

Afghan suicide attackers coming through Pakistan: UN

30 suspected Taliban killed

AFP, Kabul

The spiralling number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan are often carried out by young Afghan men who pass through religious schools in Pakistan, a United Nations report said yesterday.

Some attackers appeared driven by anger at the presence of international forces and the civilians being killed in their anti-Taliban operations, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) study said.

Others were motivated by religious zeal or were young boys who had been abducted and forced into the task or somehow persuaded they would survive and earn rewards such as cash, a motorcycle or a cell phone, it said.

International military war planes bombed apparent rebel hideouts in southern Afghanistan, killing more than 30 suspected militants, the US-led coalition said yesterday.

The strikes were in the same area and at roughly same time that two British soldiers were killed in action early Saturday, but the coalition was not immediately available to confirm whether they were in the same incident.

Afghan and coalition soldiers operating in the Garmsir area of the southern province of Helmand used "precision munitions" on compounds believed to be sheltering militants, the force said in a statement.

"Forces estimate more than 30 suspected militants were killed in the

engagement," it said. Stockpiles of weapons were also blown up.

The British defence ministry announced late Saturday that two of its soldiers were killed in Garmsir after being attacked by Taliban fighters during an operation that morning. A number of Taliban were also killed, it said.

There were 77 suicide attacks in the first six months of this year, about twice the number for the same period last year and 26 times higher than from January to June 2005, the survey said.

This year to June, suicide bombings killed 193 people, 121 of whom were civilians even though three-quarters of the attacks were targeted at Afghan and international security forces, it said.

Sixty-two Afghan security personnel and 10 international soldiers were also killed.

To the end of August this year there had been 103 attacks, compared with 123 for the whole of 2006.

The first such attack in Afghanistan was carried out by al-Qaeda operatives exactly six years ago (September 9, 2001) and killed famous Soviet occupation resistance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, the report said.

There were five between 2001 and 2005 -- and they jumped in 2006 to become today an "integral part" of the Taliban's strategy but also used by other Islamist anti-government groups.

Pakistan should release Sharif supporters: HRW

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan should immediately release hundreds of opposition activists rounded up in a crackdown ahead of the planned return of former premier Nawaz Sharif, Human Rights Watch said yesterday.

The New York-based organisation said that President Pervez Musharraf should not seek to undermine Pakistan's legal system by having Sharif himself locked up on Monday, when he is expected to arrive in Islamabad.

"General Musharraf is attempting to bolster his increasingly shaky military-backed government by repackaging himself as a democrat," said Ali Dayan Hasan, South Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch.

"But rights-respecting leaders don't lock up hundreds of people who merely want to participate in their country's political process."



PHOTO: AFP

Supporters of former Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif shout slogans during a small demonstration in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan put airports on high alert and detained hundreds of opposition supporters on the eve of defiant former premier Nawaz Sharif's planned return to challenge President Pervez Musharraf.

Afghan president ready for talks with Taliban

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he was ready to hold talks with Taliban militants in an effort to end their bloody insurgency against his US-backed administration.

Karzai however denied his government was already in "formal negotiations" with the Islamic militants, who were driven from power six years ago in a US-led invasion.

Earlier Karzai cut short an event Sunday to mark the 2001 murder by al-Qaeda operatives of resistance hero Ahmad Shah Massoud after police opened fire to control a demonstration outside the venue.

Karzai, who has survived two assassination attempts, abruptly wrapped up an address on the

advice of his security staff as the commotion grew, with several hundred men rattling a large gate and throwing stones.

In the initial confusion about what happened, authorities denied shots were fired and said the sound was caused by stones hitting the metal gate.

"Peace can't be achieved without negotiations. Any Afghan wanting to come to his country and help Afghanistan in peace, stability and development is welcomed," Karzai told reporters.

"If I could get an address for the Taliban, if I had somewhere to send somebody to and an authority that says publicly they are the Taliban, I would do it," he said at a press conference with Latvian President Valdis Zatlers.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghan President Hamid Karzai (R) speaks during a joint press conference while Latvian President Valdis Zatlers (L) looks on at the Presidential Palace in Kabul yesterday. Karzai said that he was ready to hold talks for a reconciliation bid with Taliban militants who are waging bloody insurgency against his US-backed administration.

Nepal's Shah dynasty faces extinction

AFP, Kathmandu

When Prithvi Narayan Shah, the forefather of Nepal's current King Gyanendra, finally conquered Kathmandu in 1768, he did so on the day of the most important festival of the year, Indra Jatra.

The kings who had ruled Kathmandu Valley for centuries before the Shah invasion worshipped a young girl who was the living incarnation of a powerful Hindu goddess, and when she blessed Shah over the fled Malla kings, his conquest was spiritually sealed.

Every year since, Nepal's kings have gone to receive blessings from the girl but this year after the king has been stripped of most of his powers he will most likely not be

going, as his 238-year-old dynasty hangs in the balance.

The biggest political party announced late last week it was set to back a republic in November elections and fiercely republican former rebel Maoists have ended their decade-long people's war and entered government.

The polls to elect a body to rewrite the constitution could be the endgame in an incredibly turbulent dynastic history.

