

Kabul blast kills five US troops, 14 others

BBC ONLINE

A suicide car bomb that targeted a Nato convoy in the Afghan capital, Kabul, has killed at least 19 people, including six foreign soldiers.

The US military said that five of those were American. More than 50 people - mostly Afghan civilians - were hurt.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the rush-hour attack in the west of the city, close to the parliament.

It is the deadliest attack on foreign forces in the heavily guarded capital since a Taliban assault last September.

Despite tight security, the suicide bomber managed to drive into the city in a car laden with explosives.

The Isaf (Nato-led) convoy was attacked on the Darulaman road. An Isaf spokesman confirmed that six of its soldiers were killed. Five were from the US, and unconfirmed reports say the sixth soldier was Canadian.

Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen "strongly" condemned the attack, but said the alliance remained "committed to its mission to protect the Afghan people and to strengthen Afghanistan's ability to resist terrorism".

Five military vehicles were damaged and more than a dozen civilian vehicles, including a bus, were also caught in the blast.

The BBC's Mark Dummett in Kabul says that, as is often the case in such attacks, Afghan civilians seem to have borne the brunt of the explosion.

Eyewitness Obiadullah Sadiqyar was on his way into work when the bomb detonated. He described the scene as "totally chaotic".

He told the BBC: "I witnessed the bomb this morning at around 0815. I saw many people dead and many injured who were taken to hospital."

"Among the dead there were lots of women and girls - I heard later that they were students going to university. I also saw one of my colleagues full of blood in the back of a police car, also being taken to hospital," he said.

"This situation really made me cry for the bloodshed and the innocent people who were killed and injured."



Pakistani policemen examine the wreckage of a police vehicle following a bomb attack, which killed 12 people in Dera Ismail Khan yesterday in a latest assault on security forces battling Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked militants. The bomb, planted on a bicycle, exploded as the vehicle carrying a senior officer drove through the outskirts of Dera Ismail Khan on the main road leading to Bannu, officials said.

NY BOMB PLOT Obama sends top aides in Pakistan to investigate

AFF, Washington

US President Barack Obama has dispatched two of his most senior national security aides to Pakistan in the wake of the failed Times Square car bombing, a White House official said yesterday.

US national security adviser General James Jones and CIA Director Leon Panetta have left on a mission to investigate the May 1 bomb plot, which has been blamed on the Pakistani Taliban.

"In light of the failed Times Square terrorist attack and other terrorist attacks that trace to the border region, we believe that it is time to redouble our efforts with our allies in Pakistan to close this safe haven and create an environment where we and the Pakistani people can lead safe and productive lives," a White House official told AFP.

"The US and Pakistan have a robust bilateral relationship based on shared interests. We are in frequent contact and this is one of many senior-level engagements that occur," the official added.

The discovery of a crude bomb inside a parked car in crowded Times Square prompted an evacuation of the popular tourist spot and a massive manhunt that culminated in the arrest of Pakistani-born US citizen Faisal Shahzad.

Rabri Devi gets bail for abusive remarks

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Patna

A Bihar court yesterday granted bail to former chief minister Rabri Devi for allegedly abusing Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at a public rally.

The Chief Judicial Magistrate in Chapra district, about 100 km from here, granted the bail.

Earlier this month, the court issued a non-bailable warrant against Rabri Devi, wife of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad.

Rabri Devi reportedly used abusive language against Nitish Kumar and former Janata Dal-United (JD-U) president Rajiv Ranjan during last year's Lok Sabha election.

Palestinians go door-to-door to combat Israeli goods

AFF, RAMALLAH, West Bank

The Palestinians yesterday stepped up their fight against goods produced in Israeli settlements with a door-to-door campaign to raise awareness of a territory-wide ban.

"This house-to-house campaign is part of the national campaign to combat settlement products and today it has begun in all Palestinian cities," said the project's coordinator Haitham Kayali.

He said 3,000 Palestinian youths would visit some 427,000 homes across the West Bank to distribute booklets listing banned settlement goods and informing families about the dangers they pose to the struggle for statehood.

They will then hang posters outside the homes affirming that they are free of such goods.

