

Suicide bomb kills 8 Afghan policemen

6 Canadian troops slain

AFP, AP, Kandahar

A suicide attacker blew himself up at a police gathering in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing nine people including a boy, while a Nato force soldier died in a separate blast.

The two attacks occurred as a German national and his driver abducted a week ago in the south-west of the country were released, officials said, but the extremist Taliban denied being responsible for their capture.

The suicide attack blew off the ceiling of a room at the highway police command in the southern town of Spin Boldak, near the

border with Pakistan, where a lunch was being held to welcome a new district police chief.

"Police were eating lunch when a suicide attacker entered the room and detonated himself," said police officer Bismullah Khan from the scene.

The highway police commander, Lal Jan, was killed along with his 12-year-old son and seven others, most of them policemen, southern Kandahar provincial police chief Sayed Aqa Saqib said.

The new Spin Boldak district police chief, the area's criminal investigation police head and district attorney were among 11 wounded, he said.

There was no immediate claim

of responsibility but similar attacks have been carried out by the Taliban movement, which launched an insurgency soon after being driven from power by a US-led coalition in late 2001.

The insurgents did however say they were behind Thursday's bombing that killed a soldier with Nato's International Security Assistance Force in the southeastern province of Paktika.

Two other Isaf soldiers were wounded when a bomb hit their vehicle, the 37-country force said, without releasing the nationalities of the casualties.

The attack took to 106 the number of foreign soldiers killed in

Afghanistan this year, most of them in combat.

It came a day after six Canadian troops and a translator were killed in a similar blast in Kandahar, where the al-Qaeda-backed Taliban took up arms in the early 1990s and seized power in 1996.

In a third attack Thursday, a roadside bomb struck a vehicle in northeast Kunar province, leaving dead a civilian woman and two men and wounding two other people, including a nine-month-old baby, police said.

The German foreign ministry said, meanwhile, the freed German national and his translator were handed over to ISAF.

Brown 'praises Musharraf's role against terrorism'

AFP, Islamabad

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown telephoned President Pervez Musharraf on Thursday to praise his efforts to curb militancy and terrorism, a senior Pakistani official said.

It was Brown's first contact with the Pakistani military ruler, a key ally in international attempts to tackle extremism, since taking over from Tony Blair on June 27.

"The British Prime Minister appreciated President Musharraf's key role in the fight against militancy and terrorism and promised to maintain close ties between the two countries," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The two leaders also discussed "long-standing bilateral ties between the two allies and agreed to further strengthen them," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani commuters ride past an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) after a curfew was relaxed in the vicinity of the Red Mosque in Islamabad yesterday. The leader of a radical Pakistani mosque was arrested while trying to flee in a woman's burqa as security forces stepped up pressure on a few hundred hardcore followers still holed up inside.

