



PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani mourner showers rose petals on the graves of dead militants of the radical Red Mosque at a graveyard in Islamabad yesterday. Bodies from the raid were buried a day after troops cleared the final clutch of diehard extremists from the Red Mosque following two days of intense fighting that left at least 73 rebels and nine soldiers dead.

### Pro-Taliban cleric buried in Pakistan

AFP, Basti Abdullah

The Pakistani pro-Taliban cleric killed in the army raid on Islamabad's Red Mosque was buried yesterday in his native village, mourned by over 2,000 people, witnesses said.

The crowd, under tight police watch, shouted "Allah-o-Akbar" (God is greatest) and prayed for Abdul Rashid Ghazi, 43, and two relatives due to be buried later in the dust bowl village in central Punjab province.

In Islamabad, where the army ended the week-long standoff in a hail of gunfire and explosions on Tuesday and Wednesday, at least 27 unidentified bodies were buried by officials, an AFP photographer said, while the mosque remained cordoned off.

At the funeral of Ghazi, who was cut down in intense crossfire in the raid Tuesday, his elder brother Abdul Aziz and other family members who had been arrested by authorities were allowed to attend the last rites.

## Iraq report bleak as Congr targets war

Less than half of Iraq goals met: US official

AFP, Washington

A key White House report Thursday painted a bleak picture of progress in Iraq, just as President George W. Bush tried to quell a Republican revolt and thwart Democratic demands to bring troops home.

The interim report of Bush's strategy to surge nearly 30,000 extra troops into the four-year war, came at a critical time in the political tussle over Iraq, with Bush under daily, withering attack.

The embattled president was due to defend his war strategy in a news conference at 10:31 am (1431 GMT).

The report found the Baghdad government had made satisfactory

progress towards only eight of 18 benchmarks on political, security and military goals, set by the US Congress.

It revealed that efforts by Iraq to get its armed forces operating independently of US units -- a key goal of the administration's hopes to eventually cut US troop numbers, had made "unsatisfactory progress."

Among other recommendations, the report also said "the prerequisites for a successful militia disarmament program are not present," in Iraq.

The eagerly awaited report predates a more definitive assessment of the surge strategy in September by top US commander

in Iraq General David Petraeus and US ambassador to Baghdad Ryan Crocker.

That study had been seen as the critical point for Bush's Iraq strategy, but leaked conclusions from the interim version have sent the confrontation between the Democratic-led Congress and Bush over the war to boiling point.

A senior US official said on condition of anonymity styled the interim report was merely a snapshot of the early stages of the operation announced in January.

"The report came out as you would expect an interim report to come out, with security indicators leading and political lagging behind," the official said.

## al-Qaeda urges Pakistanis to revolt against Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

al-Qaeda yesterday urged Pakistanis to revolt against President Pervez Musharraf over the storming of an Islamabad mosque as officials examined the bodies of militants killed in the raid.

Troops cleared the final clutch of diehard extremists from the Red Mosque after two days of intense fighting that left at least 73 rebels and nine soldiers dead and turned the heart of the capital into a battleground.

"The bodies will be fingerprinted and photographed for identification and investigation," a security official said. Authorities want to find out if any of the militants are foreigners, the official told AFP.

Leader of the militants, radical cleric Abdul Rashid Ghazi, was among those killed in the storming which followed a week-long standoff with the military.

Ghazi and students at the mosque, which houses a female madrasa, had been involved in an aggressive Taliban-style campaign

for Islamic law in the capital, including the kidnapping of seven Chinese accused of prostitution.

The clearing of the compound came as al-Qaeda posted an audiotape on the Internet calling on Pakistanis to revolt against Musharraf, branding Tuesday's storming "criminal aggression."

"If you do not revolt, Musharraf will annihilate you. Musharraf will not stop until he uproots Islam from Pakistan," said Ayman al-Zawahiri, the group's second-in-command.

## 8 killed in two Pak bomb blasts

AFP, Islamabad

A suicide blast and a separate roadside bombing killed eight people in Pakistan yesterday, officials said, as a deadly army raid on militants in an Islamabad mosque sparked Islamist anger.

Five people, including three police, were killed and several others wounded outside a religious centre in the Himalayan tourist town of Mingora by the bomb, local administration chief Syed Mohammed Javed told AFP by

telephone.

The policemen were clearing traffic at Mingora town 130 kilometres (80 miles) northwest of Islamabad, when a bomb exploded in a white car, Javed said, adding that it was unclear whether the car's occupant died.

Mingora is in Swat district, a stronghold of Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, a banned extremist group with close ties to the clerics of Islamabad's Red Mosque.



PHOTO: AFP

Smoke and fire rise from the besieged Palestinian Nahr al-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli in northern Lebanon yesterday. Lebanese heavy artillery pounded a refugee camp relentlessly in what could signal the start of a massive final assault against al-Qaeda-inspired Islamist fighters holed up there for weeks.

### British woman 'proud' to be married to Bin Laden son

AFP, Riyadh

A British grandmother who recently married a son of al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden is proud of her husband, who does not know where his father is, she told a Saudi daily published on Thursday.

"I know that I'm married to the son of the most dangerous person in the world. But ... I'm proud of my husband Omar. I'm ready to defy the world for him," Jane Felix-Browne was quoted as saying in AsharqAl-Awsat.

The 51-year-old grandmother and veteran of four earlier marriages, revealed Wednesday that she had wed Omar Bin Laden, 24 years her junior, for whom she hopes to get a visa for travel to Britain, the daily said.