The Palestinians view the presence of some 500,000 Israeli settlers in more than 120 settlements scattered across the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territory seized by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War, as a major threat to the eventual creation of a viable state.

India, Iran should have close ties

Says Ahmadinejad

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Tehran

Contemporary world situation calls for close cooperation between India and Iran, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday, adding both countries 'should not neglect the present opportunities to replace the dying big powers'.

Iran and India should stay together because of their cultural ties as well as the situation in the region and the world, he told Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna here on the sidelines of the G-15 meet.

All these call for close cooperation between the two countries, the president said.

'Iran and India should build upon their common views in building up new systems for the future of the world,' the president said.

Both the countries 'should not neglect the present opportunities to replace the dying big powers', he was quoted as saying by the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

Closer ties between Iran and India will benefit other countries as well because Tehran and New Delhi have always sought peace and security for the region and the world, he added.

The Indian minister said Iran and India were two developing countries, which had to make the best of their potentials.

Describing the G-15 meeting as 'successful and effective', Krishna appreciated Iran's efforts for successfully holding the event.

Lanka storms leave eight dead, 200,000 displaced

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Colombo

Torrential rains and lightning in Sri Lanka have caused the deaths of at least eight people and driven more than 200,000 from their homes, officials said yesterday as the weather worsened.

At least four people have been killed in the flooding and another four by lightning since Saturday, government officials said.

More than 50 houses were damaged by the severe weather, which has affected the western, southern, central and north-western parts of the country.

Rail and road transport was also impacted with more than 20 vehicles damaged by falling trees.

Access to the international airport has been restricted by the floods, prompting the national airline to require that passengers check in four hours ahead of their departure times.

The government has postponed a military parade scheduled for Thursday, which was to commemorate the first anniversary of the end of the conflict with separatist Tamil rebels.

Creeps reign supreme

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for parents waiting to pick up their daughters from school, swooped on them and arrested them.

"After the arrest around 30 girls of the school approached us and expressed their gratitude and narrated how they were subjected to stalking every single day," Commander Mohammad Sohail, director of the legal and media wing of Rab, said a few days back.

It was the first operation of Rapid Action Battalion in tracking down stalkers and since then the force arrested 46 stalkers. Over 400 others were also detained in over 200 such operations across the country. They were, however, released later after bonds from their guardians, Rab officials said.

The police have also arrested 432 stalkers across the country in one month until May 13 after the government asked law enforcers to go tough on stalkers. Of those the police arrested, 327 were arrested in Dhaka.

Commander Sohail said plainclothed Rab and other law enforcement agencies personnel are now deployed at different girls' schools and colleges and important shopping arcades across the country to nab the stalkers.

The instructions came as a number of female school and college students, namely Nashfia Akand Pinky of Shyamoli and Umme Kulsum Elora of Khilgaon and Mariam

Indian govt reviews anti-Maoist policy

BBC ONLINE

India's government is reviewing its strategy for fighting Maoist rebels after a landmine attack in Chhattisgarh state killed more than 30 people.

Most of those killed in Monday's blast, which destroyed a bus, were civilians, and the government is under pressure to take a tougher line against the rebels.

Home Minister P Chidambaram wants a larger mandate, thought to include the use of air power to fight the Maoists.

Thousands have died in the rebels' decades-long fight against the state.

Meanwhile, a two-day strike called by the rebels in protest at an offensive against them is affecting life in parts of central and eastern India.

In Jharkhand, transport has been disrupted and many shops and banks closed. Security on trains has been tightened to avoid possible attacks.

Officials in West Bengal state say police reinforcements have been deployed in parts of Midnapore district, a Maoist stronghold.

'BARBARITY'

Monday's attack on the bus in Chhattisgarh state's Dantewada district has prompted widespread anger in India, says the BBC's Chris Morris in Delhi.

Dantewada was the scene of the rebels' deadliest attack, when 75 paramilitary troops and their driver were killed last month.

In the past, the Maoists have warned civilian bus companies not to transport local police or members of the security forces.

In this incident it appears that Maoist supporters saw that armed police were on board the bus, and an attack was organised extremely quickly.

