

# Suicide car bomb hits Kashmir: 5 killed

## India remains on high alert as blast rocks new Kashmir CM's swearing-in ceremony

AFP, Srinagar

India, still reeling from blasts in New Delhi which killed 62 people, was hit by a suicide car bombing in its zone of Kashmir yesterday just hours before the swearing-in of the region's new chief minister.

Police said the suicide bomber and four people were killed and more than a dozen wounded in the blast in the Nowgam area on the outskirts of the state's summer capital Srinagar.

"We have five killed, including the suicide bomber," a police spokesman said, adding that more than 12 people were wounded, including five policemen.

"The car bomb is our first gift to Ghulam Nabi Azad," Abu Qudama, spokesman for Jaish-e-Moham-med, told the Kashmir News Service.

The explosion came just hours

before the scheduled swearing-in of Ghulam Nabi Azad as the Himalayan state's new chief minister.

Azad was set to be sworn in as the Himalayan state's new chief minister, as part of a power-sharing deal between the regional Peoples Democratic Party and Azad's Congress party. The PDP's chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed completed his three years in power on Wednesday.

Islamic militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed immediately claimed the blast in a telephone call to a local news agency. "Our suicide bomber targeted a security patrol," the spokesman for the group told the agency.

A police spokesman said investigators were uncertain of the intended target. "It is not an attack. Our policemen have foiled their (militant) attempts to carry out an attack," he

said.

An AFP photographer at the scene said car parts were sent flying more than 100 meters from the site of the explosion, which also damaged some adjoining buildings. The suicide bomber was blown to pieces.

New Delhi, meanwhile, remained on high alert Wednesday during a massive police manhunt for those behind Saturday's bombings which tore apart a bus and two markets.

Officials said about 2,600 additional police have been brought in to bolster the city's 71,000-member force for the Hindu festival of Diwali, and the upcoming Muslim Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations at the end of the week.

Diwali celebrations took place amid heavy security on Tuesday. In spite of the pall cast by the bombings, Delhi residents defiantly celebrated the festival of lights with perhaps even

more fervour than usual, setting off firecrackers well into the early hours of Wednesday.

Police said they are likely soon to release a sketch of a key suspect after interviewing passengers on a bus targeted for one of the bombings.

Investigators were hunting for a casually-dressed, unshaven man in his 20s whom witnesses saw slipping off the vehicle in the Okhla industrial area after leaving a bag which exploded minutes later.

Passengers were saved when the bus driver hurled the abandoned bag out a bus window.

Police said bags used in Saturday's two other blasts which killed 62 people -- in the Sarojini Nagar and Paharganj markets -- were of similar make. They were questioning shopkeepers in the hope of identifying the purchasers.



PHOTO: AFP

A Kashmiri woman waits at the site of a car bomb explosion in the Nowgam area on the outskirts of Srinagar yesterday. A suicide bomber and four people were killed and more than a dozen people were wounded when the car bomb exploded in Kashmir. The explosion came just hours before the scheduled swearing-in ceremony of Ghulam Nabi Azad as the Himalayan state's new chief minister.



PHOTO: AFP

Iranian protesters hold up a picture of US President George W. Bush during a demonstration in front of the former US embassy in Tehran yesterday to mark the 26th anniversary of its takeover. Thousands of young Iranians chanting "Death to America" converged around the former embassy to mark the anniversary.

# Hamas vows to end de facto truce at year-end

AFP, Jabaliya Refugee Camp

Hamas yesterday vowed to end an informal truce at the year-end as thousands rallied at the funerals of two Palestinian commando leaders killed in an Israeli air raid.

"The quiet will finish at the end of this year... The quiet is meaningless because Israel continues to kill," spokesman Mushir al-Masri told AFP at the funerals in the impoverished Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Asked what he meant, the spokesman said that militant groups who signed up to the informal truce in Cairo last March agreed at the time to review the situation at the end of the year.

"This is what was agreed on at Cairo. We agreed if the quiet is successful, we would discuss whether it will continue... No one should dream there will be another quiet."

On Tuesday, Hamas, the most

powerful Islamist movement in Gaza, warned Israel had "started a war" by killing local Qassam Brigades leader Fayez Abu al-Qaraa and a senior Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades commander, Hassan al-Madhun.

Just hours after Tuesday's deadly air strike, an Israeli soldier was shot dead by Palestinian gunmen in a West Bank operation to arrest a Hamas suspect.

The armed wing of Hamas, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said it killed the 20-year-old conscript in a statement to AFP.

Around 15,000 people and hundreds of Hamas and Fatah gunmen turned out for the funerals as shouts of "Qassam, Qassam, revenge, revenge," filled the air and volleys of bullets were shot skywards.

