



Islamic militant injures one

■ Islamic Jihad takes responsibility for suicide attack

BY LAURIE COPANS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — An Islamic militant riding a bicycle detonated explosives Thursday at an Israeli army outpost in the Gaza Strip, killing himself in the first suicide attack in a month of Israeli-Palestinian fighting.

The assailant was tentatively identified as Nabil Araeer, a 24-year-old kindergarten janitor from Gaza City. In wall graffiti near his home, the Islamic Jihad group claimed responsibility for the blast that lightly injured an Israeli soldier.

Israel's army radio said Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack

in a statement sent to a Western news agency.

After the explosion, an Israeli tank blocked the main north-south thoroughfare in Gaza, backing up Palestinian traffic for several miles. The tank crew kept guns pointed at the street from behind sandbags piled up atop the tank. Thursday marks the fifth anniversary of the assassination of the Islamic Jihad leader, Fathi Shekaki, in an operation attributed to Israel.

The explosion came as President Clinton tried to bring Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Washington for separate meetings on how to rescue Mideast peace-making. The response to Clinton's new initiative has been muted.

"No one said Ehud Barak is going to Washington," Barak's chief policy adviser Danny Yatom told Israel army radio. "What is important now is to stop

the violence, and that hasn't happened yet."

Barak has said he was taking a timeout from peace talks after a month of rock-throwing clashes and gun battles in which 127 people have been killed, most of them Palestinians.

Palestinian negotiators said the United States could no longer be the sole mediator, and that the European Union, Russia and others should be asked to join the talks. The West Bank head of Arafat's Fatah movement, Marwan Barghouti, went a step further, saying the uprising should continue to extract concessions.

"We must continue this uprising to change the rules of the negotiations and break the monopoly of the Americans," Barghouti said. "America is not an observer. It is protecting Israel's interests."

In Thursday's attack, the assailant rode his bicycle toward the Israeli

post, hit the defensive wall and detonated the explosives.

The Araeer family in Gaza City opened a house of mourning, serving bitter coffee to hundreds of people paying condolence calls as Quranic verses played over loudspeakers.

The wall graffiti read: "Islamic Jihad celebrates the martyrdom of Nabil Araeer."

The family said it had not yet received official word that he was dead. Nabil Araeer worked as a janitor at the "Charity" kindergarten run by Islamic Jihad.

His brothers said he was very devout, getting up before dawn every day to pray at the neighborhood mosque, and that in the early 1990s, he was briefly jailed by Israel for membership in an Islamic group.

The Israeli army commander in the Gaza Strip, Maj. Gen. Yomtov Samiya, held Arafat's Palestinian Authority ulti-

mately responsible, saying it has done nothing to prevent such attacks.

He said a meeting Wednesday evening with Palestinian security officials on how to restore calm had been encouraging. "I can say it was positive and optimistic, unlike the other meetings this month," he said.

There has been growing concern in Israel about the new alliance between Arafat's Fatah faction and Islamic groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which have carried out terrorist attacks in the past to sabotage peace efforts.

Palestinian officials have confirmed that committees with representatives of all factions hold daily meetings to direct the month-old Palestinian uprising.

Mahmoud Zahar, a Hamas leader, has said the cooperation is limited to organizing rock-throwing confrontations with Israeli troops, and that Palestinian gunmen act on their own.

NEWS BRIEFS

■ Van transporting 12 inmates hit by fertilizer truck

LONDON, OHIO (AP) — A van transporting 12 female prisoners and two sheriff's officers was hit Thursday by a truck carrying 700 gallons of fertilizer.

All the prisoners were taken to hospitals, authorities said. The extent of their injuries wasn't immediately known, but at least one inmate was in serious condition at Doctors Hospital West in Columbus.

The TruGreen ChemLawn truck slammed into the side of the van in heavy fog near London, about 25 miles west of Columbus.

About 100 gallons of fertilizer spilled, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency said. She said the health risk was minimal and the company was cleaning up the spill.

