

22 Afghans killed in new Taliban attacks

Plot to kill US ambassador foiled

AFP, Kandahar

Twenty-two Afghans were killed and three US soldiers injured in the latest attacks linked to the war-tattered country's former Taliban regime while Afghan forces foiled an attempt to kill US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, officials said yesterday.

Militants from the fundamentalist Islamic group, ousted by US-led forces in late 2001, attacked a district in Helmand province, 560km south of Kabul, early Monday, a provincial government spokesman said.

"Taliban attacked Washer district at 2:30 am and killed the district governor Mullah Sakhai and one policeman," Mohammed Wali told AFP.

"Eleven Taliban were killed in the

exchange of fire and their bodies are still lying in the area. Three Taliban were wounded," he said.

Late on Sunday at least one policeman was killed and two were wounded when a checkpoint on the highway between Kabul and the main southern city of Kandahar was attacked in southern Zabul province.

Zabul police director Abdul Jabar Urugzani said Taliban fighters had carried out the attack.

Urugzani said seven Taliban fighters were also killed but their bodies were not left at the scene. The Taliban often take the bodies of fallen comrades with them.

A highway policeman was killed in an attack on the Kandahar-Herat road in the western province of Farah early Sunday and four others were wounded, three critically, said

Herat police spokesman Abdul Raof Ahmadi.

He added that the attack was "organised by the Taliban and al-Qaeda to disturb peace and security in the country."

Meanwhile, Afghan authorities have arrested three Pakistanis armed with machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades for a plot to kill US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, a senior Afghan intelligence official said yesterday.

The Pakistanis were seized on Sunday in eastern Laghman province, where Khalilzad, nominated as the next US envoy to Iraq, was inaugurating reconstruction projects, the Kabul-based official told AFP on condition of anonymity.



An Indian bomb disposal expert (C) is watched by a large crowd as he reaches towards an unclaimed briefcase in the Maligaon District of Guwahati yesterday. The briefcase was later diffused. In an earlier incident a bomb exploded in the Assamese state capital without causing any casualties.

Bomb explodes in Assam Assembly

6 Ulfa rebels killed in gunbattles

PTI, AFP, Guwahati

Army bomb disposal squad, the sources added.

Earlier at least six separatist guerrillas and a soldier have been killed in gunbattles in India's troubled northeast, officials said yesterday.

An army commander said four suspected militants of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) were killed Sunday in the state's Nalbari district, 70km west of the main city of Guwahati.

"Fierce fighting broke out and in the ensuing encounter we shot dead four rebels," army commander Sujan Chatterjee said.

"We also lost one of our soldiers, while two more received serious injuries in the attack."

Soldiers later seized a stockpile of arms and ammunition, including several automatic rifles and pistols, hand grenades and explosives and detonators from the dead rebels, the commander said.

5 policemen killed, 20 abducted in Nepal

Maoists to halt attacks on civilians

AFP, Kathmandu

also reported missing.

The rebels freed 63 inmates from the jail in Diktel including three children, the army officer said.

Reports said the communication system in the area was also disrupted.

The rebels have been fighting for a communist republic in the impoverished Himalayan kingdom since 1996, in an uprising that has so far claimed more than 11,000 lives.

In early June the rebels were widely criticised by human rights groups for the bombing of a crowded bus that killed 36 people and injured more than 70.

Meanwhile, Nepal's Maoist rebel chief yesterday announced a halt to attacks against unarmed civilians until further notice and said the party is prepared to join political parties opposing King Gyanendra.

The move follows widespread criticism of the rebels after they blew up a bus two weeks ago killing 36 people – mainly civilians – in an incident they later acknowledged was a "grave mistake".



PHOTO: AFP
US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice holds a press conference with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh yesterday. Rice arrived yesterday in Egypt and went straight into talks with President Hosni Mubarak during which she asked him for more democratic reforms.

Rice asks Syria to take ME changes seriously

US pushes for democracy in region

REUTERS, AFP, Sharm el-Sheikh

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a strong appeal yesterday for democratic reforms in the Middle East, singling out Egypt, Syria and Iran, and telling leaders not to fear their people's free choice.

Rice made her comments in a keynote speech of a whirlwind tour of the Middle East aimed at boosting Washington's declared policies of promoting peace and stability in the volatile region.