"I married the son, not the father. I hope that people will not judge me severely to have bound to a man whom I loved," she said.

Felix-Browne, who has taken the Muslim name of Zaina Mohammed, claims her father is of Arab origin.

She presents herself as a Muslim woman agreeable to being Omar's second wife. Ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia, home to the two holiest sites in Islam, follows the Muslim custom of allowing a man to have as many as four wives.

## Kashmir violence falls to record low

AFP, Srinagar

The average daily death toll from insurgency-related violence in Indian Kashmir has fallen to its lowest level since the revolt began nearly 18 years ago, officials said yesterday.

Daily killings have dropped to two from ten in 2001 and a peak of 13 in 1996 when the revolt was at its height with daily bomb explosions, gunbattles and ambushes, according to official police records

in Indian Kashmir.

"Violence has fallen to an all-time low since 1989," said a police officer, who asked not to be named, referring to the year when the separatist revolt began in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region.

The fall in daily deaths comes against the backdrop of a slow-moving peace process between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India, each of which hold the region in part and claim it in full.

## Afghan, US-led forces kill 36 militants

6 Afghan policemen die in bomb attack

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan and US-led forces killed 36 Taliban militants in several hours of fighting in southern Afghanistan yesterday, while an Afghan policeman also died, officials said.

In an overnight operation in the Girishk district of Helmand province, the Afghan army and air strikes by multinational forces killed

20 rebels, the general for the province, Mohaiddin Ghori, told AFP.

"Twenty enemy elements were killed in the overnight operation. Friendly forces supported us with air power. Luckily there were no casualties on our side," said Ghori.

Separately the US-led coalition said 11 Taliban were killed in a four-hour firefight involving air strikes in neighbouring Uruzgan province after

a patrol of Afghan and US troops came under fire from a nearby treeline.

No civilian casualties were reported during the engagement in the village of Sarsina, it said.

Meanwhile a remote controlled bomb struck a police vehicle on a joint patrol with Nato forces in southeastern Afghanistan Thursday, killing six policemen, officials said.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif (C) addresses the media during a meeting in central London Wednesday. Exiled Pakistani opposition leaders have agreed to form a new opposition umbrella grouping, which will hold rallies in the country from next month, officials said Wednesday.

## Bush, Manmohan talk nukes over phone

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Ahead of another round of talks between India and US next week to break the deadlock over nuclear deal, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke to American President George W Bush on Wednesday evening over phone.

While expressing satisfaction at the strong Indo-US bilateral relationship, Manmohan and Bush during their telephonic conversation "spoke about the forthcoming

discussions between the National Security Advisers of the two countries scheduled for next week", said an official statement.

The two leaders were of the view that these discussions "will reinforce strong bilateral relations", it said adding the two leaders also looked forward to "continuing their own discussions at their next meeting", which is expected in September when the Indian prime minister is likely to visit New York to take part in the annual UN General Assembly session.

## Tigers vow guerrilla warfare after losing stronghold

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels have admitted losing a key stronghold in eastern Sri Lanka to government forces and said they would revert to guerrilla tactics in the troubled region.

Government forces were clearing landmines in the Thoppigala area, which they captured from rebels on Wednesday, after months of heavy fighting, military officials here said.

But Tiger guerrillas fired mortar bombs and killed a soldier in the northwest of the island on Thursday morning, the defence ministry said, adding that other sporadic attacks were being reported in the rebel-held north.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters melted away from Thoppigala, a mountainous jungle area they dominated for more than 13 years, rebel spokesman Rasiah Ilangthiriyar told reporters from the north.

Tamil Tiger forces who remained in the east had gone into "guerrilla" mode, he said, adding

that "winning the war was not about taking control of real estate."

"They are mentioning this as the end of the war in the east," Ilangthiriyar said. "But that is not the truth. We have the experience in guerrilla tactics. In fact, we have already changed our approach to guerrilla tactics."

Sri Lanka's government claimed Wednesday it had captured the "nerve centre" and last remaining Tamil Tiger stronghold in the eastern district of Batticaloa following months of intense combat.

Senior military commanders maintained that they would focus on the rebels' mini-state in the north after neutralising the Tigers in the east of the country.

Norwegian ambassador Hans Brattskar, who is to leave Sri Lanka shortly, returned from the northern Tiger bastion of Kilinochchi Wednesday after failing to clinch a deal on restarting peace talks, diplomats said.

The LTTE had previously said they will not resume discussions unless government forces halt their military campaign.

### World's tallest man weds in China

AFP, Beijing

A decades-long search by the world's tallest man for a bride finally came to an end on Thursday when the Chinese herdsman married a woman who barely stands up to his elbow.

Bao Xishun, who stands 2.36 metres (seven feet nine inches), wed sales clerk Xia Shujun in a traditional ceremony in the grasslands of northern China's Inner Mongolia, where both are from, Internet portal Sohu.com reported.

Photos showed Bao, 56, dressed in a sky-blue silk robe, beaming as he sat next his 28-year-old bride just before the nuptials were pronounced.

Xia is just 1.68 metres tall but said when her courtship with Bao began early this year that their height difference was not a problem.

"Xia said that as they got to know each other she stopped noticing how tall Bao was and was moved instead by his thoughtfulness," China's official Xinhua news agency reported in March.



PHOTO: AFP

Bao Xishun, 56, a herdsman listed by the Guinness World Records as the tallest living man (seven feet eight inches), with his bride Xia Shujun during their wedding ceremony at Genghis Khan's Mausoleum on the outskirts of Erdos in north China's Inner Mongolia region yesterday.

