

33 Taliban killed in Afghanistan raids

AFP, Kandahar/ Kabul

Afghan and Western forces killed dozens of rebel fighters in the Taliban heartland of southern Afghanistan officials said yesterday, striking back after they came under attack.

Thirty-three Taliban were killed in Kandahar province Monday in an operation launched hours after a remotely detonated bomb tore through a police vehicle and killed seven policemen, the provincial governor said.

Three more rebels were wounded and one was arrested, provincial governor Asadullah Khalid told reporters of the sweep in Zhari district, about 30km west of

Kandahar city.

He said the Afghan National Army (ANA) and police were backed by the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force.

The Isaf media office did not immediately have details of the incident but said its troops had been involved in a separate battle in the province Tuesday that killed several more rebels.

"Insurgents attacked friendly forces with RPG (rocket-propelled grenades) and small-arms fire," Isaf spokesman Major John Thomas said. "Aircraft were called in to assist. ANA also moved to assist."

An Isaf soldier was wounded in the attack, Thomas said. He was

not able to say how many insurgents were killed.

The ultra-conservative Taliban movement, allied with al-Qaeda, took up arms in Kandahar in the early 1990s and had seized power by 1996. They were driven out in an invasion led by the United States in late 2001.

Earlier a suicide attacker blew himself up near a convoy of the US-led coalition in central Afghanistan yesterday but appeared to have only killed himself, the force said.

The hardline Taliban movement that targets foreign troops as part of a growing insurgency claimed responsibility for the attack in the province of Logar, which adjoins Kabul.

9 killed in Yemeni al-Qaeda attack on Spanish tourists

AFP, Sanaa

Seven Spanish tourists and two Yemeni drivers were killed on Monday when a suicide bomber rammed his explosives-laden car into their convoy at an ancient temple in Yemen, officials said.

The interior ministry said the bombing in the restive northeastern region of Marib appeared to be the work of the al-Qaeda network.

"Preliminary information indicates that the al-Qaeda organisation is behind the cowardly attack," an interior ministry official told the state Saba news agency.

"This criminal attack has killed seven Spanish tourists and two Yemeni nationals who worked as

drivers and tourist guides, and wounded six Spanish tourists and two (Yemeni) nationals."

It was one of the deadliest bombings targeting foreigners in Yemen, the ancestral homeland of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, and drew the condemnation of Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos.

"I wish to condemn most firmly this terrorist act and pass on my condolences to the families of the victims," Moratinos said in Madrid.

Spanish high court judge Fernando Andreu said the Spanish legal authorities were launching a preliminary terrorism investigation into the attack.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani radical students of the Red Mosque wearing gas masks hold automatic weapons as they took shelter in a sand-bagged bunker during an exchange of fire with paramilitary soldiers outside the mosque in Islamabad yesterday. A Pakistani soldier and two students were killed and dozens of others injured in the clashes.

Lanka on alert for Tiger attack anniversary

7 killed in fresh fighting

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan security forces are on high alert as Tamil Tiger rebels this week mark the 20th anniversary of their first-ever suicide attack with the threat of unleashing more deadly strikes.

The island's prime minister has underlined fears that the ethnic Tamil guerrillas could be planning to celebrate with a bang, following the discovery in recent weeks of two trucks, each crammed with around a tonne of explosives.

"The explosives in the truck were enough to destroy half of Colombo," Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told reporters shortly after the first truck bomb was found before it was detonated.

In their northern de facto state, the Tigers will light coconut oil lamps and hold Hindu services for at least 260 rebels - more than a quarter of them women - who have blown themselves up in the name of an independent homeland.

The first of these "Black Tigers" was a rebel known as Captain Miller,

who drove a truck bomb into an army camp in the Jaffna peninsula on July 5, 1987, killing 40 soldiers.

Meanwhile, four suspected Tamil Tiger rebels and three soldiers were killed in fresh violence in Sri Lanka's embattled north, military officials said yesterday.

Tamil Tiger guerrillas set off a powerful roadside blast in the district of Vavuniya Tuesday, killing the three soldiers, military officials said.

Heavy rain claims 44 more in India

AFP, Mumbai

Forty-four more people have been reported killed in torrential monsoon rains lashing India, taking this year's toll to 280, officials and media said yesterday.

Fourteen people have died in the past two days in western Gujarat state alone, taking the toll there to 63, a Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency report said.

PTI said more than 7,000 people had been evacuated from low-lying areas in Gujarat as the rains worsened, and 22 children had to be rescued when their school bus was surrounded by swirling floodwaters.

In the eastern state of West Bengal, six members of the same family were killed Tuesday when rain washed away their hut in a village 40km south of state capital Kolkata.

No flights took off from Kolkata Tuesday, a city official said. "Transport was disrupted as

arterial roads in Kolkata remained waterlogged and the underground sewer system failed to drain out the water," said mayor Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya.

In Maharashtra state, where rains left financial hub Mumbai waterlogged over the weekend and disrupted flights and trains as the city's river overflowed, 19 more deaths have been reported since Sunday.

"The death toll from the state stands at 62," Ramesh Kumar, principal secretary of relief and rehabilitation said on Tuesday.

Fifteen of the deaths were in Mumbai, mainly from electrocution and collapsing walls, said Mumbai's civic chief Jairaj Pathak.

Some 5,000 people had been moved from flooded areas on the weekend, but rainfall had eased and the city was back to normal, the state's director of disaster management Suvas C Mohanty said.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian shop worker walks through a flooded street to reach his workplace in Kolkata yesterday. Heavy overnight rains threw life out of gear in the metropolis and adjoining districts of the West Bengal state. Six members of the same family were killed when rain washed away their hut in a village 40km south of the state capital Kolkata.

N Korea's Kim calls for nuclear disarmament accord: Xinhua

AFP, Beijing

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il called Tuesday for all sides to push forward a nuclear disarmament accord and said there were signs of easing tensions on the Korean peninsula, China's official news agency reported.

Kim made the rare conciliatory comments to visiting Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi, Xinhua news agency said, during talks over a stalled agreement under which North Korea promised to dismantle its nuclear programmes.

"Recently some signs of easing on the Korean peninsula have appeared. All sides should implement the initial actions (under the nuclear accord)," Kim was quoted as telling Yang.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il met China's foreign minister in

Pyongyang yesterday, state press said, as the two nations discussed ways for the Stalinist state to push ahead with nuclear disarmament.

The reclusive Kim met with Yang Jiechi, Xinhua news agency said, for talks that had been expected to focus on North Korea's commitments under a six-nation deal struck in February that would see Pyongyang scrap its nuclear programmes.

Xinhua provided no further details of the talks but a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said earlier Yang was to express China's desire to see that the accord was fully implemented.

"I believe that Mr Yang Jiechi will convey China's will to peacefully solve the nuclear issue by consultation so as to realise peace and stability of the peninsula," spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta (R) greets Pakistan Home Secretary Sayed Kamal Shah (L) as members of the Pakistan delegation look on during the Indo-Pakistan home secretary-level talks in New Delhi yesterday. Two days of home secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan began in the Indian capital to discuss issues of terrorism and the control of narcotics trade.