Our correspondent says it shows how powerful the Maoists have become in remote regions like the forests of southern Chhattisgarh. The government says it also demonstrates their barbarity.

Following the attack, the home minister said he would request wider powers to deal with the rebels.

"I took to the cabinet committee the case for a larger mandate. I was given a limited mandate. Now we will go back to the cabinet committee to revisit that mandate," Chidambaram told the NDTV channel.

He said the chief ministers of some of the worst-affected states had asked for air power to be used against the rebels - a measure that the government has so far refused to sanction.

Our correspondent says the Defence Ministry does not want the armed forces involved in an internal security issue, however serious the threat may be.

'12 dead' in Pak blast

BBC ONLINE

At least 12 people have been killed in a bomb blast near a police vehicle in the north-western Pakistani town of Dera Ismail Khan.

Officials say the bomb was planted on a bicycle and targeted the town's deputy police superintendent, who was killed along with his guard and driver.

Nobody has yet said they carried out the attack.

Dera Ismail Khan borders tribal South Waziristan, where the army launched an anti-Taliban assault last year.

Many people fled to the town after the army launched its offensive against militant strongholds in the volatile region.

While there has been a relative lull in violence in Dera Ismail Khan since the offensive, correspondents say many insurgents simply shifted to the nearby regions of Orakzai and Khyber.

"The target was Deputy Superintendent Iqbal Khan," a local police official told the BBC.



Zardari pardons interior minister

AFF, Islamabad

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari yesterday pardoned a key cabinet minister sentenced over corruption to block his possible arrest, threatening to plunge his rule into fresh controversy.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik, one of the closest allies of Pakistan's unpopular head of state and a key member of his ruling party, was sentenced in absentia to three years in jail by an anti-corruption court in January 2004.

Malik, who was abroad at the time of the conviction, appealed against the verdict but a court in the eastern city of Lahore on Monday rejected his plea and cancelled his bail.

The president quickly intervened and within hours invoked his power to protect Malik from a possible detention.

The president used his "discretionary powers" to pardon Malik, Zardari's spokesman Farhatullah Babar said early Tuesday.

Rescuers locate Afghan plane crash area

AFF, Salang

Afghan and Nato rescuers yesterday located the area where an Afghan passenger plane crashed with 43 people on board, including three Britons and an American, an official said.

More than 24 hours after the plane lost radio contact over the treacherous Hindu Kush mountains, the prospect of finding survivors appeared slim as anguished relatives gathered at the foot of the mountain-pass near Salang.

The ageing Pami Airways Antonov 24 turboprop plane was en route from the northern province of Kunduz to Kabul when it came down in bad weather, although officials said it was too early to rule on the cause of the crash.

"We have managed to locate the crash area," Yalda Natiq, head of communications at the transport ministry, told AFP.

It is in northern Salang but due to fog, bad weather and poor visibility the reconnaissance plane and helicopters now cannot pinpoint the wreckage," she added. The area is one of harsh mountain terrain.



Kashmir's chief priest and chairman of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) Mirwaiz Moulvi Umar Farooq (C) is flanked by Amnesty International representatives Ramesh Gopalakrishnan (L) and Bikramjeet Batra (R) during a photo session in Srinagar yesterday. A two-member team from Amnesty International arrived on a rare visit to Indian-ruled Kashmir to assess the human rights situation in the revolt-hit region. It is for the first time since the eruption of an insurgency against Indian rule in 1989 that New Delhi has allowed the rights watchdog to visit the scenic region.

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Qaeda leader wins appeal against deportation

BBC ONLINE

The alleged leader of an al-Qaeda plot to bomb targets in north-west England has won his appeal against deportation.

A special immigration court said Abid Naseer was an al-Qaeda operative - but could not be deported because he faced torture or death back home in Pakistan.

Naseer, 23, was one of 10 Pakistani students arrested last April as part of a massive counter-terrorism operation in Liverpool and Manchester.

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for parents waiting to pick up their daughters from school, swooped on them and arrested them.

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BBC sorry for queen's death joke

AFF, London

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