Qaraa is the first Hamas member to have been killed in the latest flare-up of violence in which the Islamist faction has stayed largely silent since a

Palestinian suicide bombing last week.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a nebulous collection of cells linked to Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas's ruling Fatah faction, renounced the informal and tenuous truce, largely in place since the beginning of the year.

"To hell with the truce," it said, announcing a "mobilisation" of its supporters in the wake of Madhun's death.

Militants in Gaza overnight fired a makeshift Qassam rocket at the Israeli community of Netiv Haasara, just north of the Palestinian territory. A mortar shell also fell north of the kibbutz of Nahal Oz.

Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, told the Haaretz newspaper that Israel would only stop serving out "justice" to militants when the Palestinian Authority moves to take action against armed groups.

# Car bomb kills 20 Iraqis

## 4 US servicemen die in crash, attacks

AFP, AP, Baghdad

At least 20 people were killed and 45 wounded when a car bomb exploded yesterday in a Shia town, while four US soldiers were killed separate attacks and helicopter crash.

The car bomb was set off just after sundown outside a Shia mosque in the Musayyib city, the local security source said.

On July 16, more than 90 people were killed when a suicide bomber set off a massive fireball in the centre of Musayyib when he blew himself up next to a liquefied tanker outside a Shia mosque.

Earlier four US servicemen have been killed in and around the restive western Iraqi town of Ramadi, including two US marines who died in the crash of their attack helicopter, the military said yesterday.

There was no immediate word on the cause of Wednesday morning's crash, but in a separate statement the

military said an F-18 fighter jet bombed a suspected insurgent command centre 500 metres (yards) from the site of the crash a few hours after the helicopter went down.

The crash occurred "while the two-man crew was flying in support of security and stabilisation operations," the military said.

Another marine and a sailor serving with the marine expeditionary force were also killed when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Ramadi on Tuesday, the military added.

The deaths brought to at least 2,026 the number of US military personnel who have died in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, according to an AFP tally based on Pentagon figures.

The Iraqi defence ministry yesterday called on all former officers of Saddam Hussein's disbanded armed forces up to the rank of major to join the new army.

# Blair plays down talk of action against Iran

## Blast outside British firms in Tehran

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said yesterday that military action against Iran was not on the agenda but said the international community's patience with the country was running out.

Speaking for the European Union, Blair reacted furiously last week to a call by Iran's hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for Israel to be "wiped off the map". Britain's six-month stint as EU president began in July and ends at the end of December.

Britain was also behind a statement of condemnation issued Friday by the United Nations Security Council.

Asked in the British parliament whether his response carried an implicit threat of military action, Blair said he did not raise the possibility either implicitly or explicitly.

"Nobody is talking about military threats or invasion of Iran," he said

during the weekly question-and-answer session.

"The Iranian government has got to understand that the international community simply will not put up with their continued breach of the proper and normal standards of behaviour that we expect from a member of the United Nations."

Meanwhile, a small explosive device went off near the offices of British Airways and oil giant British Petroleum in Tehran Wednesday, a repeat attack that comes amid mounting tensions between Britain and Iran.

"It was a weak charge placed on the stairs. It exploded on the 10th floor of Sayeh building," a witness told AFP. "A door leading to the stairwell was damaged but the offices of the two companies were not. Nobody was hurt."

The two offices were the apparent target of a similar attack on August 2, which also caused very slight damage and no casualties.

# Opposition leads Lankan presidential polls race

## Violence may keep voters away, fear monitors

AFP, Colombo

An opinion poll yesterday gave Sri Lanka's opposition leader an edge in the presidential race, with a majority saying he was better able to revive the economy and the troubled peace process.

The Centre for Policy Alternatives thinktank, in a survey of 1,200 voters in 22 voting districts across the island, found that cost of living and the peace process with Tamil rebels were the two main issues in the November 17 election.

On both counts, opposition leader and former premier Ranil Wickremesinghe was about six percentage points ahead of his main rival, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, the survey showed.

A full 41 percent believed Wickremesinghe, whose right-wing United National Party introduced market reforms in 1977, was better

suited to manage the economy. Rajapakse, who promises a socialist model, scored 35.1 percent.

The opposition leader got a 45.4 percent approval rating for his ability to handle the peace process with Tamil Tiger rebels while Rajapakse trailed with 38.7 percent.

The survey also showed many voters believed neither candidate could handle the economy nor the peace process, with 23.9 percent saying both were incapable of cutting living costs.

"The majority of every age group decides on the ability to control the cost of living when choosing a candidate," the survey report said. "The ability to solve the ethnic conflict seems to be the second highest reason for deciding on a candidate."

