

5 killed while trying to dismantle artillery shell in India

AFP, New Delhi

At least five people were killed when they tried to dismantle a discarded artillery shell in the northern Indian town of Meerut, police said.

"The shell exploded when the victims, who were ragpickers, tried to dismantle it at an army dumpyard," Meerut police inspector SS Saini told AFP by telephone from Meerut.

At least three others were injured in the explosion, which could be heard a kilometre (mile) away in Meerut, Saini said.

Police have cordoned off the area and begun searching for more abandoned munitions.

Ragpickers often scour Indian military dumpyards for ammunition waste from which they extract metals of value.

Hamas boycotts Palestinian reconciliation talks

AP, Damascus

A senior Hamas official in Syria on Saturday announced that his group was boycotting this weekend's Palestinian reconciliation talks with rival Fatah.

The talks were to start in Cairo, Egypt, on Sunday. The two feuding sides were expected to discuss forming a joint government, rebuilding security forces and setting a date for presidential and legislative elections.

But deputy Hamas leader Moussa Abu Marzouk told The Associated Press that Fatah had reneged on a pledge to release Hamas prisoners it holds ahead of the dialogue, prompting the boycott. He acknowledged that many issues had been settled but that the prisoners issue was too important to disregard.

Abu Marzouk blamed

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas for the talks' collapse.

"Going there (to the talks) is not a target in itself. The target is to reunite Palestinian groups," Abu Marzouk said. He also said Egypt's "vision" for reconciliation "does not represent the Hamas point of view." He did not elaborate.

The Fatah delegation, already in the Egyptian capital on the eve of the talks, expressed shock at Hamas' decision.

"This decision is unwise ... it shows that Hamas doesn't want a solution. I think that the consequences will be very dangerous," said Ahmed Abdel Rahman, a member of the Fatah team in Cairo. "We are shocked by this decision. It shows that Hamas is irresponsible when it comes to the fate of the Palestinian people."

Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeineh said Hamas' pretext for

staying away was "unacceptable." Hamas reportedly wants the release of some 500 Palestinians it says Fatah is holding in its jails.

Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hosam Zaki confirmed to the AP that the talks had been canceled because of the Hamas boycott and said a statement would be issued soon.

An Egyptian security official said Egypt turned back at the Rafah border crossing with the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip some 35 representatives of various Palestinian factions who were about to enter Egypt to take part in the talks after they had been canceled. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the press.

Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal had said last week that his group was "eager" for

national reconciliation and voiced support for the Cairo talks. But he also told reporters during a visit to Beirut that there were still "obstacles."

Several rounds of power-sharing talks have failed since Hamas won parliament elections in 2006.

Fatah and Hamas have been at odds since the Hamas' violent takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Following the takeover, Abbas dissolved the Hamas-led government from his base in the West Bank and formed a new administration excluding the more radical group.

Officials of other Damascus-based groups including Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command said they would also stay away from the talks.

Anwar Raja of the PFLP-FC said



A boat carrying a group of pro-Palestinian activists and European politicians arrives to Gaza City yesterday. The boat was allowed to dock in Gaza Saturday despite a strict Israeli blockade, in the third such voyage in less than three months to protest against the Israeli sanctions imposed after the Islamist Hamas movement seized the Gaza Strip in June 2007.

Taliban militants kill two 'spies' in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

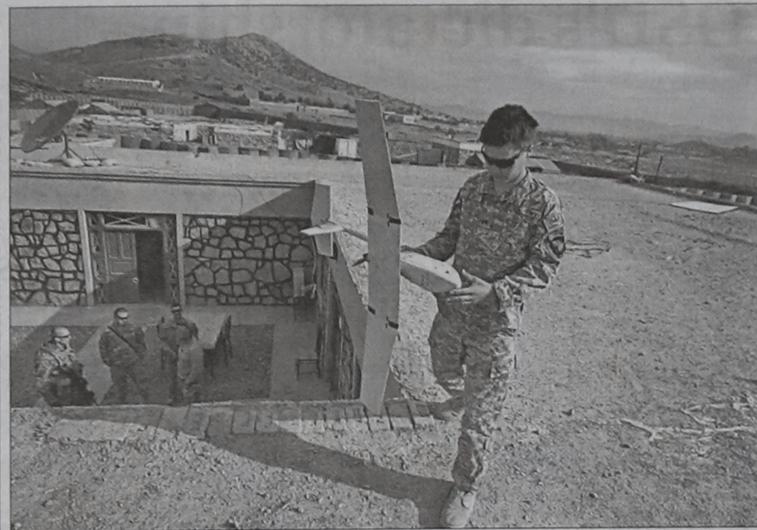
Taliban militants killed two Afghan men Saturday in Pakistan's restive tribal belt after accusing them of spying for US-led forces deployed across the border, local officials said.