■ Queen Latifah, Colin Powell appear for candidates

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Retired Gen. Colin Powell and rap's Queen Latifah were elbowing onto the campaign stage Thursday as rivals George W. Bush and Al Gore looked for ways to pull ahead in the presidential race.

Powell, popular among moderates, was joining forces with Republican Bush in Pennsylvania under the banner "Responsible Leadership."

Democrat Gore hoped to reach young voters by taking questions at Scott Community College in Bettendorf, Iowa, during a taped appearance on Latifah's nationally syndicated TV talk show.

■ Votes for Nader might cost Gore states in election

WASHINGTON (AP) — Green Party candidate Ralph Nader's 5 percent tally in national polls is now seen as a major threat to Al Gore in at least a half-dozen normally Democratic states.

This has prompted appeals for Nader to drop his campaign in states with close races, so that voting for him will not benefit George W. Bush.

In some states where Nader has a strong following, a shift of even a few percentage points could tip the election.

■ FBI finishes gathering evidence from bombed ship

ADEN, YEMEN (AP) — FBI technicians have finished gathering evidence from the USS Cole, a U.S. official said Thursday amid increasing indications that the bombing of the ship was a terrorist attack.

Yemen's president said one of the two men believed to have bombed the destroyer was identified by witnesses as an Egyptian and that a number of Arab veterans of Afghanistan's war against Soviet troops had been detained in connection with the blast.

President Ali Abdullah Saleh said the detainees were senior members of the Muslim militant group Islamic Jihad, including Yemenis, Egyptians and Algerians.

■ Gene-altered corn developer seeking government approval

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government is being asked to temporarily approve a variety of gene-altered corn for human consumption despite unresolved questions about whether it could provoke allergic reactions in people.

The corn, approved only for animal feed or industrial uses, has been showing up in the food supply, forcing recalls of taco shells and shutting down some processing plants.

The corn's developer, Aventis Crop-Science of Research Triangle Park, N.C., has submitted new data to the government the company says show the risk to people is extremely remote.

U.S. military leaders meeting to discuss security measures

BY ROBERT BURNS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — In a sign of heightened concern about terrorist threats against U.S. forces, Pentagon leaders are conferring with U.S. military commanders around the world on "force protection" measures, officials said Thursday.

Using a secure video telecommunications link in the Pentagon, Defense Secretary William Cohen and Army Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were to discuss the subject Thursday with the commanders of all major regional commands. That includes the U.S. Central Command, which is responsible for U.S. forces in the Middle East.

It was not clear in advance of the teleconference, which was not publicly announced, whether Cohen and Shelton intended to order specific new security measures, or whether their purpose was to solicit ideas on ways of improving troop security in light of the suicide terrorist attack on the USS Cole.

According to Pentagon counterterrorism guidelines, security rules in effect the day the Cole was attacked in Yemen required the crew to take special precautions against approaches by small harbor craft, such as the kind that sidled up to the Cole and detonated a bomb.

"Shipboard terrorist threat measures," described in a Pentagon document that came to light during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Wednesday, include the following precautionary measures for ships operating at the threat level that existed on Oct. 12, the day of the attack:

—Harbor craft "require special concern because they can serve as an ideal platform for terrorists." Unauthorized craft should be kept away from the ship; authorized craft should be carefully controlled and monitored.

—Crews for picket boats should be designated and placed on 15-minute alert. "If the situation warrants, make random picket boat patrols in the immediate vicinity of the ship." The picket boat crews should be armed with M-16 rifles, one M-60 with 200 rounds of ammunition and 10 concussion grenades.

—Fire hoses should be prepared for use in repelling small boats or boarders.

A ship like the Cole normally would have only a small number of craft, such as inflatable boats or small passenger boats, available to patrol around the ship's perimeter.

The full range of precautionary measures taken by the Cole prior to the attack in the port of Aden is not yet publicly known. But there has been no indication so far that harbor craft were seen as a threat.

