

## FRESH VIOLENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

## Governor survives suicide attack: 11 more killed

AFP, Khost

A provincial governor survived a suicide attack yesterday but his security guard was killed, in fresh violence that left 11 dead across insurgency-hit Afghanistan, officials said.

A suicide bomber rammed his explosives-packed car into the convoy of the governor of eastern Khost province, killing the guard and injuring seven others, officials and medical sources said.

A doctor at the city hospital told AFP that the seven injured including three civilians -- two of them teenage boys -- were admitted for treatment in the provincial capital Khost, where the attack took place.

"I'm OK, but I don't have any information about the others," he

governor, Arsala Jamal, told AFP after the bombing.

Jamal was returning from a ceremony to mark the opening of a new road built under the supervision of NATO-led forces when the bomber hit his convoy, according to a NATO spokeswoman, US Major Christine Nelson-Chung.

"We're horrified by the action taking against the life of the governor," Nelson-Chung said.

The attack was the latest in a wave of such incidents blamed on Taliban militants, who have waged an increasingly bloody insurgency since the hardline Islamic militia was ousted by a US-led invasion in late 2001.

Elsewhere, two shepherd boys were killed in the cross-fire as police clashed with Taliban rebels in the

restive south of the country on Tuesday, a police commander said.

The children, from a nomadic tribe, died in fighting in Ghazni province, where Taliban militants have been holding 19 South Koreans hostage for more than a month.

"We're investigating to find out how those two kids were killed. We don't yet know if they were killed by police or enemy fire," provincial police chief Alishah Ahmadzai told AFP.

He said the fighting had lasted several hours and a number of Taliban were also killed, although he could not give a figure.

Two Taliban fighters died in a separate clash elsewhere in the province on Tuesday, he added.

In other clashes, two policemen

and four militants were killed in fighting in the eastern province of Paktika.

The rebels, who are said to have Al-Qaeda's backing, have increasingly used tactics often employed by extremists in Iraq, such as suicide bombings and kidnappings.

In addition to the South Koreans, the Taliban have been holding a German engineer hostage for more than a month. The rebels have demanded the release of some of their jailed fighters for the hostages.

The government has rejected that demand, saying that to do so would encourage criminals in the war-shattered nation.

## Caspian Sea states to hold Oct talks in Tehran

AFP, Baku

Leaders of the five states bordering the energy-rich Caspian Sea will meet for a summit in Tehran in October to discuss long-running disputes over maritime rights, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here yesterday.

The leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan have agreed with Iran to hold the summit on October 16, Ahmadinejad said as he wrapped up a visit to Azerbaijan.

"The participation of the five Caspian leaders in the summit has been confirmed," Russia's Interfax news agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying. "The Caspian Sea must be a sea of brotherhood, peace and stability."

The five countries have been unable to agree on how to divide up the Caspian since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Iran and Turkmenistan have opposed dividing up the seabed based on the length of each country's shoreline, instead insisting that each of the five states should be allotted an equal share.



Managing Director (Additional Charge) of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank Jaglu Karim hands over donations for the flood victims to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at the latter's office in the city recently.



Chairman of EXIM Bank Board Audit Committee AKM Nurul Fazal Bulbul distributed relief among the flood-affected people at Munshiganj, Bogra, Rangpur and Gaibandha recently.



Baridhara Society and Women's World distributes relief among the flood victims at Badda in the city yesterday.

## Fresh French bid to end Lebanon political deadlock

AFP, Beirut

Top French envoy Jean-Claude Cousseran returns to Lebanon today on a new mission to try to break a nine-month deadlock among Lebanon's feuding political parties, a diplomatic source told AFP.

Cousseran's visit comes as the country prepares for a presidential election due to be held between September 25 and November 24, when the mandate of current President Emile Lahoud ends.

During his three-day mission that ends on Saturday Cousseran is due to meet Western-backed Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who is allied with the Hezbollah-led opposition backed by Syria and Iran.

France's envoy is also due to hold talks with other Lebanese leaders.