"We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people," Rice told an audience of around 600 at the American University in Cairo.

"Throughout the Middle East, the fear of free choices can no longer justify the denial of liberty," she said. "It is time to abandon the excuses that are made to avoid the hard work

of democracy."

Syria should not ignore regional changes, Rice warned yesterday on the Egyptian leg of a tour aimed at promoting democratic reforms in the Middle East.

"The United States has been very clear that our concerns are with Syria's behaviour. We need a Syria that takes seriously the changes that are happening here in the region," she said.

Rice was speaking in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh after talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit.

On Saturday and Sunday, Rice held talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials on this summer's planned Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and is due to attend a conference on Iraq

Tuesday in Brussels.

"Syria needs to stop its support for rejectionists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Rice said, referring to the Palestinian radical group Islamic Jihad which has its headquarters in Damascus.

"Syria needs to control its border and make sure that its territory is not being used for insurgents in Iraq," she also stressed.

Meanwhile, Rice delivered a strong message for more regional reforms after talks with Egyptian leaders yesterday and warned them that the world was expecting free and fair elections in September.

"I discussed preparations for the elections with the president," Rice said during a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit, in reference to presidential elections scheduled for September.

Delhi says no to Hurriyat participation in talks

PTI, Dehradun

The Centre on Monday rejected Hurriyat Conference's demand for inclusion in the Indo-Pak dialogue process but said the conglomerate could give its suggestions for the resolution of the Kashmir issue.

"There is no question of involving Hurriyat in the Indo-Pak talks," Union Minister of State for Home Sripaksh Jaiswal said.

However, he said the Centre has

opened its doors for Hurriyat to give its suggestions for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. "Now the onus lies on Hurriyat Conference as to when they want to come forward in this regard," he said, adding the Government was ready to hold dialogue with any group in Kashmir over the issue.

Chairman of the moderate Hurriyat faction Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, who along with eight separatist leaders from Kashmir had

visited Pakistan earlier this month, had said that the conglomerate should be included in the Indo-Pak dialogue process to find an amicable solution to the Kashmir problem.

Claiming that the situation in Jammu and Kashmir was better now than at any time during the last 15 years, Jaiswal said the UPA government had taken several steps, including the current round of Indo-Pak dialogue, to bring peace in the state.

Anti-Syrian alliance sweeps Lebanon polls

REUTERS, Beirut

A Lebanese anti-Syrian alliance promised sweeping change early on Monday after winning a majority in the first parliamentary election in three decades without Syrian troops in Lebanon.

An unofficial count for north Lebanon on Sunday night showed an alliance led by Saad al-Hariri sweeping all remaining 28 seats, while its rivals conceded they were heading for defeat.

The ballot, staggered by region over four weekends, is the first in three decades with no Syrian military presence after Damascus pulled its troops out in April.

"Final results show that we are ahead and show that the people have voted for change," said Hariri, the son of slain ex-premier Rafik al-Hariri who is backing the opposition slate.

Pro-Syrian Christian former minister Suleiman Franjieh conceded he and his candidates headed for defeat in the mainly Sunni Muslim north, though they did well in Christian areas.

"What we feared is happening. I think the north has been divided along sectarian lines," Franjieh told LBC television station. "We have arrived at what we used to warn against."

The anti-Syrian list squared off against an unlikely alliance of pro-Syrians and Damascus' erstwhile foe, former general Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian.



Iran goes into selective vote recount

AFP, Tehran

Iranian authorities agreed yesterday to recount a small selection of ballot boxes from presidential elections that gave a radical hardliner a shock second place, following allegations over vote-rigging.

Three candidates in the vote have complained of smear campaigns and organised plots in Friday's vote, which saw hardline Tehran mayor Mahmood Ahmadinejad come a close second behind moderate conservative cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani now faces the challenge of persuading dispirited reformists to support him against Ahmadinejad in next Friday's run-off, one of the most crucial political battles in recent Iranian history.

The Guardians Council, an unelected body that oversees the vote, said it had agreed to allow a recount of 100 randomly-selected ballot boxes out of a total of more than 41,000.

"The Guardians Council, despite the fact that it has not received any complaints from the candidates of breaches in the prescribed time, will recount to produce a more accurate result," state television said.