A sailor who was on watch aboard the Cole, for example, told CBS News' "60 Minutes" on Sunday he noticed the small boat approaching, but assumed it was among the authorized harbor craft that normally approach a Navy ship in port to assist in disposing of its garbage and performing other routine services.

Amid tight security, about 80 FBI evidence technicians have returned from

Yemen after completing their work, a federal law enforcement official said Thursday. This official said more than 20 FBI agents remain in Yemen, including investigators, security and communications experts.

When evidence recovery experts "have concluded their work, we're bringing them out and trying to do it in an orderly way that will ensure security," Attorney General Janet Reno told her weekly news conference.

U.S. officials, meanwhile, remain concerned about the threat of additional terrorist attacks. A senior defense official said Wednesday that authorities uncovered plans for terrorist attacks against several U.S. targets in Bahrain and Qatar and responded by putting U.S. forces there on high alert last weekend.

The official, who discussed the matter on condition of anonymity, said the targets included a school in Bahrain attended by American and other international students, as well as the U.S. embassies in Bahrain and Qatar. The school was closed indefinitely on Monday as a result, the official said.

ABC News reported Wednesday that U.S. officials also uncovered plans for a terrorist attack on a military airfield in Bahrain used by U.S. aircraft. ABC said the plan called for a suicide bomber to drive a vehicle loaded with explosives onto the runway and underneath an American airplane and to blow it up.

One senior Pentagon official said he believed there was a terrorist threat against the airfield, but was not certain of the details.

One of the questions yet to be answered in the investigation into the Cole bombing is how, in broad daylight, a small boat could have gotten close enough to the ship to detonate its explosives. Initially, the Navy said the attacking boat masked its approach by joining a small flotilla of harbor craft that was helping the Cole moor at a refueling station in the harbor. Later, however, the Navy said it had misstated the sequence of events and, in fact, the mooring operation was finished two hours before the attack.

Senators said a Pentagon intelligence expert on terrorism in the Persian Gulf claims he warned of possible terrorist attacks on U.S. forces there before the bombing of the Cole, but higher-ups failed to pass the information to military commanders.

The Defense Intelligence Agency official, whose name was not disclosed, resigned in protest Oct. 12, the day after the Cole attack, Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., said.

Roberts said the resignation letter was given Monday to the Senate Intelligence Committee. Although it is not classified, Roberts said the committee would not make it public.

Later, Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon issued a statement saying the analyst told the DIA's director, Vice Adm. Thomas Wilson, on Wednesday that he "had some concerns about how the agency used his analytical views," but that he didn't have information that would have provided "tactical warning of the attack on the USS Cole."

Chairman wants documents on Russia-Iran arms deal

BY BARRY SCHWEID
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House International Relations Committee called on the Clinton administration Thursday to show Congress all documents related to a 1995 deal that allowed Russia to continue selling weapons to Iran without suffering sanctions.

"We are asking for all the documents and don't have any as yet," said the chairman, Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman, R-N.Y. He spoke during a break in a classified Capitol Hill briefing on the agreement between Vice President Al Gore with then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

"And we want to know why sanctions were not enforced," Gilman said. The senior Democratic member of the committee, Rep. Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut, dismissed the widening debate over the nonproliferation agreement as an attack on Gore just before the election. And he said the agreement with Russia was "clearly in America's best interest."

"I think this is clearly about the election and not about policy," he said. The private briefing for House

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committee members followed an open hearing Wednesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at which the State Department's deputy assistant secretary for nonproliferation, John P. Barker, said there was no secret agreement. While specific documents remain classified, he said, the gist of it was announced in 1995 and Congress was briefed.

After that hearing, senators also went into a closed session. They said afterward that administration officials refused to allow them to see either the agreement or a list of weapons Russia was allowed to sell.