His visit comes amid efforts by Paris to broker an end to the political standoff in Lebanon that threatens to scuttle the upcoming presidential ballot and plunge the divided country further into disarray.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner met Lebanese leaders in Beirut at the end of July but failed to make significant headway.

The resignation last November of six pro-Syrian ministers, five of them Shiites, sparked the current political standoff, the country's worst since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war.

The Shiite militant group Hezbollah, bolstered by what it called its victory during last year's 34-day war with Israel, is pushing for the opposition to be better represented in government in order to give it veto power.

But the majority insists that this can only happen if Hezbollah agrees to stop blocking parliamentary sessions in order to ensure the quorum needed for the presidential election.

Failure by the parties to resolve their differences in the coming weeks could spark a dangerous power vacuum or even the creation of two rival governments.

France has taken the lead in trying to resolve the crisis, gathering all the parties for a conference near Paris in July and sending Cousseran to the region for consultations with the key players.

## 21 Iranian hostages freed in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Pakistani troops on Monday in a pre-dawn raid freed 21 people who were kidnapped by militants in southeastern Iran and then whisked over the border, security officials said.

Troops freed the 21 hostages, all Iranians, who were captured on Sunday in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province in a town close to the border, killing the leader of the kidnap gang and arresting the others.

Pakistani authorities began handing over the freed hostages at an airbase near here late Monday.

"The 21 recovered abductees are being handed over to Iranian officials and they are fulfilling formalities at an airbase near Quetta," said the head of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps, Major General Salim Nawaz.

Nawaz told reporters the gang leader Sher Khan had been killed in the dawn raid by Pakistani security forces that freed the hostages.

Two other kidnappers were wounded in the assault, he said.

The hostages, all Iranians, were abducted on Sunday in Iran's neighbouring Sistan-Baluchestan province.

A Pakistani security source said earlier that troops surrounded the group in Mand, a mountainous town 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the Iranian border and "overpowered them" to release the hostages.

The group was flown by helicopter to Quetta, the capital of the southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

Earlier Monday, confusion reigned over the number of hostages kidnapped, but police officials on both sides of the border confirmed that 21 people had been abducted.

"We have arrested 17 people and secured the release of 21 captives," the official added.

Iran's police chief Esmaeeli Ahmadi Moghaddam said that two militants had been killed in the Pakistani police operation and 15 others arrested.

He also renewed past Iranian accusations against Pakistan that the Islamabad government was not doing enough to ensure security along the common border.



Chief Election Commissioner Dr ATM Shamsul Huda and Commander of 88 Infantry Brigade Brig Gen Nazmul Hossain along with Warid Telecom's General Manager (Marketing & Sales) Naveed Saeed and General Manager (Government and Operator Relations) Ashraful H Chowdhury visit a voter registration centre at Khulna Model School in Khulna yesterday. (Story on Page 3)

## Pro-junta mob breaks up Myanmar protest

AFP, Yangon

A pro-junta mob broke up a rare protest by about 150 pro-democracy activists in Myanmar's main city Yangon yesterday amid mounting public anger over a massive fuel price hike.

It was the second protest this week to defy the secretive generals who have clung to power here for 45 years, and came a day after several activists were arrested.

Wednesday's protesters, most of them women, marched for about two hours through the northern outskirts of Yangon until about 200 supporters of the military regime blocked their path.

People hung out of their apartment windows to cheer on the protesters, and others in the streets stood on the pavements and

applauded -- a rare move as even observing a protest is an act of defiance in Myanmar.

The protesters disbanded after a brief standoff when the pro-government mob blocked their path, but plain-clothes security forces continued to patrol the area.

Eight of the protesters were thrown into a car and driven off. Some shouted, "We are being arrested unjustly and unfairly."

They were released after about five hours in detention, and were forced to sign a statement promising not to join any more demonstrations, according to Ohn Hla, who was among those arrested.

Two other people were arrested in downtown Yangon amid rumours of another protest.

About 500 people had staged a similar march on Sunday, in what was

the largest anti-government protest in the capital in at least nine years.

The junta usually cracks down hard on even minor expressions of public dissent, and keeps a firm grip on all the nation's media.

The marchers Wednesday were heading north from Yangon toward Insein Township, home to the notorious Insein prison that holds some of the nation's estimated 1,100 political prisoners.