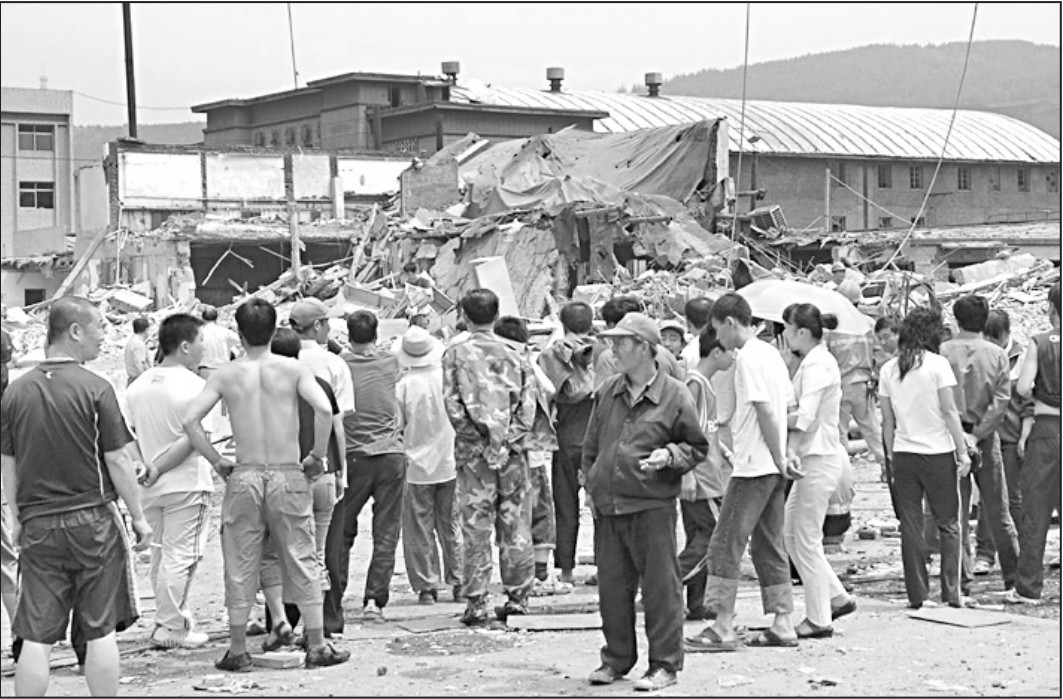


PHOTO: AFP

Onlookers gather around the rubbles of the Tianying Karaoke Hall and Bath House in Tianshifu town, northeastern China's Liaoning province yesterday after a blast destroyed the two-storey structure and damaging nearby buildings. High school students celebrating the end of exams were among 25 people killed in a thunderous explosion that destroyed the karaoke bar in a coal mining town of 40,000 people, while 33 other people were injured, four of them seriously.

UK lowers terror threat level

British bomb suspects left suicide note

AP, AFP, London

Britain has lowered the terrorism threat level following the capture of eight people connected with three failed car bombings and increased scrutiny of foreigners recruited for their skills, including doctors.

In other developments in the case Wednesday, a British priest who works in Baghdad said he was warned more than two months ago of attacks on Britain and the United States by a man believed linked to al-Qaeda who also hinted that doctors might be involved. All of the suspects in last week's attempted car bombings in London and a fiery

vehicle attack in Glasgow are doctors or other medical personnel. Authorities say the failed bombings bear all the characteristics of an al-Qaeda operation.

Two Middle East doctors who drove a blazing car into Glasgow airport's main terminal left a suicide note to explain the attack, media reports said.

Bilal Abdulla, an Iraqi, and fellow doctor Khalim Ahmed drove the car into the side of the main terminal of Glasgow airport on Saturday. Ahmed is in critical condition in hospital after suffering severe burns.

The Times newspaper and other

media said the pair had written an apparent suicide note explaining their motives. It indicated that they had planned to blow up the vehicle at the airport, the Times said.

Police refused to comment on the reports.

Britain reduced its terrorism threat level to "severe," meaning further attacks are still considered likely but not imminent, as was feared when authorities raised the level to "critical" after the failed attacks.

Still, Britain's home secretary asked the public to remain vigilant, saying there was still a "serious and real threat against the United Kingdom."

Nepal PM puts fresh pressure on king

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala issued a thinly-veiled warning Wednesday that the Himalayan country's embattled monarch should step aside or leave the country.

Koirala, one of a dwindling number of politicians in Nepal who were seen as being sympathetic to keeping the monarchy, also said the country would see "a new revolution" after key elections scheduled for November 22.

"Old remnants of feudalism must either disappear within the country or leave the country before the constituent assembly elections," Koirala said in a speech to parliament.

King Gyanendra, who was forced to end an unpopular period of direct rule last year, has seen his power crumble further following a peace deal last November between mainstream parties and fiercely

republican Maoist rebels.

The looming elections will lead to the formation of a body that will rewrite the constitution, and decide whether the king -- and the two-century-old monarchy as a whole -- should stay or go.

"A new revolution will start in Nepal after the polls in November and that will focus on economic and social reforms," Koirala said in a policy speech.

"This election shall put an end to the old era and usher Nepal into a new beginning."

Nepal's Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel also signalled that the king -- worshipped by supporters as a Hindu deity -- was on his way out.

"The task of nationalising such properties as palaces, forests, parks, heritages of historical and archaeological importance possessed by King Gyanendra shall proceed with priority," Poudel said.

Tigers honour 322 suicide bombers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was on high alert yesterday as Tamil Tiger rebels commemorated the 322 male and female suicide bombers who have blown themselves up for the guerrilla cause over the last two decades.

Security forces set up snap roadblocks and checkpoints in the capital, Colombo, and prevented heavy vehicles from passing key government buildings amid fears the rebels could try to mark "Black Tiger" day with a bombing.

"Measures are under way to heighten our alert during the Black Tiger week," said Senior Deputy Inspector General Jayantha Wickramaratne, a police spokesman.

"We are taking all measures to

eliminate the risk of terrorist attacks," he said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been fighting for a separate homeland since 1972, have frequently staged their trademark suicide attacks around religious services for the fallen "martyrs."

The group's first suicide attack was by a guerrilla known as Captain Miller, who drove a truck bomb into an army camp on the Jaffna peninsula on July 5, 1987, killing 40 government soldiers.