However, most people were sceptical about the election pledges of both candidates with fewer than 37 percent saying they had confidence in

BUSINESS SCAM

# Blunkett finally resigns from Blair cabinet

AFP, London

David Blunkett, a key political ally of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, abruptly resigned yesterday from the cabinet amid raging controversy over his business affairs, the government announced.

It was the second time in less than a year that Blunkett, who was works and pensions secretary, has quit Blair's cabinet, after being forced to resign last December as home secretary.

Blair's official spokesman said the prime minister accepted the resignation "reluctantly," after Blunkett, 58, told him he felt his position had become "untenable".

The prime minister was to face parliament at noon (1200 GMT) for a weekly question period certain to be dominated by the resignation.

Political analysts said Blunkett's downfall was a serious blow to Blair, just six months into what the prime minister wanted to be a triumphant third straight term in power for his Labour Party.

The sudden development came just a day after Blunkett gave an interview to his hometown newspaper in northern England, the Sheffield Star, declaring that he would not allow his critics to drive him out of office.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani earthquake survivors cross a road as a crane clears the road of the Chakothi area, close to the Line of Control between Pakistan-administered and Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday. The confirmed death toll in Pakistan from the October 8 massive earthquake leapt to 73,276.

# Shepherds protest poor quake aid

## Pak quake toll rises to 73,276

AFP, REUTERS, Lagama/ Islamabad

More than 250 earthquake survivors in this Kashmiri border village blocked traffic yesterday by staging a sit-in on the highway to protest poor distribution of quake relief by local authorities, police and witnesses said.

The Pakistani government yesterday dramatically increased the official death toll from the devastating earthquake that hit the north of the country last month to 73,276 and said it could rise further.

Federal Relief Commissioner Major-General Farooq Ahmed Khan told a news conference the sharp rise from a figure of 57,600 given a day earlier could be related to concerted efforts to clear up debris since the Oct. 8 disaster.

Residents of Gharkot village -- mostly shepherds -- threw stones at vehicles carrying officials and relief

materials before being chased away by the police, a witness said.

Soon afterwards the protestors, carrying long sticks and shouting slogans against the local administration, regrouped and sat on the highway linking the village to the main town of Uri, about 95km northwest of the Indian Kashmir summer capital Srinagar.

They disrupted traffic for more than an hour but broke off the protest later after police and state government officials assured them a delegation would soon visit their village.

Mohammad Ashraf, a survivor of the 7.6-magnitude October 8 earthquake that devastated much of Pakistan-administered Kashmir and border areas of India's zone of the divided state, said Gharkot had received no aid so far because most residents were Gujars (shepherds) or people from lower castes.

# Bush losing terror war: Critics

REUTERS, Washington

US terrorism experts Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon have reached a stark conclusion about the war on terrorism: the United States is losing.

Despite an early victory over the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghan-istan, the two former Clinton administration officials say President George W. Bush's policies have created a new haven for terrorism in Iraq that escalates the potential for Islamic violence against Europe and the United States.

America's badly damaged image in the Muslim world could take more than a generation to set right. And Bush's mounting political woes at home have undermined the chance for any bold US initiatives to address the grim social realities that feed Islamic radicalism, they say.

"It's been fairly disastrous," said Benjamin, who worked as a director for counterterrorism at the National Security Council from 1994 to 1999.

# 'CIA runs secret prisons for al-Qaeda captives'

REUTERS, Washington

The CIA has been holding and interrogating al-Qaeda captives at a secret facility in Eastern Europe, part of a covert prison system established after the September 11, 2001, attacks, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

The Soviet-era compound is part of a network that has included sites in eight countries, including Thailand and Afghanistan, the newspaper reported, citing US and foreign officials familiar with the arrangement.

The newspaper said the existence and locations of the facilities are known only to a handful of officials in the United States and, usually, only to the president and a few top intelligence officers in each host country.

The CIA has not acknowledged the existence of a secret prison network, the Post said. A CIA spokesman did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

The prisons are referred to as "black sites" in classified US docu-

ments and virtually nothing is known about who the detainees are, how they are interrogated or about decisions on how long they will be held, the report said.

About 30 major terrorism suspects have been held at black sites while more than 70 other detainees, considered less important, were delivered to foreign intelligence services under a process known as "rendition," the paper said, citing US and foreign intelligence sources.

The top 30 al-Qaeda prisoners are isolated from the outside world, they have no recognized legal rights and no one outside the CIA is allowed to talk with or see them, the sources told the newspaper.

The paper, citing several former and current intelligence and other US government officials, said the CIA used such detention centres abroad because in the United States it is illegal to hold prisoners in such isolation.