

Two killed in Kathmandu bomb blasts

AFP, Kathmandu

At least two people were killed and many more injured in five bomb blasts around Kathmandu yesterday, a senior police officer said.

Deputy superintendent Prajit KC said at least 15 people had been wounded, three of them critically, in the blasts, which occurred just minutes apart.

"High explosive devices were used. We've just begun our investigations and we have no idea who may have done this," said Sudip Giri, another deputy superintendent with the Kathmandu police.

One of the blasts was outside a university campus and another was at a bus stand in a busy part of the city centre, Giri said.

The last reported bomb attack in Kathmandu was at a police post in April 2006.

Troops destroy Taliban compound: 25 killed

AFP, AP, Kandahar

Afghan and international soldiers destroyed a Taliban headquarters in an operation just outside Kandahar city Sunday that killed an estimated 25 rebels, the US-led coalition said.

The overnight swoop on the complex about 17 kilometres (10 miles) southwest of Kandahar was based on intelligence that insurgents were attempting to re-establish control after being defeated there last year, it said.

Soldiers moved through the compounds, coming under heavy fire. One man blew himself up in an apparent suicide attack that did not cause casualties to the security forces, it said in a statement.

Coalition war planes struck the

area, causing many of the deaths, it said.

The complex of seven buildings was believed to be the base for several attacks on the nearby Highway One, an often-targeted road linking Kandahar and the western city of Herat, the statement said.

The Taliban first took Kandahar in their sweep to power in 1996 with the help of elements in Pakistan who are said to be aiding the insurgency against the new administration.

They were driven from government in late 2001 by the coalition, which is still tracking Taliban fighters and their allies in al-Qaeda.

Authorities in Kandahar city said Sunday they had detained four Pakistanis on suspicion of helping

insurgents build bombs.

"On a tip-off we captured four Pakistanis who are experts in making suicide-bombing vests and remote-controlled bombs," intelligence official Abdul Qayoum Katawazi told AFP.

He would not provide further details, citing an ongoing investigation.

Roadside bombs and Iraq-style suicide explosions have become key tactics for the rebels, who have intensified their attacks as part of a bloody insurgency they are waging against the government in Kabul.

A new bombing killed three patrolling Afghan army soldiers on Saturday in Kandahar's Zahri district, the defence ministry said in a statement. Two other soldiers were injured.

Clueless CBI gives up Nobel theft probe after 3 years

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kolkata

After over three years of investigation that drew a blank, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has finally decided to stop the probe into the theft of Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel medalion from Santiniketan, the idyll of peace and learning founded by the poet and philosopher in West Bengal.

According to local reports quoting the CBI, an officer of deputy superintendent rank (Special Crime Branch) has informed the Visva-Bharati university campus in Santiniketan through a letter (DP/CAS/712/2007/RC.6/S/O4-Call) addressed to Vice Chancellor Rajat Kanta Roy that they have decided to stop the inquiry after having failed to make any breakthrough in the case.