State media said that 13 leaders of the pro-democracy 88 Generation Students group, which led both protests, had been arrested. They remain in detention. Activists said at least 10 others had also been detained on Tuesday.

The phenomena causes soil to become less productive, as topsoil is blown away by the wind or washed away by the rainstorms, leading to the impoverishment of local populations who sometimes are forced to migrate.

The last UN conference on desertification was held in the Kenyan capital Nairobi in October 2005.

## No more 'cruel' jumbo parades, Hindu group says

AFP, Thiruvananthapuram

India's famed elephant parades must stop because they are cruel to the animals, says a Hindu group which has scrapped the practice for the coming festival season.

The Sivagiri Mutt or spiritual institution, which controls 30 temples in the palm-fringed coastal state of Kerala, said Wednesday it would no longer use elephants during the popular festivals.

"Our guru, Sree Narayana Guru, has taught us not to inflict pain even on an ant so disciples of the guru have the responsibility to follow his philosophy," S. Prakashananda, head of the mutt, told AFP.

Sree Narayana Guru was a Hindu reformer and social revolutionary.

Prakashananda was speaking by telephone from the Hindu group's headquarters in the tourist town of Varkala, 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Thiruvananthapuram, capital city of Kerala.

## Al-Qaeda suspect's release a blow to Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

The release of a man suspected of links to Al-Qaeda could undermine Pakistan's claims to be winning the battle to contain terrorism within its borders, analysts and experts said Tuesday.

Pakistan's Supreme Court heard Monday that Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan, who is alleged to have been an Al-Qaeda computer expert, had been released without charge after three years in custody.

Khan, who was arrested on July 12, 2004 in the eastern city of Lahore, was now at home in Karachi, his lawyer Babar Awan told AFP.

Shortly after his arrest, Pakistani investigators said interrogations of Khan and searches of his computer files and email records led them to an active worldwide Al-Qaeda ring which was plotting fresh attacks in Britain, Pakistan and the United States.

They said Khan was a top Al-Qaeda planner who used his computer skills to concoct secret codes and help its operatives send encrypted email and website messages to each other.

A senior official involved in the

investigation told AFP: "He (Khan) was a key figure in 2004 Al-Qaeda plots to stage new terror strikes in the United States, Great Britain and Kenya and his arrest led to the capture of an Al-Qaeda sleeper cell in great Britain."

"But there was no serious attempt made by the intelligence agency which had him in custody for the past three years to initiate any legal proceedings."

According to the official, who did not want to be identified, Khan could have been tried under the Security of Pakistan Act or for waging war against other countries using Pakistan as a base.

"But when the Supreme Court started hearing the petition early this year, it was too late to initiate any legal proceedings against Khan," he said.

Khan's case is among several where people arrested on suspicion of plotting attacks on Western targets and helping Al-Qaeda have later been released by the courts.

AWN said he had petitioned the Supreme Court in an attempt to discover his client's whereabouts, part of a case taken by relatives and rights groups on behalf of hundreds of missing people allegedly abduc-

"It weakens Pakistan's case

ted and held without charge by intelligence agencies.

"I told the Supreme Court that so far the government had not indicted Khan and no case had been registered against him," Awan said.

Ahmad Javed Khawaja, 59, and his accountant brother Ahmad Naveed were both released after six months in prison in June 2003 after the Supreme Court upheld a judicial tribunal's call for their release.

They had been held on charges of sheltering Al-Qaeda figures.

In another case, heart specialist Akmal Waheed and his brother, orthopaedic surgeon Arshad Waheed, were jailed for seven years in March 2005 for alleged Al-Qaeda links. Their convictions were set aside last year.

Analysts said these and other cases undermined the credibility of the government's claims to be making progress in curtailing terrorist activities within Pakistan's borders.

"It shows that the real culprits are free to do whatever they want and the authorities are catching innocent people to prove their efficiency," said defence analyst Talat Masood.

"Any perceived propaganda value of 'high-profile' arrests such as Khan's was also evaporating as the courts pressured authorities to build better cases and produce solid evidence, he said.