

Al-Qaeda assault kills 103 Yemen troops

AFP, Aden

More than 100 Yemeni soldiers have been killed in clashes with suspected al-Qaeda gunmen after the extremists attacked military positions in Yemen's restive south, medics said yesterday.

Sunday's assault was one of the single deadliest against Yemeni troops, and the latest in a spate of attacks against security forces since President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi pledged to destroy the militant group in last month's inauguration speech.

At least 25 al-Qaeda gunmen were killed in the fighting and several others wounded, a local official from the nearby militant stronghold of Jaar told AFP.

He said that at least 56 soldiers were captured by al-Qaeda, including seven army officers and 10 wounded soldiers.

A medical official at the military hospital in the southern port city of Aden, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said "the death toll... has risen to at least 103" soldiers.

He said "many soldiers died from

wounds sustained in the assault" on army posts on the outskirts of Zinjibar, Abyan's provincial capital where al-Qaeda linked militants are in control.

Military officials had reported fierce clashes Sunday when suspected al-Qaeda militants tried to overrun an army post in Kud, just south of Zinjibar. The violence then spread to other military positions on the outskirts of the city.

A military official, who also declined to be identified, told AFP al-Qaeda militants were responsible for the "surprise attack," saying "it was a massacre."

Another medic said hospital staff were overwhelmed by the number of casualties.

"We were forced to use administrative offices and waiting rooms to treat the wounded," he told AFP, declining to be named.

"The hospital was packed full with dead and injured soldiers," he added.

The militants, known in Yemen as the Partisans of Sharia (Islamic law), took control of Zinjibar and several other towns in Yemen's mostly lawless

south last May as former president Ali Abdullah Saleh faced mass protests demanding his ouster.

The military official, who was on the ground during Sunday's attack, said that troops from the Kud base were "surprised" to see the militants carrying army issue weapons and using military vehicles.

Soldiers who survived the attack accused some army leaders who had served under Saleh of "collaborating" with al-Qaeda.

The violence highlights the security challenges facing Yemen's new president as he tries to restore order in troubled regions and unify the country's armed forces, as stipulated by a Gulf-brokered transition accord that ended Saleh's 33-year rule over Yemen.

On Friday, Hadi, who will lead Yemen for an interim two-year period, named General Salem Ali Qatan to head the 31st Armoured Brigade in southern Yemen, replacing Saleh loyalist General Mahdi Maqola.

Syrian troops pursue crackdown

REUTERS, Amman

Syrian forces spread across the city of Deraa yesterday after overnight clashes there and pursued "clean-up" operations in Homs, where the Red Cross was still seeking access to a former rebel bastion.

Syria has so far brushed off international pressure to halt nearly a year of bloodshed since the first protests against President Bashar al-Assad erupted in Deraa last March, touching off an uprising inspired by others in the Arab world.

The United Nations-Arab League special envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan, will travel to Damascus on Saturday for what would be his first visit since he was appointed to the post last month.

"Kofi Annan told me that Syria will receive him on March 10 and that he would arrive in Cairo on March 7," the Arab League Secretary-General Nabil Elaraby said in Cairo.

China also said it would send an envoy to Syria to try to halt a conflict that has divided

Beijing from Western and Arab powers demanding stronger action against Assad.

Hundreds of troops and security men fanned out in Deraa on a scale not seen for months, a resident of the southern city said.

The crackdown followed attacks on security checkpoints in the city centre that were also the most extensive for months. At least one person was killed, the Deraa resident told Reuters.

Outgunned rebels have multiplied hit-and-run assaults across Syria in the last few days to signal their defiance after the military overran the Baba Amr district of Homs.

A bomb explosion hit an oil pipeline in Syria's eastern province of Deir al-Zor on Monday as Syrian troops began a sweep in the region, opposition activists said.

Syrian armored forces recaptured Baba Amr from its lightly armed defenders on Thursday after an almost month-long siege in which shelling reduced much of the district to rubble.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent were still seeking approval from Syrian authorities to enter Baba Amr to help civilians there.

'Qaeda men' kill 27 cops in west Iraq

AFP, Haditha

Suspected al-Qaeda gunmen, some wearing army uniforms, raged through a western Iraq city yesterday in a pre-dawn shooting spree that killed 27 policemen, including two officers killed execution-style.

The assault, launched at about 2:00 am, saw insurgents dressed in military uniforms simultaneously attacking two checkpoints in the east and west of Haditha before storming other security posts and raiding the homes of the two officers.

