a major space power," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told parliament in New Delhi.

The 44-metre (147-foot) Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle carried a remote sensing satellite whose detailed imaging is aimed at putting every Indian household on the map

and another for South Asian home radio operators that can be used during disasters such as earthquakes and floods.

The rocket lifted off from the Satish Dhawan space port, 100km north of Madras, to loud cheers from scientists and their families who watched the rocket streak into a clear blue sky.

"It was a fantastically accurate flight and (satellite) injection," G. Madhavan Nair, chairman of the Bangalore-based Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), told reporters.

President Abdul Kalam, a scientist dubbed India's "missile man" for his contribution to the country's satellite programmes, guided and ballistic missiles projects and nuclear weapons drive, watched the launch.

Indian SC orders search for soldier missing since 1971

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court ordered yesterday a search for a soldier missing since the country's last war with Pakistan in 1971, after his wife insisted her husband was being held in prison over the border.

The court ordered the foreign ministry and India's border guards to launch a fresh hunt for paramilitary soldier Surjit Singh who was declared killed in action after he went missing in December 1971 during the 17-day war.

"The authorities shall continue efforts to find out the actual position (of him)," said judges Arjit Pasayat and S.H. Kapadia in a written verdict.

Singh, who was a member of India's Border Security Force, is believed to have died in the eastern sector, the main theatre of the battle which finally led to the creation of Bangladesh.

9 Afghan soldiers killed in ambush

Taliban fighting toll rises to 40

AFP, Kabul

Militants killed nine Afghan soldiers in an ambush while the Taliban death toll from a battle with US and Afghan troops rose to at least 40 in a wave of violence sweeping southern Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

Rebels loyal to the ousted Islamic regime have launched a bloody spring offensive against Afghan government and military targets as well as the US-led coalition in the past month.

The renewed Taliban drive has left at least 100 insurgents and 12 police dead as the weather has become warmer in past one month, Interior Minister Ali Ahmed Jalali told a press conference.

Nine Afghan soldiers were killed and three wounded in an ambush on Wednesday by "enemies of

Afghanistan" in Shawali Kot, a troubled district of southern Kandahar province, defence ministry spokesman Mohammad Nohman Atifi told AFP.

He did not link the attackers to any particular group but similar attacks have in the past been blamed on remnants of the Taliban. Kandahar is regarded as the birthplace of the hardline movement.

The wounded soldiers were taken to a local hospital, the official said. He had no information if the attackers sustained any casualties.

US and Afghan officials on Thursday said the number of Taliban militants killed in a firefight in neighbouring Zabul province had doubled to at least 40.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian man uses an axe to cut an uprooted tree which is blocking a main road in Kolkata Thursday following a severe thunder storm late Wednesday. Eleven people were killed and at least 20 others were injured after a wall collapsed in a slum area of Kolkata as a result of the storm.