The pro-rebel Puthinam.com website said 322 members of the elite Black Tiger suicide units had perished in attacks and that the group had deployed 61 suicide bombers in the past year alone.

Rail service cut as Thai rebels sabotage tracks

AFP, Yala

Rail services were suspended Thursday in southern Thailand after Islamic insurgents sabotaged the tracks, while a Muslim man was killed in an ambush, police said.

The rebels removed 65 nuts and bolts from sleepers on the track between Yala and Narathiwat provinces, forcing trains to suspend services, police said.

Railways have been under maximum security since rebels launched 10 acts of sabotage on the tracks in early June, forcing the suspension of services for five days.

Meanwhile, a 32-year-old Muslim

man was shot dead in an ambush early Thursday in Narathiwat province as he headed to a plantation to tap rubber trees, police said.

A gun battle between soldiers and insurgents also broke out in nearby Pattani province, leaving three troops wounded, police added.

The latest violence comes amid a new government crackdown on the insurgency, with about 250 suspected militants arrested over the past two weeks.

As part of the crackdown, security forces in Yala province cordoned off a village as they searched for a militant believed injured in a gunfight on Wednesday.

al-Qaeda No 2 urges strikes on West

AFP, Dubai

Osama bin Laden's right-hand man Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a new video calling for Islamic fighters to strike Western interests worldwide and for regime change in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

"The struggle against the corrupt regimes and the corruptors is in two phases... In the short term, one must take aim at the interests of the Crusaders and Jews," Zawahiri said in the 95-minute video shown on Wednesday.

"All those who have attacked the (Islamic) nation must pay the price, in our countries and theirs, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Palestine and in Somalia, but above all where one can strike a blow against their interests," he said.

It was the eighth video released by Zawahiri so far this year, but

contained no reference to the failed car bombing attacks in London and Glasgow, nor an attack on Spanish tourists in Yemen that left nine people dead.

It was issued by al-Qaeda's media outlet As-Sahab (which means the cloud in Arabic) as the United States marked the July 4 independence day.

Zawahiri, appearing in a white robe and turban, predicted defeat for the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, saying "The wind -- by the grace of Allah -- is blowing against Washington."

The Egyptian-born Zawahiri frequently emerges in video or audio tapes to speak for the al-Qaeda network. With bin Laden now staying out of the public eye, he has become its most senior spokesman as well.

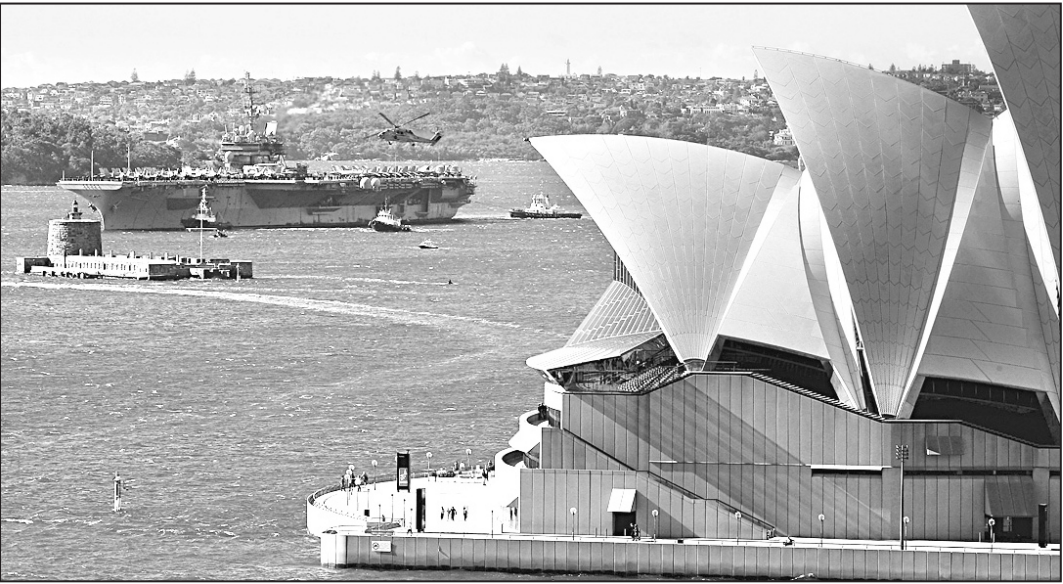


PHOTO: AFP

The US Navy aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (top-L) is positioned by tugboats in Sydney Harbour near the Sydney Opera House (R) yesterday before berthing at the Garden Island Naval Base. The 323-metre super-carrier has been taking part in the joint Australian-US military exercise Talisman off Queensland and its 5,000 crew members will now take shoreleave until July 10.