The bullet-riddled bodies of the victims were thrown on a road, which connects the troubled North Waziristan tribal district to the Afghan province of Khost, both strongholds of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants.

The executions were the latest in a string of similar killings and come a day after a suspected US drone fired missiles and destroyed an al-Qaeda sanctuary in North Waziristan, killing 14, including terror network operatives.

A note left on their bodies in Pashto language said the victims were kidnapped from Khost earlier in the week and had confessed to being spies, said a local administration official.

Militants have killed dozens of local tribesmen and Afghan nationals on alleged charges of spying, mainly for the Pakistani government or US forces operating across the border.



A US soldier from manoeuvre platoon HHB 4-320FA holds a surveillance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) on the roof of his unit's combat outpost in the Sabari district of Khost Province along the Afghan-Pakistan border on Friday. Khost province is located directly across the border from the lawless Waziristan region in Pakistan, where it is believed foreign fighters flood into Afghanistan to combat coalition forces.

Lankan military bombs rebels in north

AP, Colombo

Air force bombers attacked a gathering of Tamil Tiger rebels who were preparing to fight government troops in northern Sri Lanka, the military said yesterday.

The rebels had assembled in Pooneryn village just south of the Jaffna peninsula when the airstrike took place on Friday night, military spokesman Brig Udaya Nanayakkara said. They were likely preparing to be sent as reinforcements in fighting on a northern front, Nanayakkara said.

The attack caused a fire and heavy casualties to the rebel forces, he said without elaborating.

Government forces have been trying to win control of a key road leading to the rebel-held Jaffna peninsula, the cultural capital of

Sri Lanka's minority Tamils. The road runs up the South Asian island's west coast to Pooneryn.

Jaffna has been cut off from the rest of the country since 2006 when the government closed the main road to the peninsula, citing security concerns. That road cuts through rebel-held territory. Other soldiers are meanwhile trying to enter Kilinochchi, the rebel headquarters, east of Pooneryn.

The government has vowed to crush the rebels and end their 25-year campaign for an independent state for ethnic Tamils who have faced marginalisation from successive governments controlled by majority ethnic Sinhalese.

More than 70,000 people have been killed in the violence.

India, Qatar to sign defence pacts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Muscat

India and Qatar will sign two agreements on defence and security during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the Gulf nation beginning on Sunday evening - the first by an Indian head of government.

Apart from the two pacts, the two sides will also discuss a number of other issues ranging from energy security to bilateral trade.

"The visit by the prime minister of India has been long overdue. Qatar's Amir (Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani) visited India twice," an Indian embassy official told IANS from Doha.

"Qatar is the only country (in the Gulf) with which India has had long-term security cooperation. During the course of the visit of the prime minister, two key agreements will be signed - one on defence cooperation and another on security and law enforcement," he said.

According to the Indian official, the defence agreement will also include the issue of maritime security.

"The agreement on security and law enforcement will cover issues like common threat perceptions and sharing of data," he said.

As for energy security, India will seek to significantly upgrade its current deal with gas-rich Qatar. At 25 trillion cubic metres, Qatar has the world's third largest gas reserves, comprising 15 per cent of the world's total.

Nine years ago, India had signed an agreement for exporting 7.5 million tonnes of liquefied gas from Qatar annually in two phases.

"We want to get over the current buyer-seller relationship (in gas) and upgrade it to a more sustainable partnership," Kohli said.

Apart from defence and energy security, bilateral trade will also come up for discussion. India is Qatar's third largest export partner after Japan and Singapore.

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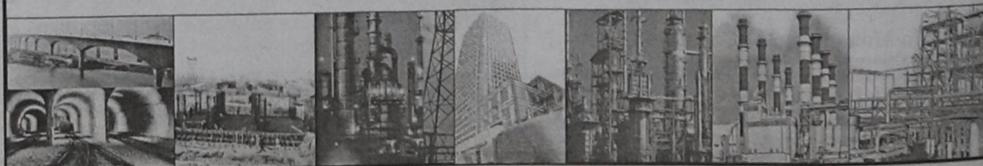
Graduates with Commerce background from any reputed institution and having practical experiences in business accounting including preparation of company accounts, balance sheets, draft of audit reports, Income Tax Returns, other taxation papers etc. Additionally, the candidates should have the ability to correspond in English.

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