In the 18th century, Gyanendra's forefather, Prithvi Narayan Shah, was king of Gorkha, a small hill kingdom in central Nepal that was not particularly fertile nor on any trade route. But the king had big ambitions.

One of at least 60 kingdoms between the Himalayas to the north

and the southern plains bordering India, the Shah dynasty founder used political wiles and force to conquer dozens of kingdoms and create what became known as modern Nepal.

"His success was due to effective military leadership and his ability to play other states off against each other," John Whelpton, author of "A History of Nepal," said.

The jewels in the crown of his conquests were three towns -- Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan -- nestled in the fertile Kathmandu valley, epicentre of a major India-China trade route.

Still seen today as an impressive military leader and shrewd political operator, Prithvi established the kingship that passed

down the male line and ruled until his death in 1775.

Proving leadership is not hereditary, his heirs were a much less impressive bunch, historians say.

After his death in 1775, "Nepal was ruled for the next 70 years by kings who were either underaged, inept, insane or all three," wrote Manjushree Thapa in a history of Nepal, "Forget Kathmandu" (An Elegy for Democracy.)

Kings were allowed to take numerous wives, which meant conflicts over succession, intrigue and killings.

"Successive kings, family members and courtiers were involved in power struggles, and many of the Shah kings of this time did not die natural deaths," said royal expert Sanu Bhai Dangol.

al-Qaeda takes credit for Algeria blasts

AP, Algiers

al-Qaeda's North African affiliate claimed responsibility early Sunday for a car bombing that killed 28 coast guard officers in Algeria and another recent blast that ripped through a crowd waiting for the Algerian president.

In Saturday's blast, explosives planted in a van ripped through barracks in the northern coastal town of Dellys, about 30 miles from the capital, Algiers. The bombing appeared timed to kill as many officers as possible, when they were grouped together to raise the flag.

Abe ready to resign over Afghan mission

AP, Sydney

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said yesterday he was ready to resign if parliament fails to extend Japan's refuelling mission in the Indian Ocean in support of US-led anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.

"I would not cling to my job as prime minister," Abe told a news conference, when asked what would happen if the vote fails. Abe was in Sydney for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which ended Sunday.

Japan's navy has provided fuel for coalition warships in the Indian Ocean since November 2001 under a special anti-terrorism law set to expire on Nov 1. It already had been extended in 2003 for two years and again for a year in 2005.

Nepali Maoists threaten to quit government

AFP, Kathmandu

that the country be declared a republic.

Prachanda said the party was "ready to start nationwide protests from September 18 if our demands are not met by that time." Ananta, a deputy commander in the Maoist People's Liberation Army, told AFP.

"We will also look into withdrawing from the government once our protest programme starts," said Ananta.

Last month, the Maoists gave a list of 22 demands they want to see met before the November polls to

elect a body that will rewrite Nepal's constitution and decide the fate of the embattled monarchy.

"The country should be declared a republic before the constituent assembly elections," said Ananta, who is also a Maoist central committee member.

The Maoists also want a proportional electoral system, detailed reports on those who "disappeared" during the civil war and compensation paid to families of those killed by Nepal's security services during the conflict.



An Indian man steers his country boat through floodwater near a submerged house in the flood-affected village of Kukurmaria, in Kamrup district, some 45 km from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam state yesterday. Vast areas of Assam were submerged in the third wave of flooding caused by continuous rain in the last four days.

Britain faces \$4 trillion suit over colonial rule in Malaysia

AFP, Washington

A Malaysian human rights lawyer has filed a four trillion dollar lawsuit against Britain for alleged atrocities suffered by Indians whose forefathers were brought as indentured labourers to Malaysia during colonial rule.

Seeking one million pounds (two million dollars) compensation for each of the currently estimated two million Indian Malaysians, the suit was filed in London last week. Ponnusamy Waytha Moorthy told reporters in Washington on a trip to brief the US Congress and rights groups on the issue.

Pakistan kills 10 militants

AP, Miranshah

Suspected pro-Taliban militants ambushed a military convoy in troubled northwestern Pakistan on Sunday, triggering a shootout that killed 10 militants and wounded seven soldiers, an army spokesman said.

The fighting began after a group of armed militants opened fire on troops traveling through Shawal on the edge of North Waziristan, Maj Gen Waheed Arshad said.

Pakistan, a close US ally in the war against terrorism, has deployed some 90,000 troops to the Pakistan-Afghan border region to track down militants but is facing pressure from the United States to do more. Washington is concerned that al-Qaeda may be regrouping in the region.

The latest attack came a day after dozens of masked militants stormed a military post in another northwestern tribal region, Bajur.

abducted two soldiers and bombed the building, an official said Sunday.

More than 30 assailants attacked the security post Saturday night, local security official Yar Mohammed Khan said. They blew up the building before fleeing with two paramilitary soldiers from the Bajur Levies, a border security force.

Pro-Taliban fighters have stepped up attacks on security forces in recent weeks and are holding about 240 troops who were abducted in South Waziristan on Aug. 30.

The abductions underscore the army's problems in controlling Pakistan's lawless border regions, where the state holds little sway.

The militants have demanded the army withdraw from their areas and release more than a dozen comrades in return for freeing the troops.

Six of the abducted troops in South Waziristan were released on Wednesday.