Published reports show that while Russia agreed not to sign new contracts with Iran, it was allowed to continue selling items already contracted for without being punished under a 1992 law aimed at keeping weapons out of the hands of countries that ex-

port terrorism. In addition, Republicans have charged, Congress was not properly informed.

Former Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., who once chaired the House committee, said Thursday he and his staff were briefed on the agreement four times.

Calling recent publicity about the U.S. understandings with Russia unfortunate, he said: "It threatens to undermine our nation's efforts to prevent further sales of advanced arms by Russia to Iran."

Eleven former top U.S. officials, including four former secretaries of state, issued a statement this week saying they were "deeply disturbed" by Gore's agreement with Chernomyrdin and that Gore, apparently at the prime minister's request, kept the terms from Congress.

Divers discover note by body in wrecked Russian submarine

■ Discovery sheds no light on cause of crash

BY IVAN SEKRETAREV
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MURMANSK, RUSSIA — Divers who entered a sunken Russian nuclear submarine found a note with the body of a sailor who wrote that 23 crewmen survived explosions that ripped through the vessel and described their desperate plans to escape, military officials said Thursday.

"None of us can get to the surface," read the note found in the pocket of a seaman identified as Lt. Dmitry Kolesnikov, Russian Navy chief Adm. Vladimir Kuroyedov said.

It was the first sign that anyone had survived the initial blasts that tore apart the submarine and sank it in the Barents Sea, killing all 118 men aboard. And it again raised the question of whether there might have been any chance to save some of the crew if Russia had not balked for days at accepting foreign aid.

The note provided no clues to the cause of the catastrophe.

"All the crew from the sixth, seventh and eighth compartments went over to the ninth. There are 23 people here. We made this decision as a result of the accident," Kuroyedov quoted the note as saying, according to the ITAR-Tass news agency.

The note was written between 1:34 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. local time Aug. 12, the day of the disaster, said Vice Adm. Mikhail Motsak, chief of staff of the Northern Fleet. Foreign and Russian ships in the area registered two powerful explosions around 11:30 a.m.

The note "also said that two or three people might try to escape the submarine through the emergency escape hatch located in the ninth compartment," Motsak said.

Water that gradually flooded the ninth compartment could have thwarted that escape attempt, he said. After the Kursk sank, Russian divers were unable to latch onto the hatch, but Norwegian divers who followed managed to open it a week after the tragedy and determined there were no survivors.

Kolesnikov, a 27-year-old son of a submariner from St. Petersburg, was commander of the Kursk's turbine section. His was among the first four bodies retrieved Wednesday and the only seaman to have been identified so far, officials said.

"I am writing blindly," his note said, and mentioned the figures 13 and five, without explanation, Kuroyedov told families of the crew gathered in the Arctic port of Murmansk. The rest of the note was private, Motsak said.

"I'm preparing for a meeting with him," Kolesnikov's widow, Olga, said between sobs in a brief Russian television interview from St. Petersburg. "I want to see him again. I want to read his letter."

The crewmen had some chance of getting out on their own through the escape hatch but apparently didn't do that because of injuries, Igor Spassky, head of the Rubin design bureau that developed the Kursk, said Thursday.

Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov quickly denied Thursday that there was any possibility they could be rescued.

Many Russian officials had said some crew members could have remained alive after the explosions, as indicated by reports of tapping sounds detected from the submarine in the first days.

But others discounted the reports as unsubstantiated and said the sounds could have been caused by collapsing equipment or the submarine settling into the seabed.

The survivors of the initial explosions, which were minutes apart, probably died of drowning, hypothermia or high pressure.

Russian and Norwegian divers recovered the first bodies Wednesday after five days of painstaking work cutting holes in the top of the submarine.

After the note was discovered, divers concentrated on the ninth compartment but were hampered by rough waters. Divers might cut a hole in that compartment to facilitate the search, Motsak said.

Officials hope to fly the recovered bodies Saturday to Severomorsk, the main base of the Northern Fleet, for a memorial ceremony if weather per-