"We received 27 dead bodies, all of them policemen, and treated three policemen," Fadhil al-Nimrawi, director of Haditha's hospital, told AFP. He added that the hospital also received the body of a gunman.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Barack Obama hold talks at the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. The two leaders go into talks on the Iranian nuclear stand-off, with each publicly seeking to stake out some common ground.

Israel master of own fate

Netanyahu tells Obama

AFP, Washington

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US President Barack Obama yesterday that Israel must remain the "master of its fate" in a firm defence of his right to mount a unilateral strike on Iran.

Netanyahu and Obama met for delicate Oval Office talks taking place amid clear differences on the imminence of the nuclear threat from Iran and after weeks of speculation that Israel may mount go-it-alone military action.

"Israel must have the ability always to defend itself, by itself, against any threat," Netanyahu said in a short, but impassioned comments to cameras at the start of a meeting with Obama, with whom he has had sometimes strained relations. "After all, that is the very purpose of the Jewish state, to restore to the Jewish people control over our destiny."

"That's why my supreme responsibility as prime minister of Israel is to ensure that Israel remains the master of its fate," said Netanyahu, who ruffled Obama's feathers last year with a stun-

ning lecture in the Oval Office.

The Obama administration has signalled that it does not yet believe Iran has taken a choice to develop a nuclear weapon, or that the time is right for military action, preferring to give biting new sanctions time to work.

Israel, which sees an Iranian nuclear weapon as a threat to its existence, however believes that Iran may be on the cusp of "break out" capacity -- the moment when it could quickly produce weapons-grade uranium.

Obama recognized that it was "unacceptable" for Israel to tolerate Iran developing a nuclear weapon after calling for the Jewish state's destruction and again refused to rule out eventual US military action.

"My policy is prevention of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons ... when I say all options are on the table, I mean it," Obama said, a day after telling Washington's top pro-Israel lobby that "loose talk" of war was damaging.

The president, seeking to preserve a way Iran could assuage international

anxiety over its nuclear program without war, said he believed a diplomatic solution to the showdown was still possible.

"We do believe there is still a window that allows for a diplomatic resolution to this issue."

Obama also took a veiled swipe at Republican presidential candidates who have slammed his approach to Iran as appeasement and claim he has failed to properly protect Israel.

"Our commitment to the security of Israel is rock solid," he said. "The United States will always have Israel's back."

Many analysts argue that Washington fears that an early, preemptive strike from Israel could trigger a fierce reaction from Iran, unleash further turmoil in the Middle East and drag Washington into a new Middle East war.

There are also fears that Israel does not possess sufficient military capacity to end Iran's underground pursuit of the nuclear arsenal it denies seeking, and could at best set back the program just a few years.

NEWS IN brief

Iceland ex-PM's trial opens over banking crisis

AFP, Reykjavik

Iceland's ex-prime minister Geir Haarde went on trial yesterday over his role in the 2008 banking sector collapse that brought his country to its knees, becoming the first political leader to be tried over the global financial crisis.

"I reject all accusations, and believe there is no basis for them," Haarde, 60, told the court as he took the stand.

He pointed out that "this is the first time I get a chance to answer questions regarding this case", adding: "I hail the fact that I get to answer questions in the case."

Indian army chief terms tapping reports 'fiction'

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Indian Army Chief General VK Singh yesterday termed as "fiction" media reports of a complaint about telephone tapping to hear conversation in connection with his age row.

"Fiction does not require any reaction. If people concoct stories and some of the irresponsible editors allow those stories to get published, I don't think it requires any reaction," he told reporters here on the sidelines of a book release function.

Asked about his letter to the defence ministry over shortage of ammunition in the Army, he said he had apprised the ministry about the status of various inventories.

Sonia Gandhi returns to India after 'check-up'

BBC ONLINE

Sonia Gandhi, the head of India's governing Congress party, is "absolutely fine" after returning to India following a "routine check-up", a party official has said.

It follows surgery she had six months ago, also overseas, for an undisclosed medical condition.

The Congress party have refused to comment on her illness or where she has sought treatment.

Gandhi, 64, is seen as India's most powerful politician. She holds no official post, but many consider her the de facto head of the government.

Media reports have suggested she was treated at a specialist cancer hospital in New York.



Geir Haarde



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar Opposition Leader Aung San Suu Kyi delivers a speech during an electoral campaign rally in Naypyidaw yesterday. Suu Kyi hit the campaign trail in the capital, seeking to challenge the military-backed government in its political heartland.