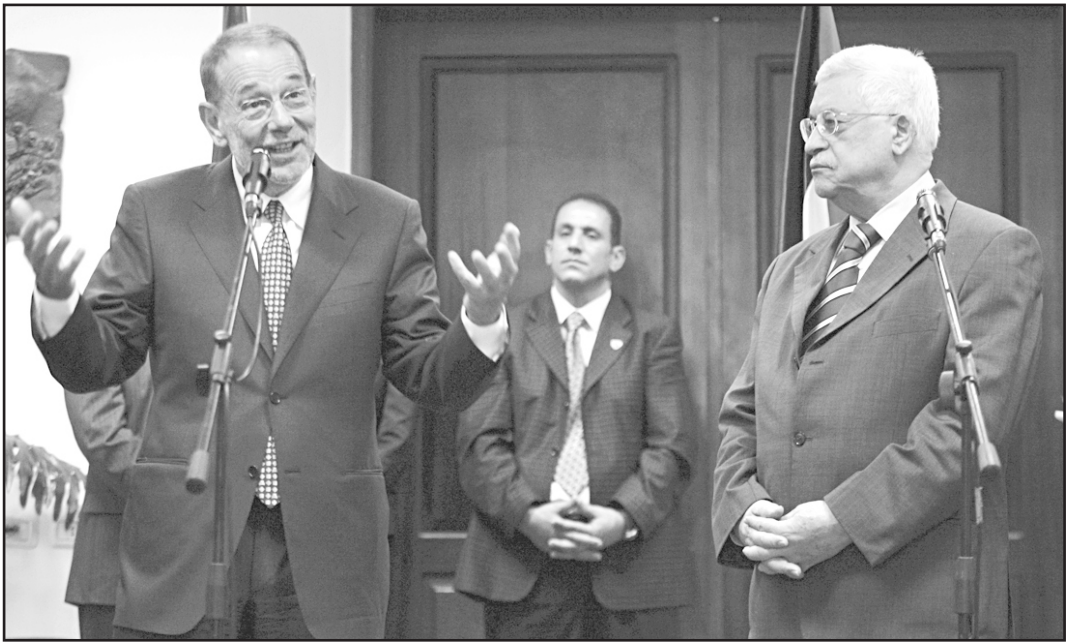


PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (R) listens to EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana during a joint press conference at the Palestinian Authority headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday. Abbas said Sunday that his office has published an amended electoral law that could effectively exclude rival Hamas ruling Gaza from any future polls.



PHOTO: AFP

Police officers patrol in front of the Sydney Opera House, the venue of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit in Sydney yesterday. A massive steel and concrete wall was being erected around Australia's largest city as Sydney stepped up its preparations for the Apec summit with an unprecedented show of security.

UK forces may move out of Iraq in Oct

PTI, London

British forces may move out of Iraq's Basra province early next month, handing over its control to the local army, a media report said yesterday.

The handover would enable most of the 5,500 British soldiers leave Iraq, although negotiations are under way to base some troops in Kuwait, the Sunday Times quoted Whitehall officials as saying.

The move signals a clear deviation from the policy of its close ally, the US, which feels the decision has "much more to do with conditions in the UK" than those in Iraq.

According to defence sources in Washington, American commanders in Baghdad have accepted that British troops are on their way out of Iraq, prompting further criticism this weekend from US military com-

mentators.

Frederick Kagan, of the American Enterprise Institute, said it was "hard to imagine" conditions that would allow a handover next month. "It really highlights the growing divergence between the British and American approach."

The irritation in Washington will only be increased by renewed claims that the British have done a deal with the Shiite militias to ease their way out of Basra.

A lawyer for a Briton held without trial in Basra detailed a number of secret meetings where the British agreed to a phased release of militants, including known killers.

The Ministry of Defence denied any such deal but a senior defence source said secret talks mediated by the Iraqi special police had been "going on for weeks" to ensure a safe withdrawal from Basra province.

Hamas barred from polls

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said yesterday that his office has published an amended electoral law that could effectively exclude rival Hamas ruling Gaza from any future polls.

"The new election law has been published," Abbas told reporters during a joint press conference with visiting EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

Rafiq al-Husseini, chief of staff of Abbas's office, told AFP that "the decree was already signed, but we are publishing it today."

No immediate reaction from Hamas was available.

Since Hamas seized power in Gaza on June 15, Abbas has

issued decrees that he says have the power of law, although this is disputed by the Islamists.

On August 15, Abbas's office said the president was mulling changing the law to require candidates in presidential and parliamentary elections "to respect the political programme of the PLO" and to respect all previous agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas is not part of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and refuses to be bound by its political programme, which recognises Israel.

Hamas's own charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state and the group has also refused to explicitly agree to abide by past

peace deals.

The amended text also said all parliamentary candidates will stand for election on party lists. Previously, half the members of parliament had been elected from constituencies.

Such a requirement makes it easier for candidates from Abbas's Fatah party to stand in the Gaza Strip, which has been under the control of the Islamists since Hamas fighters overran forces loyal to the moderate president on June 15.

The Gaza rout has left Palestinians deeply divided, with the Western-backed Abbas controlling the West Bank and the Western-shunned Islamists ruling Gaza.

2nd retired British general slams US

AP, London

A second retired British general slammed the United States over its Iraq policy, saying in a newspaper interview published Sunday that it had been "fatally flawed."

Maj Gen Tim Cross, the most senior British officer involved in the postwar planning, said he had raised serious concerns about the possibility of Iraq falling into chaos but said former defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissed the warnings.

"Right from the very beginning we were all very concerned about the lack of detail that had gone into

the postwar plan and there is no doubt that Rumsfeld was at the heart of that process," Cross said in the Sunday Mirror newspaper.

The comments come a day after the release of critical comments made by the general who led the British army during the Iraq invasion.

Retired Gen Sir Mike Jackson also singled out Rumsfeld for criticism, saying his approach to the invasion was "intellectually bankrupt," according to quotes excerpted from his autobiography and published by The Daily Telegraph Saturday.