

## Taliban mounts series of attacks in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban launched a pre-dawn attack on a Nato base in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, triggering a firefight with foreign and Afghan forces that left eight militants dead. Another 10 people, including three children, were killed in a motorcycle bombing in a market in a remote area of northern Afghanistan in an attack apparently targeting a local pro-government militia leader.

The Taliban, which often exaggerates details of its attacks and foreign casualties, said 14 suicide bombers were involved in the strike on the base at Jalalabad airport, which was the target of a similar attack in June. But the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) said only one was wearing a suicide vest. It said eight militants were killed.

"The forward operating base received small arms fire from an unknown number of insurgents and after gaining positive identification of insurgent fighting positions an ANA and Isaf quick reaction force was sent to the area," it said.

Nato said no foreign troops or Afghan soldiers were injured in the attack on one of the country's largest military bases.

Hours later, 10 people, including three children, were killed and 18 others were wounded when a motorcycle

packed with explosives detonated in a market in the remote Imam Saheb district of northern Kunduz province.

Afghanistan's interior ministry condemned the attack as "un-Islamic and inhumane" and said an investigation had been launched.

District chief Mohammad Ayoub Haqyar told AFP that the explosion bore the hallmark of previous Taliban attacks but there was no immediate confirmation of responsibility.

A pro-government militia commander was among the dead and was the likely target, he added.

"It's too early to say what the target was but we believe Commander Abdul Manan could have been the target. He was killed," said Haqyar.

A third attack on Saturday, also a motorcycle bomb, wounded five people, including a child, in the southern city of Kandahar, a security official and a local hospital doctor said.

The explosion happened in the Aino area of the city, a newly-built neighbourhood partially owned by President Hamid Karzai's brother, Mahmood, who is the head of the provincial assembly.

The hardline Islamist Taliban held power in Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, when they were ousted in a US-led invasion after the September 11 attacks in the United States.

## EU accepts Iran talks offer

AFP, Brussels

EU diplomacy chief Catherine Ashton on Friday agreed to resume long-stalled nuclear talks between world powers and Iran on December 5, and suggested they be held in Austria or Switzerland.

Ashton's office said she "has agreed to their proposal to begin talks on December 5" and "now looks forward" to meeting Tehran's chief negotiator Saeed Jalili to discuss the country's nuclear programme.

Iran this week proposed the talks take place in Istanbul but "Ashton's preference is that the first meeting take place somewhere else in Europe and has proposed Austria or Switzerland."

US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley took a similar position Friday.

## 3,000 new Jewish homes for Jerusalem in 2011

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel plans to put up for sale 3,000 new Jewish homes in Jerusalem next year, including in Arab areas, a municipality official was quoted as saying by the weekly newspaper Kol Hair.

Shlomo Eshkol, an engineer appointed by the Jerusalem municipality, also spoke of a long-term project to build 50,000 homes in Jerusalem during the next decade, Kol Hair said in its latest edition.

Eshkol said the allocation of 3,000 new Jerusalem homes in 2011 included the mostly Arab eastern sector of the Holy City which Palestinians view as the capital of their future state.

The plans were announced during a meeting between Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat and a group of 60 Israeli developers, the report said.

The homes would be available in west Jerusalem's Jewish neighbourhoods of Arnona and Ramat Rachel, as well as the east Jerusalem districts of Givat Hamatos and Har Homa.

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move the international community does not recognise.

It sees all of Jerusalem as its "eternal, undivided" capital and does not consider construction in east Jerusalem to be settlement activity.

The Palestinians want to make the east -- home to some 200,000 Jewish Israelis and 268,000 Palestinians -- the capital of their future state.

Israeli settlement construction in the occupied West Bank and in Jerusalem is the main cause blocking peace talks the pursuit of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks which tentatively resumed in September.

## People spend 'half of their waking hours daydreaming'

BBC ONLINE

People spend nearly half of their waking hours not thinking about what they are actually doing, according to a US study conducted via the iPhone.

More than 2,200 volunteers downloaded an app which then surveyed them about their thoughts and mood at random times of day and night.

The Science study suggested minds wander, even from demanding tasks, at least 30% of the time.

A UK expert said other studies confirmed people are easily distracted.

The iPhone was a novel research tool for researchers at Harvard University.

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