'Short-circuit' caused Congo blasts

BBC ONLINE

Huge explosions at an arms depot that killed at least 146 people in Congo's capital Brazzaville were caused by a short-circuit that led to a fire, government officials say.

They say some 1,500 people were hurt.

Rescuers are still searching for survivors amid fears that the death toll would rise further.

The force of the blasts was felt several miles away in the city of Kinshasa, across the border in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"It's like a tsunami passed through here. The roofs of houses were blown off," Congolese student Christine Ibata, was quoted as saying by the Associated Press news agency.

Talks for deal with US faltering

Say Afghan officials

AP, Kabul

Efforts to forge a deal that will govern the American military presence in Afghanistan beyond a planned US troop withdrawal in 2014 are faltering, current and former Afghan officials said yesterday.

They said obstacles include disputes over the transfer of American-run detention centres, night raids and quarrels within the Afghan president's inner circle that led one of his top advisers to threaten to resign.

The failure to make headway on a strategic partnership document reflects growing animosity between President Hamid Karzai and the United States, which reached its lowest level after the burning of Qurans and other Islamic texts at a US military base on Feb. 20. That incident sparked six days of angry riots across Afghanistan that left 30 people dead, including six US troops who were killed by Afghan security forces.

Karzai has been stubborn about his demands - apparently so much so that he is losing the backing of some of his own top aides. Although the president cannot be seen to be a pushover to the US on sovereignty issues, many top Afghan officials believe that Afghanistan's government is too shaky to stand on its own.

Russia polls 'skewed' in favour of Putin: Observers

AFP, Moscow

Russia's presidential election was skewed in favour of Vladimir Putin during the campaign and the ballot was marred by irregularities, international observers led by the OSCE said yesterday.

"Conditions (for the campaign) were clearly skewed in favour of... Vladimir Putin" while the vote count was "assessed negatively in almost one-third of polling stations observed due to procedural irregularities," they said.

Heidi Tagliavini, the head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), called for an investigation into all allegations of electoral violations.

"Although the authorities made some effort to improve transparency, there remained widespread mistrust in the integ-

city of the election process," the diplomat said in a statement.

"As a first step, all allegations of electoral violations need to be thoroughly investigated," she said.

The observers' post-poll report said that Putin had received a "clear advantage" through his massive dominance of media coverage and had benefited from a mobilisation of state resources to boost his campaign.

The observers assessed the voting on election day "positively overall" despite procedural irregularities, but the situation deteriorated during the counting of ballots, the report said.

Mass protests unseen for decades in Russia, sparked by alleged fraud during parliamentary polls in December, had influenced the authorities to make some improvements to the election process, the observers said.

RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Romney gains momentum in Ohio

AFP, Washington

Mitt Romney has nudged ahead of his main rival for the Republican presidential nomination in Ohio on the eve of the key primary vote in the Rust Belt state, an opinion poll showed yesterday.

A survey by the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute gave the former Massachusetts governor 34 percent support from likely Republican primary voters, while former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum got 31 percent.

While the three-point margin makes the race too close to call, the Quinnipiac pollsters said the survey shows that the momentum is squarely with Romney, who just one week ago trailed Santorum 36 percent to 29 percent.

"Just as he did in Florida and Michigan, Romney has erased a sizable deficit a week before the primary to grab the momentum in the final 24 hours," said Peter Brown, assistant director of the institute.

"A week ago, Quinnipiac had Senator Santorum ahead by seven points, now it's Romney by three -- a 10-point swing in seven days," he said. "Romney is the one with the wind at his back."

The phone survey of 753 Republican likely primary voters had a margin of error or plus or minus 3.6 percentage points and was taken between March 2 and March 4.

Voters in 10 states across America have their say on Super Tuesday -- a potentially pivotal day in the see-saw contest to see which Republican will take on President Barack Obama in the November 6 general election.



Request for Proposal

IT Company wanted for the hosting of agro-information software

Katalyst is looking for a competent IT Company to provide round the clock hosting service for the Fertilizer Recommendation Software. The hosting contract will be valid from April, 2012 to March, 2013. Interested organizations are requested to send proposals to the address mentioned in the TOR by 13th March, 2012 by 5:00PM.

The detailed ToR can be downloaded from the following web-link:
http://www.katalyst.com.bd/abtus_procurement.php

File name: ToR FRS Hosting published 2012.pdf